



Fall 1986

News That Stays News: Popular Culture and Cultural Permanence

Jim Wayne Miller

Western Kentucky University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://uknowledge.uky.edu/kentucky-review>

 Part of the [Arts and Humanities Commons](#)

Right click to open a feedback form in a new tab to let us know how this document benefits you.

Recommended Citation

Miller, Jim Wayne (1986) "News That Stays News: Popular Culture and Cultural Permanence," *The Kentucky Review*: Vol. 6 : No. 3 , Article 4.

Available at: <https://uknowledge.uky.edu/kentucky-review/vol6/iss3/4>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the University of Kentucky Libraries at UKnowledge. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Kentucky Review by an authorized editor of UKnowledge. For more information, please contact UKnowledge@sv.uky.edu.

News That Stays News: Popular Culture and Cultural Permanence

Jim Wayne Miller

I wonder if you've heard the news. You could hardly have avoided hearing it. We live in news the way fish live in water. We have morning news, noon news, news on the hour and half hour, the hour's top story. We have local, state, regional, national, and world news. We are asked to stand by for news. We have newsgrams, newswatch, newsbreaks, news updates, newscaps. We have all-news stations, Cable News Network, the Independent News. On Saturday mornings, between cartoons, we have a feature for children called "In the News," which gets kids accustomed to the adult world of listening to news. We have what is known as happy news. (This involves the anchor man or woman clowning around with a sidekick.) We have Live Action/Copter-Cam News, News as it Happens. We have a host of people who, like animals with four stomachs, process raw news and give it back to us in a more easily digested form. We live from newscast to newscast. At any moment our lives are apt to be interrupted by a news bulletin. We want to hear the news.

In the mid-nineteenth century, Thoreau, in his *Walden*, commented on our great appetite for news. "Hardly a man takes a half-hour nap after dinner," Thoreau writes, "but when he wakes he holds up his head and asks, 'What's the news?'—After a night's sleep, the news is as indispensable as the breakfast [And a man says:] Pray tell me anything new that has happened . . . anywhere on this globe."

But I don't mean to suggest that legitimate news is not useful, even necessary. I don't mean to suggest that there is something wrong with news simply because, by its very nature, news stays news only for a little while. It is the essence of the newspaper, the critic Martin Mayer tells us, to be ahistorical, to bake the world fresh today and wrap fish tomorrow. But notice that the appetite of Thoreau's man rising from his nap or from a night's sleep is not specifically for news; his appetite is less discriminating; it is for

anything new. His appetite is for novelty, which is something more, and less, than news.

I doubt whether Thoreau's man rising from sleep this morning would reach for the *Louisville Courier-Journal*, or for the *Washington Post* or the *New York Times*, or for any of the better newspapers available to him. His appetite for novelty, for the sensational, the bizarre, for *anything new*, might better be fed by the *National Enquirer*, or by those television programs which resemble news and which are known correctly as "trash news" programs. I am speaking of such things as "That's Incredible," "Real People," "Those Amazing Animals," "Speak Up, America." Such offerings are concerned with novelty for its own sake. They are calculated to amaze us, astonish us; we are struck by this or that bizarre happening, freakish feat or individual. But we never stop to *wonder*, nor can we, because we must hurry on to the next incredible item. Such entertainments package a kind of pseudo news, like potato chips, to feed a popular culture's appetite for novelty.

In the world of print, the analogue to trash news is the "fact fad." We find titles such as *Fascinating Facts*, *More Fascinating Facts*. (If these titles do well, I am sure we can look forward to *Still More Fascinating Facts*.) We are offered *Easy Answers to Hard Questions*, *The Dictionary of Misinformation*—all designed, like the television programs, to feed an appetite for mental snacks, for random, unconnected tidbits, of which trivia quizzes are an example. We are given facts, but no vision of the facts.

Novelty, or as Thoreau's man rising from sleep puts it, "anything new," is the lifeblood of fads and fashions that break over us like waves from the world of popular music, contemporary fashion and entertainment. Consider music: we can enumerate most recently disco, punk rock, New Wave, cowboy chic. The world of fashion gives us today the wet look, tomorrow the dry. One moment the short is fashionable, the next long is all the rage. One moment hairy, the next smooth; one moment sloppy, the next preppy. For some time now one could not hope to be fashionable or "with it" if one did not approve of casual sex. Now a California psychologist has identified the inevitable counter-trend and has written a book on what she calls *The New Celibacy*.

All these "dispatches from the world of fashion" are answers to the call of Thoreau's man rising from sleep for "anything new."

And it is this preoccupation with novelty—with the faddish, the fashionable, the freakish, the bizarre, the sensational—in other words, with novelty, that permeates our lives, giving us frantic, unconnected facts, random details, incidents, diverting and scattering our attention. And in its inevitable preoccupation with the present, the appetite for novelty narrows our perspective so as to make us *prisoners of the moment*.

The pervasiveness of novelty has so shortened our sense of time and the connection of things in time that we seldom speak of our lives anymore. We speak of our lifestyles. I suppose it will not be long until we will hear someone say, with a straight face, "Why, you have your whole lifestyle ahead of you!" In such a situation, to have a tattoo represents a firmer commitment than a tee-shirt with a printed message or advertised enthusiasm.

Mr. Harold Clurman, for years drama critic for *The Nation* and a teacher at Hunter College, has observed that we Americans have no memory. We do not remember our collective past, Clurman says, our personal past, or even what movie we saw last week. It is, he says, as if we had had shock treatment. Shock may be the right word. Our memory is obliterated by the shock of sensation after sensation purveyed by our novelty-fueled popular culture.

The dangers of novelty are several. Novelty diverts our attention from the authentic to the sham. Novelty implies the consideration of things in a disconnected, piecemeal fashion, and so creates what has been called a "hunger for wholeness." Novelty leads us on from one thing to another, from one moment to another, thus making us, as prisoners of the moment, spiritual nomads.

In his *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, the psychologist Carl Jung characterizes the first danger of novelty, the danger of being diverted from a consideration of the authentic. "We rush impetuously into novelty," he writes, "driven by a mounting sense of insufficiency, dissatisfaction and restlessness. . . . We refuse to recognize that everything better is purchased at the price of something worse."

Emerson warns us of a second danger of novelty—the requirement that we examine things in a disconnected, piecemeal fashion—when he suggests that things can be made exciting without being really interesting. Novelty gives us the world only as a "dull miscellany and lumber room." Young people are particularly susceptible. "To the young mind," Emerson says in

"The American Scholar," "everything is individual, stands by itself. By and by [if it matures] it finds how to join two things together and see in them one nature; then three; then three thousand." Thus the danger of novelty is that it may hold the mind in a perpetual state of immaturity.

When we lack the satisfaction of joining disparate things, we wander on from one novel, shocking, sensational, striking item to the next. We cannot be rooted—physically or spiritually—and pursue novelty. For novelty soon bores us, and we must move on. Living from novelty to novelty shatters us, fragments us, and leads to a "hunger for wholeness." This hunger, the spiritual or emotional parallel to the nagging hunger we feel when we have eaten junk food which does not satisfy, leaves us vulnerable, individually and collectively, to some sham wholeness, some inauthentic wholeness. We will accept purchasing something worse in the attempt to get something new by espousing some modern mysticism, some half-baked ideology, some substitute religion or community, some cult or ism which seems (for the moment) to satisfy the hunger for wholeness. Witness the proliferation of cults and communes which have flowered and, in the case of Jonestown, withered dramatically in recent years.

The hunger of Thoreau's man rising from sleep, the hunger for anything new, has become so intense that we have been characterized as neophiliacs. If we are lovers of the new, no matter what it is, we are prisoners of the moment. To the degree that we are prisoners of the moment, we are spiritual nomads, rootless, cut off from any tradition that is longer and larger than we are. When this happens, the danger is not that we will believe nothing but that, in our hunger for wholeness, we will believe *anything*—remember: Thoreau's man's call was for *anything* new—we will believe anything or anybody, even a semiliterate cult leader, as more than nine hundred people did in the case of Jonestown. And this is a diabolical aspect of our vulnerability: we will believe the bizarre and fantastic, yet doubt the credible, as do people who do not think Americans have walked on the moon, but who are convinced that they (or a nextdoor neighbor) have been taken to a distant planet on a flying saucer.

A preoccupation with novelty, with "anything new," and the resulting fragmentation and emphasis on the moment, is quite literally dangerous. In the *Katha Upanishad* we find: "Who sees the variety and not the unity wanders on from death to death." In

our own time this insight has been emphasized by the Italian poet Leopardi, who reveals in his *Pensieri*: "Novelty is the mother of death."

As a student of languages and cultures I distinguish between traditional culture and popular culture. Traditional culture—illustrated by language, beliefs, values, customs—tends to vary little through time but a lot over space. For example, the English language has always been changing. But it rarely changes so fast during any individual's lifetime that he becomes much aware of the change. Certainly he rarely becomes disoriented as a result of language change. Yet an English speaker who lived before 1066 (the Norman invasion) could not understand modern English; nor can we understand the English spoken prior to 1066 (or even Chaucer's English) without studying it almost as if it were a foreign language. In traditional culture, such changes take place slowly through time.

But language and indeed all aspects of culture vary a lot over space. Languages, for instance, tend to exist as a group of dialects, even when one dialect is perceived as a "prestige" dialect and treated as something like a "standard" language. The English spoken in this shire, or county, or region, at any given time, will be noticeably different from that spoken somewhere else. It is not unusual for us to guess where a person comes from by the way he speaks. Now, other aspects of traditional culture, such as songs, stories, beliefs, tend to change slowly through time, while varying more noticeably over space. A song such as "Barbara Allen," for instance, may be several hundred years old. Variations in the song text are found not so much at different points in its chronological existence as they are at different points in its spatial, or topological existence. Such variations of the song as exist are apt to be found, existing at the same time, in different places. Like the language in which it is couched the song has varied little through time, but a lot over space.

The world of popular culture reverses this process. Things vary little over space, but a lot through time. Take the example of a popular "hit" song. When a song "hits," it will be played all over the country on the same day, day after day, and this will continue for perhaps six weeks. Then it is replaced by yet another "hit." Little variation over space—this tendency has been strengthened by electronic transmission of sounds and pictures—but a lot of variation through time, a circumstance explained by the need to

feed the appetite of popular culture for novelty, for anything new.

Traditional culture and popular culture affect people differently; they tend, in fact, to produce different kinds of people. Traditional culture tends to produce rooted variety—in language, artifacts, and people. Popular culture tends to produce rootless uniformity. Witness the speech, fashions, attitudes of people who are all pretty much alike at any given moment: they have little attachment to anything beyond the immediate craze.

Popular culture can become—for some it has become—a substitute for traditional culture. It is this circumstance that makes of us spiritual nomads. What is the circumstance of genuine nomads? We have an example in the Bakhtiari tribesmen, described by Jacob Bronowski in his *The Ascent of Man*. For ten thousand years the Bakhtiari have crossed six ranges of mountains on an outward journey, and then back again. In ten thousand years their life has changed in one significant respect only: they have domesticated pack animals. Nothing else in their lives is new, despite the fact that they are constantly on the move. And nothing is memorable in their lives, Bronowski points out. Nomads have no memorials, not even to the dead. Whether we are nomads across space, like the Bakhtiari, or nomads through time, spiritual nomads, nothing is really new, in spite of the fact that things change for us almost every day. Nothing is memorable.

Where, then, do we look for the truly memorable? What offers us the genuine instead of the sham? Where do we look for images of rooted variety instead of rootless uniformity? Of connection instead of fragmentation? Of concentration instead of diversion? What is there that, instead of amazing us for a moment, astonishing us for an instant, truly engages our interest and sustains it, causing us to *wonder*? What puts things together, showing us the unity *and* the variety, thus genuinely satisfying the hunger for wholeness? What gives us not only facts, but a vision of the facts? What releases us from the prison of the moment, giving us a perspective on and an attachment to things that are larger and longer than we are? What directs our attention not just to the new but to that which really never was old?

I suggest to you that those things which never were old can be found in literature; and that literature, at its best, does not pursue novelty but offers "News that Stays News."

Literature deals with the same materials that make up news in the ordinary sense, but deals with these materials in a different

way. Literature makes connections (a metaphor is the result of putting two things together). Literature shows us the marvelous in the common and ordinary.

Thomas Hardy's newspapers brought him dispatches about the wars and upheavals of his day. But Hardy, when he wrote his poem "In Time of 'The Breaking of Nations,'" published in 1916, stresses not the dramatic details of those dispatches but rather what is abiding in the midst of great change: a man plowing a field, a young man and woman, lovers, who pass by:

In Time Of "The Breaking Of Nations"

Only a man harrowing clods
in a slow silent walk
with an old horse that stumbles and nods
half asleep as they stalk.

Only thin smoke without flame
from the heaps of couch-grass;
yet this will go onward the same
though dynasties pass.

Yonder a maid and her wight
come whispering by;
war's annals will cloud into night
ere their story die.

In his "Musée des Beaux Arts," W. H. Auden deals with materials that might have constituted the stuff of many "news" stories in the ordinary sense. Much of the material is miraculous, striking, sensational. But he deliberately juxtaposes these materials—as did the artists whose work he is contemplating—with the ordinary. He selects details from various times and places and unites them by a theme. As Emerson, describing the maturing mind, puts it, Auden joins two things, then three, then three thousand, to get at the nature of suffering.

Musée des Beaux Arts

About suffering they were never wrong,
The Old Masters: How well they understood

Its human position; how it takes place
While someone else is eating or opening a window or
 just walking along;
How, when the aged are reverently, passionately waiting
For the miraculous birth, there must always be
Children who did not specially want it to happen, skating
On a pond at the edge of the wood:
They never forgot
That even the dreadful martyrdom must run its course
Anyhow in a corner, some untidy spot
Where the dogs go on with their doggy life and the
 torturer's horse
Scratches its innocent behind on a tree.

In Brueghel's *'Icarus,'* for instance: how everything turns
Away quite leisurely from the disaster; the ploughman may
Have heard the splash, the forsaken cry.
But for him it was not an important failure; the sun shone
As it had to on the white legs disappearing into the green
Water; and the expensive delicate ship that must have seen
Something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky,
Had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly on.¹

Literature helps us to credit not just the extraordinary and unusual, not just the novel in our lives, but also the ordinary and everyday. The Kentucky writer Jesse Stuart has a story about a man named Dick Stone, who decides to sell his farm and move into town. Dick Stone gets his old friend Melvin Spencer, a local real estate agent, to help him sell his farm. Melvin Spencer is really a poet disguised as a real estate agent. Spencer's poetry has been appearing for years in the county newspaper in the form of advertisements for farms he sells. His advertisements are so striking that local people look forward to reading them, even when they are not interested in buying a farm.

Melvin Spencer comes out to Dick Stone's farm and looks the place over. He spends the better part of a day just walking around the farm with Dick Stone. He takes dinner with the Stone family. Then he goes back to town and writes his advertisement. But he mentions not just the location of the farm, the number of acres, the house and barn, the price. Spencer describes the farm as a poet would. He describes the broad-leafed burley tobacco growing in

the fields; the wild game in the woods; the tall cane and corn growing in the rich bottomland beside the river, which is full of fish. He mentions that the house is built from timber grown right on the farm. He even describes the nuts and berries and other wild fruits growing on the Stone farm—the hazelnuts, elderberries, pawpaws, and persimmons—and the jellies and preserves Mrs. Stone makes from them.

A few days later Dick Stone walks down to his mailbox, gets his newspaper, and carries it back to the house. Sitting there, he reads an advertisement for a wonderful farm. He fails to realize, until he gets to the end of it, that he has been reading a description of his own farm! Melvin Spencer's advertisement has caused Dick Stone to see his farm with new eyes. Dick Stone says to his family: "I didn't know I had so much. I'm a rich man and didn't know it. I'm not selling this farm!"

Jesse Stuart's story, "This Farm For Sale," illustrates one of the things literature does for us: it helps us to see things, and to see into things. It has been said that the things we see every day are the things we never see at all. In a sense, Dick Stone saw his farm every day. But he did not really see it until Melvin Spencer showed it to him through language. Most of us are like Dick Stone. And what Melvin Spencer's description did for Dick Stone, literature does for us generally. Literature can reveal things that reality obscures. Literature can make familiar things seem new, and new things seem familiar. The poem or the story we read is not the thing we see, finally; the poem or story is more like a light we see by, and what we see is life, or some part of life.

We like to hear stories, and we like to tell stories. Someone comes up to us and says, "Did you hear what happened?" We naturally want to hear what that person is about to tell. Something happens to us. We want to tell someone else about it. This is the beginning and end of much literature: telling what happened. Jesse Stuart's story tells about an unexpected thing that happens when Dick Stone decides to sell his farm.

How long has it been since someone came up to you and said, "Did you hear the news?" It probably has not been long. And it will happen again, soon. Someone will begin to tell, and you will listen. Literature is a lot like news. But literature is different from news, too. News is interesting only for a short time—a few days, a few weeks. Then it stops being news. A poet, Ezra Pound, has said that literature is news that stays news.

Literature contains something permanent. Unlike news, the power of literature to interest us is not limited to a few days or weeks. Literature can be just as interesting next year, or the year after that, as it was last year.

What distinguishes literature from news is the power of language, used imaginatively, to help us imagine our lives, credit our experience. Tess Gallagher, a contemporary American poet, in an essay called "The Poem As Time Machine," says "the language of the poem [i.e., of literature] is that of a hive where one may be stung into recognition by words that have the power to create images strong enough to change our own lives as we imagine and live them." Certainly this is the effect Melvin Spencer's words have on Dick Stone in "This Farm For Sale."

A work of literature may be fashionable and die with the fashion. Or a work of literature may be out of time with fashion so that it must wait for recognition. What counts ultimately is that it not be out of time with human nature. Thomas Wolfe's *Look Homeward, Angel* has been out of step with critical fashion, but it is not false to human nature. Additionally, Wolfe knows how to present the essential marvelousness of the ordinary by showing how things are interconnected and related, in time and space, through cause and effect. The opening of the novel, which is a little prose poem, is news that stays news. "Each of us is all the sums we have not counted," Wolfe writes. "Subtract us into nakedness and night again, and you shall see begin in Crete four thousand years ago the love that ended yesterday in Texas . . . our lives are haunted by a Georgia slattern, because a London cutpurse went unhung."

Is it merely fanciful for Wolfe to connect the near and far in this way? I think not. It is an accurate reflection of reality, and reality is more marvelous than mere fancy. If anything, Wolfe's suggested connections are understatement. The Appalachian mountains, setting for much of Wolfe's fiction, may themselves be the result of an astonishing connection of two continents. Millions of years ago, geologists tell us, the ancestor continents of Africa and North America collided. The Appalachian Mountains were formed when Africa left a great fragment of itself attached to the North American continent.

I find in this image of a great collision suggestive possibilities for describing the contemporary generation of writers from the Appalachian mountains, who are presently occupied with "news

that stays news." Deep in the psyche of many an Appalachian, two worlds have collided like continents, leaving a faultline like the Brevard Zone, that suture between Africa and North America deep underneath the Appalachian mountains. In novels and stories and poems and songs that are images of our lives, writers of this region juxtapose the old ways and the new, the traditional and the modern. Sometimes they emphasize the Africa, sometimes the North America. At their best, they speak a liberating truth: we are both. When they blend the indigenous and the foreign, the folk and the fine, they achieve a synthesis which unites the local and global in one vision, one voice.

Robert Morgan is such a writer. Here is what he says about novelty, fads, and fashion in literature: "I have no lasting urge to settle in the present. This lack of affinity with fashion and generational trends may be the source of my obsession with finding absolute structures in language that mirror the everlastingness of natural processes. . . . My prime obligation is to communicate that surge of feeling that comes when the ordinary stuff around us is seen anew." Thus he writes in his "Epitomes," published in *The Small Farm*.

Like Wolfe, Morgan can make "new magic in a dusty world." Like Gerard Manly Hopkins, Morgan knows that while "generations have trod, have trod," and while "all is smeared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil, . . . for all this, nature is never spent; / There lives the dearest freshness deep down things." And it is this freshness, that which was never old, which is the only news that stays news.

Connecting the far with the near, as does Wolfe; dwelling on that which is abiding in the midst of change, as does Hardy; presenting the ordinary and the marvelous together, as do Auden and Stuart—all these effects have in common (in contrast to the effects of popular culture, which make us prisoners of the now) what Tess Gallagher calls an "expansion of the now." Every time a piece of literature functions like a magnet, drawing together events and experiences from past, present, and future contexts, then the boundaries between what we thought were past, present, and future are dissolved. Recall Wolfe's "Our lives are haunted by a Georgia slattern, because a London cutpurse went unhung." Wolfe brings us the past not as a burial ground, but as living fiber that informs what is and will be.

It is this expansion of the now that Eliot has in mind when he

writes, in *Four Quartets*:

Time present and Time past
Are both perhaps present in time future
And time future contained in time past.

This expansion of the now is, in its essence, the historical sense, which, Eliot says in another place, "involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence." A sense not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence is what I try to embody in a poem entitled "Meeting." After my grandfather died, I found myself writing poems about him. I remembered that we had worked together on the farm. When we hoed corn or tobacco, we hoed separate rows. But when we hoed in garden plots, and worked on Irish potatoes or sweet potatoes, we stood opposite each other and hoed the same row, pulling dirt in opposite directions, hilling it around the plants. When we did this our hoes sometimes became entangled. And when they did, my grandfather would say, "That's a sign." "A sign of what?," I asked. And he said, "It's a sign we'll be working this same patch, same time, next year." For me at that time this was a depressing thought. Remembering this belief, I placed myself, in my imagination, back in one of those garden plots after the old man had died, and began my poem, which I thought would be a kind of ghost story. But some sophisticated readers of the poem, pointing to the significance of the shadow as a universal symbol, say the poem can be understood from the viewpoint of Jungian psychology.

Meeting

My shadow was my partner in the row.
He was working the slick-handled shadow of his hoe
when out of the patch toward noon there came the sound
of steel on steel two inches underground,—
as if our hoes had hooked each other on that spot.
My shadow's hoe must be of steel, I thought.
And where my chopping hoe came down and struck,
memory rushed like water out of rock.
"When two strike hoes," I said, "it's always sign
they'll work the patch together again sometime.
An old man told me that the last time ever

we worked this patch and our hoes rang together."
Delving there with my hoe, I half-uncovered
a plowpoint, worn and rusted over.
"The man I hoed with last lies under earth,
his plowpoint and his saying of equal worth."
My shadow, standing by me in the row,
waited, and while I rested, raised his hoe.

Ken Kesey, author of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, has expressed this sense of not just the pastness of the past, but of its presence, by observing: "It takes the past a long time to happen." That sense of the past being a part of us, living on in us through our ancestors, being as much a part of us as our shadows, is what I suggest in "Meeting."

Robert Morgan, whom I quoted earlier, gives us a sense not only of the pastness of the past but also of its presence in his book *Land Diving*. He gives us images that have to do with our life in this region, images that help us imagine our own lives—like this image of old chesnut trees in a poem called "Affliction":

How the old roots keep sending
shoots every spring
hoping the canker's gone.
How the buried sap must
remember the sun and
former height, keeping the veins

stoked winter after winter below
the frost-line, always raising a new stalk
like a periscope. . . .²

Morgan provides a vivid image that can help us imagine our lives in his poem "Volunteer," which takes as its subject something known to any of us familiar with farms and gardening: a crop that may "come up volunteer," that is, re-seed itself and sprout in a new season without further cultivation. He comments in part:

Praise all escapes
and trailing shrubs, runners that
spill out of culture
and reseed themselves.³

Earlier Morgan uses the expression "blooded varieties." Part of our received wisdom is that in unity there is strength. But there is also strength in diversity, in "blooded varieties." We have only to look at nature to confirm this. Nature, Rene Dubos points out, is redundant. Nature always tries to do things in many different ways. Nature employs diversity to experiment, find what works, devise successful strategies for surviving in particular places, under particular circumstances. (Isn't traditional culture, when it varies little through time but a lot over space, imitating nature's diversity?) Our task, in our time, is to know when and where and how to affirm our unity and our common purpose while accommodating, within that unity, the strengths of our diversity, for this is the way of nature, and we are part of nature. The steam roller of collectivization is not the way of nature. History is stronger, ultimately, than ideology. We must devise ways of thinking and imagining that discourage, in society, a *rootless uniform mass*, under the sway of popular culture which varies little over space but a lot through time. We must rather encourage *rooted diversity*, characterized by traditional culture, which varies much over space but little through time. Literature can encourage such rooted diversity by making local life—and everything is local somewhere—aware of itself; by helping us, wherever we are, to imagine our own lives, credit our own experience; by showing us that "dearest freshness deep down things"; by being "news that stays news."

There is a perspective we can get from literature which cannot be had by any other means. Literature can elevate us. Just as our parents, when we were small, might lift us to allow us to see over the heads of a crowd, literature can elevate us to a better view than others who may, in some ways, stand taller—and the view we have is of news that stays news.

Literature is the news that stays news because, while there are universal truths, these truths manifest themselves always and only through the particular—particular people, places, and circumstances. Literature renders and presents us with particular people, places, and circumstances in such a way that the new is seen under the aspect of the unchanging, while the unchanging is forever renewed.

NOTES

¹Reproduced by permission from *The Collected Poetry of W. H. Auden* (New York: Random House, 1945), 3.

²*Land Diving: New Poems by Robert Morgan* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1976), 4.

³*Land Diving*, 58.