

# Studies in English, New Series

---

Volume 1

Article 26

---

1980

## Vol. 1 (1980): Full Issue

Journal Editors

Follow this and additional works at: [https://egrove.olemiss.edu/studies\\_eng\\_new](https://egrove.olemiss.edu/studies_eng_new)



Part of the [American Literature Commons](#), and the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Editors, Journal (1980) "Vol. 1 (1980): Full Issue," *Studies in English, New Series*: Vol. 1 , Article 26.  
Available at: [https://egrove.olemiss.edu/studies\\_eng\\_new/vol1/iss1/26](https://egrove.olemiss.edu/studies_eng_new/vol1/iss1/26)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Studies in English at eGrove. It has been accepted for inclusion in Studies in English, New Series by an authorized editor of eGrove. For more information, please contact [egrove@olemiss.edu](mailto:egrove@olemiss.edu).

PR  
13  
.M5  
1980 v.1  
new ser.

Editors: Vol. 1 (1980): Full Issue

# University of Mississippi Studies in English

New Series - Volume One

1980



## **The University of Mississippi Studies in English** **(1980) New Series Volume I**

**Editor: Benjamin Franklin Fisher IV**  
**Business Manager: T. J. Ray**  
**Editorial Intern: B. H. Stewart**  
**Founding Editor: John C. Pilkington**

*UMSE welcomes submissions treating any aspect of British and American Literature. Excepting special material, manuscripts should run 15-20 pages, although notes are also considered. Unsolicited reviews are not accepted. Subscriptions are \$5.00 yearly. Manuscripts should be directed to the Editor, subscriptions to the Business Manager, at the Department of English, The University of Mississippi, University, MS 38677. Please send two copies of any submission, with an envelope containing correct postage for return; otherwise, manuscripts will not be returned.*

To

*Evans B. Harrington*

*Gerald W. Walton*

And

*Charles E. Noyes*



CONTENTS

|   |         |
|---|---------|
| Editorial .....   | 1-2     |
| Arlin Turner .....  | 3-4     |
| "The Forsaken Merman" and "The Neckan": Another Look.....   | 5-19    |
| Clyde K. Hyder  |         |
| Some Recollections of Jay B. Hubbell.....   | 20-31   |
| Clarence Gohdes   |         |
| William Dunbar's <i>Dialogus Obscoenus</i> in<br><i>Locus Amoenus</i> .....                           | 32-49   |
| Thomas W. Ross  |         |
| "Bold Hawthorne" and Rufus W. Griswold .....  | 50-57   |
| J. Lasley Dameron   |         |
| John Jasper: Hero-Villain .....   | 58-70   |
| Natalie Schroeder   |         |
| Will Allen Dromgoole:<br>Forgotten Pioneer of Tennessee Mountain Fiction.....                         | 71-81   |
| Kathy Lyday-Lee   |         |
| Coleridge's Failed Quest: The Anticlimax of Fancy/Imagination<br>in <i>Biographia Literaria</i> ..... | 82-96   |
| Eugene L. Stelzig   |         |
| Warren's "Blackberry Winter": A Reading .....   | 97-105  |
| James E. Rocks  |         |
| John O'Keeffe and the Restoration of Farce on the Later<br>Eighteenth-Century Stage .....             | 106-120 |
| Phillip B. Anderson   |         |
| An Alternative Reading of Poe's "The Bells" .....   | 121-124 |
| Richard Fusco   |         |
| Bliss and Dickens: A Note on Little Nell and<br>"Little Willie" .....                                 | 125-126 |
| Thomas H. Stewart   |         |
| Emily Dickinson and "Dimity Convictions" .....  | 127-128 |
| Rochie Whittington Lawes  |         |

REVIEWS

|  |         |
|--|---------|
| Mac Andrew, <i>The Gothic Tradition in Fiction</i> .....   | 129-130 |
| Gary William Crawford  |         |
| Turner, <i>Nathaniel Hawthorne: A Biography</i> .....  | 131-132 |
| Benjamin Franklin Fisher IV  |         |
| Carlson, <i>Emerson's Literary Criticism</i> .....   | 133-134 |
| John Pilkington  |         |
| Fisher, <i>Poe at Work: Seven Textual Studies and<br/>The Very Spirit of Cordiality...; Ketterer,<br/>The Rationale of Deception in Poe</i> .....  | 135-139 |
| Bruce Ira Weiner   |         |
| Miller, <i>Building Poe Biography</i> .....  | 140-142 |
| Benjamin Franklin Fisher IV  |         |
| Gilbert and Gubar, <i>The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman<br/>Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination</i> .....  | 143-146 |
| Missy Dehn Kubitschek  |         |
| Sloane, <i>Mark Twain as a Literary Comedian</i> .....   | 147-148 |
| Tom Brown  |         |
| Leggett, <i>The Poetic Art of A. E. Housman: Theory and<br/>Practice; [Smitskamp] Housman on Plautus: Manuscript<br/>Notes in the 'Rudens' of Friedrich Marx</i> .....                           | 149-150 |
| William White  |         |
| Vendler, <i>Part of Nature, Part of Us</i> .....   | 151-154 |
| Charles Sanders  |         |
| Plater, <i>The Grim Phoenix: Reconstructing Thomas Pynchon;</i><br>Siegel, <i>Pynchon: Creative Paranoia in "Gravity's Rainbow";</i><br>Cowart, <i>Thomas Pynchon: The Art of Allusion</i> ..... | 155-159 |
| Craig Werner   |         |

## ADVISORY BOARD

Ward Allen  
Kirk H. Beetz  
Bernard Benstock  
Richard P. Benton  
Minta Sue Berry  
Stephen Booth  
Michael H. Bright  
Louis J. Budd  
Kenneth W. Cameron  
George A. Cevasco  
J. Lasley Dameron  
Donald Davie  
Alistair M. Duckworth  
T. J. Edelstein  
Helen Ensley  
W. Austin Flanders  
Frederick S. Frank  
Helmut E. Gerber  
Don B. Graham  
Robert B. Heilman  
John P. Hermann  
M. Thomas Inge  
J. Gerald Kennedy  
Jayne K. Kribbs  
Missy Dehn Kubitschek  
Morris P. Landiss  
Cecil Y. Lang  
Kent P. Ljungquist  
Jerome M. Loving  
Timothy J. Materer

John H. McElroy  
George McFadden  
Jerome McGann  
Francis C. McGrath  
Harrison T. Meserole  
William E. Miller  
Michael Murrin  
Alan H. Nelson  
Glen Allan Omans  
Stephen M. Parrish  
David Perkins  
Marjorie G. Perloff  
Stuart Peterfreund  
Milton Rickels  
Thomas P. Roche, Jr.  
James E. Rocks  
Alexander G. Rose III  
Jason P. Rosenblatt  
Charles Sanders  
James L. Sanderson  
David E. E. Sloane  
Donald B. Stauffer  
Craig R. Thompson  
G. R. Thompson  
Joseph B. Trahern, Jr.  
Julian Wasserman  
Bruce Ira Weiner  
William White  
Brian F. Wilkie  
Calvin D. Yost, Jr.

## EDITORIAL

With *UMSE* launching a new series, changes in form and content are inevitable. We have moved from a house publication to a nationally refereed journal that welcomes submissions, articles or notes, on any aspect of literary study treating British or American writing. We will regularly run reviews. Manuscripts ranging over the spans of British and American (excepting Colonial) fields have come in, although the majority have dealt with Romantic, Victorian, and American (especially southern) topics. Such initial concentration is by no means restrictive, so far as editorial outlook sees. We desire the best articles to be had, concerning any period, topic, or figure. This is not a journal devoted to Faulkner, despite certain misconceptions, nor have any submissions on Faulknerian topics been accepted to date, although papers about him have come in quantity.

Between mid-November 1979 and mid-November 1980 eighty-odd manuscripts have arrived. Each has gone to at least two readers, and most evaluations have come back within two weeks. There have been over thirty unanimous rejections, and a fair amount of material is still circulating. Besides the nine articles and three notes appearing in this issue, a backlog exists for Number Two. In topical coverage, twentieth-century American literature leads the race (chiefly in fiction, with numerous southern topics), Victorian runs next (with much more on poetry than other forms), and Medieval third (concentrations on Chaucer topics — no acceptances as yet — and William Dunbar: is there a revival?).

Contributors to the first volume include some of the outstanding names in our profession. As a special feature, we hope to publish in each issue a screech about a great scholar or teacher. Appropriately — with the University of Mississippi's ties to one of America's foremost novelists and to southern literature of wider ranges — the first sketch is devoted to the late Jay Broadus Hubbell (1885-1979), Founding Editor of *American Literature*, lifelong promoter of southern letters, and *doyen* to all students of American literature. These accolades come, fittingly, from a long-time admirer and colleague, Clarence Gohdes, himself the editorial successor to Professor Hubbell, as well as a mighty figure and force in his own right among Americanists.

Invitations for advisory board members emphasized the maintenance of high standards for the contents of *UMSE*. That excellence

they have supported, and to them all I bear far greater gratitude than so brief a line of print can convey. Several additional hands have lent notable services to *UMSE*, for which particular notice is meet and right. First thanks go to the journal's planning committee: John Crews, Jeffrey T. Gross, and T. J. Ray, our Business Manager. Special gratitude goes to Ronald A. Schroeder for his foresight about the proportions of an editor's function. Other members of the Department of English at Ole Miss have been encouraging and helpful. Valuable advice, as well as labors beyond the call of duty, have come from persons in and out of our department: Jack Barbera, Stephen Booth, Michael H. Bright, Michael L. Burduck, Craig Gibson, Vance Justice, Missy Kubitschek, Maureen Cobb Mabbott, B. H. Stewart, E. Kate Stewart, Thomas H. Stewart, Craig Werner, and Calvin D. Yost, Jr. From their sagacity seasoned through long years upon editorial seas, several renowned editors have provided insights to better this journal: Kenneth W. Cameron, Clarence Gohdes, Clyde K. Hyder, William E. Miller, and the late Arlin Turner. To all mentioned above *UMSE* owes much. These persons have kept the lower lights burning, as it were, to bring a vessel, with a helm guided by an oft uncertain hand, safely toward port.

### ANNOUNCEMENTS

*UMSE* for 1982 will be devoted to Edgar Allan Poe; that for 1984 will feature essays on American regional literature. We look forward to outstanding submissions.

Another journal, *Milton and the Romantics*, becomes with its next issue *Romanticism Past and Present*. It will henceforth treat "the Romantic view of the past in its various and periodic manifestations." Submissions should run 2500-5000 words, prepared MLA style. Direct correspondence to the Editors (Stuart Peterfreund and Arthur J. Weitzman), Department of English, 133 Holmes Hall, Northeastern University, Boston MA 02115.

### Arlin Turner 1909-1980

American literary scholarship suffered a great loss with the death of Arlin Turner on April 24, 1980. This man's career was distinguished, providing a model of a first rate scholar who was simultaneously a great human being. His study under Killis Campbell, at the University of Texas, Austin, during the late 1920's and early 30's, securely grounded Arlin in scholarly method; thence he went on into academic teaching and scholarship at Louisiana State University and from there to Duke University. At the latter institution he ultimately held a James B. Duke Chair and became Editor of *American Literature*, a meet position for the successor in southern literary studies to Jay B. Hubbell, founding editor of that famous journal, the first devoted exclusively to our national literature. Arlin also held visiting professorships in many other corners of the world.

Professor Turner's influence was widely felt through his students, who specialized in diverse fields. Whether the concentration was in southwestern humor, civil-war correspondence relevant to the Whitmans, or the novel of puritanism, in Hawthorne, Melville, Poe, or Caroline Gordon, a candidate's dissertation came away the better for Arlin's careful reading, shrewd criticism, and kind advice. The recent *Festschrift* honoring him reveals his far-ranging authority in American literary topics, both as regards supervised dissertations and his own widespread research and publications. Naturally his work with Campbell resulted in early studies of Poe, and Arlin's last professional address concerned the Hawthorne-Poe relationship. Other interests led to the standard biography of G. W. Cable, which elicited plaudits from hard-to-please critics; a fifty-year fascination with the life and writings of Hawthorne culminated in *Nathaniel Hawthorne: A Biography*, brought out by Oxford University Press early in 1980. It surpasses previous biographies of the New England writer, and it stands as a magnificent capstone to an impressive scholarly career.

In the Fall of 1979, when *UMSE* was being revamped, Arlin was invited to serve on the advisory board. He responded that he would indeed assume those responsibilities, adding that he was "pleased and honored" to do so and that he would assist in any other way. Such courtesy was customary in this man. He went on to evaluate several manuscripts, each receiving thoughtful treatment. He would be pleased to know that a former student is represented among contributors to the present issue, as he was to learn that one would act as Editor and others would serve as evaluators. We shall miss his wise, generous counsel.

ARLIN TURNER

Overall, Arlin Turner's name will not be speedily forgotten in the realms of American Literature. That he completed two substantial books, one on Cable, another on Hawthorne, in the months immediately preceding his death; that he continued to attend professional meetings, to write shorter scholarly studies, and to teach and advise those in need, typifies one about whom the words of an old American hymn are characteristic:

Memories all too bright for tears  
Crowd around us from the past.  
He was faithful to the last,  
Faithful through long, toilsome years.

B.F.F.IV

## The Forsaken Merman and The Neckan: Another Look

Clyde K. Hyder

Emeritus, The University of Kansas

Knowledge of an author's sources may throw light on his originality; if it tells little of the relationship between his experience and his writing, it may often be useful in deflating extravagant conjectures about that relationship. Taking account of sources was beyond the aim of "Hugh Kingsmill" (H. K. Lunn), whose *Matthew Arnold* was written partly under the influence of Lytton Strachey; both set out to be condescending to Victorians. To add color to his caricature, Strachey did not hesitate to invent details — for instance, the allegation that Doctor Arnold's legs were too short for his trunk. Similarly, though Kingsmill knew only that, as a letter by Matthew Arnold explains,<sup>1</sup> Renan had told John Morley of how the youthful Arnold's visit with George Sand had created the impression of "*un Milton jeune et voyageant*," Kingsmill had a decided distaste for Milton and so placed beneath the portrait of George Sand the inscription "He struck a chill to her heart."<sup>2</sup> He presumably intended to heighten the effect of this, parallel to his other inscriptions, by assigning to George Sand "a warm bosom." Another biographer describes the youthful Sam Ward as "bubbling" and quotes his saying that "at thirty I must be *aut Caesar aut nullus*."<sup>3</sup> Nobody would think of using the four Latin words as key words for the later "King of the Lobby" (a contemporary of the Arnolds) in the fashion in which Kingsmill applies them to Thomas Arnold. He has much to say of a supposed conflict between Matthew's youthful impulses and his allegiance to his father, a much misunderstood person to whom the son's intellectual debt was considerable.<sup>4</sup>

Pursuing his purpose to find in Arnold's work some reflection of the alleged conflict, Kingsmill could detect in the "interminable poem [*Sohrab and Rustum*]... hardly a hint of any relation between Thomas and Matthew Arnold on the one hand, and Rustum and Sohrab on the other."<sup>5</sup> That "interminable", by the way, is a small indication of his lack of sympathy with his subject, less important than his misunderstanding of what Matthew Arnold meant by "moral" ideas or "criticism of life" in poetry or of Arnold's books on educational, social, and religious subjects, all exposed to a kind of pseudo-sophisticated denigration. In spite of his earlier admission regarding *Sohrab and Rustum*, Kingsmill quotes nine lines about the death of Sohrab, the last

three being an obvious reminiscence of Homer's lines describing the death of Patroclus and later of Hector (*Iliad*, XVI, 855-57, and XXII, 361-63), suggesting that "a faint relation between his own experience and his theme is perhaps discernible."<sup>6</sup>

Kingsmill's treatment of Arnold's youthful interest in a Frenchwoman is just as vulnerable. What can be reasonably assumed (as opposed to the next to nothing that is known) about Marguerite, the woman who figures in the series "Switzerland," is outlined by P. F. Baum, who considers the poems possibly related to her and sensibly deprecates conjectural assignment of others.<sup>7</sup> Evidence does not warrant attributing to a youthful love-affair the importance assigned to it by Kingsmill and others who forget that young men often feel attractions not sanctioned by congeniality of taste, temperament, or background. If they are as poetic as Arnold, they might think of barriers between persons as like the estranging sea and as something to ponder on; they also learn from the experience of other people. Kingsmill insists that Arnold's experience was crucial. He might have been satisfied if Arnold had been involved in an intimacy like Wordsworth's with Annette Vallon, not usually regarded as the real-life representative mirrored in the Lucy poems; he is disappointed by Arnold's choice, attributing it to paternal influence. No one should be surprised, therefore, when he also assumes that Margaret in "The Forsaken Merman" is "a symbol of the happiness he had missed, quickening his imagination until it attained" in that poem "a complete though only momentary freedom."<sup>8</sup> Would he have called it a mere coincidence that in the course of the narrative Arnold used (this he did not know about) the heroine's Scandinavian name corresponded to "Margaret"? "Marguerite," pleasant-sounding and in French meaning both "daisy" and "pearl," has left traces in poetry, beginning with those Old French poets Chaucer had in mind when in his Prologue to *The Legend of Good Women* he professed allegiance to the daisy. We have no reason to suppose that it was the real name of the Frenchwoman Arnold met in Switzerland, a country of which other members of the Arnold family were also fond; and if it was not her name, what would be the point of choosing "Margaret" as the name to use in the poem? Instead of being obsessed with the French name or its English equivalent, as is implied, he may have liked it and simply decided to keep what he found in his source.

It was another set of commentators, not those who took their cue



from Kingsmill, that Tolkien had in mind when he mentioned "Jabberwocks" who "burbles in the tulgey wood of conjecture."<sup>9</sup> The example of Kingsmill has to some extent affected other interpreters. If H. W. Garrod did read Kingsmill with care, he must have overlooked a passing reference to the Fausta of "Resignation" as Arnold's sister, for Garrod pauses to consider a temptation to make something of Fausta. (Arnold's choice of the name may remind us that Margarete, too, is the heroine of *Faust*, by the modern author whom Arnold most admired.) But Garrod concludes, "Nothing hints that the poet's reaction to her was stretched beyond the bound of friendship."<sup>10</sup> Since "Fausta" was not a Byronic half-sister, his conclusion is hardly surprising. Garrod was also unaware of the evidence that associated "Faded Leaves" and other poems with the woman to whom Arnold became happily married. Looking for Marguerite everywhere, he finds her in many places. If he had been familiar with the immediate source of "The Forsaken Merman," he would not have prefaced his conjectural observations by misinforming his readers that Marguerite "lent her name to the lost bride of *The Forsaken Merman*."<sup>11</sup>

In 1918 Herbert Wright had identified the immediate source of the narrative used in that poem as a passage from George Borrow's review of J. M. Thiele's *Danske Folkesagn*,<sup>12</sup> though apparently he did not realize that Borrow had merely translated a passage by Thiele, itself based mainly on the Danish ballad "*Agnete og Havmanden*" ("Agnes and the Merman"), which may be considered an ultimate though not an immediate source.<sup>13</sup> What follows is from Borrow:

There lived once two poor people near Friesenborg, in the district of Aarhus in Jutland, who had one only child, a daughter, called Grethe. One day that they sent her down to the sea-shore to fetch some sand, as she was washing her apron, a merman arose out of the water. His beard was greener than the salt sea; his shape was pleasing, and he spoke to the girl in a kind and friendly tone, and said, 'Come with me, Grethe, and I will give you as much gold and silver as your heart can wish,' 'That were not badly done,' replied she, 'for we have very little of it at home.' She let herself be prevailed on, and he took her by the hand, and brought her down to the bottom of the sea, and she in the course of time became the mother of five children. When a long time had passed over, and she had nearly forgotten all she knew of religion, one festival morning as she was sitting with her youngest child in her lap, she heard the church bells ringing above, and there came over her mind great uneasiness, and an anxious longing to go to church. And as she sat there with her children, and sighed heavily, the merman observed her affliction, and enquired

what made her so melancholy. She then coaxed him, and earnestly entreated him to let her go once more to church. The merman could not withstand her tears and solicitations, so he set her on the land, and charged her strictly to make haste back to the children. In the middle of the sermon, the merman came to outside of the church, and cried, 'Grethe! Grethe!' She heard him plainly, but she thought she might as well stay till the service was over. When the sermon was concluded, the merman came again to the church, and cried, 'Grethe! Grethe! will you come quick?' but still she did not stir. He came once more, the third time, and cried, 'Grethe! Grethe! will you come quick? your children are crying for you.' But when she did not come, he began to weep bitterly, and went back to the bottom of the sea. But Grethe ever after stayed with her parents, and let the merman himself take care of his ugly little children, and his weeping and lamentation have been often heard from the bottom of the deep.

Clement K. Shorter was probably the first person to suggest a Scandinavian source for "The Forsaken Merman"; "We owe a rendering of 'The Deceived Merman' [Borrow's title for "Agnes and the Merman"] to both George Borrow and Matthew Arnold, but how different the treatment!"<sup>14</sup> Wright, however, specifies details indicating that the passage cited is closer than the ballad to Arnold's poem: "one festival morning," corresponding to Arnold's Easter, the important festival for Christian faith; "As she was sitting with the youngest child in her lap" (cf. "And the youngest sat on her knee"); emphasis on Grethe's concern for her soul. Most decisive is the difference of names, usually Agnes, not Margaret, in the German and Scandinavian ballads, including the one Borrow entitled "The Deceived Merman." Benjamin Thorpe began his translation from Thiele (see note 13): "In the diocese of Marhuus there dwelt two poor people who had an only daughter named Margaret, or Grethe."<sup>15</sup> The sentence indicates how natural it was for an Englishman to recognize that *Grethe* is a shortened form of *Margrethe* (cf. *Gretchen*, with the suffix *-chen*, in relation to *Margarete* in *Faust*).

In "The Forsaken Merman," description, as well as revelation of Margaret's feelings, may cause one to lose sight of its being in form a dramatic lyric. Addressing his children, the merman recalls how their mother had heard the church bell that aroused concern for her soul's safety, since water-sprites are demonic and since she is living apart from the church. As is the way of poets, Arnold humanizes both Margaret and the merman. But critics search assiduously for biographical implications. A remark by Stanley T. Williams — "Like the

merman, Arnold cannot, because of something in his nature and manner of thinking, worship in the church, as do the others. He can only look on, somewhat unhappily, as the merman watches Margaret<sup>16</sup> — cannot be taken literally, for Arnold did attend church; and the author of *Literature and Dogma* and *God and the Bible* had an intelligent faith. However tempting it may be to recall “the sea of faith” in “Dover Beach,” probably written during Arnold’s honeymoon,<sup>17</sup> the merman’s not entering the church harmonizes with the tradition regarding mermen, according to which his presence would have been abhorrent, as in some of the ballads and in Arnold’s “The Neckan.” Arnold’s later letters show him devoted to his children, but to date no one has suggested that the merman’s pathetic remarks to and about his children are related to a trait which a phrenologist — phrenology was taken seriously in his day, like some aspects of literary Freudianism in ours — might assign to Arnold’s philoprogenitiveness. In ballads grouped with “Agnes and the Merman,” the various analogues of “Hind Etin” described by Francis James Child, the merman speaks of the plight of his children.<sup>18</sup> Indeed in one a division of five children between parents is mentioned; two being assigned to each parent, a theoretical division of one child would follow. In various ballads, Agnes decides to stay in the Christian world, to return to the underwater realm, or to die. Since the authorship of such ballads is unknown, they are safe from biographical speculation.

Like some other writers, Williams does justice to the skill of Arnold’s contrast between the sea-realm, where “the great winds shorewards blow” but which contains

Sand-strewn caverns, cool and deep,  
Where the winds are all asleep,

and Margaret’s “white-walled town,” with “the little gray church on the windy shore.” The merman reflects that prayers in the church must be long — a sad rather than a slightly amusing thought, for he connects it with Margaret’s absence. He has found that her “eyes were sealed to the holy book,” that she has joy in her faith, in the life of the town, in the sunlight that had not reached to her underwater home with its “spent lights” and view of strange sea-creatures, in all her daily activities. But even as she sings while spinning, she remembers that home in the sea, and her sigh and tears emphasize her mother-love, her longing

THE FORSAKEN MERMAN

For the cold strange eyes of a little Mermaid  
And the gleam of her golden hair.

It is mother-love, not *l'amour passionnel*, that this decidedly un-French Margaret feels. The merman, in speaking to the children, introduces the line "The sea grows stormy, the little ones moan," a line he repeats in his plea to the mother. *Pace* Kingsmill and others (to call the roll would be embarrassing), this emphasis on mother-love is an odd way to discharge from the dark cavern of the Freudian Unconscious a supposedly traumatic emotional experience.

Another line is repeated by the merman: "Children dear, was it yesterday?" Usually the Otherworld is timeless, and such familiar stories as those of Thomas Rymer or Rip Van Winkle recall the supernatural lapse of time, but the repeated line helps to convey the vividness of the merman's impression, like one of a recent happening.

The conclusion of "The Forsaken Merman" is emphatic. At the end of the poem the merman, though conscious of the strength of Margaret's faith, prophesies future visits in which the burden (in two senses of the word) will be:

'... there dwells a loved one,  
But cruel is she!  
She left lonely for ever  
The kings of the sea.'

In an earlier passage the merman has said:

Once she sate with you and me,  
On a red gold throne in the heart of the sea.

The detail magnifies Margaret's sacrifice and enhances the merman's dignity. The attribution of royalty requires no great powers of invention. There is no reason to suppose that Arnold had heard of the Danish poet Oehlenschläger's adaptation of the ballad "*Agnete og Havmanden*" in which the merman promises Agnete:

Thou shalt be queen of my joyous halls  
Of polished crystal with gleaming walls.  
Seven hundred maidens attend me there,  
Seven hundred young mermaids with golden hair.<sup>19</sup>

This Solomonic grandeur has no basis in the ballad, nor in another ballad that Borrow translated and entitled "The Merman." Tinker and Lowry do not note that in his *Tales of Wonder* Matthew Gregory ("Monk") Lewis included not only a translation of the latter in which he calls the merman a "water-man,"<sup>20</sup> but also an adaptation called "The Water-King." Furthermore, in his original poem "The Cloud-King" (possibly the only narrative poem in which the denouement hinges on a point in grammar) a "Water-King" appears as a brother demon.<sup>21</sup> To know who first attributed royalty to mermen is hardly possible. A dwarf-king, an elf-king, and a hill-king appear in analogues of "Hind Etin," in the group containing ballads about mermen. Robert Jamieson, who published his own translation of the ballad translated by Lewis and afterwards to be translated by Borrow as "The Merman," disclaimed "ambition to rival Lewis" and incidentally expressed the opinion that the merman "cannot, with propriety, be deemed a water-king": "Although he was the inhabitant of the water, he was not the sole lord of the element."<sup>22</sup> In Tennyson's boyish poem, "The Merman," the merman is

Singing alone  
Under the sea,  
With a crown of gold  
On a throne,

and in a companion-piece, "The Mermaid," a mermaid wishes that "the King of them all would carry me, / Woo me, and win me, and marry me." Correspondences of this kind are commonplaces. Tennyson's mermaid also aspires to sing and comb her hair, like Heine's Lorelei; mermaids who do both must be multitudinous.

The happy union of imagery and rhythm in Arnold's

Now the wild white horses play,  
Champ and chafe and toss in the spray,

recalls the imaginative association of horses and white-crested waves in ancient myth, in which Poseidon drove his steeds in Oceanus. H. J. Rose writes of Poseidon: "It is not at all certain that he was originally conceived as of human form; several legends ... and his standing title Hippios, 'He of the horse(s)', are consistent with his having horse-shape."<sup>23</sup>

Arnold's underwater realm, where appear salt-weed, sea beasts,

and whales, and where "the sea-snakes coil and twine," has prompted speculation. Needless to say, snakes can be real; there is no reason to suppose that even in dreams they are symbolical. They are usually accepted for what they are in Coleridge's lines telling how the Ancient Mariner, after perceiving the water-snakes' beauty, blessed them. If distrust of snakes is as old as the story in Genesis, the twentieth century added a new hazard: the risk of mentioning even harmless snakes in the presence of a Freudian, susceptible to phallic fallacy in forgetting that snakes have an actual existence. Without disparaging Freud's insights, one may need to suggest a word of caution to literary psychologists: professional psychologists would not attempt analysis without questioning the person to be analyzed. Freud's own attempts to analyze certain literary and historical figures have not won acceptance from special students. One might remember that Freud had limitations, such as a superstitious belief in numerology, and was capable of such misjudgments as espousing the Looney theory of the authorship of Shakespeare's plays.<sup>24</sup> Arnold's misgivings about the Zeitgeist are also relevant. In the age of theology it did not seem absurd to interpret Ovid's account of the pursuit of Daphne by Apollo as symbolical of the Incarnation. These remarks may serve as a preamble to the reminder that Arnold's sea-snakes have been interpreted as obvious "eroticism" and so as standing for a "tension" relating to the Marguerite of "Switzerland." Arnold thus becomes a merman in both "The Forsaken Merman" and "The Neckan."<sup>25</sup> "It is impossible not to perceive in the latter poem" ["The Forsaken Merman"] states a different author, "a metaphorical presentation of the poet's hopeless passion for the shadowy Marguerite."<sup>26</sup> Marguerite is sufficiently shadowy for me to achieve that impossibility. Fortunately, the poem is one that both children and old men may enjoy without hearing of the author's "hopeless passion."

## II

In Arnold's volume of 1853 "The Neckan" comes just before his greater and perhaps most popular poem. *Neckan* is a nonce word. *Neck*, used in German, is not listed in the *O.E.D.*, which does list *nicker* from Old English *nicor*, used in *Beowulf* for "water-monster." Arnold needed a word not connected with the usual meaning of *neck*

as part of the body, also one with more rhythmical flexibility. One instance of *necken* (with an *e*, not *a*) does appear in a review of a collection of old Swedish ballads edited by Geijer and Afzelius in the *Foreign Quarterly Review* for April 1840, in which “Necken, the Water-King” appears more than once, being descriptive, in a kind of *catalogue raisonné* of a few ballads in which mermen play a part.<sup>27</sup> Arnold may have seen this. He could also have adapted the word from German rather than Swedish, since *Necken* could be the German plural of *Neck*. I have also found *Necken* listed as a rare variant of *Neck* in one German dictionary, Gerhard Wahrig’s, though it is not listed in the Grimms’ *Deutsche Wörterbuch*.

Thomas Keightley, who published his *Fairy Mythology* anonymously in 1828 (republished under his own name in 1850), discusses necks and their hope for salvation, denied in oral tradition and by ministers and priests, as does Benjamin Thorpe in his *Northern Mythology*. Both point out that necks could appear in the form of horses, haunting rivers and small streams.<sup>28</sup> One may recall what H. J. Rose wrote of Poseidon, that he was always associated with water but originally may not have been a god of the ocean (see note 23). Necks were sometimes malign; their connection with human drownings reminds us of the lore behind Synge’s *Riders to the Sea*. Necks of the ocean are identified with mermen.

Both “The Forsaken Merman” and “The Neckan” are, then, about mermen and both concern disparity of religious faith in the creatures of the sea and mortals of the earth, the former being humanized. Unlike the earlier poem, “The Neckan” is a literary ballad, but is similar in that most of its story develops in the words of the Neckan’s song.

Shortly before the publication of *The Poetry of Matthew Arnold: A Commentary* (1940), I wrote to its authors of finding resemblances in the story of “The Neckan” in certain passages of Grimm’s *Deutsche Mythologie* and closer resemblances in Thorpe’s *Northern Mythology*. I noted similarities in that volume, corresponding to those in Grimm. The editors suggested that I write an article on the subject; this I neglected to do, at the time having in mind other projects. In their *Commentary*, they stated:

Like “The Forsaken Merman,” the story may be derived from two poems in Borrow’s *Romantic Ballads* ..., “The Merman” and “The Deceived Merman.” The former tells of a sea-creature who wooed and won a

## THE FORSAKEN MERMAN

mortal bride, while she was attending church, and how she sank with him to the depths of the sea, but there is no mention of any desire on his part for salvation. This, however, might have been suggested by the distress of Margaret (in the second poem) over the unholy union which she had contracted. Arnold was probably acquainted with and perhaps unconsciously influenced by the theme of Fouqué's *Undine* (1811).

In the next paragraph they add that I had pointed out to them that "some of the material in the poem could have been derived" from Keightley and from Thorpe.<sup>29</sup>

A re-examination of the problem suggests modification of their statement, which may have been prepared without time for careful study. They did not distinguish between ultimate and immediate sources and, aware of the almost boundless range of the human mind, were inclined to make some statements tentative.

Keightley says of the neck: "Sometimes he is represented as sitting, of summer nights, on the surface of the water, like a pretty little boy, with golden hair hanging in ringlets, and a red cap in his hand." Elsewhere he affirms that the neck "sits on the water and plays his golden harp, the harmony of which operates in all nature."<sup>30</sup> Thorpe, who occasionally acknowledges indebtedness to Keightley but who may have phrased some passages similarly because he and his predecessor drew from a common source, writes that the neck is seen "occasionally as a handsome youth, with yellow locks flowing over his shoulders and a red cap, sitting on a summer evening on the surface of the water with a golden harp in his hand."<sup>31</sup> Arnold's poem begins:

In summer, on the headlands,  
The Baltic Sea along,  
Sits Neckan with his harp of gold,  
And sings his plaintive song.

The second stanza adds that, like the forsaken merman, the Neckan has wife and children, who are now in the water below him. A passage in both Keightley and Grimm tells how one of two boys saw a neck playing on his harp near the river and warns him that he has no hope of salvation. But when the father of the boys, the parish priest, learns of the neck's weeping, he tells them to reassure him, as they do.<sup>32</sup>



Tinker and Lowry, in the passage quoted above, explain that Borrow's translated ballad "The Merman" — as I have pointed out, the same Danish ballad was translated by others, and nothing in "The Forsaken Merman" proves indebtedness to "The Deceived Merman" by Borrow — "tells of a sea-creature who wooed and won a mortal bride, while she was attending church..." If they had included some other details, Arnold's obligations would have been more clear. In "The Merman," the merman's mother makes a horse and necessary trappings for her young son and changes him into a knight before he goes to a church where he weds his mortal bride. Arnold's fifth stanza begins:

Sings how, a knight, he wander'd  
By castle, field, and town.

A continuation of the song tells of the Neckan's bridal and of the priest's question regarding his identity:

—'I am no knight,' he answered:  
'From the sea-waves I come.'—  
The knights drew sword, the ladies scream'd,  
The surpliced priest stood dumb.

The effect of the pretended knight's approach to the church in the ballad-translation is equally startling:

When in he walk'd with his plume on high,  
The dead men gave from their tombs a sigh:

The priest heard that, and he clos'd his book:  
"Methinks yon knight has a strange wild look."<sup>33</sup>

After the maiden accepts him, she is led to a boat, which soon sinks beneath the waves. The knight, the wedding, and the effect on the priest are details that Arnold apparently adapted from the ballad, though not necessarily from Borrow's translation.

In the first version of "The Neckan" the priest speaks thus:

—'Why sitt'st thou there, O Neckan,  
And play'st thy harp of gold,  
Sooner shall this my staff bear leaves,  
Than thou shalt Heaven behold.'—

Like other commentators, Tinker and Lowry failed to perceive that what the priest says here belongs to the Tannhäuser story; they assumed that only the part added to the final version of the poem (1869), the budding of the staff, is connected with the story. They were, therefore, mistaken in suggesting that Swinburne's "Laus Veneris" (in *Poems and Ballads*, 1866) could have supplied knowledge of the story, and Wagner's opera was not familiar in the earlier date.<sup>34</sup> Arnold could have found the story in a ballad in Arnim and Brentano's *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* or in an adaptation of another old German ballad, "Venus and the Christian Knight" by Richard Monckton Milnes.<sup>35</sup> A passage in Grimm's *Deutsche Mythologie* also tells the story.<sup>36</sup> Theoretically, then, Arnold could have found all his source material in Grimm and a translation of a Danish ballad or, if he was already acquainted with the story of Tannhäuser, in Keightley's *Fairy Mythology* and the same ballad. But one must also consider a passage in Thorpe's *Northern Mythology* that tells how a priest encountered a young man sitting on the surface of the water and playing a stringed instrument:

He saw that it was the Neck, and in his zeal addressed him thus:—"Why dost thou so joyously strike thy harp? Sooner shall this dried cane that I hold in my hand grow green and flower, than thou shalt obtain salvation." Thereupon the unhappy musician cast down his harp, and sat bitterly weeping on the water. The priest then turned his horse, and continued his course. But lo! before he had ridden far, he observed that green shoots and leaves, mingled with beautiful flowers, had sprung from his old staff.<sup>37</sup>

The priest returned to tell the news, as in the passage in Keightley the boys were instructed to do by the priest, their father. The added element is that relating to the Tannhäuser story. On the principle of William of Ockham, that one should not unnecessarily multiply entities, one must decide that, though Arnold could have been familiar with other works mentioned, Thorpe's *Northern Mythology* and a translation of the Danish ballad, whether by Borrow, Lewis, Jamieson, or others (Arnold could also have had access to a German translation<sup>38</sup>), were the likely sources of "The Neckan."

In the 1869 version of the poem, its final form, Arnold completed the incident from the Tannhäuser story, telling how the staff budded. His reason for doing so is obvious. The story told in the old ballad of Tannhäuser not only involved the union of a mortal and a supernatu-

ral being, like "The Neckan" and "The Forsaken Merman," but also was, like the former, an illustration of the wrong done by priests' harsh judgments (in the old German ballad the priest is also a pope).

The last stanza of a literary ballad may, often with slight variations, repeat the first. A familiar example is Carroll's "Jabberwocky," parodying the ballad style. Another example is Keats's "*La Belle Dame sans Merci*," in which the "lady in the meads" is an enchantress like the Venus in the Tannahüser story. Arnold's only change in his final stanza adds a letter, "this" replacing "his." As his poems and prose indicate, Arnold knew the value of repetition. In spite of the budding of the staff, the Neckan's song remains plaintive (this is a change from the source), for now he weeps at the unkindness of Christian souls, who, better than those outside the Christian pale, should know the value of what in his noble praise of the virtue St. Paul calls "charity" (in the King James Bible, I. Cor. 13).

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> George W. E. Russell ed., *The Letters of Matthew Arnold* (New York, 1896), 2: 151.

<sup>2</sup> Hugh Kingsmill, *Matthew Arnold* (New York, 1928), opposite p. 58.

<sup>3</sup> Lately Thomas, *Sam Ward: "King of the Lobby"* (Boston, 1965), p. 65.

<sup>4</sup> Charles R. Moyer's dissertation "Matthew Arnold and His Father" (University of Kansas, 1959) treats this subject sympathetically.

<sup>5</sup> Kingsmill, p. 147.

<sup>6</sup> Kingsmill, p. 147.

<sup>7</sup> *Ten Studies in the Poetry of Matthew Arnold* (Durham, N. C., 1958), pp. 58-84. See also "Matthew Arnold's Original Version of 'The River'," *TLS*, 28 March 1958, p. 172.

<sup>8</sup> Kingsmill, p. 84.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Daniel Grotta-Kurska's *J. R. R. Tolkien: Architect of Middle Earth* (Philadelphia, 1976), p. 82.

<sup>10</sup> H. W. Garrod, *Poetry and the Criticism of Life* (London, 1931), p. 35.

<sup>11</sup> Garrod, p. 36.

<sup>12</sup> "The Source of Arnold's 'Forsaken Merman,'" *MLR*, 13 (1918), 90-94.

<sup>13</sup> The passage translated by Borrow also appeared in J. M. Thiele's *Danmarks Folkesagn* (Copenhagen, 1843), 2: 259-61, cited here because the earlier edition was inaccessible. Borrow's translation, according to Wright, appeared in the *Universal Review*, 2 (1825), 563-64. For Benjamin Thorpe's translation of the same passage, see no. 15 below.

<sup>14</sup> *George Borrow and His Circle* (Boston and New York, 1913), pp. 109-10.

<sup>15</sup> Benjamin Thorpe, *Northern Mythology* (London, 1851), 2: 171.

<sup>16</sup> *Studies in Victorian Literature* (New York, 1923), p. 112.

<sup>17</sup> Baum, *Ten Studies*, p. 86. Cook and Tinker (p. 59), however, believed that the woman addressed was "a lay figure," neither his bride nor Marguerite.

<sup>18</sup> For discussion of variants of "Agnes and the Merman," the Danish ballad, see Francis James Child, *English and Scottish Popular Ballads* (Boston, 1882), 1: 364 ff.

<sup>19</sup> From a translation by Myra E. Hull in "The Merman Lover in Ballad and Song," *Studies in English* [University of Kansas Humanistic Studies, 6, No. 4] (Lawrence, 1940), pp. 65-80. Miss Hull's essay, which includes translations of other ballads, touched upon "The Forsaken Merman," but she was unaware of Wright's article on its source.

<sup>20</sup> Lewis, *Tales of Terror and Wonder* (London, 1887), pp. 153-54. In Book 2, Canto 12, stanza 24 of *The Faerie Queene* Spenser introduces "a grisly Wasserman."

<sup>21</sup> Lewis, p. 164.

<sup>22</sup> Jamieson's *Popular Ballads and Songs* (Edinburgh, 1806), 1: 214.

<sup>23</sup> *A Handbook of Greek Mythology* (New York, 1959), p. 63.

<sup>24</sup> Thomas Looney's *Shakespeare Identified*, by one of life's little ironies, illustrates as nice a correspondence between author's name and theme as does *The Imperial Animal* by Lionel Tiger and Robin Fox.

<sup>25</sup> Howard W. Fulweiler's "The Metamorphosis of a Merman," *VP*, 1 (1963), 208-22, connecting "The Neckan" also with its author, arrives at the assumption that "the man from the sea must attempt to live on the land (could we say the sensitive Victorian intellectual must find his salvation in the crude society of Philistia?)" (p. 214). A brief rejoinder by Kenneth Allott, *ibid.*, 2 (winter, 1964), 60-63, mentions my earlier suggestion regarding the source of "The Neckan" as recorded in Tinker and Lowry (cf. n. 29).

<sup>26</sup> E. D. H. Johnson, *The Alien Vision of Victorian Poetry* (Princeton, 1952), p. 161.

<sup>27</sup> *Foreign Quarterly Review*, 15 (1840), 18.

<sup>28</sup> Keightley, 1: 235; Thorpe, *Northern Mythology*, 2: 21.

<sup>29</sup> Tinker and Lowry, pp. 127-28. Their mention of Margaret (instead of Agnes) "in the second poem" is an oversight; no relation of that ballad to "The Neckan" seems likely.

<sup>30</sup> Keightley, 1: 235, 236.

<sup>31</sup> Thorpe, 2: 78.

<sup>32</sup> Keightley, 1: 236-37. A similar passage appears in Stallybrass' translation of Grimm's *Teutonic Mythology* (London, 1883), 2: 493-94.

<sup>33</sup> For "The Merman," see George Borrow, *Romantic Ballads* (Norwich, 1913, reprinted from the 1826 edition), pp. 117-18.

<sup>34</sup> Henry T. Finck, *Wagner and His Works* (New York, 1898), 1: 454-55.

<sup>35</sup> Richard Monckton Milnes, *Poems, Legendary and Historical* (London, 1844), pp. 24-28. Though it does not consider Arnold's poem, my "Swinburne's *Laus Veneris* and the Tannhäuser Legend," *PMLA*, 45 (1930), 1202-13 treats of several earlier and later versions of the story.

<sup>36</sup> Tinker and Lowry, p. 128. The story of Tannhäuser also appears as No. 171 in the Grimms' *Deutsche Sagen* (1816, 1818).

<sup>37</sup> Thorpe, 2: 80.

<sup>38</sup> One appears, for instance, in Wilhelm Grimm's *Alddänische Heldenlieder, Balladen und Märchen* (Heidelberg, 1811), pp. 403-04. According to the *D. N. B.*, Thomas Arnold was especially fond of ballads; his son may have been able to consult more than one collection.

## Some Recollections of Jay B. Hubbell

Clarence Gohdes

Emeritus, Duke University

I first heard of Jay B. Hubbell in 1925 when a fellow graduate student at Harvard on leave from Southern Methodist University sang his praises as a departmental chairman. Not long thereafter I too served as a temporary instructor at that school, where I found that my friend's enthusiasm had indeed been based on solid grounds. In Dallas I was happily admitted to the company of a choice set of young teachers and graduate assistants all of whom admired "The Judge," as we called him, and looked to him for the cheerful encouragement which he was ever ready to bestow. He had a pleasant, unassuming faculty of making young people feel at ease with him without in the least giving a hint of purposiveness or condescension. At that time English departments were in a state of excitement over the "new" poetry, a natural accompaniment of what was heralded as the "Poetical Renaissance." It was even fashionable to quote Edgar Lee Masters on the way to the bathroom. Mr. Hubbell had conducted a poetry contest for undergraduates and acted as judge a time or two; hence his nickname. As my year in Dallas advanced he and I became more intimate, for we had much in common despite the gap in our ages. We were both preachers' sons, had received an old-fashioned undergraduate grounding in the ancient classics, had taught in public high schools, and reacted similarly against the old-line philology then characteristic of the graduate regime at Harvard. I was the only one of his young teachers who intended to specialize in the study of the literature of the United States. Toward the end of the year he told me in confidence that he had been sounded out for a post at Duke University. Though a hill-country Virginian, he had really adopted Texas, married a Dallas lady, and felt himself firmly rooted at S. M. U. as a founding father. He left Dallas reluctantly, and ever after eagerly received any word as to the activities of the college or of his multitude of friends there.

Shortly after Christmas, upon his return from a meeting of the Modern Language Association, of whose new and insignificant American Literature Group he was chairman, Mr. Hubbell fairly bubbled over with enthusiasm for promoting a new magazine, to be wholly devoted to research in the national letters. The best bet thus far, he said, had been special issues of *Studies in Philology*, thanks to the zeal

## SOME RECOLLECTIONS

21

of Norman Foerster, then at Chapel Hill, but the number of English professors interested in the field had increased to the point of making a new journal imperative. He both flattered and surprised me one day by asking me to accompany him to a meeting with the dean of the graduate school, whose aid, he explained, was essential to getting such a venture started at S. M. U. The conference took place in a pleasant bedroom where the dean was found sprawled out comfortably. A geologist by profession, he often took to his bed, the Young Turks gossiped, in order to escape the heat and burden of his office. A rugged red-bearded man, he listened carefully while Mr. Hubbell neatly outlined his project and in due season asked a number of rather pertinent questions, some of which suggested that his comprehension of the necessity for such a new organ was befogged by his understanding that English professors already had the journal of the Modern Language Association as an outlet. At that point, with my usual youthful cockiness, I entered the conversation and explained that the situation was somewhat similar to that of the geologists, who had a general publication but that a host of other magazines somewhat allied existed, among them *The Coal Trade Journal* and a half dozen others whose names I fished up from memory, where they had been stored ever since I acquired them as an undergraduate debater discussing government ownership and operation of coal mines. He seemed to get the point of my remarks but terminated the session by indulging in a brief soliloquy on the financial difficulties then impeding any new departures in the graduate school. I was, of course, a novice in recognizing the dodges of university officials seeking to escape from problems in which they have no essential interest. At the end of the year when Mr. Hubbell disclosed that an offer had actually been made by Duke, he told me that one of its attractions would be the prospect of founding the much-desired journal there. Certainly *American Literature* would never have been started at Duke without his determined efforts. In all likelihood it would have seen the light first at Brown University, which likewise made an offer to the American Literature Group after Mr. Hubbell had maneuvered one from the authorities in Durham. Only his known zeal for the cause, his unselfish endeavors in behalf of the struggling organization of American literature specialists, and his shrewd politicking counterbalanced the prevailing opinions that New England provided a more intellectual atmosphere than the South and that an older institution promised

better than one as yet untried in the world of scholarship. But he never looked upon his feat — for that it really was — as a personal triumph. To him *American Literature* was, rather, a logical advance in the progress of the discipline to which he had devoted himself. He was a skilled promoter — of good causes. He was pleased when, after his retirement, I became Chairman of the Board of Editors and insisted that his name remain on the masthead of *American Literature*. The title I cooked up was “Founding Editor.” He was that, in more ways than one.

Following my stay in Dallas I spent another year at Harvard and then transferred to Columbia where I luxuriated in a University Fellowship, \$3000 in amount. Mr. Hubbell and I were in constant communication, for he solicited my help in covering a number of periodicals unavailable in Durham for the checklist on current articles which added to his labors and constituted a regular department of the new journal. That was the beginning of my activities as a scullion in the huge kitchen of scholarship, as I like to say of a bibliographer. He also had me help to beat the bushes for manuscripts written by fellow graduate students in seminars at the two schools. A paper on Emerson’s “Divinity School Address” which I submitted was promptly accepted, and he honored me by running it in the very first number, for March, 1929.

It was he, of course, who was responsible for my going to Duke in the fall of 1930, and I was responsible for Charles Anderson, who accompanied me. Neither of us taught American literature at first. We found that Mr. Hubbell himself had a class in contemporary European drama. His chief teaching assignment, however, was an undergraduate survey of American authors, which was already quite popular and had a large group of students enrolled voluntarily. It was known amidst the local ivy as “Hubbell’s English.” Majors in education planning to teach English in the high schools of North Carolina were required by state law to take such a course, a circumstance existing in several states which provided the earliest effective stimulant to collegiate study of the national letters. It was the need of a teacher for this undergraduate survey which led the authorities at Duke to hire him. Previous to his arrival the course had been shunted about among several teachers who had no special knowledge or interest in the subject and by following a path of least resistance had actually been taught by Allan Gilbert, a Renaissance specialist. He ran the students



## SOME RECOLLECTIONS

23

along the development of letters in the United States as quickly as possible, in order to arrive at Longfellow, and with that poet's rendition of Dante's *Divina Commedia* he spent the rest of the year. Emerson once opined that were he a professor of rhetoric he would use Dante as a textbook. Allan Gilbert far outreached the Sage of Concord in calling upon the Tuscan. Graduate students in our specialty gradually increased at Duke as word was spread that the new university encouraged the subject. Especially was this true in the summer sessions, to which numerous high school teachers flocked, to the point that visiting professors had to be hired to meet their demands. Among the stellar visitors at one time or another were F. L. Pattee, George Stewart, Robert Spiller, Sculley Bradley, Walter Blair, and Henry Nash Smith, all of whom, thanks to Mr. Hubbell's foresight, were asked to help order books in their particular provinces for the library.

While The Judge served on the board of the Duke Press, the Research Council, and a variety of special committees both within and without the university, his labors for the library were always paramount. He was a member of its council and continually checked book-dealers' catalogues and solicited special grants to make up deficiencies in the holdings of Americana. I had barely settled in at Duke before he had a \$500 grant put at my personal disposal to add new books. The year was 1930 and I was overwhelmed by the munificence of the gesture of welcome. He scoured the countryside along with the historian W. K. Boyd in search of old newspaper files and manuscripts, and in his very last days wrote to a large circle of friends and acquaintances to obtain materials for the archive on the history of American literary scholarship which was named in his honor and to which he turned over an extensive collection of manuscripts preserved in his home. He had been a pioneer in such endeavors at S. M. U., starting there a collection of books in his field from scratch, so that he was well experienced in the art and craft of building a library before he came to Duke. When at the end of World War II he went to the University of Vienna for a session or two he started another collection from scratch in Austria, obtained a foundation grant to help with purchases, and proceeded to make out in long hand lists of hundreds of books to be secured through dealers. He even rounded up a file of *PMLA* for the library in Vienna, soliciting help from friends in the United States who might have broken sets to send overseas. My own

copies of that journal were so used. When he went off to teach elsewhere he haunted local bookstores in search of items missing from the shelves at Duke. Since he had ordered so much of the literary Americana there he knew more about the holdings in his field than any librarian. The resources of three important libraries were thus enriched by his zest for books.

While at first the chores of editing *American Literature* were far from being as demanding as they become at the end of World War II, they were nevertheless burdensome the year round, though the management of circulation was always in the hands of the Duke Press, as were all fiscal matters. The press also dealt with the printer, for many years the Seeman Printery, then a family business, located in Durham. It held a general contract for most of the printing needed by the university and tucked the publication of books and periodicals for the press under its general umbrella. We never could be sure just when we should receive proofs or when an issue would be mailed out. At the outset a small office in the quarters assigned the press was reserved for *American Literature*; later there were two rooms, one for the Chairman, the other for the Managing Editor, the latter elected annually by the American Literature Group. His duties, so the official appointment stated, were "to assist the editor." In effect he ran the journal half of the year and whenever Mr. Hubbell was away. The press provided only a part-time secretary, a limitation which accounted for many contributors' or reviewers' receiving correspondence typed out by Mr. Hubbell on his own typewriter or sometimes scrawled by me in long hand. The first secretary was the wife of Roy P. Basler, later editor of the works of Lincoln and an official of the Library of Congress. The second was David K. Jackson, now well known as an authority on Poe. Both remained loyal friends and cheered Mr. Hubbell in his old age by personal visits or occasional letters. Many of their successors were students or wives of students; some were very incompetent. One of the very ablest, however, was a faculty wife, Lucretia Duke, who loyally and expertly carried on her duties over the years until the Law School "captured" her and set her up in plush quarters as office manager of one of its new publications. We were entirely at the mercy of press officials in the hiring or retaining of our secretary, and the budget sometimes eliminated any chance of enjoying the services of the best talent. The English Department

## SOME RECOLLECTIONS

25

showed little or no interest, though Paull F. Baum helped to design the format.

Mr. Hubbell had to proceed gently in sharing his burden of teaching and editing with me, for he was reluctant to ask for more assistance than his initial spartan arrangements for the journal demanded from the university. As a first step he merely turned over the preparation of the checklist of articles to me, work on which, as reported above, I had been sharing while still a graduate student. I put the collaborators on a more formal basis, listed their names in print, and kept the record of magazines each was to cover. Much later, of course, I insisted that the official bibliographer of the American Literature Group take over this burden, for I had been in the habit of turning over the slips accumulated from my helpers to him anyhow. The best teamwork came when Dan Patterson and Hugh Holman were Group Bibliographers. But The Judge meant to work me into the editing chores also, and when the time was ripe he had the office of Managing Editor established and induced the American Literature Council to elect me. At the end of the first semester following my election he said, "You're in charge, Clarence," and for a half year showed up at the office only to check his personal mail and advise from time to time about the selection of reviewers. He was able also to cut his junior-senior survey course into two sections and to have me released from teaching freshmen. Very quickly he also maneuvered me into graduate courses; he covered the earlier nineteenth century, Southern literature, and Poe; and I the later period, Emerson, and Whitman. Before he left for Johns Hopkins, Charles Anderson relieved him of his undergraduate instruction. It was easier to work me in much faster than would ordinarily have been possible because I had been invited to Columbia to take temporary charge of all the graduate instruction regularly conducted by R. L. Rusk. That broke the ice. When Ohio State University and later other schools offered me professorships Mr. Hubbell used my threats to leave as a means of prying a reduction in our teaching schedules and to put both me and the journal forward in various ways. When he went off on leave he left me fully in charge, took my advice about dropping the list of advisory editors originally run on the masthead, and for many years had me make the annual report on the journal to the American Literature Council. Incidentally, for several years I paid my own way to the MLA meetings in order to represent the journal, and at first I paid for my own subscription. As I

look back on our relationship I wonder that so sensible a man as he could with such sang froid put these responsibilities on the shoulders of a young whipper-snapper like me. If he ever had qualms I never observed them.

The general policies of the magazine had been pretty well established before I came on the scene, and when changes were needed, for example giving up the initial requirement that no articles on living authors be accepted, the Board of Editors was always consulted; then their recommendation was reported to the Council of the Group (later called a Section), who rubber-stamped such recommendations without much ceremony. Any strategies that became necessary in dealing with the university officials or the officers of the American Literature Group he handled. I had no talent in such matters.

Once, when a vacancy in the secretary's office of the Modern Language Association was imminent, The Judge served on a committee of selection which numbered Albert Baugh and other friends of mine. They tapped me for the honor. But political requirements of the post led me to turn it down. It may seem strange that my dear friend would have gladly seen me depart for Washington Square to take the office eventually assumed by William Parker, but his motive was quite clearly explained to me. Personally I should gain in salary and in prestige — so he thought — and, above all, he was convinced that an energetic specialist in our discipline would help to overcome the latent opposition to the study of American literature then still existing in certain scholarly bailiwicks and put emphasis on the last word in the name of the Modern Language Association of America. It is too bad that Mr. Hubbell was never elected to the secretary's job. As for me, in retrospect I suppose that I should have been quite willing to let that huge organization dwindle to a society numbering a few thousand scholars who were real McCoys, so to speak. If as secretary I had been forced to lead that worthy body into the mazes and mire of political action I should have resigned at once. One thinks of the sad case of Milton in politics even while Thoreau's crack runs in the mind: "Read not the times but the eternities."

It is possible that the indifferent or hostile attitude toward the rise of American literature studies during his early days made Mr. Hubbell more consciously look for openings to advance his special interest, but there is no doubt in my mind that promoting the study of American literature was a kind of crusade dear to his heart and allied with his

## SOME RECOLLECTIONS

27

not inconsiderable talents to gain his ends by strategy. Certainly his going off on Fulbright and other assignments fitted in with his notions of playing missionary for the cause. He was shocked and indignant when the head of the English Department at the University of Athens suggested that since there existed a severe shortage in instruction of advanced courses in British literature he, a Fulbright professor there, should turn a hand and help out. It is also true that his colleagues in Durham, prior to his very last years, more or less took him for granted. As for the journal — that was Hubbell's baby. He asked for it — and he got it, i. e., the headaches. His colleagues in English were more rather than less indifferent. Abroad he was a prominent figure in the humanistic horizon — the editor of a distinguished organ solely devoted to the new study of the national letters of the U. S. A. He had a right to the certain degree of pride he held in his accomplishments. He once told me, however, that perhaps he had made a mistake in going as visiting fireman to so many different schools at home and abroad. He would have done better, he opined, to have spent more time on research. It is visibly true that his chief contributions to scholarship, his book on Southern literature and another on the rating of American writers, came out after he had retired. But undertaking research along with all his regular chores and promotional ventures would have been formidably difficult. I could do no more than bits of editing or bibliographical garnerings amidst the tumult of running *American Literature*, teaching, and directing the work of graduate students. Sustained investigations could be carried on successfully only during sabbatical leaves. I think that The Judge later regretted also his protracted labors on his textbook anthology. To be sure, it was financially rewarding, but it took more of his time than may be supposed. He might well have brought out his monumental overview of the literature of the southern states much earlier if he had spent the time on it.

It may be overlooked that his manifold efforts in founding the first research journal in his field were materially aided by previous experience in running *The Southwest Review*. Before he moved to North Carolina he had learned a great deal about academic journalism, though, to be sure, *The Southwest Review* was a far cry from representing primarily the interests of scholars. When negotiations between the American Literature Group and Duke University were under way he was prepared to put into the initial agreement matters

that most English professors would never have bothered about. For example, it was clearly specified that fiscally *American Literature* was the property of the university, but the Group should manage editorial policies and elect an editorial board of its own choosing except that the Chairman of the Board of Editors should be named by Duke. All articles published had to be approved by a board of scholars elected by the membership of the Group. Shortly after he retired, there were certain members of the Group who felt that the editorial policies had been too conservative, and an effort was made, somewhat covertly at first, to gain control of the periodical in behalf of the "new scholarship." When a committee of the MLA body made their first maneuvers and a copy of the formal agreement was put at their disposal they gave up the ghost — and *American Literature* was spared a divagation in the direction of the "new scholarship," now so dated.

Experience with *The Southwest Review* also was helpfully preparatory to the most difficult aspect of editing a scholarly journal, namely, the conduct of the department containing reviews of new books. Mr. Hubbell knew in advance of March, 1929 the chief hurdles and bugbears and was able to avoid many. How can an editor secure a sound appraisal from a scholar who has been chosen to review a product of long labor written by a friend — or an enemy, or by a young and promising chap who disagrees radically with the general conceptions the reviewer himself believes to be basic? What shall you do when the man chosen as best suited to review a book writes in: "I can't say anything good about his opus, so please count me out as a reviewer of it?" What about the editor's weighty responsibility in isolating from a swarm of new publications the relatively few works that are to receive full treatment? Only experience can help to steer clear of such rocks and shoals, especially if anonymous reviews are *verboten*. And always something may pop up for which even long experience fails to prepare. A case in point, now a humorous memory, was provided by Arthur Hobson Quinn, the world's leading authority on the theater of the nation. He had turned in his usual sound estimate of a respectable study in that field and had of necessity employed the word *theater* in almost every other sentence. He spelled it with an *re*. Since our Chicago *Manual* rule used *er* we had to change his copy accordingly. When proof came back from dear old Professor Quinn all the many *theaters* were restored with the *re* and a most indignant letter accom-

## SOME RECOLLECTIONS

29

panied it, reminding Messrs. Hubbell and Gohdes that he had had occasion during a long lifetime of writing about the stage to use that word more than most and he had always spelled it with the *re*, and in no uncertain terms he demanded that his wishes be followed. Mr. Hubbell chuckled when he read it — and left it to me to calm the troubled sea. I simply wrote an explanation of our rule, admitted it was arbitrary, but noted that a journal couldn't change its spelling from page to page to accommodate the wishes or fashions of contributors. Professor Quinn gave up — and, years later, invited me to contribute to *The Literature of the American People* and sought to make me his successor at the University of Pennsylvania. That contretemps turned out happily. I lost more friends via reviews in *American Literature* than did Mr. Hubbell, thanks to what he had already been through in Dallas.

Mr. Hubbell had a most Christian way of keeping silent when he was wronged or hurt; he only occasionally mentioned a person's faults and never spoke ill of acquaintances. It came as a shock to me that he was never asked to write a chapter for *The Literary History of the U.S.* I found out that he had thus been slighted when he pointed out a few mistakes in portions of that work which he might have been expected to have composed himself. Only once did he mention in my hearing his chagrin that the leadership in the study of Southern literature which he had built up over the years at Duke was allowed to depart to another school seemingly without a qualm. When a favorite grandson met an untimely accidental death and, soon after hearing the news, I called to talk to him in his darkened parlor, an eyeshade draped on his forehead and a sad look on his face, he mentioned the matter only at the instance of his son Jay, who wished me to know, and then quickly thereafter changed the subject to the old days at Harvard when all the graduate students in the English Department knew one another, as well as all their professors. He had his share of griefs and sorrows, but for him the belt of gold concealed the hidden wound. A couple of weeks before he died he described a kind of sharp pain that seemed to shoot through his midriff area once in a while but cheered both himself and me again with reminiscences of his days as a graduate student. Recollections of family, church, and friends enabled him to pass his later years with equanimity, and rare was the day when, staff in hand, he did not stride through our neighborhood on his twice-daily walks.

He never complained about the burden of duties which accumulated during his earliest years in Durham with ever-increasing enrollment in his field and the journal requiring more and more time in order to keep up with the growing volume of manuscripts submitted and new books to be considered for review. When he took his first sabbatical leave he was still teaching four courses in addition to his editorial chores and directing twenty-seven graduate theses or dissertations. The favorite recollection connected with the birth of the journal which he liked to repeat was: "You know, the editor of *Studies in Philology* assured me at the outset that we couldn't get a hundred subscribers in a year." The subscriptions, in fact, paid the costs of printing from the very beginning. For the good of the cause — that sums up his idea of service to the professional students of the national letters. They did well to name their honorary medallion after him. "American literature," Howard Mumford Jones once quipped: "Why Hubbell invented the subject."

Quite apart from his accomplishments in starting the research journal, the faithfulness of his efforts in his field may be glimpsed in several other activities. The monumental history *The South in American Literature* speaks for itself, of course, but its readers may never know from it that its author was literally steeped in a fabulous knowledge of background detail undergirding the information chosen for inclusion in its pages. He started his scholarly career with an essay on Virginia life in fiction and to the end maintained his zest for the province he had originally elected to exploit. The last words I heard from his lips, the night before he went to the hospital, were the lines of a minor Southern poet written about a scuppernong vine. The scuppernong, I perhaps need to say, is the oldest native wine grape in the United States and grows nowhere else save in the South. He had routed out the poem in answer to a query I put to him the day before as to verse dealing with this delectable muscadine. The little poem which he read over the phone was to him a poor thing indeed "and yet mine own," as Shakespeare has it. There is, to be sure, no single clue to any man's character, and, even more obviously, no one can reduce the mind and nature of a humanistic scholar to a solitary boullion-cube phrase, but if I had to come, let us say, near the external reality of The Judge's personality in a word or two I should summon up the old, well-worn expression "Southern gentleman." Gentle he assuredly was. He was also ever devoted to promoting the study of the literature



SOME RECOLLECTIONS

31

of his country. So much for the "outward shows." Deep down within, however, one word will say it for me; and that word is "Friend."

William Dunbar's *Dialogus Obscoenus in Locus Amoenus*\*

Thomas W. Ross

Colorado College

For a generation or so, literary historians have been engaged in the fashionable pursuit of the pastoral. Along the way these critics have brought to bay some oddly-sorted practitioners of pastoral literature — Gide, Frost, and William Golding, for instance. But they have neglected a major poem that deserves at least a short chapter in the history of the genre: “The Tretis of the Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo” by William Dunbar (1465?-1530?) the Scottish Chaucerian.<sup>1</sup>

It may at first seem odd to think of Dunbar as a pastoral poet. In his “Tretis” there are no shepherds, though he did write another shorter poem about a sheep.<sup>2</sup> Real crook-carrying sheep-herders have, paradoxically, never been part of the pastoral tradition. Even in Theocritus<sup>3</sup> the disputants are sweet-scented shepherds, costumed, as it were, by Fragonard; or they have disappeared altogether, their places being taken by personages from other walks of life. Two ingredients remain, in Theocritus as well as in Dunbar: the dialogue and the setting in idealized Nature. These form the irreducible core of pastoral poetry.

Dunbar's “Tretis,” with its irreverent manipulation of pastoralism, might have rung the death-knell of this kind of poetry in English. But it did not — perhaps because *if* the pastoral “were ever lost as a tradition, it would presently be revived as an inspiration, equivocal and vain as it is.”<sup>4</sup> The “Tretis” is a postlapsarian paradise of dainty pastoral (and other) devices — wickedly designed to ridicule the very tradition in which it was written. Despite Dunbar's attack, the pastoral survived, with its sentimentalities almost unchanged, not only through the English Renaissance but much later. Why so? One reason is the theory of continual rediscovery, mentioned above; the other is that the cultural flow between England and Scotland in the late Middle Ages and the early Renaissance was one-way. The Southrons — the English — did not read Dunbar, even though he was the most gifted northern disciple of their most famous poet. Dunbar revered him as “noble Chaucer, of makaris [makers, i. e. poets] flour” in his “Lament for the Makaris.”(60) But there was no complementary compliment: no Englishman gave Dunbar credit for using the “English” (i. e., Teutonic) alliterative line in his “Tretis.” No Southron imitated, or could match, his brilliant aureate diction or his astonishing variety

of lyric forms. And there were no encomia of “olde Dunbar, floure of Northern Englishshe undefiled.”

Dunbar’s pastoralism is unique — a peculiarly effective mixture of the two essential ingredients, natural description and dialogue. His work is also uniquely important in any assessment of what can be done with the English pastoral. First, because it occurs first, let us examine the nature of Nature in the “Tretis.” Dunbar combines two traditional views:

... the Nature, innocent and perfect, which was man’s before the disaster in the garden, and the Nature to which he was afterwards reduced, limited, corrupted, death-bearing. Prelapsarian nature achieved its goodness and its pleasure naturally, without effort or strain. Postlapsarian nature, on the other hand, is in constant need of correctives — education, law, habit — inculcated rather than springing from within.<sup>5</sup>

Into this ambivalent Nature comes the Poet, who eavesdrops upon the three ladies. They complain about their husbands, past and present. The tensions and ironies are familiar: they are those of Shakespeare’s comedies when, for instance, Touchstone complains about the underwashed Audrey while seated beneath the greenwood tree; or when Autolycus interjects his roguery into the rites of Perdita, that Queen of Curds and Cream, who is pranked up most goddess-like as Flora. We find similar incongruities in the bad verses of Orlando juxtaposed with the inanities and charms of three different pairs of shepherds: Silvius and Phoebe, William and Audrey, Ganymede and Aliena. Dunbar’s poem shares this same wonderful greenwood-cum-obscenity — or Nature-and-naturalism. He also uses some other less familiar (non-Shakespearean) motifs: native Anglo-Saxon and Continental medieval conventions that give special resonances to his sophisticated verse.

To judge Dunbar’s poetry, therefore, we must draw upon a broader tradition than that in which a poet like Nicholas Breton (for instance) worked.<sup>6</sup> Not only does the Scot have classical roots; there are also French ones (as contrasted with the Italian which dominated the poetry farther south), together with a number of other strains, some of them native. “Native” applies particularly and most significantly to the Anglo-Saxon alliterative line, the splendid sounds of which differentiate the “Tretis” from all other pastoral poetry.<sup>7</sup>

William Empson is the progenitor of modern pastoral studies. He

ignores Dunbar, along with many other significant poets, but one may nevertheless turn to him for guidance in determining the breadth of the genre and Dunbar's place in it. Empson's definitions are broad indeed, including as examples such disparate works as *Paradise Lost*, *The Beggar's Opera*, and *Alice In Wonderland*. In the first part of his famous study,<sup>8</sup> he stresses the proletarian message inherent in the genre. Later he ignores this sort of thing. He observes that the pastoral makes "simple people express strong feelings (felt as the most universal subject, something fundamentally true about everybody) in learned and fashionable language." He notes, then, that the quality of the poetry results from the "clash between style and theme," or, as I should like to describe Dunbar's technique, between the *locus amoenus* and the *dialogus obscenus*.<sup>9</sup>

E. K. Chambers describes these two pastoral tonalities in a slightly different way:

On the one hand, there is a body of poetry, transparent, sensuous, melodious, dealing with all the fresh and simple elements of life, fond of the picture and the story, rejoicing in love and youth, in the morning and the spring; on the other, a more complex note, a deeper thrill of passion, an affection for the sombre, the obscure, the intricate, alike in rhythm and thought, a verse frequent with reflections on birth and death, and their philosophies, a humor often cynical or pessimistic.<sup>10</sup>

Youth, morning, and spring are all in the opening of Dunbar's poem. The transparent, the sensuous, and the simple are absent — or, rather, they are adduced only for purposes of irony. I doubt if any readers find anything sombre (to continue the gloss on Chambers) in the three ladies' complaints about their husbands. The humor *is* cynical and pessimistic; however, we do not feel Death's chilling breath in Dunbar's Caledonian Arcadia.

A more comprehensive treatment of the genre, Marinelli's brilliant little *Pastoral*, gives us further guidance. The pastoral impulse is a "projection of our desires for simplicity." (p. 3) The reductive impetus in the "Tretis" is toward a more natural and therefore perhaps a simpler erotic experience.<sup>11</sup> But this may be pushing things: the difficulty with "simple" is the same encountered above with Chambers's definition. The simplicity in Dunbar is devilishly complex.

Marinelli continues (p. 8): pastorals are "all poems of the same formal type, 'mixed' poems of description and dialogue, part-narrative, part-dramatic, and usually but not always in either hex-

ameter or pentameter verse." Dunbar's "Tretis" is "mixed" in this sense. However, the long alliterative line is of course totally alien to the classical forms which Marinelli has in mind. Had the Scot been writing in London several generations later, he would probably have used the English equivalent of the classical heroic line, blank verse. The alliteration which he *did* choose derives from well-springs as noble and almost as venerable as are the models supplied by Theocritus and Virgil. Dunbar's line had been used for Anglo-Saxon epic poetry and later for heroic romances. We can never be sure that Dunbar was consciously using an "epic" measure to heighten his cynical distortion of the pastoral; we can only say that he achieves a brilliant effect by contrasting the lofty metre and the "low" matter. Nobody before or since has tried to combine the two in just the same way as did Dunbar; yet the two elements are perfect complements. As Marinelli concludes (in a different context, to be sure), "clearly, pastoral and epic imply each other continually." (p. 19)<sup>12</sup>

The two great themes of the pastoral (Marinelli continues on p. 20) are Time and Nature. Certainly the second is manifestly present in Dunbar's poem, not only in the *locus amoenus* preamble but also in things like the "natur" of line 174 — a reference to the husband's flaccid "lume."<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, the three ladies in the Middle Scots poem seem blithely unconcerned with the passage of time. To be sure, they all hope for a future in which their amorous activities will be more satisfying; but they have no sense of the past or of growing old. Here we may profitably contrast the reveries of the Wife of Bath: one of the most pathetic details in her Prologue is her awareness that

The flour is goon, ther is namoore to telle;  
The bren, as best I kan, now moste I selle.<sup>14</sup>

Such a rueful sentiment is alien to the "Tretis." Perhaps Dunbar does hint at another familiar "time" *topos*, the *Carpe diem*, from earlier European literature, but he has nothing of the more melancholy *Ubi sunt* here.<sup>15</sup>

Dunbar may neglect the Time theme, but he makes another bold synthesis that is without precedent I think. He puts a Wife of Bath (the Wedo) into the *hortus conclusus* of the Song of Solomon, a landscape that also recalls the enclosed rose-garden of the *Roman de la Rose*. The Wedo is a trespasser in the paradise of the Song, but she has some

rights of easement (at the very least) in the French landscape of Guillaume and Jean. She, like Alison of Bath, is a descendant of La Vieille, the garrulous old woman in the *Roman*; her speeches also owe something to another personage from that poem, the jealous husband Le Jaloux.

By contrast Chaucer puts his oft-married webster into no setting at all: we know that she is on the road to Canterbury, of course, but the poet gives us no idea of the natural surroundings in which she reminisces about her past. Setting is not important. We are aware of the irony of her being on a holy pilgrimage while simultaneously looking for Husband Six. But lush landscape plays no part in Chaucer's ironies in the *Canterbury Tales*.

Elsewhere Chaucer does use natural description in the traditional pastoral fashion. After introductory material from the dream-vision convention, the *Parlement of Foules* continues:

A gardyn saw I ful of blosmy bowes  
 Upon a ryver, in a grene mede,  
 Ther as swetnesse everemore inow is,  
 With floures white, blewe, yelwe, and rede,  
 And colde welle-stremes, nothyng dede,  
 That swymmen ful of smale fishes lighte,  
 With fynnes rede and skales sylver bryghte.

On every bow the bryddes herde I synge,  
 With voys of aungel in here armony. (183-91)

Chaucer follows this with animals, music, and gods: Cupid together with a whole pantheon of allegorical beings, Wille, Pleasaunce, etc. Then there appears the Goddess Natura, surrounded by the birds on St Valentine's Day — details that Dunbar borrowed for the "Tretis." (60-63, 205-06)

Obviously Dunbar knew Chaucer's *Parlement* well. However, pastoral description in the "Tretis" plays a different role. Chaucer's is harmonious while Dunbar's is deliberately dissonant with the dialogue. The "Tretis" is *sui generis*, as we see once again, drawing upon English and classical traditions but adding to the mixture other conventions that make it peculiarly important and delightful. To these conventions I shall now turn — first to the Old French lyric devices that Dunbar employed in an unusual way.<sup>16</sup>

The *pastourelle*, the *chanson de mal mariée*, and what Bartsch

classifies as "Romanzen" are linked forms.<sup>17</sup> They customarily begin on a May or Midsummer morning with the poet riding out before dawn. Nature is burgeoning. The poet overhears the lament of a woman — an abandoned, love-lorn maiden; a shepherdess; a disappointed, ill-wed young wife. More often than not he listens to conversation (rather than monologue) — a debate or complaints from more than one speaker. The poems can be very sophisticated. Speaking of the *chanson de mal mariée* Voretzsch points out that though the matter is undoubtedly derived from the folk, the manner is artful.<sup>18</sup>

Sometimes the description of the *locus amoenus* is only sketched in the Old French forms from which Dunbar drew — as in this *chanson de mal mariée* (classified by Bartsch among his "Romanzen"):

Pancis ameroucement  
de Tornai parti l'autrier.  
En un pre lons un destour  
vi trois dames ombroier,  
mariees de novel. (I. 21. 1-5)<sup>19</sup>

All three ladies wear green chaplets and the eldest has a green gown: green was the traditional emblematic color of fickleness.<sup>20</sup> The ladies are willing to take lovers since they have found their husbands inadequate. The eldest says that she would never have married at all if she had found a "leal ami." (26) Though this *chanson* is very spare, it clearly establishes the contrast between the natural beauty, both of the mead and of the ladies, and the naturalistic dialogue.

The *pastourelle* differs from these *chansons* only in cast of characters. It begins with the poet, usually a *chevalier*, riding forth into the greenwood; he overhears a shepherdess who is usually complaining about her lover or husband; sometimes he takes part in the dialogue, which concludes with his attempted seduction of the *pastoure*, but often he is only an eavesdropper. The connection of the *pastourelle* with the classical pastoral seems obvious, though some scholars think undemonstrable.<sup>21</sup> Virgil was the probable immediate source with Theocritus providing the ultimate exemplar in his *Idyll* 27. In it a lovers' conversation is overheard. The man puts his hands on her breasts ("I am fain to give thy ripe pippins their first lesson," Edmonds tr., p. 341). There is a seduction: she complains that she arrived a *tiapdéros* (maiden) but departed a *yuvý* (full-blown woman). p. 344)

These conventional situations had imitators before Dunbar. The Goliards, Walther von der Vogelweide, Adam de la Hale, and Dunbar's fellow-Scot Henryson all have connections with either the French or, less clearly, the classical pastoral models.<sup>22</sup> Middle English lyricists imitated the French too and Dunbar may well have known their work. The early (twelfth-century) *debat* "The Owl and the Nightingale" is narrated by a poet who eavesdrops from a "digele hale" (hidden nook) on a summer's day.<sup>23</sup> The narrator in a later poem hears the "strif" between a thrush and a nightingale.<sup>24</sup> Riding along he hears a "litel mai" (maiden) complaining. (Brown, No. 62)<sup>25</sup> By a bank he listens to a nightingale. (No. XXXIII in Chambers and Sidgwick) He overhears a debate between a clerk and a husbandman.<sup>26</sup> One ME poem includes the description of a "newe gardyn" where love-games are played. (Robbins, No. 21) The action of another takes place on Midsummer's Day (Robbins, No. 28); or the narrator, lying asleep in May, takes part in the dialogue rather than merely reporting what he hears. (Robbins, No. 179)

Dunbar's opening should now sound very familiar indeed:

Apon the Midsummer evin, mirriest of nichtis,  
I muvit furth allane, neir as midnicht wes past .... (1-2)

Each detail has precedents, but the mixture is new and fresh. This "evin" is traditionally associated with love-making and the choice of mates. The poet moves forth, alone, before dawn. Dunbar could almost be translating from Old French and in turn faintly echoing the entire tradition, through medieval Latin back to Virgil and ultimately Theocritus:

He is now ready for his *locus amoenus*:<sup>27</sup>

Besyd ane gudlie grein garth, full of gay flouris,  
Hegeit, of ane huge hicht, with hawthorne treis;  
Quhairon ane bird, on ane bransche, so birst out hir notis  
That never ane blythfullar bird was on the beuche harde:  
Quhat throw the sugarat sound of hir sang glaid,  
And throw the savour sanative of the sueit flouris,  
I drew in derne to the dyk to dirkin efter mirthis  
[lie in wait for anything amusing];  
The dew donkit the daill and dynnit the feulis  
[the dew dampened the dale and the birds made a din]. (3-10)

Poets usually employ this sort of setting to provide a lush, sensual



## DIALOGUS OBSCOENUS

39

background for lush, sensual dialogue. But even in its earliest manifestations it could be used ironically — as for instance in Virgil's "Culex" where there is "a mixed forest of nine kinds of trees, a stretch of grass with eighteen kinds of flowers." (Curtius, p. 193) The hyperbole, as such, is amusing.

While Curtius found his earliest *locus amoenus* in Petronius, an earlier exemplar can be identified in Propertius:

Sed procul inclusas audit ridere puellas,  
 lucus ubi umbroso fecerat orbe nemus,  
 Femineae loca clausa deae fontesque piandos,  
 impune et nullis sacra resecta viris  
 Devia puniceae velebant limina vittae.  
 putris odorato luxerat igne casa,  
 Populus et longis ornabat frondibus aedem,  
 multaque cantantes umbra tegebat aves. (IV. ix. 23-30)<sup>28</sup>

Chaucer also probably uses "place" in a bawdy sense (for the pudendum) in *Thopas*, B 1910:<sup>29</sup> the entire *locus amoenus* (i. e., the agreeable place) is a set of symbols for the female organs and environs in one of the medieval Latin poems ascribed to the Goliards:

Hec est vallis insignita,  
 vallis rosis redimita,  
 vallis flos convallium:  
 inter valles vallis una,  
 quam collaudit sol et luna,  
 dulcis cantus avium.  
 te collaudit philomena  
 vallis dulcis et *amena* [italics added],  
 vallis dans solatium.<sup>30</sup>

Dunbar has nothing exactly like this, but the precedent of bawdry in the midst of idealized landscape, firmly established here, makes it easier for us to understand the methods of the "Tretis."

C. S. Lewis has said of the "Tretis" that Dunbar "is playing a practical joke on the audience. That is the point of the beautifully idyllic opening which contains not the slightest hint of what is to follow." (p. 94) He is right about the joke but he underestimates Dunbar's subtlety and thus is wrong about the hints. They are actually very broad: the locale is a "gudlie grein garth, full of gay flouris" but the insistence upon its thorniness ("hawthorne ... hawthorne ... pykis

... thorne," 4, 14, 15) is clearly ominous. As one might expect, thorns and hawthorne had symbolic value in medieval iconography. "Thorns and thorn branches signify grief, tribulation, and sin."<sup>31</sup> Further, a red-blossomed hawthorne that grows in southern Europe [and in the British Isles too] is nicknamed "Spina Christi" or "Christ's Thorn."<sup>32</sup>

The ladies themselves are all in "glaid hewis" (20); more specifically they, like the three new brides in the *chanson* quoted above, are dressed in ominous green, symbol of infidelity: "Thair mantillis grein war as the gress that grew in May sessoun."<sup>24</sup> They are compared with both "lillies"<sup>28</sup> and the "new spynist [blown, opened out] rose."<sup>29</sup> It is a commonplace that the lily and the rose (especially that without thorns) are Mary's flowers. In retrospect we can clearly see the ironic function of these allusions. No blessed virgins these three!

The Blessed Virgin is also represented in medieval art by the enclosed garden itself. (Ferguson, p. 95) Dunbar is careful to make clear that his *locus amoenus* is indeed *conclusus*: it is "hegeit, of ane huge hicht"<sup>4</sup> and the poet must force his way between the thorns, since he is "heildit" [held back, restrained] by hawthorn and "heynd [sheltering]" leaves.<sup>14</sup>

As we turn to the dialogue from the description of nature, from this vantage-point we can appreciate the powerful and bitter significance of thorn, lily, rose, and enclosed garden. Further to link the *locus amoenus* with the *dialogus obscoenus* Dunbar uses an ingenious device. In their "grein arbeir" the three ladies have set up "ane cumlie tabil"<sup>34</sup> on which are arranged "ryalle cowpis apon rawis full of ryche wynis."<sup>35</sup> Having brought these props on stage Dunbar can now punctuate each of the ladies' speeches with laughter and a round of drinks. The table also provides an arena smaller than the expansive "grein garth" — cosy, "indoors-y," artificial — for the intimate confessions of the three speakers, "as thai talk at the tabill of many taill sindry."<sup>38</sup> Despite their aristocratic pretensions these three are after all not much different from Dunbar's own "twa cummeris," those two drunken old gossips who also have a good deal to complain about.<sup>33</sup>

In the "Tretis" the conversation or debate characteristically deals with love. As often, Bacchus and Venus have joined forces. The three ladies begin to speak under the aegis (if he has one) of the God of Drink: they quaff the "wicht [strong] wyne."<sup>39</sup> When we reach the

## DIALOGUS OBSCOENUS

end of section one, Bacchus appears again:

Quhen that the semely had said her sentence to end,  
Then all thai leuch [laughed] apon loft with latis  
[manners] full mery,  
And raucht [reached] the cop round about full of riche  
wynis,  
And ralyeit [jested] long, or thai wald rest, with  
ryatus speche. (146-49)

The same occurs again after the second wife has finished:

Thai drank and did away dule under derne [dark, secret]  
bewis;  
Thai swapit of [tossed off] the sueit wyne, thai  
swanquhit [swanwhite] of hewis. (242-43)

and after the Wedo's disquisition too:

Than culit thai thair mouthis with comfortable drinkis;  
And carpit [conversed] full cummerlik [comradely] with  
cop going round. (509-10)

But it is Venus rather than Bacchus who is the major tutelary deity in the "Tretis." She is mentioned by name in 127, 183, 200, 399, and 431. This last passage is particularly amusing. Like Alison of Bath this Wedo casts about for a future playfellow even while still in mourning for her late husband — and in "kirk":

Ful oft I blenk [glance] by my buke, and blynis of  
[cease from] devotioun,  
To se quhat berne is best brand or bredest in schulderis,  
Or forgeit is maist forcely to furnyse a bancat [banquet]  
In Venus chalmer [Venus's chamber, the vulva]. (428-31)<sup>34</sup>

Despite this conduct we are inclined to sympathize with her, as we are with all the complainants in the pastoral and *mal mariée* poems. The Wedo and the Tua Mariit Wemen are, all three, shackled to enfeebled and incapable bed-partners. They need more manly men to satisfy their needs — to nourish their beauties and their passions.

The ladies' complaints take up most of the dialogue in the "Tretis." Their terms are often drawn from nature, thus joining the two major pastoral ingredients in yet another way. Alliteration under-

scores the invective:

I have ane wallidrag [weakling], ane worme, ane auld  
 wobat [caterpillar] carle [fellow],  
 A waistit wolroun [boar], na worth bot wourdis to clatter;  
 Ane bumbart [drone], ane dron bee, ane bag full of flewme  
 [phlegm],  
 Ane skabbit skarth [monster, cormorant], ane scorioun,  
 ane scutarde [shitter] behind;  
 To see him scart [scratch] his awin skyn grit scunner  
 [disgust] I think. (89-93)

Invective is a common product of pastoralism — “one of the ingredients in the developed bucolic tradition.” (Rosenmeyer, p. 34)

Dunbar’s inventiveness never flags. There is the continual but varied bombardment of invective from the three mal-married ladies; their sexual terms are just as varied, direct, and clear. Passages like the following have given the “Tretis” whatever notoriety it has:

As birs of ane brym bair [bristles of a wild boar], his  
 berd is als stiff,  
 Bot soft and soupill as the silk is his sary lume [tool].  
 (95-96)<sup>35</sup>  
 Ay quhen that caribald carll [monster man] wald clyme one my  
 wambe,  
 Than am I dangerus [disdainful] and daine and doure of my  
 will;  
 Yit leit I never that larbar [impotent one] my leggis ga  
 betueene,  
 To fyle my flesche, na fumyll me, without a fee gret;  
 And thocht his pene [penis] purly me payis in bed,  
 His purse pays richely in recompense efter. (131-36)  
 Also lang as he wes on loft [on top of me], I lukit on  
 him never,  
 Na leit never enter in my thocht that he my thing persit,  
 Bot ay in mynd ane other man ymagynit that I haid. (388-90)

This last passage is not to be dismissed as merely another bit of bawdry. It is remarkable insight into a woman’s fancy.

Despite Dunbar’s sympathy for the Wedo here, he is still “outside” the poem, keeping himself isolated because he has swallowed the “harsh medicine of misogyny.”<sup>36</sup> However, lest the “Tretis” end on too bitter a note he has his three women rise from their third round of drinks and pass the rest of the night “with danceis full noble, / Quhill

## DIALOGUS OBSCOENUS

43

that the day did up daw, and dew donkit flouris". (511-12) To remind us perhaps of the great Rose tradition upon which he also draws, Dunbar calls his three ladies "ryall roisis" (523), reaffirming their dewy morning freshness and their aristocratic birth and demeanor. It is delicious irony.

Finally as a most unusual conclusion for his mocking pastoral Dunbar employs yet another medieval literary device, the *demandes d'amour*, the formal questions of love with which lords and ladies were supposed to amuse themselves:

Ye auditoris most honorable, that eris has gevin  
Oneto this uncouth [strange] aventur, quhilk airly me  
happinnit;  
Of thir thre wantoun [gay, lascivious] wiffis, that I  
haif writtin heir,  
Quhilk wald ye waill [choose] to your wif, gif ye suld  
wed one? (527-30, the concluding lines)<sup>37</sup>

It is only a game after all. All rancor has disappeared. We delight in Dunbar's fertile invention and in his bold new synthesis of pastoralism and other conventions.

During the century or more following Dunbar's death it was, in the South anyway, as if he had never written. Englishmen turned to Italian and Latin models (not to the medieval French so much) and produced some slavishly sugary pastorals. One of the most successful of these pastiches is Nicholas Breton's "Phillida and Coridon" (1600). A glance at its beginning will show, by contrast, something of what Dunbar had accomplished:

In the merry month of May  
In a morn by break of day  
Forth I walked by the woodside,  
Whenas May was in his pride.  
There I spiëd, All alone,  
Phillida and Coridon....<sup>38</sup>

He woos, she is reluctant. She sounds singularly unlike either of Dunbar's women or his widow:

She said maids must kiss no man  
Till they did for good and all.

Despite this puritanical coyness their love is somehow consummated:

And Phillida with garlands gay  
Was made the lady of the May.

Breton's poem is bloodless but brief. It is not really fair to put its limp-wristed couplets alongside the sinewy alliteration of Dunbar. But Breton and his kind held the day in England.

At the other extreme from Breton's brevity are William Browne's *Britannia's Pastorals* (1613 and later). They are a melange of Tasso, Montemayor, and Fletcher, with general indebtedness to Chaucer and of course Spenser: swains love, often allegorically; there is a contrapuntal progress of Thetis and her court. Browne treats passions that are tender and homely, never obscene. But his work runs to 10,000 lines — an abundance that Greg (p. 136) generously characterizes as exhibiting "leisurely amplitude."

Obviously I think readers should prefer Dunbar's "Tretis" to Browne. But that is probably not the point: Browne looks ahead to Milton and perhaps to Donne ("The Bait") and Marvell. These Southrons are of course worthy in their own right of our critical attention. Theirs are simply different versions of the pastoral from Dunbar's vibrant *dialogus obscoenus in locus amoenus*.

The nymphs have departed (to recall Eliot's phrase) from "The Tretis of the Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo," but we should not mind. The ribald conversation of these three Scottish ladies is much more entertaining than that of any nymphs I know, occurring as it does in the pastoral frame that Dunbar so carefully preserves.

## NOTES

\*A version of this paper was read at the Chaucer section of the Modern Language Association meeting in New York City. I should like to call the reader's attention to Roy Percy's first-rate article "The Genre of William Dunbar's *Tretis of the Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo*," *Speculum*, 55 (1980), 58-74, in which he argues persuasively that the poem has much in common with the OF *judgement* genre. Professor Percy's article came to my attention too late for inclusion in my essay.

<sup>1</sup> All quotations are from *The Poems of William Dunbar*, ed. W. Mackay Mackenzie (Edinburgh, 1932). I shall refer hereafter to the poem as the "Tretis." "Chaucerian" is still a useful term, even though it irritates nationalists and other over-sensitive Scots. Dunbar does not slavishly imitate the English poet; yet without Chaucer he could not have written what he did. The question is briefly and fairly summarized in H. Harvey Wood, *Two Scots Chaucerians*, Robert Henryson,

## DIALOGUS OBSCOENUS

*William Dunbar* (London, 1967), p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> "The Wowing of the King," pp. 51-53, in which the ultimately willing seductee is a lamb, a ewe-let.

<sup>3</sup> Citations are from *The Greek Bucolic Poets*, tr. J. M. Edmonds; Loeb Classical Library (London, 1928).

<sup>4</sup> Richard Cody, *The Landscape of the Mind: Pastoralism in Tasso's Aminta and Shakespeare's Early Comedies* (Oxford, 1969), p. 176 — the last words of this monograph. Another (minor) Scottish poet repeated or revived the conventional pastoral opening but with insipid hyperbole instead of Dunbar's élan. See "Off the Cherry and the Slae" by Alexander Montgomerie (1545?-1610) in Tom Scott, ed., *Late Medieval Scots Poetry* (London, 1967), pp. 167 ff., which begins "About ane bank quhair birdis on bewis / Ten thousand tymes thair nottis renewis."

<sup>5</sup> Peter V. Marinelli, *Pastoral*; Critical Idiom Series, ed. John V. Jump (London, 1971), p. 21.

<sup>6</sup> For Breton's place in the pastoral tradition see the conclusion of this article.

<sup>7</sup> In *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century* (New York, 1954), p. 91, C. S. Lewis calls Dunbar's work "a triumph of fruitful obedience to conventions ... [a] minuets of conventions." Dunbar is "the accomplished master of one tradition that goes back to *Beowulf* and of another that goes back to the Troubadours." Francis Lee Utley, *The Crooked Rib* (Columbus, O., 1944), calls the "Tretis" a classic (p. 41) and says that Dunbar "is as much a master of medieval genres as he is of meters." (p. 65) Lewis and Utley are almost the only non-Scots literary historians who recognize Dunbar's genius, though neither discusses the "Tretis" in the pastoral tradition.

<sup>8</sup> *Some Versions of the Pastoral* (New York, 1960). Thomas Rosenmeyer, *The Green Cabinet: Theocritus and the European Pastoral Lyric* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1969), like many other contemporary scholars considers Empson too latitudinarian, though he does admit that the older critic's "conception of the pastoral ... accommodates an ample spectrum of experiences and styles." (p. 6) Rosenmeyer confesses too that "in all probability a tidy definition of what is pastoral about the pastoral is beyond our reach." (p. 3)

<sup>9</sup> Empson, pp. 11-12. The term *locus amoenus* for the idealized landscape has been given currency by Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, tr. Willard R. Trask (New York, 1953), pp. 193-95 ff. A. D. Hope, *A Midsummer Eve's Dream: Variations on a Theme by William Dunbar* (Canberra, 1969), also points out the contrast between opening and body of the "Tretis." His study does not, however, deal with pastoralism. The three ladies are not the Edinburgh citizens they seem, says Hope: they are fays taking part in a fairy revel. See *The Year's Work in English Studies*, ed. Geoffrey Harlow et al. (London, 1972), pp. 138-39.

<sup>10</sup> *English Pastorals* (London, 1895), pp. xvii-xviii, quoted in Rosenmeyer, p. 10. Evidently Rosenmeyer does not recognize that this sombreness amidst pastoral beauty is the *Et in Arcadia ego* of Poussin, as analyzed by Erwin Panofsky, "*Et in*

*Arcadia Ego: Poussin and the Elegiac Tradition*," in *Meaning in the Visual Arts* (Garden City, N. Y. 1955), pp. 295-320.

<sup>11</sup> Even in Theocritus there is abundant sensuality—for instance — in Idyll 2, 136 ff., where the speaker Simaetha tells of her seduction of the young athlete Delphis: "... I that was so easy to win took him by the hand and made him to lie along the bed. Soon cheek upon cheek grew ripe, our faces waxed hotter, and lo! sweet whispers went and came. My prating shall not keep thee too long, good Moon: enough that all was one, enough that both desires were sped" (Edmonds tr., p. 37). In *The Greek Bucolic Poets* (Cambridge, 1953), p. 14, A. S. F. Gow translates the last phrase "we twain came to our desires." The achievement of mutual pleasure provides the climax for another Dunbar poem, "In Secreit Place," 61: "Quhill that thair myrthis met baythe in ane." For "myrthe" and "place" in sexual senses, see my *Chaucer's Bawdy* (New York, 1972), pp. 150-51, 157-58.

<sup>12</sup> James Kinsley ed., *William Dunbar, Poems* (Oxford, 1958), p. xviii, says, "The centre of the *Tretis* is the contrast between appearance and reality, between the idea world of courtly poetry and the 'spotted actuality' of the three women's minds and habits; and to this end a metrical form associated with high style and sophisticated matter is turned into the medium of coarse erotic reminiscence." The judgment betrayed in "spotted actuality" and "coarse" is a little prissy. Some of Dunbar's fellow-Scots have always found it difficult to appreciate his humor. But Kinsley's evaluation of the "centre" of the poem is perceptive. Utley, pp. 156, 215, discusses a couple of later poems about women and in alliterative form; one is perhaps of "Scots provenance" but neither combines the ingredients as does the "Tretis."

<sup>13</sup> For ME bawdy meanings of "nature" see *Chaucer's Bawdy*, p. 151.

<sup>14</sup> F. N. Robinson ed., *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*; 2nd ed. (Boston, 1957), D 477-78; all Chaucer citations are from this edition. Dunbar's "Tretis" naturally recalls Chaucer's Prologue for Dame Alice — despite Lewis's cautionary remark that "comparisons with the Wife of Bath's prologue are here, to my way of thinking, wide of the mark .... Chaucer creates a richly human personality; I do not think Dunbar is trying to do anything of the sort .... If you cannot relish a romp you had best leave this extravaganza alone; for it offers you no other kind of pleasure." (p. 94) "Romp" and "extravaganza" suggest that Lewis undervalued Dunbar's intelligence, but his judgments are a good corrective for those who wax too solemn about Dunbar or about pastoral poetry generally. Wood, pp. 28-29, thinks that the "Tretis" would have shocked the author of the Wife of Bath's Prologue. He calls Dunbar's naturalism "bestiality." (p. 29) Janet M. Smith, *The French Background of Middle Scots Literature* (Edinburgh, 1934), p. 38, admits that though there are French parallels (which I treat below) to the "Tretis" it "certainly owes not a little to Chaucer's Wife of Bath."

<sup>15</sup> Dunbar is the author of the second-best *Ubi sunt* poem (not pastoral in any sense of course) in all literature. His "Lament for the Makaris" with its refrain "Timor mortis conturbat me" is only imperceptibly inferior to Villon's "Ou sont les neiges d'antan."

<sup>16</sup> This is not of course to belie his powerful individuality — something insisted upon by critics like G. Gregory Smith, *Scottish Literature* (London, 1919), p. 14, et



*Passim*. In his old-fashioned *Les E'cossais en France, les francais in E'cosse* (Paris, 1892), Francisque Michel examines at great length the cultural and political ties between the two countries and concludes (I:300) that Dunbar must have studied in France, but there is no evidence for his conjecture.

<sup>17</sup> *Altfranzösische Romanzen und Pastouellen*, ed. Karl Bartsch (Leipzig, 1870); all OF citations are from this anthology.

<sup>18</sup> Carl Voretzsch, *Einführung in das Studium der altfranzösischen Literatur*, 2nd ed. (Halle, 1913), p. 165. He says the subject-matter is "zweifellos volkstümlich," the form "ziemlich kunstlich." More recent historians are less certain about the "folk" material, having found that the "singing, dancing throng" theories of the last century, which relied upon group-composition to account for much anonymous European literature, do not always hold up under scrutiny.

<sup>19</sup> "Deep in amorous thought, / I rode out from Tournai the other day. / In a mead near a path / I saw three ladies shading themselves, / Newly-married brides." (my translation)

<sup>20</sup> *Chaucer's Bawdy*, s. v. "blew," p. 44.

<sup>21</sup> The romanists seem unable to decide whether the *pastourelle* derives from folk-poetry or -ritual or from antiquity. The most authoritative answer is probably still that of Edmond Faral, "La Pastourelle," *Romania*, 49 (1923), 259: "... si, quant à l'esprit, nos poètes sont fort éloignées de Virgile, ils ont subi fortement l'influence de sa technique" (although, as far as the spirit goes, our poets are far removed from Virgil, they are still very much under the influence of his technique). On the other hand, Rosenmeyer (p. 8) says, "... on the whole it is agreed that the *pastourelle* is a specifically medieval genre, and should not be linked too closely with the ancient pastoral." Marinelli (p. 60) takes a more positive tack: he sees the *pastourelle* as extremely important as the medium for introducing the aristocratic point of view into the pastoral tradition. In any event Dunbar knew these OF forms and imitated them in his "Tretis."

<sup>22</sup> Walter W. Greg, *Pastoral Poetry & Pastoral Drama* (New York, 1959; orig. publ. 1905), pp. 63 ff. There were Italian *pastourelles* (as Cody, p. 48, points out) but Dunbar probably did not know them. Greg did not find much influence on English poetry from any pastorals other than the Italian. He does not mention Dunbar.

<sup>23</sup> *Early Middle English Verse and Prose*, ed. J. A. W. Bennett and G. V. Smithers (Oxford, 1966), No. 1.

<sup>24</sup> *English Lyrics of the XIIIth Century*, ed. Carleton Brown (Oxford, 1932), No. 52.

<sup>25</sup> A similar lyric is No. XXVII in *Early English Lyrics: Amorous, Divine, Moral and Trivial*, ed. E. K. Chambers and F. Sidgwick (London, 1966; orig. publ. 1907). Helen E. Sandison, *The Chanson d'Aventure in Middle English*, Bryn Mawr

Monographs 12 (Bryn Mawr, Pa., 1913), connects this poem with the OF tradition. Froissart (Bartsch, III. 54) easily adapts the French form to a new locale: "Entre Eltem [Eltham, in Kent] et Wesmoustier [Westminster], / en une belle prairie, / cuesi [I perceived] pastoureaus avant hier."

<sup>26</sup> *Secular Lyrics of the XIVth and XVth Centuries*, ed. Rossell H. Robbins (Oxford, 1952), No. 181. One is reminded of the medieval Latin "De Phillide et Flora" in which the two ("ambae virgines et ambae reginae") debate the merits of their lovers, a clerk and a knight. See *The Latin Poems Commonly Attributed to Walter Mapes*, ed. Thomas Wright (New York, 1968; orig. publ. 1841), pp. 258-67. It was translated during the 1590's, one version being attributed to Chapman.

<sup>27</sup> Curtius, p. 195, says that the *locus* has "an independent rhetorico-poetical existence" as a trope. Its ingredients include "a beautiful, shaded natural site ... a tree (or several trees), a meadow, and a spring or brook. Birdsong and flowers may be added."

<sup>28</sup> "But far off he heard the laughter of cloistered maids, where a sacred grove made a dark encircling wood, the secret place of the Goddess of Women [The Bona Dea], with holy fountains and rites ne'er revealed to men save to their cost. Wreaths of purple veiled its portals far-withdrawn and a ruinous hovel shone with sweet fire of incense. A poplar decked the shrine with far-spread leaves, and its deep foliage shielded singing birds," in *Propertius*, tr. H. E. Butler; Loeb Classical Library (London, 1927). This example was identified by H. MacL. Currie, "Locus Amoenus," *CL*, 12 (1960), 94-95.

<sup>29</sup> *Chaucer's Bawdy*, pp. 157-58.

<sup>30</sup> "This vale exceeds all vales beside, / A vaunted vale, the valley's pride, / Where rose-bloom veils each alley; / Available to birds, a vale / Where sun and moon themselves regale / And longest love to dally; / The nightingales reveal thy worth, / Most valuable of vales on earth, / O sweet and pleasant valley": George F. Whicher's tr. from *The Goliard Poets: Medieval Latin Songs and Satires* (New York, 1949), pp. 188-89. Whicher accuses Helen Waddell of giving this poem an unjustifiably romantic reading in her *Mediaeval Latin Lyrics*; 4th ed. (London, 1942), pp. 254-55, but neither he nor Miss Waddell seems to recognize the *double entente* in the topographical details. "Birds" may, moreover, mean penises — as do Catullus's *passer* (sparrow) and modern Italian *uccellino* (little bird).

<sup>31</sup> George Ferguson, *Signs & Symbols in Christian Art* (New York, 1966), p. 38.

<sup>32</sup> "Ein rotblühender Hagedorn, der im südlichen Europa wächst, heisst 'Spina Christi,' 'Christusdorn', " Klementine Lipffert, *Symbol-Fibel: eine Hilfe zum Betrachten und Deuten mittelalterlicher Bildwerke* (Kassel, 1964), p. 56. Miss Lipffert agrees that the thorn is a symbol of sin.

<sup>33</sup> "The Twa Cummeris," p. 84 in Mackenzie's ed.

<sup>34</sup> Even as early as Theocritus the role of the gods had become almost purely ornamental or emblematic or both, as here. Venus is cheek-by-jowl with the medieval devils Mahowne and Belzebub (101 and 112 in the "Tretis"). Rosenmeyer says, "The divinity of the woodland creatures — Pan, Satyrs, and Nymphs — was never

## DIALOGUS OBSCOENUS

49

anything more than a trope .... Where the traditional divinities — Aphrodite, Hermes, Apollo — appear, they tend to have the same function" (pp. 127-28). Latin, both classical and medieval, and Renaissance Christian pastorals are likely to take their deities more seriously, Rosenmeyer says.

<sup>35</sup> The unappetizing and bristly old husband of course recalls — and probably owes a debt to — Chaucer's January, *Merchant's Tale*, E 1826. Dunbar reaffirms this husband's harshness (his rough skin) in line 107.

<sup>36</sup> Renato Poggioli, "The Pastoral Self," *Daedalus*, 88 (1959), 699.

<sup>37</sup> Dunbar probably owed a general debt to French literary tradition for his *demandes d'amour* ending, but more specifically to Chaucer's *Franklin's Tale*. This potentially tragic story of deception and adultery ends happily, with forgiveness and liberality all round. Chaucer puts his concluding *demande* just as does Dunbar: "Lordynges, this question, thanne, wol I aske now, / Which was the mooste fre, as thynketh yow?" (F 1621-22).

<sup>38</sup>In *Poetry of the English Renaissance, 1509-1660*, ed. J. W. Hebel and H. H. Hudson (New York, 1946), p. 165. The standard ed. is *The Works in Verse and Prose of Nicholas Breton*, ed. A. B. Grosart (London, 1879). Dunbar's strong qualities and shortcomings are well summed up in Kinsley, p. xix, "Throughout all his satiric catalogues, cataracts of abuse, and vertiginous flights of fancy beyond the middle earth, Dunbar never abandons craft to impulse. 'The people of Scotland,' says Sir Herbert Grierson, 'have never taken Dunbar to their hearts'; 'he wants the natural touch.'" But he is their finest artist, if not their greatest poet."

***Bold Hawthorne* and Rufus W. Griswold**

**J. Lasley Dameron**

**Memphis State University**

Nathaniel Hawthorne's biographers usually devote at least one paragraph to Daniel Hathorne (1731-1796), Nathaniel Hawthorne's grandfather who is the subject of a ballad entitled "Bold Hawthorne."<sup>1</sup> First printed in *Graham's Magazine*, in October 1842, "Bold Hawthorne" has been anthologized ever since as an authentic naval ballad.<sup>2</sup> Hawthorne's biographers frequently refer to the poem as evidence of Hawthorne's family heritage, an ancestry of seamen and sea captains. Although his father was a sea captain, Hawthorne's grandfather gets much of the attention as a New England privateer during the early months of the American Revolution. Vernon Loggins, for example, in his *The Hawthornes* writes:

More perhaps than any other Salem Shipmaster, Captain Daniel Hathorne, forty-five years of age, set the pattern which the privateersmen were to follow. His glorious cruise during the latter half of 1776 on the *True American*, with ten guns and eighty men, was described in verse by his anonymous surgeon, a bad poet but an authentic reporter.<sup>3</sup>

Loggins has little reason to doubt the authenticity of "Bold Hawthorne," which he quotes in a version edited by Rufus W. Griswold — the most noted anthologist of American literature during the early decades of the nineteenth century.<sup>4</sup> Evidence suggests that Griswold's version of "Bold Hawthorne" is historically inaccurate, and that Griswold's role in printing the ballad is less than objective and clearly unprofessional by today's standards.

Griswold's version, first appearing in *Graham's Magazine*, October 1842, is the primary text upon which all subsequent printings are based. This text has never been questioned as an authentic naval ballad, even by William McCarty who in 1842 slightly modified Griswold's text in his *Songs, Odes, and Other Poems on National Subjects, Compiled from Various Sources*.<sup>5</sup> In introducing *Graham's* text, Griswold offers little help in establishing his version or its origin. He states only that the surgeon of Hathorne's ship composed the ballad. Regardless of the origin of his text, written or oral, Griswold must have had in hand at least general information about the cruise along with the specific details relative to Hathorne's encounters with two British vessels.

Most important, Griswold's version is clearly inconsistent with other accounts of Hawthorne's second encounter with a British vessel. Because no available text of the ballad predates Griswold's version, collating texts as one approach in determining the authenticity of Griswold's text is not possible. Griswold is known for his tampering with texts, and his editorial practices have frequently been scrutinized by scholars, especially by a legion of critics writing on Edgar Allan Poe.<sup>6</sup> Poe himself on one occasion attacked Griswold as a poet,<sup>7</sup> and one can assume that Griswold did experiment in verse and would have been aware of the intricacies of the ballad form. In 1843 Griswold even ventured to translate the works of the French poet Béranger. Griswold's talents, declares his biographer, were best suited, however, to "his work as an anthologist and promoter of works by others."<sup>8</sup>

First, as editor of *Graham's* in the fall of 1842, Griswold contributed an essay entitled "The Minstrelsy of the Revolution" under the heading of the "Editor's Table" in which he introduced "Bold Hawthorne" in these words:

From a large collection of naval ballads, we select the following, as one of the most curious of its class, and because, like several others in this collection, it has never before been printed. It was written by the surgeon of the "Fair American," and was familiar to the Massachusetts privateersmen during the last years of the Revolution. The "noble captain," we believe, was an ancestor of the inimitable author, NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE, of Salem. (p. 227)

The "large collection of naval ballads" has not survived, and a text of "Bold Hawthorne" apparently is not at present available in either manuscript or in broadside form.<sup>9</sup> The surgeon Griswold cites as the composer of the ballad cannot be identified, for no records of the personnel on Hawthorne's *True American* have been found. McCarty, who next printed the ballad in his 1842 edition of *Songs, Odes, and Other Poems on National Subjects*, states that his text of the poem, coming from R. W. Griswold's manuscript collection of "American History Ballads," "was several years ago taken down by C. A. Andrews, Esq., from the mouths of the surviving shipmates of Hawthorne[sic], who were accustomed to meet at the office of the Marine Insurance Company in Salem." (p. 250) McCarty no doubt alludes to the same ballad collection cited by Griswold in *Graham's*, and his text is more than likely based on Griswold's version.<sup>10</sup> In a column entitled "Review of New Books," in *Graham's* for December 1842, pp. 341-42,

the following statement pertains to McCarty's text:

We perceive that Mr. McCarty has copied from our Magazine for October most of the pieces included in the article on "The Minstrelsy of the Revolution." We have many others not embraced in his volumes, of which we intend to present a few additional specimens to our readers, in connection, perhaps, with some of the most curious verses in the books he has given us. (p. 341)

In this same issue of *Graham's* is an announcement that Griswold had become editor,<sup>11</sup> thereby replacing Edgar Allan Poe, who had held the post since April 1841.

That Griswold was responsible for the "Minstrelsy" collection in the October issue seems clear. Furthermore, McCarty knew of the collection only in *Graham's*, for there appears to be little reason to doubt his statement relative to the origin of his own printed version. Later, in a subsequent 1843 printing of the ballad appearing in Griswold's "Curiosities of American Literature" supplementing Isaac D'Israeli's *Curiosities of Literature*,<sup>12</sup> Griswold could be deliberately misleading the reader when he says that "'Bold Hawthorne' has never been printed before" (p. 37), since both he and McCarty published the poem in 1842, assuming, of course, that Griswold had not submitted the complete text of "Curiosities..." to his publisher before he printed the ballad in *Graham's* in October 1842. In short, available evidence reveals that no original manuscript of "Bold Hawthorne" has been preserved, or authenticated, or even acknowledged except by Griswold, and the exact circumstances of its composition remain a mystery.

Having no original text of "Bold Hawthorne" in hand and no verifiable facts as to its composition do not, of course, disprove the authenticity of the poem as a naval ballad. McCarty's brief account of its composition, if verified, suggests the "folk" features of the ballad. Griswold, obviously, choosing not to be specific about the text of his printed version, says little about its composition except that it was composed by an unidentified surgeon. An examination of other accounts of the cruise of the *True American* strongly suggests that Griswold's version is in part not only inaccurate but also slanted to stress the heroic actions of Daniel Hathorne and his crew. The stanzas of the ballad in question (stanzas 8-11) concern Hathorne's second engagement with a British vessel which Griswold incorrectly terms a "scow."

Regardless of his source, an original text or whatever he may have used in preparing his text for *Graham's*, Griswold's version clearly makes a hero of Daniel Hathorne, the grandfather of Nathaniel Hawthorne, a rising author Griswold may have wished to bring to the reader's attention. Whatever Griswold had in mind, and it is possible that he had no reason other than to present an accurate text of a folk ballad, recorded by an anonymous surgeon, his version differs from two reliable reports on what occurred when the *True American* engaged a British packet in early fall of 1776. One account, dated 21 October 1776, is found in *The American Journal of Ambrose Serle, Secretary to Lord Howe*, 1776 in 1778, and reads as follows:

This Afternoon the Harriot Packet came in from England, after a Passage of 6 Weeks & 5 Days, and brought me long-expected Letters from my dearest Wife & other Friends. The Packet was attacked by a Rebel Privateer so near England as Long. 20<sup>o</sup>, and lost her Captain and 5 men who were killed in the Engagement. About 9 or 10 were wounded. The Privateer, meeting with a stout Resistance, at last sheered off; and the Packet arrived without further molestation.<sup>13</sup>

A second report of the action between Hathorne and the packet comes from the Boston *Independent Chronicle* of 24 October 1776, and later reprinted word for word in the Boston *Gazette* of 28 October 1776:

Yesterday Capt. Daniel Hathorne arrived at Salem from a Cruise. On his Passage he met with an armed Packet, which he attacked. In the Engagement (which lasted two Hours) he lost three Men killed, and nine or ten wounded, himself slightly. Since which, he has taken and sent into Cape-Ann, a Prize Snow, with Oats, &c.

Ambrose Serle (1742-1812), whose journals convey the attitudes of a well-educated English civilian toward the Americans during the Revolutionary War, is noted for his reliability. In early 1776, he was appointed Solicitor and Clerk of the Reports for the (British) board of trade, and soon after this official appointment he came to America to serve Lord William Howe (1729-1814)<sup>14</sup> as his private secretary.<sup>15</sup> At the time he is describing the arrival of the *Harriot* packet on 21 October 1776, he was living in New York and contributing to the *New York Gazette*.

Without question, the *Harriot* packet Serle mentions is the ship engaged by Daniel Hathorne's *True American*. William James Mor-

gan, Head of the Historical Research Branch, Department of Navy, Washington, D. C., in a letter to me dated 24 February 1978, concludes that based on coincidence of timing and circumstance, Hathorne's *True American* did engage the packet *Harriot* as described by Serle. Morgan is careful to point out that Serle places the engagement 420 miles from Hathorne's first sighting of the "scow" mentioned in Griswold's version of the ballad, and that Serle does not identify the "Rebel Privateer." Serle, nevertheless, is consistent with one contemporary newspaper account printed in the Boston *Independent Chronicle* which is later repeated in the Boston *Gazette*; and although he does not identify the American privateer, Serle could be generally accurate in locating the action.

It is not surprising that Serle's account and Griswold's ballad would differ in many respects, but these differences are certainly not minor. Among other matters, obvious discrepancies exist between Griswold's version and Serle's account concerning the provocation and the conclusion of the engagement. Griswold emphasizes the brave and successful exploits of an American privateer fighting for its life; whereas Serle describes the confrontation between the ships as an ineffective molestation of a British packet begun by a Rebel privateer, the latter of which was forced to withdraw after meeting stiff resistance.

According to Griswold's ballad, Hathorne's ship gave chase, but was forced to fight in order to defend itself:

Our captain did inspect her, with glasses, and he said —  
 "My boys, she means to fight us, but be you not afraid;  
 All hands now beat to quarters, see everything is clear,  
 We'll give her a broadside, my boys, as soon as she comes  
 near."

She was prepared with nettings, and had her men secured,  
 She bore directly for us, and put us close on board;  
 When cannon roar'd like thunder, and muskets fired amain,  
 But soon we were alongside and grappled to her chain.

In contrast, Serle states that the Rebel Privateer instigated the action. Consistent with Serle, the Boston *Independent Chronicle* reports that Hawthorne attacked the "armed Packet."

Second, Griswold's ballad, in describing the action between the *True American* and the "British scow," declares that the British ship



## BOLD HAWTHORNE

55

“quickly bore away”:

And now the scene it alter'd, the cannon ceased to roar,  
 We fought with swords and boarding-pikes one glass or  
 something more.  
 Till British pride and glory no longer dared to stay,  
 But cut the Yankee grapplings, and quickly bore away.

In an opposite vein, Serle bluntly reports that “The Privateer” withdrew after meeting “stout” resistance and thereafter ceased to molest the homebound packet. The Boston *Independent Chronicle* makes no comment as to who was the first to withdraw from the action. Neither Serle nor the Boston *Independent Chronicle* hints bravery on the part of Daniel Hathorne or his crew. Apparently, Griswold’s ballad is the sole account of the heroic *True American* pitted against a British Armed packet.

In conclusion, Griswold’s version of “Bold Hawthorne” first appearing in *Graham’s Magazine* in October 1842, is very likely the primary text upon which all subsequent texts of the ballad are based. Comparing his text with other editions of the poem shows only minor differences in wording and punctuation. Griswold’s text of the ballad — differing from other reportings of the incident involving Daniel Hathorne’s schooner and a British packet, notably *The American Journal of Ambrose Serle* and the Boston *Independent Chronicle* — not only could be inaccurate, but may be in part a literary ballad composed by Griswold himself. Griswold’s readers would have little reason to doubt the authenticity of his text, especially in 1842 at a time when patriotic lyrics of the American Revolutionary War made good reading for a mass reading public already aware of its distinct national heritage.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> “Bold Hatwhorne,” *Graham’s Magazine*, 21 (1842), 227. Alternate titles are “Bold Hathorne” and “The Cruise of the *Fair American*.” Nathaniel Hawthorne added the “w” to the spelling of his family name; see Randall Stewart, *Nathaniel Hawthorne* (New York, 1970), p. 1. The actual name of Daniel Hathorne’s ship was the *True American*, a “privateer” and schooner (later re-rigged as a brig) commanded by Hathorne from August 5 to December 3, 1776. See *Naval Documents of the American Revolution*, 6:57, ed. William James Morgan (Washington, D. C., 1972), and the *Massachusetts State Archives*, 166:22. I am much indebted to William James Morgan, Head, Historical Research Branch of the Naval Historical Center, Department of Navy, and Captain Ward W. Lasley, U. S. N., for their aid in

gathering facts relating to Hawthorne's command of the *True American*.

<sup>2</sup> William McCarty ed., *Songs, Odes, and Other Poems, on National Subjects. Part Second — Naval* (Philadelphia, 1842), pp. 250-54; Evert A. and George L. Duyckinck eds., *Cyclopaedia of American Literature*, 2 vol. (Philadelphia, 1875), pp. 70-71; Burton Egbert Stevenson. ed., *Poems of American's History* (Boston 1908), pp. 219-20; Percy H. Boynton ed., *American Poetry* (New York, 1919), pp. 70-71; Fred Lewis Pattee ed., *Century Readings for a Course in American Literature. rev. ed.* (New York, 1925), pp. 76-77; Frederick C. Prescott and Gerald D. Sanders. eds., *An Introduction to American Poetry* (New York, 1934), pp. 31-32; and Robert W. Nesser ed., *American Naval Songs and Ballads* (New Haven, 1938), pp. 9-12.

<sup>3</sup> Vernon Loggins, *The Hawthornes* (New York, 1951), p. 176.

<sup>4</sup> Griswold cites himself as author of the article "The Minstrelsy of the Revolution" which includes "Bold Hawthorne" in the October 1842 issue of *Graham's Magazine*. See Griswold's letter to James T. Fields, 7 September 1842, in Griswold's *Passages from the Correspondence and Other Papers of Rufus W. Griswold* (Cambridge, Mass. 1898), pp. 120-21. Apparently, at the time he wrote Fields Griswold was planning a sequel to "The Minstrelsy." He requested that Fields ask "Ditson" (possibly Oliver Ditson, Boston music publisher from 1835 till 1888) for more ballads. My thanks to James Lawton of the Boston Public Library for his aid in identifying Ditson.

<sup>5</sup> McCarty, pp. 250-54. The textual variations between Griswold's version and McCarty's text are largely word choices that have little effect upon the rhythm and content of the poem. For example, line 2, stanza 3 of Griswold's text reads: "Of all your conq'ring armies, your matchless strength at sea[.]" In McCarty, we find in lines 3-4 of stanza 3: "By land thy conquering armies, / Thy matchless strength at sea." According to Morgan, McCarty is quite accurate in referring to the second British ship encountered by the *True American* as a "snow" (line 6, stanza 8); Griswold's reference to "scow" (line 3, stanza 8) is incorrect or perhaps a printing error. McCarty's stanzas, unlike Griswold's, are presented in the short-line form that will be selected by subsequent editors.

<sup>6</sup> Notably Arthur H. Quinn, *Edgar Allan Poe* (New York, 1941), especially pp. 444-50.

<sup>7</sup> Edgar Allan Poe, *The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. James A. Harrison, (New York, 1902), 11:225.

<sup>8</sup> Joy Bayless, *Rufus Wilmot Griswold: Poe's Literary Executor* (Nashville, Tenn., 1943), p. 78.

<sup>9</sup> The letters I have received from a variety of library depositories, including the Boston Public Library and the American Antiquarian Society, report no manuscript or broadside printing of "Bold Hawthorne" in their collections. I thank Professor Kent Ljungquist of Worcester Polytechnic Institute for his aid in my unsuccessful search for a manuscript copy of the ballad.

<sup>10</sup> The *Salem Directory* (1842), p. 3, lists a C. A. Andrew (not a C. A. Andrews as

BOLD HAWTHORNE

57

identified by McCarty) living in Salem, Massachusetts, in 1842, although I can find no connection between Andrew and "Bold Hawthorne."

<sup>11</sup> *Graham's Magazine*, 21 (1842), 344.

<sup>12</sup> I. C. D'Israeli, *Curiosities of Literature*, and *The Literary Character Illustrated*. With *Curiosities of American Literature* by Rufus W. Griswold (New York, 1890), p. 37. The 1890 text of the ballad and the 1843 version are identical.

<sup>13</sup> Ambrose Serle, *The American Journal of Ambrose Serle, Secretary to Lord Howe, 1776-1778*, ed. Edward H. Tatum, Jr. (San Marino, Cal., 1940), p. 127.

<sup>14</sup> Howe served as commander of the British army forces in America from October 1775 to May 1778.

<sup>15</sup> Tatum, "Introduction," *The American Journal of Ambrose Serle*, p. xii.

**John Jasper: Hero-Villain**

**Natalie Schroeder**

**The University of Mississippi**

Existing present criticism concerning John Jasper's role in Charles Dickens's *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* leaves me unsatisfied. Critics cannot seem to agree whether Jasper is the hero or the villain. I cannot accept Felix Aylmer's thesis that he is a misunderstood, innocent half-brother of Edwin Drood,<sup>1</sup> and I am dubious of all theories that suggest that Edwin Drood is alive. Neither can I accept Philip Collins's conclusion that Jasper is a completely "wicked man who murders for lust"<sup>2</sup> or A. E. Dyson's, that Jasper "is a man so devoted to evil that evil colours all he does."<sup>3</sup> Howard Duffield's well-known idea concerning Jasper's connections with the Thugs still appears outlandish to me, and I could never understand Edmund Wilson's and Edgar Johnson's acceptance of it. Johnson supports the Thuggee theory by providing what I consider dubious circumstantial evidence from *Edwin Drood* and then by citing Dickens's acquaintance with the authors of *Confessions of a Thug* and *The Wandering Jew*. He also offers as evidence Dickens's familiarity with Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone*, which, Johnson says, "deals with a secret murder committed in England by a group of Hindu devotees."<sup>4</sup>

There is a more important connection between *The Moonstone* and *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*. At the center of Collins's novel is not the murder of Godfrey Ablewhite, which takes place in the final pages, but the mystery surrounding the theft of the moonstone. That Mr. Franklin Blake himself, the protagonist of Collins's novel, takes the diamond after being drugged with opium, and with no recollection of the "theft," adamantly pursues the thief is more pertinent to *Drood* than the obscure murder. Edgar Johnson offers an alternative to the Thuggee theory which is linked to the subject of opium, a "possibility" which I find more satisfying than his other explanation because of the abundance of supportive evidence within the novel: "There is the possibility, though, that Jasper is a divided personality, and that in his normal state he does not remember what he does under the influence of opium, or know in what ways his everyday doings are influenced by the hidden self that then emerges. He may thus be entirely sincere in writing that he devotes himself to the destruction of a murderer whom he does not realize to be himself."<sup>5</sup>

Despite Aylmer's book, it is generally accepted that Edwin Drood

is murdered and that John Jasper is the murderer.<sup>6</sup> Although circumstantial evidence may suggest that Jasper carefully planned the murder and then executed it in cold blood, I intend to argue that he plans and commits the crime under the influence of opium; and consequently he actually believes himself innocent of the crime.<sup>7</sup> The often quoted passage about Miss Twinkleton's "two distinct states of being" has been applied to John Jasper's hypocrisy — pious choir director by day, opium addict and murderer by night.<sup>8</sup> But that passage could also be signalling Jasper's innocence. Dickens may have been giving the reader a clue in Chapter 3 (as he did about Rokesmith's identity very early in *Our Mutual Friend*) that there are two John Jaspers — that the sober Jasper cannot remember what the drugged Jasper does:<sup>9</sup> "As, in some cases of drunkenness, and in others of animal magnetism, there are two states of consciousness which never clash, but each of which pursues its separate course as though it were continuous instead of broken (thus if I hide my watch when I am drunk, I must be drunk again before I can remember where) ...." (p. 15) Ezra Jennings's experiment in *The Moonstone* illustrates that this kind of memory loss can also be caused by opium. If Jasper does have two distinct states of consciousness — one good, one evil — and the two never clash, then only one part of him is guilty of murder; his other self remains innocent.<sup>10</sup>

Before *Edwin Drood*, Dickensian heroes are so good that they are often too perfect to be believable. In order to depict the world realistically (a world that increasingly fills with evil, as a survey of the Dickens canon reveals), Dickens used evil external doubles as foils for his "good" characters. In *Bleak House* and *Great Expectations*, for example, an evil character (Hortense and Orlick, respectively) commits a murder which frees his double (Lady Dedlock and Pip) of moral responsibility for a crime he subconsciously wishes to commit. But in *Edwin Drood* Dickens uses the figure of the double differently; John Jasper is his own double. Through Jasper Dickens illustrates the ambiguity of good and evil, of heroism and villainy — a theme which also concerned him, but to a lesser degree, in the two novels which precede *Drood*. The dissatisfied, snobbish Pip of the first two stages of *Great Expectations*, for instance, is quite different from the innocent Oliver Twist; still at the end of the novel Pip becomes almost as perfect as his predecessors. Dickens carries his experiment with a morally ambiguous hero a step further in *Edwin Drood*. John Jasper, the

protagonist, is his own antagonist. Because of his divided self, it would have been virtually impossible for Jasper to purge himself of all evil and metamorphose into an innocent *à la* Dickens's early fictional heroes.

By noting various characters' reactions to Jasper, it is possible to determine when he is the drugged self, the murderer; when he transforms from one self to the other; and when he is the tormented, lonely, lovesick choirmaster, the devoted uncle and later the ardent pursuer of the murderer of his beloved nephew. Jasper's usual self, presumably the self he would have remained had he never taken opium, is "a little sombre"; yet he is a "womanish," affectionate, sometimes gay man who, despite the proximity of their ages, "moddley-coddleys" his nephew. The drugged Jasper, on the other hand, is cunning and aggressive. In the opium den he attempts to discover whether opium visions can be intelligibly communicated by artfully listening to the others in the room; then he "pounces on the Chinaman, and, seizing him with both hands by the throat, turns him violently on the bed." (p. 3) At the end of the fragment, Jasper returns to the den, and the reader observes the change in him as the drug affects him, body and mind. He suspects the opium woman of changing the formula; then as he smokes more, he begins to speak "with a savage air, and a spring or start at her." (p. 206) He continues the dialogue with "the snarl of a wolf." (p. 208) Sometimes he changes suddenly from one self to the other — following a "fit" — seemingly without smoking opium immediately before.

The differences between Jasper's two selves are noticed by Mr. Tope, Edwin, Rosa, Mr. Crisparkle, Mr. Grewgious, and Durdles. Even when performing his duties as choirmaster, Jasper is subject to an appearance of his second self. Mr. Tope, the Verger, describes this transformation as a "fit" which overcame Jasper during the service immediately following his return to Cloisterham from the London opium den. Jasper's breathing became short, and he had difficulty singing: " '... His memory grew DAZED ... and a dimness and giddiness crept over him as strange as ever I saw: though he didn't seem to mind it particularly, himself. However, a little time and a little water brought him out of his DAZE'. " (p. 5) After that phenomenon, Tope states that Jasper returned home "quite himself." (p. 5)

Soon after Tope's report, the reader views the two sides of John Jasper as he changes back and forth from one self to another in front

of his nephew. Edwin and Jasper sup together in jovial spirits. After his uncle gently chides him for his improper attitude towards his prearranged engagement, Edwin is alarmed to see suddenly “a strange film” come over Jasper’s eyes. In response to Edwin’s fear, the older man explains that the change in him is an aftereffect of opium—a drug he has been taking to ease some pain—which steals over him “like a blight or a cloud” and then passes. He instructs Edwin to look away: “With a scared face, the younger man complies, by casting his eyes downward at the ashes on the hearth. Not relaxing his own gaze at the fire, but rather strengthening it with a fierce, firm grip upon his elbow-chair, the elder sits for a few moments rigid, and then, with thick drops standing on his forehead, and a sharp catch of his breath, becomes as he was before.” (p. 10)<sup>11</sup> After he is restored to his usual self again, Jasper lays a “tender” hand upon Edwin and confesses that the “pain” he has been easing results from his monotonous existence, and he attempts to warn the younger man that he too might one day be “troubled with some stray sort of ambition, aspiration, restlessness, dissatisfaction.” (p. 12) Jasper’s second self evidently surfaces again; for after the warning, Edwin comments that his uncle is unlike his “usual self,” and Jasper changes once more. He becomes “a breathing man again without the smallest stage of transition between the two extreme states, lifts his shoulders, laughs, and waves his right arm.” (p. 12) Early in the novel, then, the choirmaster’s dual personality is established. Later, when Edwin tells Rosa that he is a little afraid of his uncle, he explains that he fears any startling news which might cause his uncle to go into “a kind of paroxysm, or fit,” which makes him different — not the usual “dear fond fellow.” (p. 118)

Rosa, of course, fears Jasper continuously, but she feels most endangered when he is under the influence of opium — “when a glaze comes over” his eyes “and he seems to wander away into a frightful sort of dream in which he threatens most, he obliges me [Rosa] to know it, and to know that he is sitting close at my side, more terrible to me than than ever’.” (p. 54) Many critics have speculated on Jasper’s power over Rosa and on the sources of her fear. Jasper may, indeed, be an accomplished mesmerist. For my argument, however, it is important only to note that Rosa senses a distinct difference in Jasper at certain times. She observes the same glaze that Edwin notices in both Jasper’s and the Princess Puffer’s eyes — a glaze that is specifically attributed to the drug.

Jasper's two selves are also evident when Minor Canon Crisparkle surprises the choirmaster in the midst of an opium dream from which he cries out, "What is the matter? Who did it?" As Jasper awakens, the "glare of his eyes settled down into a look of recognition." (p. 85) Mr. Crisparkle senses an unusual, "perplexing expression" on Jasper's face, a look that Dickens tells us seems to denote "some close internal calculation." (p. 86) On the other hand, Jasper is probably opium free the day before the murder, for the Minor Canon observes a change for the better in the choirmaster that day and asks if he is using a new kind of medicine for his occasional indisposition (opium "fits"). Shortly after he meets Mr. Crisparkle, immediately before he enters the gatehouse to host the dinner for Neville and Edwin, Jasper's other self momentarily surfaces: "He sings, in a low voice and with delicate expression, as he walks along. It still seems as if a false note were not within his power to-night, and as if nothing could hurry or retard him. Arriving thus, under the arched entrance of his dwelling, he pauses for an instant in the shelter to pull off that great black scarf, and hang it in a loop upon his arm. For that brief time, his face is knitted and stern. But it immediately clears, as he resumes his singing, and his way." (p. 130)<sup>12</sup>

Unlike the soft-hearted Reverend Crisparkle, Mr. Grewgious dislikes Jasper from the beginning; but, although he is prejudiced against the choirmaster, Rosa's guardian also recognizes the existence of the two separate selves. When Grewgious first sees Jasper coming from the Cathedral, he notices an unusual whiteness of his lips. Later, after Jasper returns from the exhausting search for Edwin's missing body, the older man tells him that Edwin and Rosa had severed their engagement. This news causes Jasper to lose control, and he is transformed into his guilty-opium self before Rosa's guardian: "Mr. Grewgious saw a staring white face, and two quivering white lips, in the easy chair, and saw two muddy hands gripping its sides. But for the hands, he might have thought he had never seen the face." (p. 137) Jasper becomes a "ghastly figure" who finally falls into a heap on the floor.

Finally, because of the many clues that Dickens provides during Jasper's and Durdles's nocturnal journey through the Cathedral and Crypt, it is evident that Durdles is accompanied by the evil Jasper. First, Dickens says that the choirmaster acts unlike his usual self that night; he craftily moves more "softly, with no visible reason." (p. 108)



When he sees Neville Landless and Mr. Crisparkle, the violence and sudden aggression of the opium den surface again: A “strange and sudden smile” appears upon his face, and he watches Neville “as though his eye were at the trigger of a loaded rifle, and he had covered him, and were going to fire. A sense of destructive power is so expressed in his face, that even Durdles pauses in his munching, and looks at him.” (p. 104) For no apparent reason Jasper bursts into a fit of laughter. Finally, when he sees the hideous Deputy as he leaves the Cathedral with Durdles, Jasper vehemently threatens to murder the boy: “‘What! Is that baby-devil on the watch there!’ cries Jasper in a fury: so quickly roused, and so violent, that he seems an older devil himself. ‘I shall shed the blood of that Impish wretch! I know I shall do it!’ Regardless of the fire [of stones], though it hits him more than once, he rushes at Deputy, collars him, and tries to bring him across.” (p. 110) Durdles finally has to tell the strangely abusive Jasper not to hurt the boy, to “‘Recollect yourself’,” (p. 111) that is, to become his other self again. It is true that earlier, when Jasper first meets Deputy, he also threatens him. He tells the boy to stop throwing stones “‘or I’ll kill you’.” (p. 33) But Jasper’s manner on the second encounter is distinctly different from the earlier one at which time he rids himself of the boy by giving him a halfpenny and telling him to return to his “home,” the Travellers’ Twopenny.

While in the opium state Jasper is unquestionably villainous—capable of carrying out his verbal threat and murdering Deputy. But Dickens’s plans for the ending of *Drood* (which I shall discuss later) support my thesis that the other Jasper, the sombre, talented musician, while suffering from a general malaise (guilt over his addiction, love for Rosa, and, perhaps, even a subconscious premonition of danger to come), is ignorant of the actions of his other self. Thus, one side of Jasper remains innocent of the premeditated murder of Edwin Drood.

In addition to the various characters’ perceptions of the two sides of John Jasper, there is even more evidence in the novel which supports the innocence of one side of the dual personality. Dickensian characters who are innately good generally sense the presence of evil and shun it. Towards the end of the fragment, Rosa and Mr. Grewgious (good characters) do suspect Jasper of murder, but they both have other motives besides their separate experiences with the choir-master’s evil side. Rosa is repulsed by the threat of sex, suggested to

her by Jasper's very presence, and by (what she is ashamed to admit even to herself) his alleged motive for murder. Grewgious is jealous (a jealousy akin to Jasper's earlier coveting of Edwin's fiancée) of the new and threatening rival for the hand of his beloved's daughter, the very likeness of her dead mother. Mr. Crisparkle, on the other hand, is a more neutral "good" character; his reaction to Jasper is strikingly different. Unlike Rosa and her guardian, Crisparkle does not suspect Jasper of murder. The Minor Canon is not a foolish, all-trusting benevolent gentleman like Mr. Pickwick; he perceives the hypocrisy of Mr. Honeythunder and chides the would-be philanthropist. Crisparkle's trust in Jasper, like his unwavering faith in Neville Landless, reinforces the thesis that one side of Jasper remains innocent. Crisparkle "could not but admit, however, as a just man, that it was not, of itself, a crime to fall in love with Rosa, any more than it was a crime to offer to set love above revenge. [par.] The dreadful suspicion of Jasper which Rosa was so shocked to have received into her imagination, appeared to have no harbour in Mr. Crisparkle's [imagination]." (p. 203)

Jasper's dual personality leads me to the subtitle of my paper: "Hero-Villain." Could a Victorian audience consider a partially evil character also to be "heroic?" Much criticism of *Edwin Drood* focuses on comparisons between John Jasper and Dickensian villains, particularly Quilp, Bill Sikes, Jonas Chuzzlewit, and Bradley Headstone. Despite the misleading title, there is little doubt that John Jasper is the central character of *Edwin Drood*; a villain had never before been the central character of a Dickens novel. Even though it was highly unconventional for a Victorian hero to be "immoral" (i. e., a murderer), I believe that by creating a character who anticipates Stevenson's Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, Dickens fully intended Edwin Drood's uncle to be both hero and villain.<sup>13</sup> Like the other Dickensian villains to whom the choirmaster has been compared, aspects of Walter Gay (who was, in Dickens's original plan, "to show how the good turns into bad, by degrees"),<sup>14</sup> Richard Carstone, Eugene Wrayburn, and Pip all reappear in the character of John Jasper.

Although no one has ever questioned Pip's role of hero in *Great Expectations*, there are some striking parallels between that novel and *Edwin Drood* that support the thesis that Jasper, like Pip, is the hero. In the opening chapters of both novels, the main characters experience an awakening in which they face the bleak reality of their

lives. In the graveyard Pip suddenly senses a “vivid and broad impression of the identity of things”;<sup>15</sup> he realizes for the first time that his parents are dead. Jasper awakens from an opium dream, but even when drugged he could not obliterate the image of the Cathedral in Cloisterham — a symbol of the “monotonous” existence that he had been trying to blot out — and his “scattered consciousness ... pieced itself together.” (p. 1)

The two protagonists are both orphans, outcasts from society. The young Pip, persecuted by Mrs. Joe and her small society of friends, turns to Joe, his only source of love and companionship. Similarly, Jasper’s only friend is his nephew Edwin. Although Jasper watches Edwin with a “look of intentness and intensity,” it is also one of “devoted affection,” a look which is “always, now and ever afterwards” on his face. (p. 7) Later in the novel when Jasper confronts Rosa with his passion, he tells her that his love is so mad that had he not loved Edwin as much as he did, he might have “swept even him from your side when you favored him’.” (p. 171) Jasper is so impassioned in the garden scene that it is highly unlikely that he is capable at that moment of being false or cunning.<sup>16</sup>

A frustrated love is the partial source of both Pip’s and Jasper’s dissatisfaction with their lives early in the novels. Pip’s passion for Estella is frustrated first by his low station in life and later by the consequences of Miss Havisham’s perverse upbringing of her adopted daughter. Haunted by the notion that Estella might one day look in the window and see him working at the forge, Pip despises his apprenticeship to Joe. He frequently compares his “own perspective with the windy marsh view, and making out some likeness between them by thinking how flat and low both were.” (GE, p. 100) Rescued by “great expectations,” Pip is relieved from his hateful life as a blacksmith. Yet when he becomes a gentleman in London, he feels guilty for betraying Joe. He finds the life he had dreamed of as a boy almost as unsatisfactory as his life at the forge had been, thus paralleling Jasper’s dissatisfaction: “We were always more or less miserable, and most of our acquaintance were in the same condition. There was a gay fiction among us that we were constantly enjoying ourselves, and a skeleton truth that we never did.” (GE, p. 260)

Like Pip’s early infatuation with Estella, Jasper’s attachment to Rosa is thwarted first by the prearranged engagement and later by Rosa’s fear and rejection of Jasper. The older gentleman’s uncontrol-

lable feelings for Rosa, like Pip's for Estella, add to his self-pity about his tedious life and work in Cloisterham: "... I am so weary of it. The echoes of my own voice among the arches seem to mock me with my daily drudging round. No wretched monk who droned his life away in that gloomy place, before me, can have been more tired of it than I am." (p. 11) Like Pip's, Jasper's passion haunts him, intensifying his misery. He tells Rosa: "... I loved you madly. In the distasteful work of the day, in the wakeful misery of the night, girded by sordid realities, or wandering through Paradises and Hells of visions into which I rushed, carrying your image in my arms, I loved you madly." (pp. 170-71)

Jasper's profession of love is strikingly similar to Pip's earlier outpouring to Estella: "... You are part of my existence, part of myself. You have been in every line I have ever read, since I first came here, the rough common boy whose poor heart you wounded even then. You have been in every prospect I have ever seen since — on the river, on the sails of the ships, on the marshes, in the clouds, in the light, in the darkness, in the wind, in the woods, in the sea, in the streets ... Estella, to the last hour of my life, you cannot choose but remain part of my character, part of the little good in me, part of the evil'." (GE, p. 345) Pip openly admits that he is a mixture of good and evil, but he feels his love for Estella has done him more good than harm. It has. At first, of course, Pip's hopes of marrying Estella lead to his snobbishness, his cruel treatment of Joe, and his aversion to Magwitch. Eventually, however, as Pip grows to care for his benefactor and then learns that Magwitch is Estella's father, his love for her inspires one of his noblest acts: he tells the dying convict that his daughter lives and that he loves her. Pip's passion for Estella indirectly leads to his redemption. Jasper's love, on the other hand, leads to his fall; it becomes his motive for murder.

In both *Great Expectations* and *Edwin Drood* a murder is committed, and the evil double confronts (or would have confronted, in the case of the unfinished *Drood*) the hero with his guilt. Although he knows he is innocent of the actual crime, Pip feels guilty when his sister is struck down even before he learns that he is indirectly responsible by providing the weapon — the convict's leg iron: "With my head full of George Barnwell, I was at first disposed to believe that I must have had some hand in the attack upon my sister, or at all events that as her near relation, popularly known to be under obligations to her, I

was a more legitimate object of suspicion than any one else.” (GE, p. 113) But towards the end of the novel, Orlick specifically accuses Pip of murdering his sister: “I tell you it was your doing — I tell you it was done through you ... I come upon her from behind, as I come upon you to-night. I giv’ it her! I left her for dead, and, if there had been a limekiln as nigh her as there is now nigh you, she shouldn’t have come to life again. But it warn’t Old Orlick as did it; it was you. You was favoured, and he was bullied and beat. Old Orlick bullied and beat, eh? Now you pays for it. You done it; now you pays for it’.” (GE, pp. 404-05)

Had Dickens completed *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* according to the plans that he communicated to Forster, presumably there would have been a scene similar to the above confrontation between Pip and Orlick, Pip’s evil counterpart; but, in *Drood*, the double would have been talking to himself. According to Dickens, his last novel would have been original “in the review of the murderer’s career by himself at the close, when its temptations were to be dealt upon as if, not he the culprit, but *some other man* [italics mine], were the tempted. The last chapters were to be written in the condemned cell, to which his wickedness, all elaborately elicited from him as if told of another, had brought him.”<sup>17</sup> If one accepts my thesis that there are two sides of John Jasper — the good, heroic side and the evil, villainous side, the ending that Dickens apparently had planned becomes more meaningful. It certainly supports the “possibility” that the good Jasper is not aware of what the evil Jasper has done. It also suggests that Dickens’s theme was not simply as Earle Davis implies, “that murder is not a good idea, and one should not smoke opium,”<sup>18</sup> but that it is one of gradual self-recognition — a theme worthy of the last work of the great genius.

I would like to believe that because Jasper is the hero, he would, after his confession, have been redeemed like Pip is in both versions of the earlier novel.<sup>19</sup> From the opening pages of *Edwin Drood*, however, John Jasper is a condemned man. He is seeking oblivion, but achieving only temporary escape, where he is faced with a separate awareness of his misery. His final relentless pursuit of Edwin’s murderer is an active, but a subconscious drive towards self-destruction. In the opening dream Jasper is unable to erase the Cathedral from his opium visions; the only complete escape for him would be death. Despite the fact that Edwin’s body is never found, unknowingly Jasper vows to destroy a part of himself: “I will fasten the crime of the murder of my

dear dead boy, upon the murderer .... I devote myself to his destruction'." (p. 146)

Ironically, Jasper's persecution of Neville Landless — his attempt to "isolate him from all friends and acquaintance and wear his daily life out grain by grain" (p. 191) — results in Jasper's own alienation. At the end of the fragment, the choirmaster is suffering the punishment that he plans for his rival: "Impassive, moody, solitary, resolute, concentrated on one idea, and on its attendant fixed purpose that he would share it with no fellow-creature, he lived apart from human life. Constantly exercising an Art which brought him into mechanical harmony with others, and which could not have been pursued unless he and they had been in the nicest mechanical relations and unison, it is curious to consider that the spirit of the man was in moral accordance or interchange with nothing around him." (p. 203) It is difficult not to pity John Jasper. He finds no solace in either art or religion. They, in fact, add to his isolation because he cannot achieve "moral accordance" with them. When he tries to find solace in love, he is overtly rejected. When Jasper begs for Rosa's hatred if he cannot win her love, he becomes pathetic, far from the "terrible man" of the young girl's erotic imagination: "There is my past and my present wasted life. There is the desolation of my heart and my soul. There is my peace; there is my despair. Stamp them into the dust, so that you take me, were it even mortally hating me!" (p. 173) There is a kind of innocence and truth in Jasper's passion. He lays his soul bare to Rosa who feels, in turn, "soiled" by his declaration of love.

It is not surprising, then, that at the end of the fragment Jasper returns to the opium den of the first chapter temporarily to escape his hateful existence, "to get the relief." (p. 208) Critics have provided various explanations of what Jasper sees at the end of his final dream: "Look at it! Look what a poor, mean, miserable thing it is! *That* must be real. It's over'." (p. 208) I do not think it is too outlandish to speculate that at this point Jasper is not just looking back to the murder, but that Dickens was also foreshadowing the ending of the novel. Jasper might be seeing, not Edwin Drood, but himself in the dream — that is, his divided self, a "poor, mean miserable thing." Finally, he may be watching his own execution: "It's over." By having his hero-villain commit murder by a hidden self, Dickens might have been attempting to avoid public censure. It would have been possible, then, for Victorian readers to sympathize with a murderer because of

**Will Allen Dromgoole:  
Forgotten Pioneer of Tennessee Mountain Fiction**

**Kathy Lyday-Lee  
The University of Tennessee**

The mountaineer in the rough ... is a jewel. He has some strong and splendid characteristics. He is honest, he is the soul of hospitality, he hates a lie, he will "pay back" an injury if it takes till the day of his death to do it. He takes every man at his word ... he takes him at his true value, and then treats him accordingly.<sup>1</sup>

This quotation is a perceptive view of the Tennessee mountaineer as seen through the eyes and experience of Will Allen Dromgoole. A versatile and popular author during the 1890's and early 1900's, Dromgoole was a native Tennessean who wrote novels, short stories, poems, and edited a weekly column entitled "Song and Story" in the *Nashville Banner* from approximately 1904 until her death in 1934. Evidence of this column appears earlier than 1904 but on sporadic basis. Dromgoole's literature revolves around her mountain experiences, with the settings unmistakably derived from a knowledge of Tennessee. She has written a group of short stories that deals exclusively with the Tennessee mountaineer, an integral, oft misrepresented element of Tennessee society. Though much of her work is over-romanticized and contains excessive sentimentality, these portrayals of the mountaineer deserve to be praised for their accuracy in both characterization and speech patterns.

Dromgoole is, of course, only one of the many Tennessee authors who used the mountaineer as a stock character in their stories, but for some unexplained reason her works have received less acclaim than that of her contemporaries, such as Mary Noailles Murfree and George Washington Harris, both of whom achieved national recognition. This lack of notoriety results from several causes, among them being perhaps a serious lack of exposure, because of her works not being promoted nationally. Many of Dromgoole's stories appeared in the Boston magazine, the *Arena*; in fact, some of her stories have never been printed anywhere except in this periodical. The *Arena*, although relatively popular in the North, did not enjoy widespread popularity in the South. During the late nineteenth century, book publishers were being deluged with local color/regional literature; some, like Murfree's and Harris's, exhibited good quality and appeared early in the flood, but most of this literature was mediocre to poor quality. Dromgoole followed in these authors' footsteps, perhaps becoming lost in the crowd, thus explaining her lack of recognition. In addition, Dromgoole wrote only nine stories dealing with the mountaineer, which is far less than Murfree's extensive collection of moun-

tain literature. Although Dromgoole has been largely forgotten, her works were popular in the 1890's in Tennessee, and Dromgoole enjoyed renewed popularity in 1920's and 30's because of her weekly column in the *Banner*. Other than mountain literature, Dromgoole's work consists of stories of Nashville's people, especially the blacks and the poor. These tales tend to be overly sentimental, of mediocre quality, and not nearly as well written, as convincing, or as interesting as her mountain stories.

After discovering the nine "mountain" stories which are dispersed through two anthologies and three magazines, it seems necessary in the interest of Tennessee literature to praise Dromgoole's accurate portraits of the mountaineer, which capture the essence of the rugged men and women of the mountains.<sup>2</sup> In her attempts at realism, some of her characters are stereotyped; by *stereotyped*, I mean that characters are often flat and unoriginal, lifeless imitations of a real person. During this literary period, people had conceptions of how a mountaineer looked and acted, even though they had probably never seen or met one. Usually their descriptions were unflattering. For example, mountain men were described as being lean and lanky, dirty, ill-mannered, lazy, illiterate, drunk a good deal of the time, wary of strangers, and mean to their women. Some of these qualities were characteristic of some mountain men; however, the pictures of the mountaineers given to us by such experts as Horace Kephart (*Our Southern Highlanders*, 1913), Levi Powell (*Who Are These Mountain People?*, 1966), and Jack Weller (*Yesterday's People*, 1965) dispelled these generalities. The women, on the other hand, were of two types: they were either meek, wan, submissive, overworked with too many children; or they were hard, toughened by many years of back-breaking work, and were sometimes the presiding force in the family. It must be stressed that people cannot be placed into preconceived categories; individuality certainly existed in the mountains as much as in any other culture. When authors resort to using stereotyped characters, it is usually to subordinate characterization to theme, and Dromgoole is as guilty of this as any other writer during this period. She does not, however, make an overt habit of it.

Although Dromgoole is not well-known in the field of mountain fiction, the superiority of her work ranks her with the best, and in measuring her worth an examination of some of her contemporaries and their status as mountain authors will be useful. George Washing-



ton Harris, creator of the *Sut Lovingood Yarns* (1867), is considered one of the best presenters of the mountaineer, even though his main purpose was not to draw attention to mountain culture as much as it was to focus on political and social ideas. Sut Lovingood is a composite figure, made up of many features of the mountaineer but is not a realistic representation of a mountain man because of Harris's exaggerations. Harris's dialect also presents problems to the reader because of its inconsistencies and difficult spellings. Unlike Murfree and Dromgoole, Harris focuses on one main character instead of emphasizing a mountain society filled with various sorts of people. Mary Noailles Murfree is the undisputed spokesperson for mountain culture in the late nineteenth century, perhaps more for the quantity of her work rather than the quality; Dromgoole, however, had more contact with the mountaineer, which accounts for her realistic descriptions. Although Murfree is a specialist in this area, Dromgoole shows equal aptitude in reproducing not only the mountain characters and their situations, but also their dialect. It is difficult to make comparisons between these two authors because of the considerable gap in productivity, Dromgoole's nine stories as compared with Murfree's many stories and novels. Murfree combines accurate portraits of the mountaineer and his society with reasonably realistic speech patterns and not overly sentimental plots to capture the spirit of the mountains and their people. Her descriptions are unrivaled, resulting in a total effect that does justice to the mountaineer and his culture. Dromgoole maintains these high standards as well, but only for a short time; her mountain fiction began in 1890 and ended in 1904, with no mountain stories appearing between 1899 and 1903. Thus it is impossible to say whether her work would have maintained the high standards that Murfree exhibits. Because of productivity, accuracy of characterization, settings, dialect, and purpose, I must place Dromgoole somewhere between Murfree and Harris in importance, with Murfree being at the top of the scale.

Conversely to the above examples, there were other authors writing during this period who inaccurately presented the mountaineer, and, unintentionally, have done him an injustice by their ignorance and lack of understanding of mountain society. Since most readers will be less familiar with these authors than with Murfree or Harris, I mention two of them briefly as a means of comparison with Dromgoole.

Louise Regina Baker, an elusive figure because of lack of data, lived in Maryland, but wrote in Tennessee. There is no evidence of her having visited, much less lived, in Tennessee, and the manner in which she represents the mountaineer in her novel *Cis Martin* (1898), her only mountain work, lends strong support to this statement. She could have easily obtained general information about Tennessee and its people by reading earlier literature, such as Murfree's, but the insight gained only through experience in the mountains is seriously lacking. Baker consistently refers to the mountains as "the Tennessee mountains" and speaks of them as a hostile, foreign place — which indeed they were to many. The main characters in the novel are an upper-middle-class family who have experienced financial failure and have traveled to the mountains so that the father, an ex-professor of Greek and Latin, can try his fortune in the lumber business. The story is narrated by the oldest daughter, who is newly arrived from a finishing school in the East; her main goal is to publish a novel her father has written, and thereby rescue her family from the Tennessee mountains and return them to civilization, events which eventually do occur. If this plot is not preposterous enough. Baker gives an unflattering and highly inaccurate picture of the mountaineer. For example, one mountain woman gives her son away as a Christmas present, while at another point in the story some of the women ramble uninvited through a house, looking through dresser drawers, touching everything in sight, and generally behaving rudely. None of these actions is typical of the mountaineer and shows Baker's lack of experience with and knowledge of this people. Such examples appear throughout the book; however, her representation of mountain dialect, although superficial, is better than average. When placed beside such ignorant renderings, the works of Murfree and Dromgoole shine like novae.

Somewhat comparable with Baker is Sarah Barnwell Elliott, a Tennessean by adoption, having spent most of her adult life in Sewanee. Her novel, *The Durket Sperret* (1898), exhibits a sentimental plot with two-dimensional, stereotyped characters who are out of their element and who behave unrealistically. Elliott presents a high contrast by juxtaposing well-educated city dwellers and semi-literate mountain dwellers; the story revolves around a melodramatic plot — good mountain boy saves innocent mountain girl from the corrupting influences of both the evil villain and city life. The importance of

ping the moral principle, that is, good triumphing over evil, takes precedence over characterization. There does, at least, seem to be a purpose to this work, and Elliott's use of dialect is excessive but tolerable. Fortunately, both Murfree and Dromgoole can achieve purpose in their works as well as believable situations, speech, and characters.

As shown by these comparisons, Dromgoole is as good as the best in most respects, and better than others in all respects — her only challenger, as far as this author is concerned, being Murfree. Now that stereotyped characters have been defined and some of her contemporaries have been examined, a study of some of Dromgoole's experiments in mountain literature can now be presented. In the small collection of nine stories, one sees many suitable and interesting topics for discussion, with one that is unique, interesting, and surprisingly contemporary in her treatment of women. Only two of the stories do not have female characters, while two others include women who indirectly influence the male characters. In five of the nine stories, however, Dromgoole draws strong portraits of women who openly challenge not only their way of life, but sometimes their men. These portrayals, ranging from the fatalistic mountain matriarch to young, strong-willed, rebellious mountain girls, are definitely refreshing and make Dromgoole's works quite different from those of her contemporaries. I center on these latter five stories because these types of female heroines were not typically found in literature during this period, and especially not in the South. Women were usually "kept in their place," but Dromgoole, being a rather strong-willed, liberated female herself, decided to alter this image — in some of her literature at least. She apparently felt the need to show a side other than the more common docile, house-tending, child-bearing mountain women frequently seen in mountain literature of the 1890's.

The first of the stories to contain a prominent female character is "The War of the Roses," published in the *Boston Arena* in 1892. In this East Tennessee story, Dromgoole uses an actual historical event as a backdrop to her fictional tale, which presents an interesting portrait of a headstrong young girl. The conflict involves a common subject — politics. The title refers to the color of the roses one wears to show his political persuasion — red for Republican and white for Democrat; the plot is based loosely on the rivalry between Bob and Alf Taylor, two brothers who ran against each other for governor of Tennessee in the

late nineteenth century. The entire story takes place at a corn shucking which serves as a political rally for the almost exclusively Republican community. Denie Lynn and Eb Ford are a young "courtin' " couple, but politics disrupts their relationship when Eb wears the Republican red rose to the shucking, and Denie arrives wearing a white one. The community looks upon Denie as a radical, as well as a woman who obviously does not know her place, since she deliberately has defied her fiancé by wearing the white rose.

Both Eb and Denie are stubborn and believe strongly in their principles and their candidates. Eb, however, becomes frustrated with Denie and their political quarrel, his pride keeping him from forgiving her obstinacy. He makes a statement which was probably in the minds of all the men and women present: " 'Women ought ter keep out'n o' politics anyhow ... an' men hev got ter stand up fur the'rse'ves if they *be* men' . " (p. 486) Denie, however, is not the meek, submissive woman so often seen in mountain literature. She is equally as stubborn as Eb, but possesses a quiet resolution which gives her a sophisticated air throughout the story. Living up to her convictions, she says, " 'T'd ruther be the oneliest one ter wear her hones' colors ... es ter be the oneliest one not brave enough ter stan' by her principles' . " (p. 488) Clearly, Denie comes out the winner in the end, as Eb changes his mind and votes Democratic, presumably because Denie has persuaded him that her candidate is the better of the two men. Even though women had no right to vote yet, this young girl defies public sentiment and hostility, as well as the one she loves, to stand up for her rights and beliefs.

In 1892, Dromgoole published "The Leper of the Cumberlands," in the *Arena*, a story set in the valley of the Milksick Mountain in White County. The only character of any importance is Granny, and even though Dromgoole gives minimal description, the reader can clearly picture the white-haired, wrinkled, almost ageless, work-worn mountain matriarch who possesses a strength to match her years. No rebellious female is seen; rather Dromgoole pays tribute to the women of the mountains by showing what great strength, conviction, and compassion they convey.

Undulant fever, or milksick fever, apparently a common killer in rural Tennessee communities of this time, is the antagonist in the tale. Granny accepts the fever with a typical mountain fatalism by saying, " 'I air not questionin' of the Lord's doin's ... He made the milksick ez it

air, so I reckon it air all right, bein' ez I ain't never heard ez he were give ter makin' mistakes. I reckon' it air all right'." (p. 66)

Even though Granny and her family exhibit a sense of independence throughout the story, she goes out of her way to help her neighbors when they are sick or in need. According to one neighbor, Granny had "such a gentle way of carrying hope to afflicted hearts, such a natural way of making trouble seem less hard than it was." (p. 67) Although she was a tough old woman, Granny shows much sympathy and understanding through such simple acts as covering a small girl's grave with flowers so it would not look so bare. Granny and the family were poor monetarily, but it was her conviction that wealth was not the riches one should seek in life.

This story centers on Granny's belief in God and Fate. The community often tired of her fatalistic approaches to life and wondered if she would accept fate so readily when faced by disaster herself. Even though she loses her husband and grandchildren to the fever, Granny's strength prevails and her faith does not desert her. With the character of Granny, Dromgoole's mountain types reach a more realistic stage. Faith — in oneself and in higher powers — has thus far been an important feature of Dromgoole's heroines and will continue to be.

"Cinch," Dromgoole's third mountain story, was first published in the *Arena* in 1894. This novella is set in the mountains of what is present-day Polk County in lower East Tennessee. There are two male characters and one female — all of them sharing equal importance; however, the eventual conflicts arise over Isabel Stamps, the wife of Jerry Stamps, a semi-literate, rough, crude mountain man. The third character and cause of the problems is Bob Binder, a more literate, worldly man, who has been away from the mountains for eight years. Jerry treats Isabel badly, both physically and emotionally, and Binder fancies himself the rescuer, but Isabel is caught in the middle. She is very attracted to Binder, as he is to her. Isabel has a "cameo delicacy" and golden hair, but her figure is weary and drooping, the result of the hard life she leads. Admiring Binder's worldliness and good looks, she is flattered because he pays her the attention that she craves from her husband but does not get. In short, we are shown a clear picture of a mistreated mountain wife, who is overworked, unappreciated, naïve, lonely, as well as starving for attention. Isabel also shows Binder some bruises that are the result of Jerry's rough treat-

ment after he had come home drunk one night. Because of this physical brutality, Binder decides to steal Isabel from her husband, but she reveals that she is pregnant and feels that her place is with her husband, the father of her child. By the end of the story, Jerry is reformed by the birth of their baby. The reader is led to believe that this transformation is complete and permanent, but Binder is not as sure. During the story, Isabel goes through two separate stages of emotion; she wants to leave her husband and her confining way of life, but conscience will not allow her to overstep her role as wife and mother. This is her lot in life, and she calmly accepts it. Because of Jerry's reformation, this decision is easier for the reader to accept.

Dromgoole presents a common picture of the stereotyped mountain woman in "Cinch"; there is no rebellion except against inner desires. The extensive stereotyping used here suppresses the character and brings forth the symbolism — not of good triumphing over evil, but good becoming tainted and evil mellowing and becoming decent. So, as Dromgoole sometimes does, she has sacrificed strong characterizations for strong meaning.

The fourth tale is to be considered is "A Humble Advocate," published in the *Arena* in 1895. The events more than likely take place in the mountains of Sevier County, since the characters go down to Sevierville to vote. Dromgoole's most rebellious heroine is introduced in the character of Josephine Cary. Josephine is like Denie Lynn of "War of the Roses" in the way she stands up for her principles, but she is more like a stronger version of Isabel Stamps in "Cinch." Unlike Isabel, Josephine defies her husband, who remains like an unreformed Jerry Stamps. Dromgoole speaks out for women of the mountains whom she felt deserved better lives, but seldom ever achieved them — women always under the male dominated societal influences.

Josephine is described as having "small, labor-marked" hands and a dreary life, a "cat and dog existence," essentially being a servant to her husband and children (pp. 289-99). Her face was pleasant and showed "resolve, spirit, and a courage that death itself could not put to shame." (p. 291) At one point Josephine declares that she only stays with her husband because of the children and knows that it is useless to rebel against him. One day she hears that laws to give women the right to vote are being considered, and she decides to go into town on election day to investigate the situation. She is, of course, ridiculed by the other women for not keeping in her place, and by the

men for talking politics. Josephine stands up to the taunts well and makes this statement: " 'Some of you'uns'll live ter see the women o' the land cast'n o' their votes yet'. " (p. 314) This was a dramatic statement for Dromgoole to make in 1895. After Josephine's husband hears these remarks, he throws a bottle at her head and whips her publicly. She did not want the right to vote because she was a sufragette; she merely wanted some fairness and protection from men like her husband.

In "A Humble Advocate" Dromgoole again replaces objective characterizations with stereotypes, especially with her male characters. The emphasis here, however, is on the theme, which is the plight of the mountain women as women in general, and to facilitate this recognition of theme, the women are placed on pedestals and are fighting for equal rights, while the men are depicted in the worst possible light, as can be seen by these comments made to Josephine by a minor male character: " 'My wife gits all she air entitled to in *this* world ... she hev got the right to milk the cow, an' cook the victuals, ter rise up an' set down. What more mortal critter air wantin' for, air too much for Jeff Bynum ter say'. " (p. 304) Certainly there were such men present in mountain society, and Dromgoole does get her points across, but she does little to the male mountaineer image in general. Unfortunately, this sort of stereotyping was all too frequent in regional fiction of this time; for example, Harris's Sut Lovingood and Murfree's Mrs. Ike Peel and Mrs. Isaac Boker, Rufus Chadd and Hi Bates, and Celia Shaw and Cynthia Ware. Not all of these are harmful stereotypes, but by overgeneralizing authors do not project accurate pictures of any society.

"Tappine," the final piece I examine, never appeared in the *Arena*, but did appear in "*Cinch*" and *Other Stories* in 1898. With this story Dromgoole offers a testimonial and perhaps a tribute to woman's great inner strength, which ironically leads to disaster in Tappine's case. Beersheba Springs in Grundy County, a popular resort area in the late 1800's, is the setting. Dromgoole maintained a summer home in nearby Estill Springs and probably was familiar with the hills she speaks of in this story. The main character, Tappine, a young mountain girl, serves as a guide for Mrs. Ennerly, a summer resident

who is sophisticated and wise. Dromgoole describes Tappine as "a slight, frail figure, full of lissome grace ... yet despite her youth there was that about her ... that bore evidence of strength which might, under stress of necessity, leap into life." (pp. 322-23)

The conflicts result from a love triangle in which Tappine rejects the love of a boy named Ben, while in turn she is rejected by another boy named Jeff. Tappine swears undying love to the mountain boy Jeff, who is not worthy of her love. Various persons warn Tappine about Jeff, and Mrs. Ennerly goes so far as to suggest that Ben would make a much better husband, but Tappine disregards the advice by saying, " 'A woman can't help who she loves and she can't allus love as she knows ter be wise an' right' ." (p. 335) The truth of this statement makes both the reader and Mrs. Ennerly realize Tappine's wisdom beyond her years. At the close of the tale, Tappine is dead because of her love for the ne'er-to-do-well Jeff. Jeff kills a man in a fight, and while Tappine is on her way to warn him of the posse, a shot is fired which scares her horse, causing both horse and rider to plunge off a cliff to their deaths. Ironically, it is implied that the shot was fired by Jeff.

The character of Tappine is not stereotyped; she is strong-willed, following her heart and her principles, although the reader may condemn her for her feelings and actions. The tragedy of her death sentimentalizes the story, but reinforces the characterizations.

In these five stories, a good cross-section of Dromgoole's work is evident; she showed sensitivity as well as versatility in dealing with the mountaineer, and even though much of her work is overromanticized and sentimentalized, one must keep in mind her reading public of the time and their limited knowledge of the mountains. They probably would not have had much patience with realistic portraits of mountain life. Dromgoole does no great harm to the mountaineer as others have; what stereotypes she uses are limited (Isabel Stamps, Ike Cary), and she employs enough variety to make her characters seem realistic. Her women begin as rather weak, but stubborn figures (Denie Lynn and Isabel Stamps) and end as portraits of feminine strength and rebellion (Granny, Josephine Cary, and Tappine). They symbolize important ideas. For example, Josephine Cary becomes the spokeswoman for women's rights, and Tappine represents an inner strength which transcends the boundaries of death. As compared with other authors who wrote mountain fiction in the late nineteenth cen-



tury, Dromgoole's representations of the mountain women were certainly ahead of her time. We must recognize that this lady with a man's name from Murfreesboro, Tennessee, wrote mountain fiction that stands up with that of the best of her contemporaries.

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> "Conversations With Miss Dromgoole," *The Coming Age*, 1(1899), 614.

<sup>2</sup> The anthologies and the mountain stories they contain are "*The Heart of Old Hickory*" and *Other Stories* (Boston, 1895): "Fiddling His Way to Fame" (1890) and "Ole Logan's Courtship" (1894); "*Cinch*" and *other Stories* (Boston, 1898): "Cinch" (1894), "The Leper of the Cumberland" (1892), "A Humble Advocate" (1895), and "Tappine" (1898). The three stories never anthologized are "The War of the Roses" [*The Arena*, 5(1892)], "The Herb Doctor" [*The Arena*, 17(1897)], and "The Light of Liberty" [*The Arena*, 31(1904)]. All further references to Dromgoole's stories will be placed within the text from the sources above.

**Coleridge's Failed Quest:  
The Anticlimax of Fancy/Imagination in  
*Biographia Literaria***

**Eugene L. Stelzig**

**SUNY Geneseo**

He began anywhere: you put some question to him, made some suggestive observation: instead of answering this, or decidedly setting out towards answer of it, he would accumulate formidable apparatus, logical swim-bladders, transcendental life-preservers and other precautionary and vehicular gear, for setting out; perhaps did at last get underway, — but was swiftly solicited, turned aside by the glance of some radiant new game on this hand or that, into new courses; and ever into new, and before long into all the Universe, where it was uncertain what game you would catch, or whether any.

Carlyle, "Portraits of His Contemporaries"

I

T. S. Eliot's assertion in a 1956 lecture still represents the contemporary consensus: "the criticism of to-day ... may be said to be in direct descent from Coleridge."<sup>1</sup> Coleridge is the founding father of modern Anglo-American criticism, even if at times he did no more than introduce the currency of German idealism, sometimes passed off as his own, into the vaults of English thought. Indeed, could it be seriously argued that any concept at the back of modern criticism has been as important as Coleridge's imagination theory? And this brings me to the subject of my essay: if the famous conclusion of the first volume of the *Biographia* is a touchstone of modern criticism, the regularity with which it is anthologized demonstrates something about the reception of Coleridge's testament of his literary life. *Biographia Literaria* is known largely for a few scattered passages of practical criticism and for a number of brilliant but difficult definitions of a philosophical/aesthetic nature. Coleridge's method, or lack of it, in his literary quasi-autobiography encourages such an approach (he himself called it "so immethodical a miscellany"<sup>2</sup>) but the miscellaneous, excerpting approach signally distorts the true character of his essay. The context of questioning and uncertainty in which his thought-formulae are imbedded is overlooked, and the well-known phrases are made to function with a finality which the open-minded and ever-hesitant Coleridge may not have intended, and which, moreover, is not warranted by the overall tenor of the work. There is something paradoxical about such a treatment of a thinker one of whose basic aesthetic premises is "organic form." To dis sever parts of the *Biographia* is to deny in practice Coleridge's vitalist aesthetics: "a living body is of necessity an organized one, — and what is organiza-

tion but the connection of parts to a whole, so that each part is at once end and means."<sup>3</sup>

In the following pages I wish to re-embodiment the most famous and most frequently severed part, the fancy-imagination distinction, and to examine the relationship of part to whole which in Coleridge's own terms is tantamount to seeing the "organization" of the work for what it is. An open-minded reading of this work in terms of its overall structure must admit that it contains not only the highlights of impressive insight but also elements of the absurd. The author of *Biographia Literaria* is something of a literary prankster and escape artist: Coleridge on imagination has been taken too seriously by most modern scholars and critics.<sup>4</sup> Instead of radically over- or underestimating his true stature, we are starting to see the Inquiring Spirit in a truer perspective. From his earliest ventures in poetry and prose to the grand mirage of the Logosophia or grand synthesis that kept always receding just beyond the horizons of the possible during his final decade, the gap between promise and performance in Coleridge's life and works is so large that it makes him a unique figure among major English writers. Whatever unity the *Biographia Literaria* may have is not to be found in the execution of the work, which is pretentiously, albeit feebly, propped up from the start to collapse disastrously by the end of volume I. The deeper, Romantic coherence of the book lies in the conception only. The conception, indeed, is as magnificent as the execution is bungled. Like Hamlet, Coleridge here has that within which passes show. It does not see the light of day, although Coleridge makes a number of grandiloquent gestures in the attempt to deliver the goods he has promised — and promised, and promised. The author of the *Biographia* struts self-importantly to the center of the stage; he informs his audience that he has come to tell them all, but shortly before the climax of his presentation, he makes a clumsy exit. The conception behind Coleridge's discussion of imagination merges into infinite spaces, the performance can be bounded in a nutshell. As in the drama of Hamlet, whose character Coleridge understood more fully than any other, including his own, delay, postponement and anticlimax are the typical features of his mind and art.

## II

Coleridge dictated the *Biographia* between July and September

1815 as a preface to a new edition of his poems. It soon turned into an informal meditation on characteristic themes that can be summed up under the word, imagination, which is the central idea pervading the book. Volume I is meant to lead up to and culminate with a detailed philosophical presentation of a theory of imagination, and volume II is designed to ground the theory back in the actual, and the abstract in the concrete, through its close examination of Wordsworth's poetry: to Coleridge, Wordsworth is the chief modern poet whose works will give a local habitation and a name to that "plastic power" obscurely hymned in *Biographia Literaria*. Thus the two volumes are meant to complement, and in a sense, complete one another. Coleridge had been thinking about imagination for a decade and a half before his attempt to define it in the *Biographia*. The first mention of the fancy-imagination distinction occurs in a well-known letter of 1802: "Fancy, or the aggregating Faculty of the mind — not Imagination, or the modifying, and co-adunating Faculty."<sup>5</sup> Typically, Coleridge defers the exposition of one of his leading notions for so long that when he does get around to the task, it has become such a burden that his heart sinks under him, and he feels compelled to arm himself with much prefatory matter, only to suffer a decisive failure of nerve when the momentous encounter can no longer be postponed. What a trickster he can be in his peregrinations on the road to imagination! Certainly his introductory paragraph is not reliable but positively misleading as an indication of the "motives of the present work":

It has been my lot to have had my name introduced, both in conversation and in print, more frequently than I find it easy to explain, whether I consider the fewness, unimportance and limited circulation of my writings, or the retirement and distance in which I have lived, both from the literary and political world. Most often it has been connected with some charge which I could not acknowledge, or some principle which I had never entertained. Nevertheless, had I had no other motive or incitement, the reader would not have been troubled with this exculpation. What my additional purposes were will be seen in the following pages. It will be found that the least of what I have written concerns myself personally. I have used the narration chiefly for the purposes of giving continuity to the work, in part for the sake of miscellaneous reflections suggested to me by particular events; but still more as introductory to the statement of my principles in politics, religion and philosophy, and the application of the rules deduced from philosophical principles to poetry and criticism. But of the objects which I have proposed to myself, it was not the least important to effect, as far as possible, a settlement of the

long-continued controversy concerning the true nature of poetic diction, and at the same time to define with utmost impartiality the real poetic character of the poet by whose writings this controversy was first kindled and has been since fuelled and fanned (*Biographia Literaria*, p. 1).

In view of the actual contents of the book, this introduction is a curious hodge-podge. After a note of exaggerated humility, the author suggests that he is going to attempt a defense of his life and works. But then he gives himself a blank check as far as other "purposes" are concerned. The effusion of authorial benevolence is followed with the claim that he is going to use an autobiographical format to give narrative continuity to his book. The psychogenetic method will allow him to suggest miscellaneous topics (again the blank check) as well as lead up to a statement of his principles in politics, religion, and philosophy. But where in the *Biographia* is there any such comprehensive statement? And can anyone claim in good conscience that he "deduced" from philosophical principles the "application of rules" to poetry and criticism? Coleridge has again confounded intention with achievement. Only the last sentence is valid as summary, for in the second volume he does produce a discussion of the "controversy concerning the true nature of poetic diction," as well as what is in some respects still the best analysis of "the real poetic character of Wordsworth."

The inaccuracy of the opening, which claims at once too much and not enough, and which provides only a confused focus on the chapters that follow, may serve as an index of Coleridge's erratic procedure in the *Biographia* generally. His statement of "motives" fails in fact to mention his fundamental concern with the theory of imagination. This does not surface until Chapter IV, where it is acknowledged that Wordsworth's poetry first led Coleridge to those repeated meditations which paved the way for the fancy-imagination distinction. What first struck him so forcibly in Wordsworth's poetry "was the union of deep feeling with profound thought; the fine balance of truth in observing with the imaginative faculty in modifying the objects observed ...." (p. 48) Coleridge goes on to say that "repeated meditations" on "this excellence, which in all Mr. Wordsworth's writings is more or less predominant and which constitutes the character of his mind ... led me first to suspect ... that fancy and imagination were two distinct and widely different faculties, instead of being, according to the general

belief, either two names with one meaning, or at furthest the lower and higher degree of one and the same power." (pp. 49-50)

Coleridge's "first and most important point" is his desire to "desynonymize ... two conceptions perfectly distinct [fancy-imagination] ... confused under one and the same word." Thus only in Chapter IV does he come around to the real subject of Volume I. Through the systematic discrimination of fancy from imagination "the theory of the fine arts and of poetry in particular could not ... but derive some additional and important light. It would in its immediate effects furnish a torch of guidance to the philosophical critic, and ultimately to the poet himself." (p. 51) With a peculiar blend of vanity and humility, Coleridge adds that "metaphysics and psychology have long been my hobbyhorse," and that "there was a time, certainly, in which I took some little credit to myself in the belief that I had been the first of my countrymen who had pointed out the diverse meaning of which the two terms were capable and analysed the faculties to which they should be appropriated." We are to appreciate that STC is an original thinker: he has already informed us that he got his basic insight from reading Wordsworth's poetry, but he wishes to make it plain that the fancy-imagination theory is not indebted more directly than that to the author of the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*:

The explanation which Mr. Wordsworth has himself given will be found to differ from mine chiefly, perhaps, as our objects are different.... it was Mr. Wordsworth's purpose to consider the influences of fancy and imagination as they are manifested in poetry, and from the different effects to conclude their diversity in kind; while it is my object to investigate the seminal principle, and then from the kind to deduce the degree. My friend has drawn a masterly sketch of the branches with their *poetic* fruitage. I wish to add the trunk, and even the roots, as far as they lift themselves above the ground and are visible to the naked eye of our common consciousness (p. 52).

Clearly Coleridge intends to get to the bottom of this matter in a way that nobody has ever done before. And so, at the conclusion of Chapter IV he begins to gird up his loins for the encounter with Imagination. He winds up the chapter with a curious array of self-serving disclaimers, warnings, and equivocations (pp. 52-53), the upshot being that he has committed himself to "this labour" of formally expounding his theory. Like Wordsworth at the end of Book I of *The Prelude*, Coleridge has finally adumbrated his true subject. He is

big with its conception; he will give us the hard “deductions” that will either produce fundamental conviction or be capable of fundamental confutation. The road lies plain before him. Or does it?

### III

As the puzzled readers of *Biographia Literaria* can testify, it does not. With the first step the philosopher-poet takes toward his theory, he begins stepping away from it. Caught in an expository dilemma, he fails at first to recognize that he is approaching the subject from a tangent that will eventually get him side-tracked in a maze of his own myriad-mindedness. In Chapter V Coleridge recoils so that he may strike the better, but in subsequent chapters he keeps recoiling farther and farther, to the point that when he finally decides to take up his central argument “on the imagination” he is exhausted and out of striking distance — the recoil has become a rout. The chief impasse Coleridge finds himself in is that he feels compelled to acquaint his readers with the philosophical territory he has traversed on the road to imagination. He has already acknowledged Wordsworth’s poetry as a catalyst, but he has not yet mentioned David Hartley’s associational psychology, Coleridge’s reaction to which is the second major influence on the genesis of his theory. So at the beginning of Chapter V he proceeds to trace his philosophical debts, and in so doing loses sight of his primary objective and, like an overzealous historian, falls into the psychogenetic trap of regressive recapitulation. Once Coleridge has succumbed to this, his exposition of imagination is lost, at least for the present, because he cheers himself up with the illusion of finishing it — like “Christabel” and “Kubla Khan” — at some more auspicious time.

Coleridge could have accounted for the importance of his obligations to Hartley in a few pages, but instead he drifts off for three chapters on a tedious disquisition, beginning with “the law of association — Its history traced from Aristotle to Hartley.” This title is the beginning of the end: ostensibly projected as a bridge to his imagination theory, the discussion will turn into a catch-all. It is too bad for Coleridge and his readers that he succumbs to a Shandyan retrogression. Doubtless, his initial enchantment with and subsequent reaction against Hartley’s system is crucial to an understanding of the development of his concept of the imagination. His valid intention is to

demonstrate that associationist psychology is inapplicable to the higher reaches of the mind. In striving to trace the history of associationism from Aristotle to its authoritative modern version in Hartley's *Observations on Man* (1749) that had enlisted the young Coleridge's enthusiastic allegiance, he is trying to undermine the radical empirical foundations of eighteenth-century English psychology that in Hartley's source-book accounted for all mental and emotional processes through the law of the association of ideas. Coleridge's eventual reaction against Hartleyan psychology helped him as much as his reading of Wordsworth's poetry in evolving his concept of the imagination because he came to perceive that associational psychology mistakes a part of the mind for the whole. The fancy-imagination distinction is founded on the insight that Hartley's mind-picture is reductive because applicable only to lower thought-processes, which may be adequately understood under the mode of fancy, "the aggregative and associative power." What Coleridge calls *fancy* English philosophers from Hobbes and Locke on up to the eighteenth-century psychologists had equated with imagination. Coleridge wished to desynonymize the words because the lower mode of fancy is not adequate to explain the genesis and production of a work of art, which depends on imagination or the "shaping and modifying power." Fancy is nothing but "memory emancipated from the order of time and space" and "must receive all its materials ready made from the law of association." But the (esemplastic) Romantic imagination cannot be summed up in such limited terms, because it does not receive sense impressions passively (the empirical model), but actively transforms them into something wondrous, rich, and strange (the idealist model). For Coleridge, in short, the laws of imagination begin to operate only on a level on which the laws of fancy cease to apply.

The difficult and fragmentary distinction at the end of Volume I, the key to his critical theories and the subject of much on-going controversy, has its origins, then, in his ambivalent relations to Hartleyan associationism as much as in his initial response to Wordsworth's poetry. But instead of concisely setting forth the significance of the former to his theory, Coleridge begins to lose himself in a pedantic history of associationism; and this, as we discover to our dismay, serves in turn only as the prelude to further digressions which dramatize what Fruman has described as Coleridge's "failures to pursue an argument to a conclusion." (*Coleridge, the Damaged*



*Archangel*, p. 79) These failures are amply demonstrated in the five chapters sandwiched between the three on association and the fancy-  
imagination paragraphs at the end of Volume I, and which reveal on a  
large scale the collapse of the exposition in the first half of the  
*Biographia*.

Coleridge widens the scope of his discussion in Chapter VIII, beginning with "the system of Dualism introduced by Des Cartes" and wending his way from Leibniz to Hylozoism. To compound the problem that the center will not hold and that things are falling apart, he employs a discursive style that comes close to being a parody of philosophical argument. And he begins to digress even from his digressions. Chapter IX opens with one of the unanswerable questions: "Is philosophy possible as a science, and what are its conditions?" and proceeds to discourse on his intellectual obligations, especially to the "Teutonic theosophist, Jacob Behmen," and to the "illustrious sage of Koenigsberg, the founder of the Critical Philosophy," the "clearness and evidence" of whose works "took possession" of Coleridge's mind "as with a giant's hand." (p. 84) From thence he proceeds to the thorny problem of his borrowings from the Germans, only to conclude with the famous disclaimer, "I regard truth as divine ventriloquist" — another instance of Coleridge giving himself a blank check. Having trekked to Chapter X, we discover that he drops all pretence of being still on target: "A chapter of digression and anecdotes, as an interlude preceding that on the nature and genesis of the imagination or plastic power." After nearly forty pages of anecdotes (the best about "Spy Nozy") we arrive rather the worse for wear at Chapter XI, only to be told that we are not, after all, to have the promised chapter, but instead "an affectionate exhortation to those who in early life feel themselves disposed to become authors." And once we have finished this, we find that Coleridge disappoints us further with the delaying action of "a chapter of requests and premonitions [only too well founded] concerning the perusal or omission of the chapter that follows." One does not have to read it to realize that by now his prolonged stalling has become absurd.

Chapter XII is a prime example of Coleridgean mystification. He opens by putting the reader in his place with the maxim, "until you understand a writer's ignorance, presume yourself ignorant of his understanding." (p. 134) With that put-down of his audience, he goes on to request that the reader "will either pass over the following

Chapter altogether or read the whole connectedly. The fairest part of the most beautiful body will appear deformed and monstrous if dis severed from its place in the organic whole." (p. 135) With this cautionary preamble, Coleridge enters on an obscure rehash of the subject-object dilemma of modern philosophy. Again the English philosopher-poet seems a rickety imitation of the German idealists. In reading it one is reminded of Carlyle's account of Coleridge's conversation, or of Byron's description (in the Preface of *Don Juan*) of Coleridge as "a hawk encumbered by his hood, — / Explaining metaphysics to the nation — / I wish he would explain his Explanation." Chapter XII culminates with ten heavily inflated "Theses" to sustain those "readers who are willing to accompany" him "through the following chapter, in which the results will be applied to the deduction of the imagination." (p. 149) But this is followed by a digression on Coleridge's disagreement with Wordsworth's views on the imagination (in the Preface of 1815). And then, finally, after the hundred-odd pages of digression subsequent to the end of Chapter IV, where he announced his intent to "deduce" the imagination, Coleridge will begin "Chapter XIII On the imagination, or esemplastic power." The issue is at hand.

#### IV

I have traced Coleridge's labyrinthine build-up to this chapter of chapters, the intended pivotal point of the two volumes of *Biographia Literaria*, because I think an overview of his expository method is essential to our perception of how his attempt there to make good on his promises disintegrates quite absurdly. In the actual organization of its argument Chapter XIII deserves the close scrutiny Coleridge had repeatedly asked for in the earlier sections, and one that is rarely receives from commentators intent only to explain those enigmatic passages at the end, often by simplifying whatever meaning they have for the sake of a false textbook clarity.<sup>6</sup> It opens with more mystification in the form of several paragraphs on "the transcendental philosophy" of "the venerable Sage of Koenigsberg." Coleridge's desire to lean on a philosophical father figure when the going gets tough only serves to aggravate his difficulties, because the transcendental portions he serves up get increasingly indigestible, until we are

mercifully released with the sudden collapse of a paragraph in the middle of a sentence: "Now this *tertium aliquid* can be no other than an inter-penetration of the counteracting powers, partaking of both." (p. 164) And here we are, dangling in the void of *counteracting inter-penetration*. Even Coleridge must have realized that the metaphysical mumbo-jumbo that is to deduce the imagination was becoming preposterous.<sup>7</sup> He was trapped, having written eight introductory chapters only to paint himself into a corner. But rather than face his dilemma, Coleridge chooses to employ the rogue's age-old gimmick for squeezing out of a tight spot. He makes a forced exit with a rhetorical sleight-of-hand:

Thus far had the work been transcribed for the press, when I received the following letter from a friend whose practical judgement I have ample reason to estimate and revere, and whose taste and sensibility preclude all the excuses which my self-love might possibly have prompted me to set up in plea against the decision of advisers of equal good sense, but with less tact and feeling (p.164).

This bogus letter from an invented correspondent is a face-saving device that renders the last chapter of Volume I ridiculous in a manner reminiscent of the literary high jinks of *Tristram Shandy*. The "friend" answers Coleridge's request for his "opinion concerning your Chapter on the Imagination, both as to the impressions it made on myself and as to those which I think it will make on the *public*" deferentially with the advice that it is much too difficult for the benighted audience of the *Biographia*:

... as for the public, I do not hesitate a moment in advising and urging you to withdraw the Chapter from the present work, and to reserve it for your announced treatise on the Logos or communicative intellect in Man and Deity. First, because imperfectly as I understand the present Chapter, I see clearly that... you have been obliged to omit so many links from the necessity of compression, that what remains looks ... like the fragments of the winding steps of an old ruined tower (p. 166).

Coleridge's ruin would strike the readers of his "literary life and opinions" like "Bishop Berkeley's *Siris*, announced as an *Essay on Tar-water*, which beginning with Tar ends with the Trinity."<sup>8</sup> His friend concludes by recommending that the imagination chapter be deferred until "that greater work to which you have devoted so many years, and study so intense and various," where "it will be in its proper

place." The letter ends, as J. A. Appleyard puts it, with "Coleridge's expressions of good will toward himself" (*Coleridge's Philosophy of Literature*, p. 198): "All success attend you, for if hard thinking and hard reading are merits you have deserved it." Not surprisingly, Coleridge is only too willing to accede to the plea to reserve his aborted chapter for the "announced treatise on the Logos or communicative Intellect in Man and Deity."

What is particularly revealing about Coleridge's practical joke of a laudatory letter by himself to himself is that it allows him not merely to squirm out of a tight spot, but that it aims, characteristically, to enhance further his claims to being a profound thinker. He will have his cake and eat it too: his dismal failure in the here and now as the theorist of imagination will be more than compensated for by some greater work in the future, by an all-encompassing Logos that will turn relative defeat into absolute triumph. His philosophical pretensions go from the absurd to the pathetic to the extent that he has partly talked himself into believing them, for the imagination account of the *Biographia* is almost as much a hoax on himself as on his public. For the sake of shoring up his threatened sense of self-esteem, it is the saving illusion he wanted to preserve. But as Appleyard points out, "after the collapse of the argument in the first volume of the *Biographia* Coleridge never again attempted a complete description of his literary theories." (*Coleridge's Philosophy of Literature*, p. 209).

Such is the intricate expository web in which the fancy-imagination paragraphs are entangled. By way of lead-in to those celebrated pronouncements, Coleridge humbly concludes:

in consequence of this very judicious letter, which produced complete conviction in my mind, I shall content myself for the present with stating the main result of the chapter, which I have reserved for that future publication, a detailed prospectus of which the reader will find at the close of the second volume (p. 176).

(It should not surprise us that the promised "prospectus" is nowhere to be found in the *Biographia*.) After the famous definition of fancy and imagination, Coleridge winds up the first volume with a pontifical gesture:

Whatever more than this I shall think it fit to declare concerning the powers and privileges of the imagination in the present work will be

found in the critical essay on the uses of the supernatural in poetry and the principles that regulate its introduction: which the reader will find prefixed to the poem of *The Ancient Mariner*.

The essay on the supernatural too is nonextant, the notice of it being part of the greater tissue of plagiarisms and histrionics that makes up the last chapter of Volume I. As for Chapter XIII itself, aside from the oft-quoted, enigmatic fancy-imagination paragraphs, it is both farcical and anticlimactic. Anyone who takes the trouble to examine its actual contents or those of the digressive sections leading down to it cannot take the claims of Coleridge the theorist of imagination at face value.

## V

Having suggested that whatever unity the *Biographia* may possess lies in Coleridge's conception alone, and not in his exposition of the imagination theory, and having re-embodied the two paragraphs usually disserved from the whole by plotting the actual structure of the argument in volume I, I conclude with some general comments about the *Biographia* as an expression of the Romantic sensibility which reveals more of its weaknesses than its strengths.

Many Romantic works are built around a series of epiphanies (to use Joyce's term) and frequently build up to a plateau of sublime feeling and perception that can have a cathartic effect. Perhaps this is the literary equivalent of the grand finale in music, of the climactic crescendo, which in some Romantic symphonies (Beethoven's *Ninth*, for instance) can have an overwhelming impact. The best example in English Romantic poetry is probably the concluding book of Wordsworth's soul-biography, *The Prelude*, which with the Mount Snowdon "spot of time" hymns majestically "the discipline and consummation of a poet's mind." Other major instances that come readily to mind are the conclusions of Blake's *Jerusalem*, with its triumphant note of alienation overcome ("All Human Forms identified"), and Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*, where Demogorgon's choric close is the philosophic climax to an entire act of epiphanic celebration. In German Romanticism too, the final uplift is just as notable a feature, as manifest in the chant of the Chorus Mysticus at the conclusion of the second part of Goethe's *Faust*, or in the ending of Part I of Novalis' *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* (which conjures with a visionary fable "the

realm of eternity"), and the conclusion of his *Hymns to Night* with an ecstatic *unio mystica* of love and death.

As a defining trait of many longer Romantic works, the final epiphany serves both as a unifying perspective and a triumphant finish — this is the way a positive Romantic ends, with a bang, and not a whimper. Such an aesthetic mode has its dangers and pitfalls. What if the grand conclusion is bungled? Even some of the best Romantic writers come close to disappointing the readers' aroused expectations with a flat finish. Clearly this is one of Coleridge's major weaknesses. It has often been pointed out that he had trouble finishing what he started, and that some of his most famous compositions are fragments — a not untypical situation, given the overweening and grandiose ambitions of many Romantic artists. Of those he did complete, the most perfect is *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. But even that nightmare of Life-in-Death has a rather prosaic ending with the proverbial coda:

He prayeth best, who loveth best  
All things both great and small;  
For the dear God who loveth us,  
He made and loveth all.

Like the conclusion of Wordsworth's "Resolution and Independence," it has struck many readers as an anticlimactic homily which undercuts the stature of the visionary experience that has preceded it.

When considered in terms of the epiphanic paradigm according to which some of the best Romantic texts are structured, Coleridge's presentation of his theory of imagination in *Biographia Literaria* may strike us not only as a dismal explanatory collapse, but also as a failed epiphany. He falters at epic length in his theodicy of imagination, only to abandon the reader in a rhetorical fog. Again the genius of Wordsworth, whose life and work is so closely intertwined with that of STC, presents an interesting parallel *and* contrast. Like the *Biographia*, *The Prelude* is a personal, digressive, miscellaneous and meandering work that has a way of getting lost in the turnings of its sinuous structure. But where Wordsworth succeeds in the end with the breathtaking mountain vision that consummates the search for his poetic identity and that embodies the higher unity of his development, conceived under the banner of imagination, Coleridge suffers a definitive failure of vision in his concluding chapter "on the imagination." The

Mount Snowdon “spot of time,” after the monumental, epic quest for a personal past, represents the true Romantic sublime; Coleridge’s fancy-imagination paragraphs are the false sublime, the ruins — and runes — of a failed vision after a long and fruitless quest. In a sense we are back to the loss of his “shaping spirit of Imagination” lamented much earlier in “Dejection: An Ode.” The fundamental irony of Coleridge’s failed quest in *Biographia Literaria* is that without the aid and guidance of the spirit that forms unity out of multeity, the poet-philosopher of imagination can hardly expound a *theory* of the imagination. Instead of the illuminations of esemplastic power, Coleridge only serves up (to recur to the words of “Dejection”) the regurgitations of “abstruse research” that has stolen from his “own nature all the natural man,” having by now become the confirmed “habit” of his soul. Thus, the imagination quest of Coleridge’s literary self-portrait, pursued a decade and a half after the prophetic grief of his great ode, attests on a massive scale to the collapse of his “genial spirits.”

#### NOTES

I wish to acknowledge the support of the Research Foundation of the State University of New York in the writing of this article.

<sup>1</sup> “The Frontiers of Criticism,” in *On Poetry and Poets* (New York, 1961), p. 115.

<sup>2</sup> *Biographia Literaria, Or, Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions*, ed. George Watson (London, 1965), pp. 52-53. All subsequent citations of *Biographia Literaria* are of this edition.

<sup>3</sup> Coleridge on “organic form,” in *Shakespearean Criticism*, ed. T. M. Raysor (London, 1960), 1:197.

<sup>4</sup> This recognition has been gaining momentum in Coleridge studies. Norman Fruman’s *Coleridge, the Damaged Archangel* (New York, 1971), is the most hostile modern reevaluation of Coleridge the man, thinker, and poet. Fruman challenges us to realize that the image of Coleridge’s “character, mind and art that has emerged from the tremendous surge of scholarly and critical studies of the past half century is seriously askew,” (p. xv) and that “Coleridge plain is a far more absorbing figure than the exalted seer fitfully glimpsed through the painted mist of illusion.” (p. xix) Other notable studies are J. A. Appleyard’s *Coleridge’s Philosophy of Literature* (Cambridge, 1965) and Thomas McFarland’s *Coleridge and the Pantheist Tradition* (Oxford, 1969). Appleyard presents a judicious and balanced summary of Coleridge the literary theorist which, although not slighting legitimate claims, notes that “the long-awaited analysis of imagination which is to complete the argument of the first volume is almost a total disappointment.” (p. 197) and that “Coleridge promised to ‘deduce’ the imagination, but he never did so.” (p. 211) McFarland works with the premise that Coleridge is “the most profound of English

wrote the *Biographia*." (pp. xxiii, 41)

<sup>5</sup> *Collected Letters*, ed. E. L. Griggs (Oxford, 1956), 2:864.

<sup>6</sup> The major recent instance of this is Owen Barfield's *What Coleridge Thought* (Middletown, Conn. 1971), Chapters 6 and 7, "Imagination and Fancy." The classic example is still I. A. Richards' *Coleridge on Imagination*, which wrenches Coleridge's "imagination" into Richards' own fanciful context.

<sup>7</sup> As Fruman observes, Coleridge "suddenly breaks off ... having breathlessly unloaded tons of ill-digested metaphysics ... as if he realized that, after all, he had little to say on the subject," *The Damaged Archangel*, p. 100.

<sup>8</sup> With these descriptions Coleridge seems to be lampooning his work in the process of writing it, a stylistic device of self-conscious irony popularized by Sterne in *Tristram Shandy* and central to many of the leading modernists of our century.



## Warren's "Blackberry Winter": A Reading

James E. Rocks

Loyola University of Chicago

Robert Penn Warren wrote "Blackberry Winter" shortly after he completed *All the King's Men* and "A Poem of Pure Imagination: an Experiment in Reading," the long essay on *The Ancient Mariner*; these three works, written during 1945 and 1946, are notable examples of their respective genres and reveal Warren's varied literary talents. That "Blackberry Winter" was written soon after the novel and essay suggests that it might be read critically in the light of the two earlier works. It is unlikely that they influenced the short story in any definite way, but the essay on Coleridge and *All the King's Men* do foreshadow some of the themes, symbols and techniques of the story and indicate that Warren was thinking about similar problems as he wrote each work. *All the King's Men* and "Blackberry Winter" share the same mood of impending disorder and express a similar view of the idea of change, a major theme in Warren's work.

In "Writer at Work: How a Story was Born and How, Bit by Bit, It Grew," Warren describes the origin of "Blackberry Winter" in World War II, when he felt civilization might never again be the same. A line in Melville's poem "The Conflict of Convictions" carried for him the frightening reminder that wars threaten to uncover the "slimed foundations" of the world, an image that is reminiscent in tone of the decay, corruption and death in the novel and the story.<sup>1</sup> His tale grew, he says, from the association of various experiences in his own life and was an attempt to treat the "adult's grim orientation" toward the fact of time and the fall of man into moral awareness. As Warren writes, "I wanted the story to give some notion that out of change and loss a human recognition may be redeemed, more precious for being no longer innocent."<sup>2</sup> This condition of growth into maturity, with its concomitant gains and losses, is shared by Jack Burden in *All the King's Men* and Seth in "Blackberry Winter."

Warren's essay on "Blackberry Winter" gives us some clues in reading both the story and *All the King's Men*, but it is like Poe's "The Philosophy of Composition" or Allen Tate's "Narcissus as Narcissus" in that it leaves most of the important pieces of the puzzle for the reader to assemble. Warren expects the reader, like the writer in the act of composing, to be a creative and discerning individual. The quest for knowledge that fictional characters undergo is interpreted by a sym-

pathetic and imaginative reader, who must discover in the work the symbols, myths and archetypes that the writer has used to dramatize the universal human condition.<sup>3</sup> As a New Critic, Warren affirms the significance of a symbolic reading of literature and states that a "poem is the light by which the reader may view and review all the areas of experience with which he is acquainted."<sup>4</sup> A story, like a poem, uses symbol and has rich texture. Warren stresses the varied and suggestive meaning of any symbol, particularly one "rooted in our universal natural experience."<sup>5</sup> The sun, moon, stars and wind that he identifies in Coleridge are examples of such fundamental symbols, which like the archetypes of rebirth and the journey in Coleridge are to be found in Warren's own work, including, of course, "Blackberry Winter" and *All the King's Men*.

Warren's discussion of Coleridge's sacramental conception of the universe, violated by the Mariner's crime against the sanctity of nature, is relevant to a reading of "Blackberry Winter." The short story examines how the prideful individual can isolate himself from what Warren calls the sense of the "One Life"<sup>6</sup> in which all creation participates. In "Blackberry Winter" the older Seth arrives at a similar knowledge as he looks back at his day's journey: like the Mariner, he learns about the beauty and terror of the universe and the natural process of change that both renews and destroys. Seth, like all men, must reenact the fall of the first father, Adam, whose third son we are told in Genesis was named Seth. Although the story, in its series of episodes and recurring symbols, seems to emphasize decay and death (the "slimed foundations"), it asserts finally the triumph of human perception over the natural forces that age and destroy. Seth, whose fall is fortunate, has moved, like Jack Burden and Ann Stanton in *All the King's Men*, "into history and the awful responsibility of Time."<sup>7</sup> The adult Seth, like Jack and Anne, has learned the meanings of sin and guilt, isolation and community.

The tramp, or the Mysterious Stranger, represents, as Warren finds them in Coleridge's poem, the ideas of sin and guilt and the isolation that attends them. Warren maintains that Coleridge was interested in the mystery of original sin — not hereditary sin, however, but sin that is original with the sinner and is a manifestation of his own will. In the Mariner, Warren says, we witness the corruption of the will, which is the beginning of the moral history of man. The Mariner's killing of the albatross reenacts the fall and is a condition of

the will and results from no single human motive. Although a comparison between the Mariner and Willie Stark certainly cannot be carried too far, one may see in Stark an example of the corruption of the will that Warren finds in the Mariner. Like the Mariner, Willie makes his own convenience the measure of an act and therefore isolates himself from the "One Life." One might argue, then, that Willie Stark and the tramp in "Blackberry Winter" represent in Warren's fiction the corruption of the will and the isolation of sin he finds in Coleridge. Both men are agents in the narrators' initiations and can be viewed as primarily beneficial in their influence on them. Stark may be corrupt in the means of his politics but he is often motivated by altruistic ends; goodness, as Jack Burden learns, can be accomplished by the morally bad agent. Like Stark, the tramp is also a human being, however sinful and violent he may appear. In "Blackberry Winter," as Warren states in "Writer at Work," Seth remembers "this lost, mean, defeated, cowardly, worthless, bitter being as somehow a man" who had come "out of the darkening grown-up world of time."<sup>8</sup> The Ancient Mariner, Willie Stark and the tramp are alike in that they serve to elicit the emotions of pity and terror from the reader and suggest the knowledge that man must apprehend if he is to avoid a similar fate. Each of these men enters a "darkening grown-up world of time"; so, also, do their observers, the wedding guest, Jack Burden and Seth. An awareness of time is a central concern of Warren's characters, and in his story he depicts the truth that Jack Burden and Seth must suffer to learn; life is motion toward knowledge.

The title "Blackberry Winter" foreshadows the principal knowledge that Seth will gain: what man thinks has been permanent and will always remain permanent is subject to unexpected and devastating change. As a boy Seth believes that what he has done before will remain possible forever — that in June, for example, one need never wear shoes:

... when you are nine years old, what you remember seems forever; for you remember everything and everything is important and stands big and full and fills up Time and is so solid that you can walk around and around it like a tree and look at it. You are aware that time passes, that there is a movement in time, but that is not what Time is. Time is not a movement, a flowing, a wind then, but is, rather, a kind of climate in which things are, and when a thing happens it begins to live and keeps on living and stands solid in Time like a tree that you can walk around. And if there is a movement, the movement is not Time itself, any more

than a breeze is climate, and all the breeze does is to shake a little the leaves on the tree which is alive and solid. When you are nine, you know that there are things that you don't know, but you know that when you know something you know it. You know how a thing has been and you know that you can go barefoot in June.<sup>9</sup>

At the time the story opens, however, an unseasonable cold spell, blackberry winter, and a gully washer have just interrupted the anticipated plan of boyhood activity. From the beginning of the story, we are aware that the apparent security of the boy's world will be upset by a series of episodes revealing the mystery of change. The four scenes of the story — the first at his house, the second at the bridge, the third at the Negro cabin and the fourth at his house — are structured to suggest the idea of cycle or return, a going forth and a coming back. This pattern, like the notion that the gain of knowledge is worth the loss of innocence, argues for an interpretation of the story that stresses rebirth and renewal — if not the regeneration of life, at least the enlightenment of the mind. In the epilogue that concludes the story, the older Seth looks back from the year 1945 — when Warren felt that the “slimed foundations” of the world might be exposed — and considers the profound ironies of change: that the father who seemed invincible to him as a boy has died early, a victim of the machine, not of nature; and that the mother who seemed strong has died of a broken heart; and that Old Jebb, who most wanted the release of death to end his fatigue and who had prophesied the end of the world, lives on like an aging Samson. Most important of all, Seth realizes the value of his memory, which has kept alive the image of the tramp for thirty-five years.

This tramp and not the cold spell first disturbs the harmony of Seth's world, his “One Life.” Seeing the tramp emerge from the woods, he is struck by “the strangeness of the sight” (p. 64) and he tries to “walk around” (p. 64) in his mind the idea of such unpredictable behavior. The tramp is completely out of place; his appearance and his manner suggest the origin of the city, a complex world unknown to the country boy. In the figure of the tramp Warren creates the archetype of the outsider, a character who threatens the security of a closed world; a vagabond or maverick, he is the type of the failure of the American dream of success. The tramp's nondescript eyes and “perfectly unmemorable face” (p. 69) are like a confusing mask to the boy, making him all the more inquisitive of the reality underneath. The

boy's "steady and self-reliant" mother (p. 68), in whom he can feel confidence, offers the tramp the work of burying the dead chicks and cleaning up the trash in the flower beds. This description of the littered setting, suggesting the destruction and death of the animate world, foreshadows the vivid descriptions in succeeding scenes of the trash that runs in the creek and of the trash under Dellie's cabin. The boy begins to see the capacity of nature to ravage what it creates (chickens) and what man creates (flower beds). Seth will grow to realize that man does not control his environment and that he cannot be certain either of his expectations or of the satisfaction of his desires.

Seth does not perceive the full devastation of nature until he arrives at the strange sight of the bridge over the swollen creek, which is described as "boiling," "frothing," "hissing," "steaming" and "tumbling" (pp. 72-73) — words that suggest natural cataclysm and foreshadow the Biblical tone of Old Jebb's later description of the next great and annihilating flood. On the bank the boy's tall, proud father sits on his horse, above the heads of the other men, who are mostly poor white tenate farmers and in Seth's mind of a lower social class. In this episode Seth begins to learn about poverty, a condition largely unknown to him. The dead cow that floats past reminds the onlookers of their probable hunger in the future. The cow, which suggests the idea of maternity, foreshadows Dellie's condition of menopause, Old Jebb's remark that mother earth might stop producing and his own mother's death some years later. Each of these images gives unity to the story and affirms the idea of death to man and nature, a death out of which there will seem to be no renewal.

When the young spectator at the bridge asks whether anyone has ever eaten a drowned cow, the response is stunned silence; but the question becomes ironic in the light of Old Jebb's statement later that if the earth stops producing man will eat up everything. Jebb's wisdom is anticipated in an old Civil War veteran's response to the boy: "you live long enough and you'll find a man will eat anything when the time comes." (p. 76) This man speaks, it might be said, rather like a character out of Southwestern humor; his words demonstrate knowledge of the comic and the tragic. He is, like Old Jebb, the sage and seer, to whom time and experience have brought wisdom.

The third episode of the story, at the Negro cabin, falls into two parts — in the first, Seth talks with the family cook Dellie and, in the

second, with her common-law husband Old Jebb. Both of them have always been proud of their clean, orderly house and yard; but, much to Seth's surprise, the yard has also become littered by the storm. Contrary to what he had come to expect, the yard is full of the trash and filth that had always remained hidden under the house. Seth learns that appearances or order, cleanliness and health can be deceptive, that dirt, ugliness and decay lie beneath the surface of things. This new awareness is reaffirmed when he sees Dellie, normally healthy and active, lying sick under her quilt, which, like the house hiding the litter, covers the reality of the decay underneath. Dellie is suffering menopause, what Old Jebb later calls "the change of life and Time." (p. 82) This change signals the end of her ability to reproduce and thus the approach of a kind of death. When Seth says he is sorry to hear that she is ill, he realizes that the word is an empty one. Language fails to express the emotions of loss or sorrow, and, like the men watching the creek, Seth stands a mute and powerless witness to this example of natural change and human suffering.

The culmination of the boy's journey is reached in his dialogue with Jebb, who unlike the tramp has a wise, sad, kind face and represents the security of love and fatherly wisdom. A prophet figure, Jebb speaks like Noah, who foretells a flood but who has not heard God's word of a possible salvation for man; he is also like the preacher of Ecclesiastes, but his message is that the sun will never rise again, that the earth will not abide forever. Old Jebb will not tell Seth why Dellie is ill, and his response, "Time come and you find out everything," (p. 82) reveals the Negro's understanding that all things change and that time is needed for man to be aware of the nature of change and of his part in it. Time, Jebb knows, is maturity.

Seth argues with Jebb that because it is June the cold spell will pass. Jebb contradicts the boy's belief that what has been will always be when he says that the cold may have come to stay:

Cause this-here old yearth is tahr'd. Hit is tahr'd and ain't gonna perduce. Lawd let hit come rain one time forty days and forty nights, 'cause he was tahr'd of sinful folks. Maybe this-here old yearth say to the Lawd, Lawd, I done plum tahr'd, Lawd, lemme rest. (pp. 82-83)

Like Dellie, mother earth will lose her fecundity and man will be faced with extinction. The irony of Old Jebb's speech is that man feels no awe for the earth's seemingly infinite bounty or no concern to

preserve it; the Lord rested on the seventh day and so does man, but the earth can never rest. As Seth leaves, the cold penetrating his spirit as well as his bare feet, Jebb tells him to hurry home before "you ketch yore death." (p. 83) Young Seth will also have to endure the process of change and decay; like all men, he has caught his death. Back at his home, in the concluding episode that brings the action full circle, Seth follows the tramp up the drive toward the pike and into the memory of the future.

In the epilogue, the adult Seth provides a perspective on his youthful experiences and reveals that he is not unlike the Ancient Mariner in his need to articulate the meaning of what happened to him on that day. The story provides for him and for the reader an epiphany that gains value in the narrator's dual vantage point of youth, which feels, and age, which interprets. The fullest insight belongs to the reader, however, for it is he who perceives the entire significance of Seth's experience. The epiphany we participate in is a discovery of the self in relation to one's environment and to other individuals, not unlike Robinson Crusoe's discovery of the footprint, a mark that signalled a change in his life. (Seth thinks early in the story about this moment of self-awareness in Defoe's work.) The image of a footprint is particularly meaningful in the light of its importance as a symbol of man's relation to nature, which is both his sustainer and his destroyer. Seth's bare feet grip the earth but they are unprotected from the cold and dirt; they let him know nature as she is. As the foot is an important symbol in the story, so is the hand, which can grasp hold of reality. Each of the adult characters has strong hands, which presumably can control and shape destiny — or at least that seems so to young Seth. But the painful truth is that these people cannot alter their lives, that they will become victims of their mortality. Their condition is almost like that of the character in *All the King's Men* who has what Jack Burden calls the Great Twitch, which determines that man is a victim of uncontrollable forces. The characters in "Blackberry Winter" have the freedom to choose and to act but no certainty that their choices and acts won't be overwhelmed by nature.

"Blackberry Winter," like *The Ancient Mariner* and *All the King's Men*, creates in literary form, as Warren writes in "Knowledge and the Image of Man," "a vision of experience ... fulfilled and redeemed in knowledge, the ugly with the beautiful, the slayer with the slain, what was known as shape now known as time, what was known in time now

known as shape, a new knowledge."<sup>10</sup> This definition of the ordering of experience into a literary image comments on the theme of his own fiction, particularly "Blackberry Winter." Man has a right, states Warren, to define himself and to achieve his own identity, or an image of himself. He says that this notion of personality is part of the heritage of Christianity, in which every soul is valuable to God and in which the story of every soul is the story of its choice of salvation or damnation. In the quest for knowledge, Warren declares, man discovers his separateness and the pain of self-criticism and of isolation; but he also learns that his condition is shared by all men alike:

In the pain of isolation he may achieve the courage and clarity of mind to envisage the tragic pathos of life, and once he realizes that the tragic experience is universal and a corollary of man's place in nature, he may return to a communion with man and nature.<sup>11</sup>

Man's knowledge makes him aware that he is a fallen creature, Warren is saying, but that he has gained more than he has lost:

Man can return to his lost unity, and if that return is fitful and precarious, if the foliage and flower of the innocent garden are now somewhat browned by a late season, all is the more precious for the fact, for what is now achieved has been achieved by a growth of moral awareness.<sup>12</sup>

These two passages provide a perfect gloss of Warren's story and novel written a decade earlier.

The essay on *The Ancient Mariner* and *All the King's Men* share with "Blackberry Winter" similar themes of sin, isolation, change and growth, similar characters who lose their innocence because of others who embody evil and guilt or because of forces over which they have no apparent control and similar techniques of rich texture, narrative point-of-view and the treatment of time. Reading "A Poem of Pure Imagination," *All the King's Men* and "Blackberry Winter" together enhances the reader's appreciation of each of the works.

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> "Writer at Work," *NYTBR*, 1 March 1959, p. 5. See line 65 of Melville's poem.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Winston Weathers's comprehensive essay, "'Blackberry Winter' and the Use



of Archetypes," *SSF*, 1(1963), 45-51, discusses the meaning of Warren's symbolic and archetypal patterns and has enlightened my reading of the story, as has Richard Allan Davison's "Physical Imagery in Robert Penn Warren's 'Blackberry Winter'," *Gar*, 22 (1968), 482-88.

<sup>4</sup> "A Poem of Pure Imagination: an Experiment in Reading," *Selected Essays* (New York, 1966), p. 212.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 219.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 222.

<sup>7</sup> *All the King's Men* (New York, 1973), p. 438.

<sup>8</sup> "Writer at Work," p. 5.

<sup>9</sup> *The Circus in the Attic and Other Stories* (New York, 1962), pp. 63-64. Page numbers of subsequent quotations from the story are given in the text.

<sup>10</sup> *SR*, 62 (1955), 241-42.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 241.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 241-42.

**John O’Keeffe and the Restoration of Farce  
on the Later Eighteenth-Century Stage**

**Phillip B. Anderson**

**University of Central Arkansas**

Of the important critics in the history of English literature, none, perhaps, has been more generally incisive in his practical criticism, in his evaluation of individual works and authors, than William Hazlitt. Certainly, Hazlitt is among those critics whose specific literary judgments have been most consistently ratified by the consensus of twentieth-century criticism. Thus, it is more than a little surprising to encounter his opinion, expressed in his *Lectures on the English Comedy Writers*, that one John O’Keeffe was “our English Molière.”<sup>1</sup> Nor does Hazlitt stop with this apparently absurd comparison. This same O’Keeffe, we are told, is also an “immortal farce writer,” and two of his characters, from a play called *The Agreeable Surprise* (1781), are no less than “Touchstone and Audrey revived.”<sup>2</sup> We might easily suppose that such praise for such a dramatist from such a critic were no more than a momentary and perhaps whimsical indiscretion. However, Hazlitt will allow us no such supposition. Eleven years after the publication of *The English Comic Writers*, he again writes of O’Keeffe in the *Conversations of James Northcote*, and again O’Keeffe is “the English Molière.”<sup>3</sup>

Now, I know of but one modern scholar — Allardyce Nicoll — who has commented on Hazlitt’s opinion of O’Keeffe, and he admits to being mystified by the romantic critic’s praise of the now obscure eighteenth-century Irish playwright.<sup>4</sup> Professor Nicoll’s wonder would no doubt have been all the greater had he known or recalled that O’Keeffe was a favorite, not only of Hazlitt’s, but also of Hazlitt’s contemporaries, Charles Lamb and Leigh Hunt. Lamb, in the character of Elia, devoted an entire essay, “On the Acting of Munden,” to his reactions to a performance of O’Keeffe’s farce, *The Modern Antiques* (1791), and Hunt, writing in 1831 for *The Tatler*, numbers “some of the pieces, by O’Keeffe” (along with Sheridan’s *The School for Scandal*, *The Rivals*, and Goldsmith’s *She Stoops to Conquer*) among “the best pieces produced in later times.”<sup>5</sup>

It would, of course, be too much to hope or even wish that the collective praise of Hazlitt, Lamb, and Hunt might lead to a modern revival of interest in O’Keeffe, but this early nineteenth-century critical response to the Irish comedian calls for some explanation, and I believe this can be provided by recognizing the important place which

O'Keeffe occupied in a significant and heretofore unappreciated revolution in taste and repertoire which occurred on the English stage in the last two decades of the eighteenth century.

In order to understand this revolution, it is necessary to look briefly at the nature of English comic drama and dramatic criticism during the middle fifty years of the eighteenth century. Professors Hume and Sherbo have taught us that we can no longer explain English comedy of the mid-eighteenth century by simply dismissing it as tediously sentimental.<sup>6</sup> No one can read many of the comic plays written between 1725 and 1775 without encountering much that is far from any definition of sentimentality. Still, something is, or at least seems, very wrong with most of what passed for comic entertainment during these fifty years.

As one turns the pages of play after play from this period, one is first struck and then oppressed by plots that are mechanical and uninteresting, characters that are tame and conventional, and dialogue that is frigid and flat. I think that what was ultimately wrong in all of this was, more than anything else, the very concept of comedy espoused by most Augustan critics and dramatists. This view of comedy produced not so much sentimental comedy as "elegant" and "genteel" comedy. It produced not so much the systematic inclusion of sentimental scenes and dialogue as the more or less systematic exclusion of all that could be regarded as extravagant, improbable, unnatural, ludicrous, or — to use the favorite eighteenth-century word — "low."

In 1780, George Colman, in the Prologue to Sophia Lee's comedy, *A Chapter of Accidents*, surveyed English comedy during his century and could mention only Fielding and Goldsmith as having escaped the iron tyranny of the word "low":

Long has the passive stage howe'er absurd  
 Been rul'd by Names and govern'd by a Word  
 Some poor cant Term, like magick Spells can awe,  
 And bind our Realms like a dramattick law.  
 When Fielding, Humour's favorite Child, appear'd  
 Low was the word — a word each Author fear'd!  
 'Till chac'd at length by Pleasantrys bright ray  
 Nature and Mirth resum'd their legal Sway,  
 And Goldsmith's Genius bask'd in open day.<sup>7</sup>

However warmly Goldsmith's genius "basked in open day," he none-

theless felt the oppression of conventional criticism and its favorite one-word weapon. In his *Enquiry into the Present State of Learning in Europe* (1759), he writes:

By the power of one single monosyllable, our critics have almost got the victory over humour amongst us. Does the poet paint the absurdities of the vulgar; then he is low; does he exaggerate the features of folly, to render it more thoroughly ridiculous, then he is very *low*.<sup>8</sup>

The refined Augustan concept of comedy which practically condemned humor itself as low influenced every aspect of comic writing. Thus, the plot had to be "regular" and "probable." An indication of what this meant may be gathered from Elizabeth Cooper's Preface to her comedy *The Rival Widows* (1735), in which Mrs. Cooper points out with satisfaction that the action of her play is "single and entire," that each scene is "intended naturally and consistently to produce and make room for the next," "that the characters neither enter nor exit ... without a manifest reason," and that every act of the play is necessary to the plot.<sup>9</sup> Comedies, old or new, which failed to conform to the standards of decorum evident in this Preface were generally condemned, and the demands for probability of plot were no less rigorous. As late as 1779, a critic for *The Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser* could write of a performance of Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors*: "This [confusion of persons] as it has no foundation in nature, cannot be deemed a true source of comedy or a pretense of human life and manners."<sup>10</sup> So too, in 1776 the *St. James's Chronicle* attacks *The Cozeners*, a farce by the popular later eighteenth-century playwright Samuel Foote, as "a Jumble or Assemblage of Incoherences, Improbabilities, and Puerilities." The plot "offends against every rule of Probability." The irate critic finally damns the performance as "the Birth of a Monster."<sup>11</sup>

The extent to which English critics and audiences during most of the eighteenth century demanded probability and regularity of comic plot may be further illustrated by the critical responses to Goldsmith's *She Stoops To Conquer* (1772). Horace Walpole liked nothing about Goldsmith's comedy, but in a letter written in 1773 to William Mason he especially complains of the "total improbability of the whole plan and conduct" of the plot.<sup>12</sup> Even Dr. Johnson himself, to whom the play was dedicated, felt a little uneasy about his friend's comic plot. In

1773, he wrote Boswell of *She Stoops to Conquer*: "The chief diversion arises from a stratagem by which a lover is made to mistake his future father-in-law's house for an inn. This, you see, borders upon farce."<sup>13</sup>

If the refined Augustan concept of comedy placed severe restrictions on plot, it was no less rigorous concerning character and language. Even in the Preface to his farcical opera *Love in the City* (1767), Isaac Bickerstaffe felt it necessary to defend his inclusion of characters and language that were not genteel:

The admirers of lords and ladies and fine sentiments will probably quarrel with it for being low; but my endeavour has been, thro' the whole, to make my audience laugh; and however respectfully we may consider illustrious personages; I will venture to say they are the last company into which any one would think of going in order to be merry.<sup>14</sup>

It perhaps goes without saying that Bickerstaffe's play was a failure. In 1768, Goldsmith's *The Good Natur'd Man* also met with rough treatment at the hands of audiences and critics, and again the cause had to do with "low" characters and language. In the original form of this comedy, Goldsmith included a scene in which a lowly bailiff appeared whose language was a true reflection of his social position. This scene was almost universally condemned. Writing in 1793, William Cooke recalled the audience's reaction: "In vain did the *bailiff scene* mark with true comic discrimination the manners of that tribe ... The predominant cry of the prejudiced and illiterate part of the pit was 'it was low — it was d — mned vulgar.'"<sup>15</sup> It was not only the "illiterate part of the pit," however, that objected to the bailiff scene. Almost every newspaper critic attacked it. *Lloyd's Evening Post* remarked that the scene was written "in language uncommonly low" and that it "gave some offence."<sup>16</sup> The *St. James's Chronicle* insisted that "the Bailiff Scene must be very much shortened or totally omitted."<sup>17</sup> When the play was printed, the bailiff scene again found disfavor with the critics. *The Gentleman's Magazine* noted that "it depends upon the exhibition of manners, which the taste of the present age will scarce admit even in farce."<sup>18</sup> The drama critic for the *Monthly Review* admitted that he was "not disgusted with the scene in the closet," but nevertheless condemned it as "intolerable upon the stage."<sup>19</sup>

One further example of the concept of comedy which obtained during the middle decades of the century must suffice. Most critics

demanded that the characters and language of comedy be not only genteel, but also probable. The prevalence of this demand is best illustrated by the early critical history of Sheridan's *The Rivals* (1775). Although Sheridan's comedy was not a complete failure, the reactions to the character and language of Mrs. Malaprop were overwhelmingly negative. Reviewing the first performance of the comedy, the *London Packet* praised the genteel language of Faulkland and Julia, but damned the speech of Mrs. Malaprop: "The diction is an odd mixture of the elegant and the absurd. Some of the scenes are written in a very masterly stile; others in a low, farcical kind of dialogue, more fit for a Bartholomew-droll than a comedy."<sup>20</sup> The *Public Ledger* was no less negative in its response to Mrs. Malaprop's language:

The author seems to have considered puns, witticisms, similes, and metaphors, as admirable substitutes for polished diction; hence it is that instead of the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid, one of the characters is made to talk of Ovid's "Meat-for-hopes." These are shameful absurdities in language, which can suit no character how widely soever it may depart from common life and common manners.<sup>21</sup>

*The Town and Country Magazine* disliked the play generally and noted that "the most reprehensible part is in many low quibbles and barbarous puns that disgrace the very name of comedy."<sup>22</sup> As in the case of Goldsmith's bailiff scene, the audience as well as the press rejected the departure from the genteel and the "natural." The early nineteenth-century theatrical historian, John Bernard, in his *Retrospections of the Stage* (1830), described its reaction: "Mrs. Malaprop was denounced as a rank offence against probability ... as a thing without parallel in society — a monstrous absurdity which had originated with the author."<sup>23</sup>

Given the strength of these demands for a more refined and elegant comedy, it was perhaps inevitable that comedy's poor relation, farce, would be influenced in ways similar to its more exalted cousin, and indeed this is what came to pass. It is significant in this regard that one of the first and most influential genteel comedies, Richard Steele's *The Conscious Lovers* (1732), contained a Prologue by Leonard Welsted which asked the audience not only to approve Steele's decorous and virtuous comedy, but also to reject farce:

No more let lawless farce uncensur'd go,  
The lewd dull gleanings of a Smithfield show.

'Tis yours with breeding to refine the age,  
To chasten wit, and moralize the stage.<sup>24</sup>

In a sense, this sort of attack on farce was conventional. Ever since the early 1660's, when the genre first appeared on the English stage as a recognizable form, critics were uneasy with and often hostile to the absurdity and "lowness" of farce. The most hostile and the most influential of these critics was John Dryden, and though he is not a critic notable for consistency, his attitude toward farce was nearly constant. In prologues, epilogues, prefaces, and essays from 1667 to 1696, Dryden treated farce as a foolish import from France, a dull bag of low comic tricks, an unlawful form of comedy, a genre consisting of "forced humours" and "unnatural events," a kind of play without form or structure, and a debased variety of comedy.<sup>25</sup>

Critics and dramatists contemporary with Dryden and those who followed him for two generations were largely in agreement with his negative view of the genre. Thomas Shadwell, Edward Howard, Colley Cibber, Thomas Otway, John Dennis, and William Congreve joined in the attack on farce, and Susannah Centlivre nicely summarized the dominant critical view of farce in the Prologue to her *The Beau's Duel* (1702): "If Farce their Subject be, this Witty Age/Holds that below the Grandeur of the Stage."<sup>26</sup>

Still, despite such critical opposition, farce flourished throughout the period of the Restoration and into the eighteenth century. Such energetically ludicrous plays as Nahum Tate's *A Duke and No Duke* (1684), Aphra Behn's *Emperor of the Moon* (1687), Thomas Doggett's *Hob* (1711), and Charles Johnson's *The Cobler of Preston* (1716) were popular successes, and during the 1730's, Henry Fielding, in a series of plays which combined farce, burlesque, fantasy, and satire, made a notable contribution both to the development of farce on the English stage and to the satiric accomplishments of his age. His particular brand of farcical, non-representational, political satire, exemplified by such plays as *The Author's Farce* and *The Historical Register*, was a radical departure from earlier farcical practice, and in his own time Fielding found no real imitators.<sup>27</sup>

With the Licensing Act of 1737, of course, Fielding's political plays became an impossibility, and he of necessity turned his attention to other forms of artistic creation. Although it is possible to regret Fielding's forced desertion of the stage and to wonder about the effects of the Licensing Act on the general vitality of English drama, the

evolution of English farce between roughly 1740 and 1780 was, as I have already suggested, conditioned by forces more subtle and complex than either Fielding's retirement from the theater or the passage of the Licensing Act.

To understand something of these forces, we may return for a moment to Welsted's Prologue to *The Conscious Lovers*. Here we see not only the conventional Augustan disapproval of farce, but the specific opposition of "lawless farce" to an ideal of drama which emphasizes breeding, refinement, chaste wit, and morality. Thus, the eighteenth-century concept of "elegant" and "genteel" comedy is brought specifically to bear on farce. As we have seen, such pressure did not bring about any mass or immediate rejection of farce. Nevertheless, Welsted's Prologue looks forward to the later developments in criticism and taste which I have already outlined, and by the early 1740's the critical spirit and the sense of dramatic decorum which would eventually attack Mrs. Malaprop as unnatural and *She Stoops to Conquer* as improbable began to have their effect on farce.

An interesting indication of the truth of this statement is provided by David Garrick's first farce, a play entitled *Lethe* (1740). In this farce there is little slapstick, little absurd "business," little comic extravagance. The premise of the play is improbable enough (a gathering of characters in hell), but the play as a whole is a decorous and general satire on society's foibles. In almost every respect, Garrick's piece is a contrast to the absurdity of Restoration and earlier eighteenth-century farce. Nor was this difference lost on Garrick's contemporaries. In his Prologue for *Lethe*, Samuel Johnson significantly recommended the play as a farce chastened by innocence and "useful Truth." Thus he expresses Garrick's novel intention:

This night he hopes to show that farce may charm,  
Tho' no lewd hint the mantling virgin warm.  
That useful truth with humour may unite,  
That mirth may mend, and innocence delight.<sup>28</sup>

The play was a success, and when it was revived in 1749, at least some members of the audience recognized that *Lethe* represented a new direction for farce. We can know this because of the publication in 1749



of an anonymous pamphlet praising the farce. This pamphlet, entitled *Lethe Rehearsed or, A Critical Discussion of the Beauties and Blemishes of that Performance* applauds *Lethe*, as a new kind of farce, one which combines general satire and humor, comedy and "meaning." Furthermore, *Lethe* is specifically contrasted with earlier farces in which "Pleasantry [was] unaccompanied with meaning."<sup>29</sup>

*Lethe* and the reactions to it suggest the particular ways in which farce came to be influenced by increasing demands for refinement and elegance. Audiences and critics did not generally reject farce altogether, but they did expect something different from the genre. In the middle four decades of the century, farce moved toward standard comedy. In the afterpieces of Garrick, George Colman, Arthur Murphy, and even to a degree Samuel Foote, the wild farce of the Restoration and earlier eighteenth century was "improved" so as to become at times almost indistinguishable from comedy. By 1757 it was possible for Arthur Murphy to praise Samuel Foote's *The Author* as a play which "justly answers the true idea" of farce and which nowhere descends to "low buffoonery" or "indelicate vulgarisms."<sup>30</sup> Similarly, in his *A General View of the Stage* (1759), Thomas Wilkes echoes Dryden's strictures on farce but then goes on to state that few plays in English correspond to Dryden's conception of farce and that a new "Species of Drama" has lately risen in place of farce which "answers all the ends of Comedy."<sup>31</sup> Finally, William Cooke, writing in 1775, congratulates his age on its improvements in farce:

But we are every day improving in this department of drama; as the farces of the last twenty years, instead of exhibiting the most improbable fables, and lowest species of humor ... are many of them, far from deficient in outline, humour, and observation.<sup>32</sup>

The "improvements" were real. The extravagant and low form of the Restoration and earlier eighteenth century had become relatively comedic and relatively refined. It is significant that the term *petite comédie* gained some currency as a near synonym for farce among many critics of the period.

It is against the background of these developments in drama and criticism that O'Keeffe's career must be viewed. Whatever the intrinsic merits of his plays, he was the most significant figure in a revolution in taste and in the writing of comic drama which not only rejected the major elements of Augustan comic decorum but also brought

about on the English stage the successful return of genuine, extravagant, low-comic farce.

I think it is fair to place the beginning of this revolution in 1778, for in that year appeared two very popular plays which both contained in their printed forms defenses, not only of "low comedy," but of farce itself. One of these plays was a farce called *The Invasion* by the now forgotten playwright, Frederick Pilon. In the Preface to this play, Pilon defends "downright farce" against *petite comédie*. He argues that it is the true nature of farce to be "extravagant" and "irregular" and cites the examples of Molière and Fielding:

Can anything be more improbable and extravagant than the plot and incidents of *The Mock Doctor*? Yet this has been the production of two of the first geniusses this or any other country produced. It is not to be supposed that Molière and Fielding were ignorant of the rules of the drama; nevertheless, in their best farces, they totally lost sight of them, appearing to have nothing in view but whimsical characters and laughable situations.<sup>33</sup>

Pilon goes on to admit freely that true farce is "low" but reminds the critic that Smollett, Fielding, Gay, and Cervantes "all descended to the humble walk of life in search of humor." Pilon's Preface is interesting, but his own handful of plays was too small and too insignificant to have much effect on the farces of comic refinement on the English stage. In John O'Keefe, however, low comedy and "downright farce" found a remarkably fertile and successful champion. Although he had written drama before 1778, it was between 1778 and 1800 that most of his important plays were produced. Despite his present obscurity, O'Keefe wrote literally scores of plays and was probably the most popular English dramatist during the last two decades of the century. The Prologue to his 1778 play, *Tony Lumpkin in Town*, contains a statement similar to Pilon's Preface:

If there's a Critick here, who hates what's low  
We humbly *beg* the gentleman would go:  
Tonight no Two-Act Comedy you'll view  
But a mere farce ...<sup>34</sup>

*Tony Lumpkin in Town* was a great popular success and even the critics seemed to fall under its spell. *The Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser* reviewed *Tony Lumpkin in Town* and decided, since it produced laughter, to "avoid severity."<sup>35</sup> As O'Keefe continued to

write plays and command popular success, critics not only avoided severity but gave praise. His *Son-in-Law* (1779) was applauded by one critic for its "store of laugh and whim" and by another as "a laughable and diverting broad farce."<sup>36</sup> Indeed, as early as 1779, some critics began to see O'Keeffe as a new and positive force on the English stage. Thus, in *The Public Advertiser* for July 20, 1779, we read that O'Keeffe

has many claims to publick approbation and gives us to hope that [he] will be the means of restoring the reputation of *Farce* which is a species of drama peculiarly proper to the English stage, because it is best expressive of true English humor, and therefore ought not to be thrown aside for that French frivolity la petite comedie.<sup>37</sup>

O'Keeffe's successes continued, as did critical approbation. In 1781, he scored two brilliant triumphs with *The Dead Alive* and *The Agreeable Surprise*. Late in the summer theatrical season, the *St. James's Chronicle* commented upon O'Keeffe's plays:

Mr. O'Keeffe's two farces *The Dead Alive* and *The Agreeable Surprise* have deservedly met with success. As downright Farce is intended merely to excite laughter, no matter be what Absurdities it is effected, *The Agreeable Surprise* has created more incessant Roars from every Part of the Audience than perhaps any other Farce whatever. The snarling Critick, indeed, after he has almost burst his sides with Laughter may cavil at the absurd means by which the Author has ensnared him in a Grin, but has he laughed? — then the End of Farce is answered; and it is to be presumed, that the person who can thus set our risible muscles a going by farcical Means is not deficient in those Qualifications that constitute the Comick Writer.<sup>38</sup>

This reference to the Snarling Critick is significant, for, although O'Keeffe's plays won popularity with audiences and many critics, they did so in spite of, or perhaps in some cases because of, their flagrant violation of every aspect of conservative Augustan comic decorum, and there were some critics, at least, who continued to attack these violations. The most interesting of these conservative critics was Paul Jodrell, a minor member of the Johnson circle. In 1787, Jodrell published a play called *One and All* which contains a long dialogue prologue in which there appears "a writer of nonsensical farce" named Spatter-Wit who is clearly meant to suggest O'Keeffe and who is made to discuss his latest play with two characters, Sir Peter and his wife:

*Spatter-Wit.* And does your ladyship really think the little piece has merit?

*Lady.* Infinite — and quite in the present taste — equivoque — improbability — and everything that is charming!

*Spatter-Wit.* I was afraid it wanted improbability —

*Lady.* You are too modest — it rises superior to anything I have seen.

*Sir Peter.* How the taste of the times differ! — I remember when the latest deviation from what is natural, was the greatest fault a dramatic production could have ...

*Spatter-Wit.* Thanks to a more enlightened taste, Sir Peter, all that vulgarity is now laid aside.<sup>39</sup>

At another point in this little dialogue, Sir Peter, the defender of conservative dramatic decorum, attacks Spatter-Wit's (O'Keefe's) characters as unnatural:

*Sir Peter.* All your likenesses are caricaturas.

*Spatter-Wit.* Quite the contrary! a caricatura is nature enlarged or diminished; whereas we put nature quite out of the question, and form a new creation. — There lies the difficulty; for as any painter, with decent colours, and with a little knowledge of perspective, may draw your likeness, if you sit for your picture, so may any poet describe your characters and manners, with the smallest observation of your behavior and conduct. The art of copying, therefore, is wisely banished from the stage, and nothing succeeds without originality.

*Sir Peter.* I thought the stage was a looking-glass, in which men might see their vices and foibles, and learn to correct them.

*Spatter-Wit.* That's old stuff from Horace and Shakespeare. — But give me the poet, who, as the latter says of his prayers, "outstrips the modesty of nature."<sup>40</sup>

This is itself perhaps a caricature of O'Keefe and his manner of writing, but it is a revealing one. O'Keefe's plays, almost without exception, depend upon the wildest and most absurd of improbabilities — in his extremely popular *The Agreeable Surprise* one strain of a hopelessly complicated plot is based on the hero's successful efforts to convince an entire household that Mrs. Cheshire, a Southwark cheesemonger, is actually "The Princess Rustifusti" of Russia, who has killed a great count of the Holy Roman Empire in a duel and has fled to England for safety. O'Keefe's characters and comic language are no less extravagant. In the nineteenth century the novelist and critic

John Galt was to speak of “the grotesque characters of O’Keeffe,”<sup>41</sup> and Hazlitt was to refer to “those extraordinary and marked characters that Gilray painted, and O’Keeffe drew.”<sup>42</sup> O’Keeffe’s language was most remarkable for its dependence on the pun — that *bête noire* of Augustan criticism — but the extravagance of O’Keeffe’s handling of language may best be illustrated by a macaronic song which a pedantic schoolmaster in *The Agreeable Surprise* sings to a milkmaid named Cowslip:

Amo, Amas,  
I love a lass  
As a Cedar tall and slender.  
Sweet Cowslip’s grace  
Is her nom’tive case  
And she’s of the feminine gender.  
Can I decline  
A nymph divine?  
Her voice as a flute is dulcis.  
Her oculus bright,  
Her manus white,  
And soft, when I tacto, her pulse is.  
Oh How bella  
My puella  
I’ll kiss secula seculorum.  
If I’ve luck Sir  
She’s my uxor  
O dies benedictorum.<sup>43</sup>

Although such absurdity as this continued to offend some critics throughout the century, by the 1790’s, O’Keeffe’s reputation was secure and his revolution essentially complete. In 1795, *The Times* significantly praises him as one “who has even ever defied the rules of the old school,”<sup>44</sup> and in the same year, *The St. James’s Chronicle* writes:

Horace says ... “Let your Tale have some probability.” “This may be the general rule,” says Mr. O’Keeffe, “but it is not without exceptions — for I have amused and diverted the English Theatre nearly twenty years without much attention to the rule, and I have produced crowded houses; soothed the bosom of care; softened the acrimony of the Splenetick; and unfolded into the sprite of Candor, the harshest features of Criticism.”<sup>45</sup>

As O’Keeffe’s farcical style of drama increasingly met with approval, other playwrights followed his lead. Elizabeth Inchbald, James

Cobb, John Till Allingham, Andrew Franklin, and other once popular dramatists wrote more or less in O'Keefe's manner, and in 1799 *The Sun* could refer to "The School of O'Keefe and his Followers."<sup>46</sup>

Perhaps O'Keefe's greatest contribution as a revolutionary force was to suggest by his example that a departure from Augustan standards might be viewed, not as a despicable aberration from reason, but rather as an exercise in imaginative freedom. It was largely as a result of O'Keefe's influence, I think, that one critic could write in 1784:

Aristotle has defined Tragedy and Comedy. We, his Disciples, the Critics of Newspapers, have, therefore, some Phrases and Terms, if not Principles and Rules, to give Plausibility and Effect to our Decisions. But in Farce we are left to our own Imagination and Feelings, if we should happen to have any. Farce is an unlimited Region of happy Absurdities, Antithesis, Puns, and Repartees. They should be brought together by a Fable as improbable, and Characters as extravagant as possible.<sup>47</sup>

It was, more than anything else, O'Keefe's revolutionary revelation of this happy and absurd "unlimited region" that so endeared him to Hazlitt, Lamb, and Hunt. It was also, I suspect, the mere fact that O'Keefe was funny, that he made people laugh, and perhaps the best praise of the now neglected Irish comedian is the notice of him in the 1812 edition of the *Biographia Dramatica*: "O'Keefe gladdened the hearts of his auditors between twenty and thirty years, and 'sent them laughing to their beds'; and all this he has done in the hearing of good scholars, good writers, and good critics."<sup>48</sup>

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> *The Collected Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. A. R. Waller and Arnold Glover (London, 1903), 8:166-67.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 6:417.

<sup>4</sup> Allardyce Nicoll, *A History of Late Eighteenth Century Drama, 1750-1800* (Cambridge, 1927), p. 176.

<sup>5</sup> Leigh Hunt's *Dramatic Criticism*, ed. Lawrence H. Houtchens and Carolyn W. Houtchens (New York, 1949), p. 256.

<sup>6</sup> Robert Hume, "Goldsmith and Sheridan and the Supposed Revolution of 'Laughing' Against 'Sentimental' Comedy," *Studies in Change and Revolution*, ed. Paul J. Korshin (Menston, Yorkshire, 1972), pp. 237-76.

Arthur Sherbo, *English Sentimental Drama* (East Lansing, 1957).

<sup>7</sup> *St. James's Chronicle*, 8-10 August 1780.

<sup>8</sup> *Collected Works of Oliver Goldsmith*, ed. Arthur Friedman (Oxford, 1966) 1:320.

<sup>9</sup> Elizabeth Cooper, *The Rival Widows* (London, 1735), p. vi.

<sup>10</sup> *The Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, 23 January 1779.

<sup>11</sup> *St. James's Chronicle*, 29 June - 2 July 1776.

<sup>12</sup> *Horace Walpole's Correspondence with William Mason*, ed. Wilmarth Lewis (New Haven, 1955) 1:79-80.

<sup>13</sup> *Boswell's Life of Johnson*, ed. G. B. Hill, rev. L. F. Powell (Oxford, 1934), 1:205-06.

<sup>14</sup> Isaac Bickerstaffe, *Love in the City*, (London, 1767), p. ii.

<sup>15</sup> *European Magazine*, 24:(1793), 94-95.

<sup>16</sup> *Lloyd's Evening Post*, 29 January - 1 February 1768.

<sup>17</sup> *St. James's Chronicle*, 28 - 30 January 1768.

<sup>18</sup> *The Gentleman's Magazine*, February 1768, pp. 78-80.

<sup>19</sup> *Monthly Review*, February 1768, pp. 159-60.

<sup>20</sup> *The London Packet*, 16-18 January 1775.

<sup>21</sup> *Public Ledger*, 18 January 1775.

<sup>22</sup> *The Town and Country Magazine*, February 1775, p. 43.

<sup>23</sup> John Bernard, *Retrospections of the Stage* (London, 1830), 1:143-44.

<sup>24</sup> *The Plays of Richard Steele*, ed. Shirley Strum Kenny (Oxford, 1971), p. 302.

<sup>25</sup> See Dryden's Epilogue to *The Wild Gallant*, his Prologue to *The Conquest of Granada*, his Prologue to Carlell's *Arviragus and Philicia*, his Prologue to his son's *The Husband his Own Cuckhold*, his Preface to *An Evening's Love*, his Preface to *Troilus and Cressida* and his translation of Boileau's *L'Art Poétique*.

<sup>26</sup> Susannah Centlivre, *The Dramatic Works* (London, 1872), p. 60.

<sup>27</sup> For a good brief discussion of Fielding's historical position as a dramatist see Charles B. Wood's introduction to his edition of Fielding's *The Author's Farce* (Lincoln, 1966), pp. xi-xix

<sup>28</sup> *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson*, vol. 6: Poems, ed. E. L. McAdam, Jr., with George Milne (New Haven, 1964), p. 67.

<sup>29</sup> *Lethe Rehearsed or, A Critical Discussion of the Beauties and Blemishes of that Performance* (London, 1749), p. 48.

<sup>30</sup> *New Essays by Arthur Murphy*, ed. Arthur Sherbo (East Lansing, 1963), p. 119.

<sup>31</sup> Thomas Wilkes, *A General View of the Stage* (London, 1759), pp. 60-64.

<sup>32</sup> William Cooke, *The Elements of Dramatic Criticism* (London, 1775), p. 170.

<sup>33</sup> Frederick Pilon, *The Invasion* (London, 1778), p. v.

<sup>34</sup> John O'Keefe, *Tony Lumpkin in Town* (London, 1780), p. vii.

<sup>35</sup> *The Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, 4 July 1778.

<sup>36</sup> *The Public Advertiser*, 20 July 1779.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *St. James's Chronicle*, 13-15 September 1781.

<sup>39</sup> Paul Jodrell, *One and All* (London, 1787), pp. 11-12.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13.

<sup>41</sup> John Galt, *The Lives of the Players* (Boston, 1831), 2:198.

<sup>42</sup> *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. P. P. Howe (London, 1930) 18:288.

<sup>43</sup> John O'Keefe, *The Agreeable Surprise* (London, 1796), p. 15.

<sup>44</sup> *The Times*, 19 March 1795.

<sup>45</sup> *St. James's Chronicle*, 21-23 March 1795.

<sup>46</sup> *The Sun*, 28 October 1799.

<sup>47</sup> *St. James's Chronicle*, 6-8 July 1784.

<sup>48</sup> David Baker, Isaac Reed, and Stephen Jones, *Biographia Dramatica; or a Companion to the Playhouse* (London, 1812), 1:551.



## An Alternative Reading of Poe's "The Bells"

Richard Fusco

Oxford, Mississippi

Most critics of "The Bells" dissect the poem in light of its allegorical and onomatopoeic qualities. By dismissing coexistent alternative interpretations, they ignore Poe's complex artistic vision. The common argument states that "The Bells" is a simple allegory of human development. For example, Davidson equates each of the four stanzas with a successive life stage, defining them respectively as youth, love, maturity and old age. Critics generally acknowledge that one theme in "The Bells" is progression toward death. Davidson claims, in fact, that the tolling bells are "concrete representations" of death.<sup>1</sup> Differing, Williams sees death as an ironic and unifying theme. According to him Poe saw life, even when in bliss, as doomed because existence itself reminds man "that discord and death alone are triumphant." In contrast, for Fletcher the poem has no meaning, nor does it project "anything concrete to see or hear." Unlike most other interpreters, Ketterer states that the poetic structure of "The Bells" superimposes additional meanings other than the traditional human cycle analogy. DuBois believes the poem was a product of Poe's self-deprecation following the death of his wife, Virginia. "Reminding Poe of life and death which cheated him, the bells ... induc (-ed) a kind of madness."<sup>2</sup>

I suggest that Poe also illustrates brilliantly four levels of perception progressively detailing a descent into madness. Several psychological approaches are possible. For example, one could assume that the poem reflects an individual's impressions of four carillons ringing simultaneously. In a psychological light, I tend to discount this possibility because it would give the "narrator" a multiple personality — a phenomenon that neither Poe nor a majority of the medical world in 1848 would likely know to exist. A second approach would be to see four individuals, each in a different stage of mental health, noting their impressions upon hearing bells tolling. Using such a device, an author can achieve rather incisive contrasts in characterization. In "The Bells," however, the parallels between the stanzas, as well as other matters described below, suggest one voice — a voice that Poe measures in four stages of psychic development.

The etherealness of the first stanza suggests dreams unfettered by anxiety. Words such as *merriment*, *tinkle*, *crystalline* and *tintinabulation* — none of which is repeated in later sections — connote lightness in both sound and definition. The bells that the narrator hears are silver, the lightest of the metals in the poem. In all, an innocence is established that will be both echoed and corrupted in later passages.

In stanza two, Poe presents a somewhat tainted happiness. Albeit the discord is slight in a shift from delight in thought to that of reality, yet there are signs of stress, particularly: "*What a gush of euphony voluminously wells! How it swells! How it dwells/On the future!*"<sup>3</sup> These lines imply growth that could be uncontrollable, as well as acknowledging the future's uncertainty. Besides being golden (thus heavier than silver), the bells are mellow. The single melodic voice from the first stanza has evolved into complicated harmony in the second; merriment has become happiness; the "icy air of night" is now balmy. Even the wedded bliss described in the opening lines of the passage is offset later by "the turtle-dove that listens while she gloats." The effect produced is one of happiness with unconscious foreboding — an anxiety that is the seed of alienation.

The psychic distress hinted in the second stanza manifests itself fully in the third. Unable to cope with his environment, the narrator reinterprets the pealing in terms of horror and despair. Paranoiacally, he hears danger ebbing and flowing, sinking and swelling. There are anger and frustration in the loud brazen bells. The harmony of the previous passage has dissolved into shrieks "out of tune." Even within the passage there are indications of increasing mental dissolution: the fire that lunges repeatedly to newer heights, the despair of the bells in their inability to resolve their terror in "the mercy of the fire." Also consider: "With a desperate desire/And a resolute endeavor /Now — now to sit, or never,/By the side of the pale-faced moon."<sup>4</sup> These lines suggest a last, frantic attempt to recover an earlier, less encumbered frame of mind, but this wish is doomed as the tolling continues. Although he reacts to their manifestations, the narrator reveals no conception of the causes for his fears. Essentially, Poe depicts in this section the perception of a man as he passes the thin line dividing sanity and insanity.

In the fourth and final section, Poe presents a view of man at odds with his environment. The stanza begins with the isolation and hypersensitivity of the narrator and then demonstrates how that void is filled. Alienation is established by ironically restating earlier lines.<sup>5</sup> The dense iron bells ring in a single, solemn voice, but unlike the melody of the first stanza it is monotonous. Whereas before the bells "scream out their affright," they now only shiver and groan, suggesting that even hopeless appeals for help are no longer attempted. The bells divest themselves of human behavior and emotion, becoming

“Ghouls” symbolized poetically by a king dementedly yelling and dancing. Thus, the narrator fills his self-created mental void with delusions inspired by the same bells that had earlier seemed heavenly.

Other textual features support and supplement this reading. Each successive stanza of “The Bells” is longer than its predecessor. Subliminally, one effect produced by this experimental structure is that the reader feels compelled to read each successive line faster and faster. If this theory is valid, the final passage would consequently be read at breakneck speed: thus, approximating the violent ravings of a lunatic.<sup>6</sup> The maniacal repetitions, especially in the final eighteen lines, further reinforce this impression. One is presented with madness that is incessant — that can be relieved only by death. Clinical instances of such insanity are rare: occasionally, schizophrenics lapse into irreversible, frenzied behavior, often resulting in physical collapse and death.<sup>7</sup>

The dynamics of Poe’s vision in “The Bells” under such analysis show the poem to be more remarkable than is usually believed. Deriving inspiration from either observation, education or self-examination, Poe expertly chronicled the human mind in decay — a feat which he integrated with allegory and poetic mastery in “The Bells.”

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Edward H. Davidson, *Poe: A Critical Study* (Cambridge, Mass., 1957), p. 96.

<sup>2</sup> Paul O. Williams, “A Reading of Poe’s ‘The Bells,’” *PN* [now *PoeS*], 1 (1968), 24-25; Richard M. Fletcher, *The Stylistic Development of Edgar Allan Poe* (The Hague, 1973), p. 68; David Ketterer, *The Rationale of Deception in Poe* (Baton Rouge, La., 1979), p. 153; Arthur E. DuBois, “The Jazz Bells of Poe,” *CE*, 2 (1940), 241-42. DuBois assumes that Poe the writer reflects Poe the man. I differ in that I believe Poe concerned himself more with artistic and clinical aspects of madness rather than trying to create a poetic mirror of his mental outlook on life.

<sup>3</sup> *Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe: Poems*, ed. Thomas Ollive Mabbott (Cambridge, Mass., 1969), 1:436.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Ketterer sees the repetitions as part of a fusion process which leads “to the quality of indefiniteness that Poe so admired in poetry.” See p. 154.

<sup>6</sup> DuBois agrees with such a reading (see p. 243). Professor B. F. Fisher of the University of Mississippi suggested this alternative: “... or does this structure slow

THE BELLS

one? Such a tactic could coalesce with dying, madness, or death.”

<sup>7</sup> Poe would likely know of clinical works such as Benjamin Rush, *Medical Inquiries and Observations, upon the Diseases of the Mind* (Philadelphia, 1812).

## Bliss and Dickens: A Note on Little Nell and "Little Willie"

Thomas H. Stewart

### Blue Mountain, Mississippi

With the publication and first-year sales in 1840-41 of *The Old Curiosity Shop* approaching 100,000, this novel firmly established its popularity.<sup>1</sup> By the turn of the century, however, critical views of *The Old Curiosity Shop*, in particular those relating to Dickens's treatment of the death of Little Nell, had become unfavorable. Whatever condemnations a present-day critic may heap on Dickens's handling of Little Nell, he cannot deny Dickens's success in gaining wide audience appeal.<sup>2</sup>

A reader may easily conclude that Nell is not long for the world when in Chapter Fifty-five a little boy runs in "with eyes full of tears" to put his arms around her neck and lament: "Why, they say ... that you will be an angel, before the birds sing again." He pleads, reasoning in reference to a departed brother:

"After a time ... the kind angels will be glad to think that you are not among them, and that you stayed here with us. Willy went away, to join them; but if he had known how I should miss him in our little bed at night, he never would have left me, I am sure."

Yet the child could make him no answer, and sobbed as though her heart were bursting.

"Why would you go, dear Nell? I know you would not be happy when you heard that we were crying for your loss. They say that Willy is in heaven now, and that it's always summer there, and yet I'm sure he grieves when I lie down upon his garden bed, and he cannot turn to kiss me ..."<sup>3</sup>

In this case the separation is painful but temporary. Eternal separation, in which one soul is in heaven and another soul is in hell, is worse. And the Dwight L. Moody crusades, among others, were carried on to save souls.

Music was a necessary part of Moody's evangelism; and it was led by Ira Sankey, a singer and composer of musical scores. Lyrics were usually set down by either Philip Phillips, P. P. Bliss, George C. Stebbins, or James McGranahan. Although most singing would be congregational, Sankey rendered a few solo numbers that reportedly would leave audiences "bathed in tears."<sup>4</sup>

"Little Willie" was written by P. P. Bliss shortly before 1875, and its content demonstrates that *The Old Curiosity Shop* was still alive

and well in the public mind:

“I should like to die,” said Willie, “if my papa could die too;  
But he says he isn’t ready ’cause he has so much to do;  
And my little sister, Nellie, says that I must surely die,  
And that she and mamma, then she stopp’d, because it made her cry.

“But she told me, I remember, once while sitting on her knee;  
That the angels never weary watching over her and me;  
And that if we’re good (and mamma told me just the same before),  
They will let us into heaven when they see us at the door.

“There will be none but the holy — I shall know no more of sin;  
There I’ll see mamma and Nellie, for I know He’ll let them in;  
But I’ll have to tell the angel, when I meet him at the door,  
That he must excuse my papa, ’cause he couldn’t leave the store.”<sup>5</sup>

The pathos that dominates *The Old Curiosity Shop* recurs in the lines of “Little Willie.” Some of the words reflect the conversation between Nell and Dickens’s Willy’s brother. Significant, too, both Dickens’s Nelly and Bliss’s Nellie lose their power to speak as a result of grief. Further, both the prose and the verse contain specific references to reunion in heaven in the presence of angels.

*The Old Curiosity Shop* enjoyed immense popularity, and its wide-spread familiarity made an impression — a deep and long-lived impression — on popular culture as well as on the literary world.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Malcolm Andrews, *Introd.*, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, ed. Angus Easson (New York, 1977), p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> George H. Ford, *Dickens and His Readers* (New York, 1975), pp. 64, 68, 193.

<sup>3</sup> *The Old Curiosity Shop*, pp. 509-10.

<sup>4</sup> William G. McLoughlin, Jr., *Modern Revivalism: Charles Grandison Finney to Billy Graham* (New York, 1959), pp. 234-35.

<sup>5</sup> McLoughlin, p. 236. “Little Willie” appears in *Sacred Songs and Solos with Standard Hymns Combined, Compiled, and Sung by Ira D. Sankey*, No. 415 (London, n. d.), a copy of which is deposited in the Brown University Library, Providence, Rhode Island.

## Emily Dickinson and "Dimity Convictions"

Rochie Whittington Lawes

Cleveland, Mississippi

Emily Dickinson was a poet *and* (this matter is often forgotten) a woman. Only from a woman's vocabulary is there a phrase so undeniably suited to the description of "These Gentlewomen" as possessed of "Dimity Convictions" in the poem "What Soft — Cherubic Creatures —." To those who have never worn, nor sewed, nor ironed dimity, the dictionary definition — a "fine, thin, corded cotton fabric" — is inadequate or misleading.

Any woman of the nineteenth century would have been familiar with dimity, would have realized that the chief characteristic distinguishing it from other cotton fabrics is the straight, narrow cord at even intervals throughout the length of the bolt. There is no deviation, no irregularity, then, in "dimity" convictions. Dimity is also associated with femininity. One with dimity convictions must recoil in horror from any prospect of encountering some aspect of "freckled Human Nature." Anyone with dimity convictions is — even to one of a "Fisherman's — Degree" — always and unquestionably a lady. Here is a typical Dickinsonian turn of mind in the matter of Christian charity.

Dimity is also known for its crispness. Consequently dimity convictions are durable, retaining their starched perfection through many scrubblings on a washboard and boilings in an iron pot. Neither one's own nor another's sufferings ever soften or crumple precepts within this metaphor. In fact one might reasonably expect to remain virtually unchanged during a lifetime. Although dimity is durable, it is a very thin, almost transparent, cloth. Dimity convictions are not so transparent as those of organdy or voile; they can never be considered revealing or daring, and they evince neither luster nor depth. A material that is thin, durable, and feminine might seem ideal for a lady's convictions, but dimity also scratches. No lady is very comfortable wearing dimity close to her skin. Those who have worn it realize that, especially when the climate is warm, they must interpose a softer garment between the crisp, if light, fabric and the body. A final attribute of dimity that renders it a subtle metaphoric vehicle for convictions is its coolness. It is suitable for balmy days, but when winter comes one whose convictions are of this substance must withdraw or freeze.

DIMITY CONVICTIONS

For these reasons the phrase “Dimity Convictions” perfectly describes Emily Dickinson’s gentlewomen. Two words well known to Victorian ladies, but hardly understood in the wash-and-wear era, express the multiple ironies in her portrayal.



## Reviews

Elizabeth MacAndrew. *The Gothic Tradition in Fiction*. New York: Columbia U. Press, 1979. 289pp. \$15.00.

The growing number of critical explorations into the Gothic as a viable literary genre during the past twenty-five years has led to the establishment of numerous seminars and undergraduate courses on the subject. The Gothic is no longer regarded as meaningless sensational fare. There are Devendra P. Varma's pioneer study *The Gothic Flame* in 1957, Maurice Lévy's *Le Roman Gothique Anglaise* in 1968, G. R. Thompson's collection of essays *The Gothic Imagination* in 1974, and Coral Ann Howells's *Love, Mystery and Misery: Feeling in Gothic Fiction* in 1978. However, none of these books treats this genre as a continuing tradition. Elizabeth MacAndrew's recent book *The Gothic Tradition in Fiction* looks back over previous criticism, and, while doing so, seeks to do what no other study has done: to define Gothic fiction, to discern its shape as a convention, and to outline its growth through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

In her preface, MacAndrew regards the Gothic in fiction as a convention, since these writers use their convention as "a means of alerting the reader to the kind of work he is engaged with, of guiding him toward interpretation." (p. x) She regards Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) as the work that establishes Gothic fiction as a late eighteenth-century innovation. From this point, she outlines the course of later writers' use of Walpole's innovation. It becomes a convention in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but with an important difference: as the Gothic convention matures, the eighteenth-century notion of absolute moral value gives way to a relative morality.

While she charts the maturation of the convention, she concerns herself with the ideas embodied in it. Above all, MacAndrew sees the ideas in the Gothic as "a variant of the eighteenth-century Sentimental genre, with related structures, forms, and devices. Sentimental

novels reflect an ideal that, coming from God, is possibly realizable: the Gothic represents the distortion of that ideal." (p. 24) Although the relationship of the Gothic to the Sentimental novel has been noted by previous critics, most important among them Coral Ann Howells, MacAndrew presents a detailed analysis of the ways in which the Gothic writers vary the Sentimental convention. In this respect, her book makes a sound contribution to Gothic criticism.

As she demonstrates the evolution of the convention from its origins in the Sentimental novel, MacAndrew moves forward and backward in time over such writers as Beckford, Walpole, Radcliffe, Emily Brontë, Hawthorne, Poe, Hoffmann, Maturin, LeFanu, and Stoker, always basing her study in the growth of ideas about the nature of evil in man's mind and relating these ideas to their expression in the convention — the use of the grotesque, the double, the mad scientist, the Faust figure, dreams and nightmares, houses, portraits, and mirrors. All of these symbols of the convention embody the gradual development of ideas about the nature of evil in man. By the end of the nineteenth century and the publication of Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw*, all moral absolutes have disintegrated into a conscious awareness of moral relativity and ambiguity.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, MacAndrew finds that man, as portrayed in the Gothic convention, has arrived at consciousness. She writes: "psychology has continued to affect concepts of human nature and their reflection in Gothic literature. The course of the Gothic tradition in the twentieth century merits a study of its own for this reason alone." (p. 241) Such a statement brings to mind the intriguing possibilities of just such a study, and MacAndrew points the way toward further investigation.

*The Gothic Tradition in Fiction* begins with Walpole, carries us through Henry James and Stoker, and in an epilogue discusses Anne Rice's recent *Interview with the Vampire* at some length. In view of this fact it is an extraordinary work of scholarship; it even allows one to forgive MacAndrew when she misspells the name of the heroine of *Dracula* and calls Poe's famous character both Roger and Roderick Usher. Her book is a welcome study of the form and will be valuable to both the Gothic specialist and the reader new to the genre.

Gary William Crawford

Editor, *Gothic*

Arlin Turner. *Nathaniel Hawthorne: A Biography*. New York and Oxford [England]: Oxford U. Press, 1980, xiii + 457pp. \$20.00

The capstone to near half a century's career in Hawthorne studies, this book will long keep memorable the name of Arlin Turner. Randall Stewart's biography is surpassed because of Turner's access to additional documents and a wealth of critical commentary, the results of which are but too obvious. Turner's account strikes a deft balance of Hawthorne's life with his literary career — the latter never widely separated from the former — that is informative, critically perceptive, and eminently readable. Such criteria bear out Turner's comment in the "Acknowledgments" that "responsible literary research and effective writing seem to be goals worth pursuing."

The "rich variety of Hawthorne's personality and the individuality and complexity of his thought" come alive in these pages, from the ardent lover and husband that he was to Sophia, through the writer of densely textured tales and novels, to the acquaintance of Emerson, Thoreau, and Melville. Turner's treatment of these relationships is good at defining and suggesting. The Hawthorne-Melville situation, of course, takes first place, but the more terse sections concerning Hawthorne's qualified admiration for Thoreau and his view of Emerson as not so wonderful are illuminating. So is that concerning Poe, much more admired as a fictionist than as a critic in Hawthorne's opinion. Hawthorne, after all, was human, and his varied attitudes crop up elsewhere, for example in his life among such persons as Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, his formidable sister-in-law, or in that among his custom-house or consular duties.

In Turner's estimate, Hawthorne's works form a complex whole, in which the writer draws upon American experience as he senses it. The truth of this theory is borne out in that Hawthorne's first writings, *Fanshawe* (1828), the projected "Seven Tales of My Native Land" and "The Story Teller," as well as the historical sketches, center in American types and themes — with domestication of the Gothic in the fiction. So do the abortive romances of his last years, with their mingling of American claimants to European ancestry, grandeur, and guilt. Let us remember, too, that *The Scarlet Letter* shares the lime-

light with *Moby-Dick* as the greatest American Gothic novel in the nineteenth century. Much of Hawthorne's best work delved into the American past and its effects upon the present. "Alice Doane's Appeal," "The Gray Champion," and "Young Goodman Brown" (probably Hawthorne's greatest tale) suggest a once-upon-a-time aura, although they are far different from children's stories. Hawthorne's ceaseless fascination with probing the human mind, particularly into its darker, irrational regions, is a legacy from his Puritan forebears, but he modifies that legacy into subtle psychological substance in fiction. "The Haunted Mind," "Fancy's Show-Box," and "Ethan Brand" are in this respect great advances upon "Alice Doane's Appeal," itself nonetheless a haunting tale.

Chapter 17 outlines the day-to-day circumstances underlying composition of *The Scarlet Letter*, and it may be considered representative of the matured Hawthorne as man and as writer. The death of his mother agitated him, as did the need for money, so he turned feverishly to writing. After the publication of the novel he was ready to leave Salem. Like other "classics" of American fiction (*Moby-Dick* or *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*), this book was begun as something different — a collection of tales — from what appeared in final form. That it has antecedents in Hawthorne's earlier tales, Turner makes clear, just as he clarifies its American elements. The notion of concealed sin, the series of ironic reversals in human circumstances and responses, the psychological turn given to seventeenth-century morality and theology: all were wrought and unified by a practiced hand. The central concerns of the novel were integral parts of Hawthorne's vision, and as such the romance context allows for indulgence of his genuine visionary frame of mind.

Overall, Turner has created fine literary biography in *Nathaniel Hawthorne*. The man and his thought are presented in detail, a detail unmarred by any axe-grinding. The biographer sees his subject steadily and whole, and he knows how to proportion his material. If the passages of analytical criticism are terse, that feature results from no single literary method's being given preeminence. Readers consequently must build upon Turner's thinking with their own, a procedure he advocates in the "Preface." This biography will be required reading for anyone with serious interests in Hawthorne and his writing. The book is the work of the scholar most capable of doing it, and Turner's *Nathaniel Hawthorne* will be the standard life for years to come.

Benjamin Franklin Fisher IV

The University of Mississippi

Eric W. Carlson. ed. *Emerson's Literary Criticism*. (Regents Critics Series). Lincoln [Nebraska] and London: U. of Nebraska Press, 1979. L + 251pp. Cloth. \$21.50

Eric Carlson's anthology of Emerson's literary criticism is the latest volume in the Regents Critics Series established at the University of Nebraska "to provide reading texts of significant literary critics in the Western tradition." Although one may argue the merits of Ralph Waldo Emerson as a "significant literary critic," Professor Carlson assembles in logical fashion an impressive body of Emersonian commentary upon literary theory and practice. Some of the materials, for example, Emerson's essays on "Art," "The Poet," and "Intellect," are well known and easily available; other selections, particularly those dealing with specific authors and individual works, are not so readily accessible to the student.

Professor Carlson prefaces the selections in his anthology with a lengthy introduction in which he analyzes Emerson's literary theories in the context of his basic transcendental philosophical premises. Since Carlson relies very heavily upon the conclusions of other scholars, the introduction offers little that is new to Emerson's admirers. To be fair to Carlson, however, one should say that the introduction appears primarily aimed at the undergraduate student and not intended as a contribution to Emerson scholarship. In the headnotes to the individual selections, Carlson evidently feels much more at liberty to advance his own commentary.

*Emerson's Literary Criticism* is effectively organized. Selections are grouped under five major headings: "Art as Experience," "The Creative Process," "The Art of Rhetoric," "Toward a Modern Critical Perspective," and "Writers and Books." The first three sections contain material familiar to many students of American literature. The last two topics will doubtless prove the most interesting to anyone seeking to observe Emerson applying his literary theories to individual writers. On the whole, they suggest that Emerson was more at ease in the explication of his intuitive philosophical speculations than he was in dealing with specific writers and individual books. He seems particularly inept in evaluating novels and novelists. Without bestowing prizes to literary critics, one can say that Emerson's literary criticism does not rank with that of Poe, or Lowell, or Howells.

Professor Carlson includes a very helpful bibliography, as well as

134

REVIEWS

informative notes following each group of selections. The volume should prove useful to students who seek to understand Emerson's basic literary theories and their possible application to specific works and authors.

John Pilkington

The University of Mississippi

## REVIEWS

135

Benjamin Franklin Fisher IV. ed. *Poe at Work: Seven Textual Studies*. Baltimore: The Edgar Allan Poe Society, 1978. 110pp. \$8.00

Benjamin Franklin Fisher IV. *The Very Spirit of Cordiality: The Literary Uses of Alcohol and Alcoholism in the Tales of Edgar Allan Poe*, Baltimore: Enoch Pratt Free Library, The Edgar Allan Poe Society, and the Library of the U. of Baltimore, 1978. 32pp. \$2.75.

David Ketterer. *The Rationale of Deception in Poe*. Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State U. Press, 1979, 285pp. \$17.50.

The popular image of Edgar Allan Poe as a romantic visionary and purveyor of Gothic gloom must now compete with the image of a pragmatic journalist and exacting artist and critic. As Stuart Levine has recently argued, Poe was both "seer and craftsman." He mixed romantic vision with rational analysis and tailored his aestheticism to suit the popular magazine. Some of Poe's contemporaries saw the dualism in his writing, but the image of the romantic seer, living "out of space, out of time," prevailed after his death, thanks to his detractors in America and his devotees in France. The craftsman has been revived recently, but the proper balance has not yet been struck; the relationship between seer and craftsman in Poe's canon remains problematical and obscure. Much recent criticism, in fact, continues to be divided in its focus, concentrating on the visionary or the journalist, the artist or the critic, the themes or the texts, pursuing the relationships tentatively, if at all. The three works under review here illustrate the point. In *The Rationale of Deception in Poe*, David Ketterer minimizes Poe's popular, Gothic craft in order to emphasize his visionary kinship with Emerson and Blake. There is little of the visionary, on the other hand, in *Poe at Work*, a collection of textual studies, edited by Benjamin Franklin Fisher IV, that attests to Poe's craftsmanship in the tales, his manipulation of popular conventions, and his careful revisions. In *The Very Spirit of Cordiality*, Professor Fisher gives us something of both seer and craftsman, appending to his essay on Poe's literary uses of alcohol the first printed version of

“MS. Found in a Bottle” and commentary on subsequent revisions of the tale.

First, the craftsman. Originally collected for the University of Pennsylvania *Library Chronicle* [41(1976)], the essays in *Poe at Work* are made even more useful by the addition of Robert W. Burns’s annotated checklist of previous textual criticism of Poe’s fiction. Except for a misleading subtitle — there are six, not “seven textual studies,” Fisher’s introduction, and Burns’s checklist, *Poe at Work* is carefully edited and attractively made. The essays are arranged in order of the composition of the tales they treat and reveal much about Poe’s development as a writer of fiction. Alexander Hammond builds upon two earlier essays to give us the amplest account yet of Poe’s abortive plan to publish his early tales as a unified collection, called initially *Eleven Tales of the Arabesque* and later *Tales of the Folio Club*. Hammond identifies Poe’s framing device as Menippean satire, arguing that the tales, which are read by members of a comical literary club as they wine and dine, were meant to imitate and very likely spoof popular authors and fictional types. Although the exact nature and contents of the collection Poe was circulating remain speculative since only two manuscript leaves survive, Hammond makes a strong case for the view that Poe was writing his early tales as part of a projected volume and not simply gathering fugitive pieces together in a scheme for book publication. Moreover, in tracing the fortunes of Poe’s lost book in the marketplace, Hammond vividly illustrates the trials of Poe’s apprenticeship in fiction. Hammond’s essay is supplemented by those of Christie and Fisher, who examine the revisions of two Folio-Club tales, “Bon-Bon” (originally “The Bargain Lost”) and “Silence — A Fable” (originally “Siope — A Fable”). Christie shows how Poe transformed “Bon-Bon” from a loose burlesque of popular devil tales, in which a gentlemanly Satan bargains for men’s souls, into a more controlled and unified satire of Gothic terror and German metaphysics. Fisher argues, on the other hand, that in revising “Silence — A Fable” Poe toned down or eliminated the Gothic extravagance typical of Folio-Club satire and transformed the tale into a more serious, symbolic fable of human isolation.

Poe’s revisions of later tales, though often less substantial, can be significant too, as Marc Leslie Rovner points out in the case of “William Wilson.” He notes how Poe’s revisions tend to underscore Wilson’s moral obtuseness, clarifying the theme of the tale. The last two



contributors to *Poe at Work*, however, are less successful than Rovner in their textual analyses of Poe's later tales. Joel Kenneth Asarch argues that Poe revised "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" to shift its emphasis "from a theoretical study of analysis to a practical demonstration of the imagination," but only Poe's deletion of an introductory paragraph supports this claim. Finally, Richard Fusco contends that Poe's revision of "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt," after his fictionalized solution to the real case was proven wrong, indicates a development towards the more imaginative mystery of "The Purloined Letter" and not, as some critics have argued, a hoax, designed to convince readers that he *had* solved the case. The textual evidence that Fusco musters in support of his argument, however, is not convincing. Though the essays are not of equal quality, *Poe at Work* is an important collection, the first to be devoted to the study of Poe's texts. Fisher's introduction, Burns's checklist of previous commentary on Poe's revisions, and the textual studies, where they succeed, make *Poe at Work* a valuable resource for the student of Poe's craftsmanship in the tales.

Fisher turns his attention to the visionary Poe, though he does not forget the craftsman, in *The Very Spirit of Cordiality*, an essay on Poe's literary uses of alcohol and alcoholism, originally read at the Fifty-Fifth Annual Commemoration Program of the Edgar Allan Poe Society of Baltimore in 1977. Putting aside the much vexed question of Poe's alcoholism, Fisher traces the sources of Poe's artistic interest in wines and spirits and surveys his imaginative use of alcoholic drink and drunkenness. *The Very Spirit of Cordiality* is profitably read in conjunction with Hammond's discussion of *Tales of the Folio Club* in *Poe at Work*, since Fisher concentrates primarily on the many allusions, situations, and wordplays relating to alcohol in those early tales Poe framed as the work of a wine-sodden literary society. Fisher maintains, however, that these tales are more than satiric in their treatment of drink and drunkenness. Poe's *in vino veritas* in the Folio-Club tales and elsewhere, according to Fisher, is a mixture of satiric and Gothic, of classic and romantic vision. But Fisher's space is limited and his analysis brief and suggestive. He leaves us to interpret more fully for ourselves "the spirit of cordiality" in particular tales, reminding us once again to consider Poe's changing texts by appending to his essay the first printing of a Folio-Club tale, "MS. Found in a Bottle," and a brief discussion of how revision transformed

it into a more "sober" story.

The image that Fisher creates of Poe at work, manipulating popular conventions and carefully revising, is offset by David Ketterer's portrait of an idealistic visionary in *The Rationale of Deception in Poe*. Ketterer claims to be "redressing a balance" by avoiding the Gothic "machinery" he suspects Poe used "largely for market considerations" and focusing on the transcendental "vision" that underlies the horror and links Poe to Emerson and Blake. Poe's craft, in Ketterer's view, consists of certain "strategies of deception" that serve to expose limitations of the human condition and understanding that inhibit transcendental vision. According to Ketterer, Poe believed that such vision could be achieved, not only in some future state but here and now, by looking at the world through "the half-closed eye" — Poe's metaphor for a synthetic imagination that fuses the deceptive distinctions apparent in our world and to our reason into a holistic reality. Ketterer sees a development in Poe's art, moreover, from a preoccupation with the deceptions of reason and reality (the "grotesque"), to the use of deception as the means of imaginative fusion (the "arabesque"), to a climactic synthesis in the tales of ratiocination and *Eureka*, in which reason and imagination combine as "intuition" to reveal a transcendental unity.

Ketterer avoids the technical and obscure language of much modern criticism. His discussion of the philosophical context of Poe's strategies of deception is remarkably clear and simple, and he makes fresh, though not always convincing, interpretive use of terms Poe applies to his own works, "grotesque" and "arabesque." Attempting to cover Poe's entire canon and to see him whole, Ketterer includes an "admittedly speculative" chapter on Poe's life and is sometimes hurried and inconclusive in his analysis of Poe's works. But more problematical is his interpretation of Poe's vision. Pursuing the holistic Poe, Ketterer is dogged by the "schizoid" Poe, who exults in the devisive reasoning he scorns, who draws back in horror from the transcendence he seeks. Ketterer acknowledges that Poe found himself "in a better position to attack the false reality than reveal the true" and realized his "arabesque intimations" of a supernal world "may themselves be a deception," but these doubts, Ketterer argues, are "secondary to his faith in ideality." To see Poe as Ketterer sees him, we must half-close our eyes to the polarities in his canon. From this perspective, "the arabesque concept subsumes the grotesque," death

means transcendence, horror is the “corollary” or “disguise” of idealistic vision. The terrifying falls into pits or whirlpools in Poe’s tales are “fortunate,” the collapse of Roderick and Madeleine Usher is “healing,” and the raven’s “Nevermore” is only a deception of the intellect of Poe’s narrator, who could have his lost Lenore back here and now if he would maintain “the perspective of the half-closed eye.” To those who contend that the horror and equivocation in Poe’s art are the measure of his doubts about transcendence, Ketterer answers that the skepticism is theirs, not Poe’s. Yet Ketterer’s own equivocation about whether Poe’s climactic vision in *Eureka* affirms his transcendentalism or reflects his “own alienated condition” in a confining world gives us cause to doubt Ketterer’s faith in Poe’s idealism. Poe was, in fact, more skeptical about transcendence than Emerson and more enamored of fact and reason than Blake. His development was not, as Ketterer suggests, towards a climactic vision of transcendental unity, but back and forth between the grotesque and arabesque, and through several equivocal resolutions of idealistic vision and nihilistic despair. Nevertheless, Ketterer’s provocative study deserves careful attention because it clearly identifies Poe’s strategies of deception and offers a serious challenge to darker readings of the vision that informs them.

Bruce Ira Weiner

St. Lawrence University

John Carl Miller. *Building Poe Biography*. Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State U. Press, 1977. xix + 269pp. \$20.00.

This book, the first of four projected volumes, ensconces the name of John Miller among other modern scholars who have contributed invaluable to Poe studies: Killis Campbell, Thomas Ollive Mabbott, Arthur Hobson Quinn, and Floyd Stovall. Like them Miller gives much that is new; in turn he alters, at times shatters, much that is old, as he serves us quantities of documents assembled by John Henry Ingram for a "definitive" life of Poe. In this respect Miller resembles his subject, although with none of Ingram's envy of and acrimony toward others working on Poe's biography. An Englishman, Ingram caused Americans shame for so long neglecting one of their foremost literary artists, and, worse yet, for allowing a veil of calumnies and villifications so to enshroud Poe the man and writer as to recall the accomplished "masonry" of his own fiendish Montresor. As that worthy entombed Fortunato, so R. W. Griswold interred Poe beneath considerable biographical distortion and degradation. Not that Poe had furthered his own cause much. With his flair for romance and sensationalizing he contributed mightily to establishing the "Poe legend," with hints of a novel patterned after Sue's, travel and adventures in Russia and Greece, and the ministrations of a luscious woman while ill in foreign climes. Small wonder, as Mrs. Clemm wrote to Neilson Poe (p. 50), that "Eddie used to laugh heartily when he would hear it, but did not think it worth the trouble of contradiction." If such a person as Griswold believed rumors about Poe's foreign travel, 'twas perhaps "Eddie's" own fault. He had circulated that story in that portrait purported to be the work of Henry B. Hirst, but substantially, if not wholly, composed (and not over modestly) by the young writer himself.

Now, long afterward, Miller puts together in handy form materials for the future biographer of Poe, with guidelines — couched in his superb, if self-effacing authority in matters Poesque — to distinguish the reliable from the otherwise. This is scholarship of a fascinating, captivating variety, recalling another book that continues to attract and inform readers, though written long ago, John Livingston Lowes's *The Road to Xanadu*.

Miller's eight chapters contain information, mainly unpublished,

in the form of letters by Maria Clemm, Rosalie Poe, William Hand Browne, Marie Louise Shew Houghton, Annie Richmond, and George W. Eveleth that assisted Ingram's campaign against the Griswold portrait of Poe. The good index, and, even more, the appendices aid the reader of *Building Poe Biography*. The first appendix supplies thumbnail sketches of "Names, topics, newsclippings, and letters frequently mentioned in the text." These items are asterisked within the text itself for convenient cross-reference. Two bibliographies furnish a chronological list of Ingram's works, the first itemizing those on Poe, the next citing other subjects.

Mrs. Clemm, Ingram himself, and W. F. Gill are held up for particular judgment in these pages, and, we only too readily discern, all deserve whipping. Poe scholarship has enjoyed associations with cranks and crankiness, and both exist among these three personages (not to forget about the others, in whom either individual or cross-line quirks were evident, witness the rift between Mrs. Whitman and Mrs. Richmond upon the publication of Ingram's essay printing Poe's letters to the latter). Miller's clarity is laudable. Although he pretty much lets his dramatis personae speak for themselves, his terse, pithy remarks interspersed among the primary documents treat what is accurate, what inaccurate, and what indeterminable, and often save his subjects from themselves, so to speak. Mrs. Lewis's letters to Eveleth, revealing that she, and not Mrs. Clemm alone, pressed Griswold into "doing" Poe modifies a bit of flummery current for more than a century. Miller reveals how human, if not always humane, impulses have shaped the image of Poe that prevails in the mountain of biographical assays (or forays) upon a knotty subject. That among devotees Poe the man dominates Poe the artist, his personal hopes to the contrary, is clearer now because of Miller's work. Letters, portraits, editing, fact-gathering (along with much time-becobwebbed reminiscence), and gush hold the stage onto which Miller sends out of the wings characters to speak their lines before us. John Henry Ingram, the hero, ironically resembles Griswold in rearranging and distorting Poe's character, although the Englishman's obfuscations, instead of scarifying, went toward whitewashing *his* Edgar Allan Poe. Like Griswold, too, Ingram engendered great animosities, even if his battles resulted not so much because he tampered with factuality, which he did, but from his pugnacity toward anyone else whom he considered a poacher upon his private preserves as Poe's "definitive"

biographer. Miller, as I stated above, provides us with a readable scholarly book.

Benjamin Franklin Fisher IV

The University of Mississippi

Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. New Haven and London: Yale U. Press, 1979. 719pp. \$25.00

*The Madwoman in the Attic* begins splendidly. Drawing on an impressive number of sources, its overture shows that literary creation has traditionally been described in metaphors connected with male sexuality, a form of psychological discrimination particularly invidious to the woman writer's self-image. So long as Gilbert and Gubar discuss the means, both overt and covert, by which women were/are inhibited from literary participation, they remain persuasive and cogent. Indeed, their first chapter gives a most succinct, lucid account of the difficulties which women authors must confront. Excerpts from "The Metaphor of Literary Paternity" deserve to be reprinted often in texts for composition and beginning women's studies courses. To be sure, the argument will help stimulate advanced classes; in addition, the firm tone will inform without, I think, alienating students in introductory classes. The discussions of how specific writers cope with these problems, however, vary greatly in quality and persuasiveness. *The Madwoman in the Attic* contains both over-ingenuity in supporting a thesis, a temptation for all scholars; and a bias against writers who do not conform to a desired pattern, a temptation for scholars with any particularly strong ideological commitment. Nevertheless, the book insists on a response, a clarification of one's objections; many readers will be provoked, I expect, to a flurry of sometimes appreciative, sometimes argumentative marginalia.

After describing the predicament of the woman writer, Gilbert and Gubar differentiate the attitude of women writers toward their predecessors from the Oedipal male attitudes suggested by Harold Bloom in *The Anxiety of Influence*. Unable to challenge the literary establishment in the same way as men, women writers have adopted elaborate ruses to hide their rebellions. This desire to rebel inevitably coexists with the desire to accept and conform to social norms, and the nineteenth-century literature produced by women authors reflects this authorial split in madwomen who double not only the heroines but the writers themselves.

The title of this work refers, of course, to Bertha Rochester, and, not surprisingly since *Jane Eyre* provides the paradigm of the doubling pattern, the chapter on Charlotte Brontë illuminates all the

texts, particularly *Villette*. Gilbert and Gubar's framework enhances our understanding, for example, of Lucy Snowe's swings toward and away from emotion by exploring the other characters as fragmented reflections of Lucy's (and Charlotte Brontë's) character. In turn, this fragmentation explains a part of *Villette* which has puzzled readers since its publication: the exact basis of Lucy Snowe's attraction to Catholicism. Catholicism, which in Brontë's view encourages an independent and bestial sensuality and at the same time promotes childish dependence on priests, sanctions Lucy's schizophrenic selves. At its best *The Madwoman in the Attic* suggests both new questions—where in a writer's work does her inevitable rage appear?—and new answers to old critical riddles.

Other sections remain problematic. One might feel uneasy with the statement that "*Frankenstein* is ultimately a mock *Paradise Lost* ... Not just the striking omission of any obvious Eve-figure from this 'woman's book' about Milton, but also the barely concealed sexual components of the story as well as our earlier analysis of Milton's bogey should tell us, however, that for Mary Shelley the part of Eve is all the parts." (p. 320) No one figure has much in common with Eve, but some of them share something with her and so become a kind of pastiche? On the other hand, the clear presence of many Miltonic elements makes such a thesis tenable if not persuasive. When Heathcliff must become part of a female principle, however, common sense rebels against such thesis-mongering. Yes, Heathcliff is alienated and deprived of a heritage, but that analogy to women's position will not suffice to make him "female" or "an alternate version of masculinity" when his aggressive male sexuality and his legal revenge (open only to a man) constitute so much of his presence.

As the argument becomes less compelling, the language and style become less lucid and elegant. The final section, on Emily Dickinson, contains jargon in full Bloom, and some habits of analysis degenerate into rather annoying stylistic tics. The discovery of disguised meanings in individual words makes up an important part of the introductory argument. To note there that "premises" means both "argumentative assumptions" and "buildings or dwelling places" and that premises in both senses have enclosed women writers seems valuable. To observe later that "Hareton" becomes "Heir/ton (Heir-/town?)" does not.

The chapters on George Eliot have neither the last section's jar



gon nor the preceding section's tendency to overread; they do demonstrate, however, a serious critical failing. First, the treatment of Eliot is anomalous in the context of the rest of the book. Gilbert and Gubar fiercely defend the sanity and intelligence of Emily Dickinson's refusal to participate in an insane culture; they say nothing at all about Charlotte Brontë's decision to marry and in effect give up writing. George Eliot, however, is condescendingly criticized for "her inability to stand alone." Furthermore, she is taken to task for faults ranging from preferring male friends to refusing to read reviews of her work. This portrait of Eliot's dependence initially appeared in Gordon Haight's biography, and it almost caricatures a woman who could certainly have found many more conventional and less productive ways to avoid standing alone.

Why this animus? George Eliot refuses, we learn, to write her own story. Now Gilbert and Gubar mean this objection not only in the literal sense that Eliot did not write autobiographically but in the figurative sense that she tends to value renunciation more highly than self-assertion and thus does not present successful, aggressive women like herself. Why, however, must Eliot write her own story? Committed to a realist aesthetic, and in her early work to ordinary characters, she can neither present her own experience as typical nor construct superwomen. Gilbert and Gubar claim that Eliot not only accepts self-renunciation but applauds it and denies the moral validity of her heroines' anger by making them afraid of their own hatred. This representation is essentially correct, but it gives a false impression. Eliot prescribes renunciation for male characters as well, and they too are afraid of their own anger, witness Lydgate struggling to remain in love with Rosamond because he cannot bear a loveless marriage. *Daniel Deronda*, which mitigates Eliot's earlier view of renunciation, receives barely a mention. In short, Eliot did not write the stories which Gilbert and Gubar wish she had, and their feminist examination of her works proceeds from an ideological bias against what she did write.

Fortunately, the book returns to issues and writers better suited to its authors' tastes in "The Aesthetics of Renunciation." Like the introductory section on metaphors of literary creation, this chapter deals superbly with a trend, here the tendency of nineteenth-century women authors to write prose rather than lyric poetry. The impossibility of earning a living by writing such poetry (as compared with the relative

ease, in England, of doing so by writing popular novels), the inaccessibility of classical forms to those denied a classical education, and above all, the direct self-assertion required by the lyric combined, Gilbert and Gubar suggest, to make lyric poetry the most difficult genre for a woman writer. Such suggestions contribute enormously to our comprehension of both the nineteenth century and women's literary progress. *The Madwoman in the Attic* is an important and — a most underrated value in the scholarly world — an exciting book.

Missy Dehn Kubitschek

Eastern New Mexico University

David E. E. Sloane. *Mark Twain as a Literary Comedian*. Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State U. Press, 1979. 221pp. \$12.95.

Tradition may not answer all our questions, as Northrop Frye has argued, yet it does help explain the conditions under which an artist has labored. David Sloane thoroughly understands the traditions about which he writes, resulting in a study of Twain refreshing and illuminating.

Sloane states his thesis immediately — that Twain was less influenced by the old Southwestern humorists than by the literary comedians of the 1850's and 1860's. Writers such as Augustus Baldwin Longstreet, Johnson J. Hooper, George W. Harris, and Joseph G. Baldwin, Sloane claims, reflected the social mores of their respective locales, and their humor is essentially unsympathetic to the common man. The literary comedians of the Civil War era, on the other hand, — John Phoenix, B. P. Shillaber, Artemus Ward, Petroleum V. Nasby, Orpheus C. Kerr — expressed the ethics of the rising middle class and championed a democratic social vision opposed to government and corporate power and traditional social mores. Twain's attitude throughout his career, Sloane argues, is clearly egalitarian, for his humor consistently asserts the positive values of the individual pitting himself against such corporate structures as government, big business, and organized religion.

Twain's use of literary comedy clashed with his interests as an ethicist, Sloane claims, as it did with other comedic writers of the period. Yet unlike other contemporary literary comedians, Twain eventually succeeded in combining literary comedy, realism, and local color in the novel form. Twain sought to achieve the appearance of realism in order to make more credible his social ethics but was not much interested in the actual mechanics of realistic fiction.

Sloane suggests that Twain's success in combining the tradition of literary comedy with the novel form resulted from his own writing career's diverging radically from that of other literary comedians. Twain fortuitously dropped out of the printing trade altogether between April 1857, and July 1861, while writers like Ward and Billings were most active in "refining and freezing the personae that became famous through early commentary on the Civil War." They

thus became locked into a particular personae, voice, and point of view, from which they could never successfully extricate themselves. Twain's slower development, assisted by his wide reading while a river-boat pilot, evolving through newspaper work and platform lecturing, allowed him greater range in acquiring the ironic stance that became characteristic of his work. Moreover, Twain, unlike Ward and Billings, resisted the temptation to achieve humor largely through cacography, a device that severely limits the range of the narrative voice. Finally, whereas Ward's immense popularity was based on his commentary of very contemporary events, Twain's popularity was based instead on the American egalitarian point of view of his various narrative voices.

Sloane's study begins with a thorough review of British and American literary comedians and their respective influences on Twain. It continues with a superb chapter on the work and contributions to the genre of Artemus Ward and proceeds to examine the social ethics of the literary comedians. The rest of the study traces Twain's development as a literary comedian and social critic in detailed analyses of *The Gilded Age*, *The Prince and the Pauper*, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *A Connecticut Yankee*, *The American Claimant*, and *Pudd 'nhead Wilson*.

Exhaustively researched yet uncluttered and gracefully written, *Mark Twain as a Literary Comedian* is a major contribution to Twain scholarship. Because of its fundamental disagreement with certain established interpretations of Twain's work, it is likely to provoke controversy, but it is an approach to understanding the paradox of Mark Twain that cannot be ignored.

Tom Brown

The University of Mississippi

B. J. Leggett. *The Poetic Art of A. E. Housman: Theory and Practice*. Lincoln [Nebraska] and London: U. of Nebraska Press, 1978. xii + 161pp. \$9.95.

[R. Smitskamp]. *Housman on Plautus: Manuscript Notes in the 'Rudens' of Friedrich Marx (1928)*. Leiden [Holland]: E. J. Brill [1979]. 31pp. 600 copies. \$20.00.

Because of his small poetic output, A. E. Housman (1859-1936) is a minor poet, but as long as English poetry is read, *A Shropshire Lad* and his other short lyrics will always have admirers. Among scholars and critics he has never been a "forgotten" poet, although he has not attracted their attention, except perhaps during the 1920's and 1930's, in the way such modern authors as T. S. Eliot, Dylan Thomas, Thomas Hardy, and James Joyce continue to do. And most of the books—for example, those by A. S. F. Gow, Grant Richards, Laurence Housman, Percy Withers, George L. Watson, Maude Hawkins, and John Pugh—have been largely biographical. Not until 1970, when B. J. Leggett (University of Tennessee) published *Housman's Land of Lost Content: A Critical Study of "A Shropshire Lad,"* did we get a full-length and first-rate work of criticism on AEH as poet.

Where Mr. Leggett's previous account was confined to the theme and structure of the first small volume that Housman produced, he has now written in considerable depth about Housman's poetic theory and his reputation in the 1930's and today in the context of recent views, particularly those of the formalists, of whom Cleanth Brooks is a prime example. This long overdue reevaluation shows, with both insight and thoroughness, the relationship between Housman's Leslie Stephen Lecture, *The Name and Nature of Poetry*, delivered in 1933, with its anti-intellectual theory of poetry, and his own practices. This theory runs directly counter to the scientific and intellectual critics of that age. And Mr. Leggett says, Housman's "reputation as a serious artist has never recovered," he is not widely taught today, and he is thus less familiar than he was in his own time.

In studying what AEH actually said in the lecture "as opposed to the positions which are attributed to him," Mr. Leggett makes a fine case that Housman is in agreement with the central tradition of nineteenth-century criticism; furthermore he is in line, strangely enough, with T. S. Eliot, generally regarded as Housman's chief adversary.

A good deal of space in this interesting and valuable study is taken up in defending Housman in the light of Freudian and current psychoanalytic theory, as seen in such critics as Norman Holland. The most fruitful chapters are devoted to an examination of Housman's technique of persona and point-of-view and the structural patterns by which he makes his painful progress from innocence to experience. There might have been more discussion of the poems themselves.

Not only is *The Poetic Art of A. E. Housman* a needed reevaluation of Housman's poetry — with its seeming simplicity and ease of presentation — some forty years after his death, thus opening up new possibilities of reading him, but this new volume does deserve a place of its own in any serious collection of literary criticism.

The second book under review, *Housman on Plautus* — if that's what one can call a thirty-one-page publication — is not worth much space, though it may interest Housman collectors, who may nevertheless cringe at its high price (\$20) for a small thing.

R. Smitskamp, whose name is given at the end of the 1½-page introduction but is not on the title page, has taken Housman's copy of Friedrich Marx's edition of *Rudens* of Plautus (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1928), and recorded all of the remarks in the margins made in AEH's characteristic pencilled handwriting. Mr. Smitskamp says: "These remarks deserve publication as a supplement to Housman's classical papers edited in 1972," issued by the Cambridge University Press in three volumes.

Those of us who know Housman's scathing regard for German scholarship, long ago reported by Gow, Richards, and Laurence Housman, will learn little that is new from this pamphlet, though they will — as Housman himself wrote in Vol. five of his edition of *Manilius* — "extract from it a low enjoyment." This will come from seeing Housman's scurrilous and "outraged" marginalia over Marx's scholarship: "shame!", "knave," "booby," "Egotism stupefies its victim," "silly" (several times), "that is your ignorance," "ugh," "nonsense," "absurd," "pooh!", "false," "dirty dog," "you lie," "you poor German," "stuff," "dirty knave," and so on for thirty pages, along with the passages by Marx to which they refer.

In reply to the question, "Does this booklet deserve publication?" I can only quote Housman: "nonsense."

William White

Oakland University

Helen Vendler. *Part of Nature, Part of Us*. Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard U. Press, 1980. xi + 376pp. \$15.00.

In her new book, Helen Vendler notes that as a critic Randall Jarrell “had three special talents. He thought naturally in metaphor (a source of charm and jokes as well as a source of truth); he wrote, in almost every account, an implicit suspense story; and he saw books constantly as stories about human beings.” Professor Vendler’s remark describes, unconsciously to be sure, some of her own gifts. Does she not — to cite but two of many examples from this book — characterize Jarrell’s own “telling accuracies” as the “blackberries in [his] wood” or Marianne Moore’s physical experience of language as a “princesslike apprehension of every pea-size solecism?” One catches his breath at the start of Vendler’s review of Robert Penn Warren’s *Audubon: A Vision* over sentences like “Audubon’s art is muscular and avid: his birds and his rats alike inhabit a world of beak and claw and fang, of ripped-open bellies and planted talons — and finds that he is holding that same breath still (*planted!*) three pages later when, confirming the “stunning completion” of Warren’s poem, Vendler quotes its climax and ‘naturally’ echoes its sense with: “The grim and the contented coincide, and neither is falsified.” Finally, there can be no doubt that behind every poem she analyzes, Vendler etches the human context, as for instance she does most movingly in discussing the moments of brutality in Wallace Stevens’s late poems:

As self and beloved alike become, with greater or lesser velocity, the final dwarfs of themselves, and as social awareness diminishes dreams of self-transcendence, the poet sees dream, hope, love, and trust — those activities of the most august imagination — crippled, contradicted, dissolved, called into question, embittered. This history is the history of every intelligent and receptive human creature, as the illimitable claims on existence made by each one of us are checked, baffled, frustrated, and reproved — whether by our own subsequent perceptions of their impossible grandiosity, or by the accidents of fate and chance, or by our betrayal of others, or by old age and its failures of capacity.

As one who was schooled in the notion that verse should rise to the level of competent prose before it launches into the ‘poetical,’ I would have been automatically refashioning the quotation above — reminiscent of the resonant valediction of Vendler’s *Poetry of George Herbert* — into the Fifth Quartet (pace, Parson Possum!) had I not been too

stunned into reflection to read further in this book that day.

Perhaps no other passage than the one I have quoted at length indicates better that the book's title, drawn from Stevens, is as well chosen as its implications are generously enacted in the thirty-five essays and reviews collected here. Of the poet, Stevens had written that

As part of nature he is part of us.  
His rarities are ours: may they be fit,  
And reconcile us to ourselves in those  
True reconcilings, dark, pacific words.

As critic, Vendler's are, equally, "dark, pacific words." They are "true reconcilings," as well, in at least three senses. There is, first, the reconciling of a poet's interior tensions, their precise and unique definition, their location economically charted to reveal interpenetration in technique and theme. Stevens, Vendler finds, to be the prisoner of warring truths, unable to make adoration and sensuality cohabitable, yet reluctant — in his tortured greatness — to relinquish either "the truth of desire [or] the truth of the failure of desire." Through those mobiles of imagination Marianne Moore intricately assembled, the pain of feeling and the pain of governance gust and vie for dominance. The work of Elizabeth Bishop vibrates between two inextricable frequencies — the domestic and the strange. Lowell "feels the thread of self as perpetual clue, while following the labyrinths of change." Jarrell "can be said to have put his genius into his criticism and his talent into his poetry."

In addition to this kind of reconciling, there is the second of Vendler the critic to the individual and various poets themselves, nowhere better illustrated than in the manner with which her flexible prose first identifies, then emulates the subject. When she says of an Auden passage that "it also gives us once again Auden-the-saga-sayer, writing the Anglo-Saxon alliterative line as only he can," we scan her lines again for their double identity. Eliot, who carried no mean club for parody or slapstick himself, might have relished Vendler's remark about a symbol-hunting book which states: "Sir Henry Harcourt-Reilly (in *The Cocktail Party*) 'drinks gin, juice of the tree of resurrection, and water, symbol of purification.' Oh blessed juniper bush!" Dave Smith, for one final contrast, is of "high-piled books," writes "dense verse out of hard moments," so that Vendler



confesses to knowing not “where to begin in describing his rich writing.” But, of course, by now we know better; and sure enough, no sooner does she define Smith’s “characteristic speed-up of mass” than Vendler, her accelerator floored, takes poet and us for a ride (its hazards all the more felt for a detouring parenthesis in its progress):

There is an ambitious poem called “Night of the Chickens, North of Joplin,” which describes (not autobiographically, it is about someone else) drunkenness, night driving, memories of a girl lost, memories of a dead father riding the rails, running into chickens on the road, breaking the headlights on the chickens, trying to drive without headlights, being guided by the lights on the houses and roadhouses paralleling the route, being sideswiped, trying to follow another man’s car lights, and being evaded by him out of fear.

But the third reconciling — that of both the poet and the critic to the reader — is (as it was in Vendler’s earlier studies on Herbert, Stevens, and Yeats) once more paramount, if more explicit. Recalling in her preface that as a young schoolgirl she read “books about poets to find new poets and new poems,” Vendler admits that in collecting her pieces published over a span of twelve years she remembered her “younger self in the library; it is for her counterparts today that this volume is intended.” That is, obviously, a high compliment to Vendler’s “counterparts,” and characteristic of her courage, generosity, and humility — overworked words these last three, I admit, but restored to their precise meanings when applied to a critic who candidly says of her first reading of Adrienne Rich’s poetry:

Four years after she published her first book, I read it in almost disbelieving wonder; someone my age was writing down my life. I felt then, as I feel now, that for each reader there are only a few poets of whom that is true, and by the law of averages, those poets are usually dead or at least far removed in time and space. But here was a poet who seemed, by a miracle, a twin . . .

The same critic, over twenty years later however, can look at Rich’s “For the Felling of a Tree in Harvard Yard,” feel that it “played with fire, yet did not burn,” and now just as candidly admit (and qualify): “I must have liked that.” By example here, as elsewhere in *Part of Nature, Part of Us*, Vendler underscores and dramatizes the second half of her title; thus, in other, if slightly altered, words of Stevens, Vendler has made “A transporence in which we heard music, made

music, / In which we heard transparent sounds . . ." Her "rarity" becomes ours.

Aesthetic *chastity* and *reticence* have always been terms of special and repeated significance to Professor Vendler. Together, they have signified those rarest moments in the arts when feeling and governance coincide and coalesce in natural if mysterious equivalence; when imagination and judgment have seemed to seize upon syllables just beyond the reaches of consciousness; when the medium of imagination and judgment then contains and transparently reflects substance and maker in its syntax; when after all our analyses of a medium's minutest details, we sense something we call perfection but also know that perfection does not reside in any of its details, not to say our analyses; when, finally, we resort to terms like *grace* or a *je ne sais quoi*, when remembering (however imperfectly) with Herrick we are moved to exclaim, "Lust, there's no like to Poetry!" Viewed by her own prized terms, Professor Vendler's *Part of Nature, Part of Us* is sovereign in its expression of such chastity and reticence.\*

---

Despite her contention that "flaws die of themselves, in silence, and need no criticism for their extinction," it is necessary (if impertinent) to remark that Professor Vendler's respect for the word has not been matched by that of her printer, who, succumbing to the ills of publishing today, has given us an imperfect text. I list the following typographical mistakes in the hope that they will "die" (by an agency natural or not) in a second printing: P. 15 [Although Wallace Stevens was born in 1897]; p. 30 [*pole, Let*]; p. 34 ["Anatomy of Montomy"]; p. 58 [betwee]; p. 63 [humburg]; pp. 78-79 [paragraphing or spacing between these pages]; p. 80 [a principal of composition]; p. 129 [earth' fairer children]; p. 156 ["found" where]; p. 167 [terrestrial]; p. 175 [it seed summons]; p. 197 [short, It]; p. 206 [Kite Poem"]; p. 298 [uniforms("a)]; p. 299 [mediative poem]; p. 308 [temped]; p. 334 [superficially]; p. 335 [he remember]; p. 361 [Bidar's].

Charles Sanders

The University of Illinois

## REVIEWS

155

William M. Plater. *The Grim Phoenix: Reconstructing Thomas Pynchon*. Bloomington Ind.: U. of Indiana Press, 1978. 268 pp. \$12.95.

Mark Richard Siegel. *Pynchon: Creative Paranoia in "Gravity's Rainbow"*. Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1978. 136 pp. \$10.95.

David Cowart. *Thomas Pynchon: The Art of Allusion*. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois U. Press, 1980. 154 pp. \$10.95.

Thomas Pynchon's works pose special problems for critics. As William M. Plater observes in *The Grim Phoenix*, "Pynchon lures his readers into exotic regions, dazzles them with chimeras of possibilities, but he never strays from fundamental conditions and ordinary themes, however elaborately they may be embellished." The critical difficulty in confronting *V.*, *The Crying of Lot 49*, and especially *Gravity's Rainbow* is to provide the information necessary for traversing the exotic regions without pursuing chimeras into regions removed from "ordinary" human experience. Plater, Mark Richard Siegel, and David Cowart all comprehend the significance of this difficulty. As a result, they have created a remarkably sane base for future Pynchon criticism, defining many of the major issues and clearly establishing the sides of what promises to be a stimulating debate.

Reading Thomas Pynchon forces several basic questions on readers and critics. The first question concerns whether Pynchon sees a world dominated by entropy or a world charged with wider possibilities. Plater emphasizes the entropic elements while Siegel and Cowart concentrate on the possibilities. The second question is whether the scientific or the artistic disciplines provide Pynchon's primary points of reference. On this question, Plater and Siegel share a scientific (and philosophical) emphasis while Cowart argues that "science is the junior partner in Pynchon's fiction-making enterprise," insisting that his primary sources are artistic. Although each of the writers admits the theoretical need to recognize the full diversity of Pynchon's work, each occasionally limits his vision with a type of tunnel vision dictated by his premises. A tendency remains, perhaps a legacy of the modernist criticism represented by Stuart Gilbert's chart of "corre-

spondences" in *Ulysses*, to assume that the discovery of a few crucial ideas or structures will suddenly illuminate the dark corners of *Gravity's Rainbow*.

The tendency to consider Pynchon in terms of mediating concepts occasionally mars Plater's *The Grim Phoenix*. Considering Pynchon as a "closed system" writer, Plater represents the earliest thrust of criticism of *Gravity's Rainbow*. Emphasizing the importance of the ideas of Wittgenstein, Heisenberg, Wiener and Moles in Pynchon's novels, Plater argues that Pynchon's world is a "closed system" which, in accord with the second law of thermodynamics, will eventually reach maximum entropy, a bleak, lifeless state from which Plater sees no escape. Rather than simply dwelling on the nihilistic implications of this vision, however, Plater analyzes its effects on Pynchon's characters. He concentrates first on the concept of the "tour." Pynchon's characters, both tourists and natives, shape their experience on the basis of preconceptions, turning the "land" into a mediated "landscape." Plater then examines the characters' struggles for transcendence (as exemplified by the Rilkean concept of "death transfigured") and for communication, however abstracted and ultimately doomed it may be.

Plater structures *The Grim Phoenix* by examining the development of these ideas from the early stories through *Gravity's Rainbow*. Occasionally, he must strain to establish the continuity. His idea of the tour as a trivialized modern substitute for the quest illuminates *V.* (the most clearly entropic of Pynchon's works) very well. It does not, however, cast light on *Gravity's Rainbow* which, as both Siegal and Cowart note, is filled with quest images, not all of which can be dismissed as ironic. Similarly, Plater's emphasis on Slothrop as the dominant figure of *Gravity's Rainbow* (equivalent to Stencil or Oedipa) leads him to the conclusion that "there can be no more fundamentally pessimistic view" than Pynchon's. By thus elevating Slothrop, only one of the several crucial characters, Plater denies the validity of several options portrayed in the novel. In effect, Plater occasionally turns the "land" of *Gravity's Rainbow* into a "landscape" shaped by the tour guides of the earlier works. Nonetheless, Plater recognizes the Heisenbergian uncertainty of any observation of Pynchon and he analyzes specific passages brilliantly. *The Grim Phoenix*, although flawed, will remain a standard expression of the entropic approach to Pynchon.

Siegal's *Pynchon: Creative Paranoia in "Gravity's Rainbow"* contrasts sharply with *The Grim Phoenix*. At once the most energetic and the most uneven of the three studies, Siegal's book presents *Gravity's Rainbow* as a radical departure from the nihilism of *V*. and emphasizes Pynchon's search for alternatives to the increasingly constricted sense of modern life. Cautioning against the over-extension of Pynchon's metaphors, Siegal clearly grasps Pynchon's presentation of alternative views of reality. Siegal views *Gravity's Rainbow* as a reflection of the overarching consciousness of an implied narrator determined to express the full complexity of himself and the world. Siegal's belief that "every important character in the novel represents a complex of thoughts and feelings that originally belongs to the narrator" mitigates against overvaluing any single character. Proceeding largely on the basis of ideas derived from C. G. Jung and Martin Buber, Siegal attempts to transmit a strong sense of the nature of Pynchon's narrative persona.

Unfortunately, Siegal's frequent reversion to unsupported generalities undercuts his argument. To say, as he does, for example, that romanticism, symbolism, realism and naturalism "are all metaphoric — that is, they implicitly hold that the interpretive structures of the mind . . . are adequate modes for grasping reality" demands detailed explanation and qualification which Siegal does not provide. In his enthusiasm for Pynchon, Siegal sometimes (though certainly unintentionally) implies that previous literary figures have been either simplistic or shallow. On occasion, he entangles his argument in contradictions. At one point, Siegal accuses entropic critics of perceiving irony where none is intended (p. 14); he later accuses them of failing to see the irony in a passage where irony is needed to support his own view (p. 45). The result of these problems is an open system book which, however intriguing its argument, is not nearly as pointed or as convincing as Plater's closed system book.

Cowart's *Thomas Pynchon: The Art of Allusion* also emphasizes the possibilities in Pynchon but proceeds in a much more systematic manner than Siegal's book. Cowart first examines the importance of painting and film in Pynchon's work, concluding that allusions to the pictorial art forms serve as "emblems of insubstantiality," as reminders of the ultimate Void. He then analyzes musical and literary allusions which Pynchon uses as reminders of the "nearly mystical" possibilities which complement the bleaker aspect of his vision. Inas-

much as he recognizes both entropy and possibility, Cowart provides a balance between Siegal and Plater. His hierarchical view of art as "more important" than science to Pynchon, however, at times leads him into difficulties.

While Cowart observes in his introduction that both science and art contribute to Pynchon's vision, he remains committed to a vision of Pynchon as a neo-modernist who sees the artist as "the God of his own creation." At times this insistence, or perhaps more correctly his avoidance of scientific frames of reference, results in problems of interpretation which Cowart could easily have avoided. When discussing the relationship between the Schwarzkommando and the director vonGöll's propaganda film, Cowart argues that Pynchon endorses the idea that "art . . . precedes life." Even a brief consideration of the application of relativity and uncertainty principles in *Gravity's Rainbow*, however, indicates that Pynchon does not endorse precedence for either the cinematic or the realistic phenomenon. The scientific principle provides a needed corrective to the artistic assertion.

An aspect of Cowart's hierarchic impulse which generates difficulties is his insistence that Pynchon's artistic allusions focus on "classical" (Cowart uses the term "serious") rather than "popular" art forms. While this insistence does nothing to damage Cowart's analysis of allusions to Euro-American orchestral music (in fact, some of the most brilliant analysis in the book concerns Pynchon's use of Webern in *Gravity's Rainbow*), it does lead him to observe incorrectly that there is a lack of music in the *The Crying of Lot 49*, a work jammed with references to rock. It also leads him to see the musical center of V. in Puccini's *Manon Lescaut* while it can be easily argued that the center lies much closer to the jazzman McClintic Sphere. Again, both elements are necessary to a convincing view.

Ultimately Cowart fails to establish his thesis that Pynchon relies more on artistic than on scientific allusions. No major critical statement has ever denied the importance of artistic allusions in *Gravity's Rainbow* (even Plater grants major importance to Rilke and Henry Adams) and Cowart makes no attempt to refute the claims made by those who have demonstrated the importance of science. Nonetheless, *Thomas Pynchon: The Art of Allusion* is an important book filled with valuable comments on the areas it does explore.

Reading all three of these studies provides a strong sense of the

## REVIEWS

159

possible choices concerning Thomas Pynchon. Perhaps this is nowhere as clear as in the decisions Plater, Siegal and Cowart make concerning the "important" characters in *Gravity's Rainbow*. All three agree that Slothrop is important. From that point on, however, their paths diverge sharply. Plater spends a great deal of time analyzing in generally approving terms the attempted transcendence of Blicero/Weissman, who Cowart refers to as "the novel's most viciously sadistic character." Cowart concentrates on vonGöll whose insistence on the priority of imagination implies the "literature as game" orientation of Borges and Barth. Siegal, whose orientation if not argument I find most convincing, inverts this egotistic emphasis and focuses on the collective Counterforce consisting of such diverse characters as Roger Mexico, Pig Bodine and Enzian. Perhaps this diversity constitutes the strength of this phase of Thomas Pynchon criticism. To read these three books is to confront three highly individual sensibilities. This confrontation in turn sends the reader back to the original texts on one hand and to the source of his/her own preconceptions on the other. These studies indicate that an intriguing and enriching critical community (God save us from an industry) is being born.

Craig Werner

The University of Mississippi

PRINTED BY  
THE COVINGTON PUBLISHING COMPANY,  
COVINGTON, TN.