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GLENWAY WESCOTT'S APARTMENT IN ATHENS:
"A NOVEL OF INSTRUCTION AND REVELATION"

by

Claire Frank Angle
#1

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ANGLE, CLAIRE FRANK. Glenway Wescott's Apartment in Athens: "A Novel of Instruction and Revelation." (1965) Directed by: Dr. Robert O. Stephens.

Glenway Wescott's novel Apartment in Athens (1945), the last fictional work published by the American author, differs markedly in style, intent, subject matter, and scope from Wescott's earlier novels-- The Apple of the Eye (1924), The Grandmothers (1927), The Babe's Bed (1932), and The Pilgrim Hawk (1940). Wescott's early prose, like his poetry, is chiefly autobiographical, subjective, and lyrical, while his later work becomes more analytical and controlled.

The shift in Apartment in Athens to the pure narrative, to a limited Jamesian viewpoint, and to a broader and more conventional theme-- World War II--comes as the result of Wescott's growing insistence on the power of literature to instruct as well as delight. His didacticism reaches its culmination in Apartment in Athens, but his didactic intent does not eliminate his continuing dedication to literary style and form--in short, to the power of literature to delight.

In his 1962 collection of essays, Images of Truth, Wescott classifies Apartment in Athens as a novel of "instruction and revelation." For Wescott this type of narrative, fiction as diagnosis, is the "greatest or the gravest of the functions of fiction." The diagnosis with which Apartment in Athens is concerned is totalitarianism, a force germinal since the beginnings of civilization, but never fully realized until the 1930's. The novel diagnoses and dramatizes western man's confusion and indecision in the face of this force, one in which human life, for both conquered and conqueror, is superfluous except as an instrument for the state.

Wescott's career as a prose writer began with his expatriation in 1921. His early works, praised by critics, are marked with a willingness to experiment with various literary techniques and a skillful impressionistic use of language; his preoccupation was with the texture of the work rather than its structure. But with the publication of The Pilgrim Hawk in 1940, Wescott's writing entered a new phase, one notable for its greater control, more consistent tone, and more unified structural pattern. With the appearance in 1945 of Apartment in Athens, which Wescott called his "war work," the Wisconsin author entered the ranks of the socially oriented writers--writers whose concern is communicating to the reading public an insight into some contemporary moral problem of extreme importance. Wescott's last novel is not designed as social criticism, however, for his aim is not reform or change, but an understanding of the appeal of the Nazi mystique--an understanding made possible through what Wescott calls the "precise, potent truth" of the story.

Within a narrative framework dealing with the effects of the German occupation on a Greek family, Wescott dramatizes the subtle connections between weakness and strength, "good" and "evil," and the particular and the universal. But his myth of modern man's dilemma, Apartment in Athens, contains a positive commitment not found in his earlier work, for Wescott's personal values--destroyed with the impact of World War I--re-emerge in his World War II novel as traditional western values.

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CHAPTER I

THE CRITICAL REPUTATION OF APARTMENT IN ATHENS

Glenway Wescott's novel Apartment in Athens first appeared in the January and February issues of McCall's Magazine, 1945, and was published in book form in England and America the same year, joining John Steinbeck's The Moon Is Down (1942) and John Hersey's A Bell for Adano (1944) in its use of World War II as subject matter even before the war's end. Since much memorable war fiction is separated from its subject by a number of years--both Remarque's All Quiet on the Western Front and Hemingway's A Farewell to Arms were published ten years after World War I ended--it is perhaps not surprising that critical and popular attention to the three major American novels written during the war has been overshadowed by the attention given later works, notably Norman Mailer's The Naked and the Dead (1948) and James Jones' From Here to Eternity (1951).

It is surprising, however, that Wescott's Apartment in Athens, praised by literary figures as perceptive as Katherine Ann Porter, Edmund Wilson, and Eudora Welty; published in Canada, England, and America; and translated into French, Spanish, Portuguese, and Czech, has disappeared so completely from the literary scene. In the twenty years since the novel's publication only one critic has singled out Apartment in Athens for literary evaluation: Edmund Wilson in the Classics and Commercials (1950). Wescott scholars C. E. Schorer and

Sy M. Kahn find Apartment in Athens less rewarding than Wescott's earlier novels. Schorer points to The Apple of the Eye (1924) and The Grandmothers (1927) as the "most noteworthy and the best remembered,"¹ while Kahn praises The Grandmothers, winner of the 1927 Harpers' Prize Novel Award, as Wescott's "most enduring novel."²

It cannot be denied that Wescott's literary prestige has plummeted since the twenties, when the "inflated market value" of The Apple of the Eye caused Scott Fitzgerald to urge that Wescott write a laudatory essay designed to help launch Fitzgerald's friend Ernest Hemingway.³ Most critical surveys of American literature fail to include Wescott, or mention him only in relation to the expatriate movement of the twenties. George Snell, in The Shapers of American Fiction, and Fred Millet, in Contemporary American Authors, indict Wescott for failure to achieve his early promise; Millet goes on to attribute this failure to the "severance from the source" of Wescott's creative power. Millet's reference is to the Wisconsin author's self-imposed expatriation and to his abandonment, in the thirties, of the midwestern focus of his fiction.⁴

¹"The Maturing of Glenway Wescott," College English, XVIII (March, 1957), 325.

²"Glenway Wescott: A Bibliography." Bulletin of Bibliography, XXII (1958), 156.

³"The Moral of F. Scott Fitzgerald," The New Republic, CIV, February 17, 1941, p. 213. (Wescott's essay is also included in The Crack-Up, ed. Edmund Wilson, New York, 1945, and F. Scott Fitzgerald: The Man and His Work, ed. Alfred Kazin, New York, 1951)

⁴New York, 1947, p. 301, and New York, 1940, p. 47.

Critical rejection of Wescott's post-midwestern fiction meets some dissenting voices, however. Frederick J. Hoffman, in The Modern Novel in America, praises The Pilgrim Hawk (1940) for its "great subtlety and technical mastery," and Arthur Mizener, in The Sense of Life in the Modern Novel, ranks it as one of the "fine" novels of the thirties.⁵ Wescott's only other novel without the regional stamp, Apartment in Athens, fares worse; Mizener excludes it, and Hoffman merely notes its "special view of civilization."⁶

Despite the praise of The Pilgrim Hawk by Hoffman and Mizener, Wescott scholarship is becoming increasingly rare--mute evidence of his declining literary reputation. Since C. E. Schorer's 1957 article in College English, no studies of Wescott's work have appeared in periodicals, and mention of Wescott in American literary histories has steadily decreased.

Two facts contribute to the decline of critical attention to Wescott. The first is his failure to publish any fiction in the twenty years since Apartment in Athens appeared; the second, his shift from the intensely lyric and personal prose of his early novels and stories to the deliberately controlled, analytic, and impersonal approach of his last two novels.

When Herbert Gold, in a 1959 article in Hudson Review, divides fiction writers into two groups, the "Controllers" and the "Avowers," he gives each group characteristics which appear in Wescott's work (even

⁵Hoffman, Chicago, 1959, p. 27, and Mizener, Boston, 1964.
p. 122.

⁶Hoffman, p. 173.

though Gold's article deals only with fiction of the fifties). Gold's Avower, who seeks "the mastery of experience by passionate avowal," runs the risk of "looseness, maudlin howling, and self-indulgence"; the description fits the Wescott of The Apple of the Eye. The Controller, on the other hand, who seeks a formal, orderly "coming to an understanding of ends and causes," but who runs the risk of a "false, faked formalism" can be said to describe the Wescott of Apartment in Athens.⁷

Wescott's move from avowal to control, as evidenced in the structure, language, and theme of Apartment in Athens, is based on the author's growing belief in the didactic function of literature--on the moral obligation of the writer to instruct, even if he runs the risk of a failure to delight. Wescott's increasing concern with the power of fiction to teach can be seen in the following paragraph from Images of Truth, (1962) a collection of informal essays which describes rather fully his dedication to the art of the narrative:

I believe that there is a more precise, potent truth in story than in philosophy. In a truthful account of something which has happened, our minds discover, almost without thinking, a kind of knowledge of the world which lies deeper and is less subject to perversion and change than all the rules of ethics cut and dried. The emotion of a story has a more pacifying, fortifying effect on our wild hearts than any amount of preaching and teaching. And in spite of our modern sophistication, our pride of economics and politics and science, wildness of the heart is still one of the most problematical and important things in the world. Sometimes it is our downfall and sometimes, if we understand it alright, our salvation. It may be good or it may be evil; it may be energy or only a fast fever. (pp. 19-20)

Apartment in Athens contains a "precise, potent truth"--a truth about a war. But Wescott's novel is one among hundreds written about the Second World War. Of the hundreds written, few will endure, for

⁷"Fiction of the Fifties," Hudson Review, XII, 199.

most war fiction attempts to capture realistically the intensity of wartime experience, rather than its implications. During the war years, in fact, the American reading public was eager to experience the intensity of war, but it preferred factual accounts rather than fiction. The best sellers in non-fiction for the war years, based on Publishers' Weekly records, are war-related: Shirer's Berlin Diary in 1941, Hargrove's See Here, Private Hargrove in 1942, Wilkie's One World in 1943, Hope's I Never Left Home in 1944, and Pyle's Brave Men in 1945. On the other hand, none of the fictional best sellers for those years are in any way connected with the war, and only two war novels, Steinbeck's The Moon Is Down (1942) and Hersey's A Bell for Adano, reached the list of better sellers.⁸

Although the acute reportorial sense of non-fiction like Pyle's Brave Men is echoed in much of the war fiction written after the war, Louis Auchincloss has rather aptly compared the postwar reading of war literature to "taking an old enlistment poster out of a trunk."⁹ But war literature brings back more than the dated loyalties and old hatreds that Auchincloss' simile suggests, for much of the literature of World War II is characterized by a sense of despair and disillusionment, like the literature of earlier wars--Hemingway's A Farewell to Arms, Crane's The Red Badge of Courage, Tolstoy's War and Peace, Remarque's All Quiet on the Western Front, and Cummings' The Enormous Room.

⁸Frank Luther Mott, Golden Multitudes, New York, 1947, pp. 331-328.

⁹Seven Modern American Novelists, ed. William Van O'Connor, Minneapolis, 1964, p. 31.

But enduring war fiction obviously must capture something more than the sense of despair and disillusionment that accompanies war. That "something more" is a quality to which every novelist--whether or not his theme is war--aspires. It has been variously described. James calls it the "impression of life"; Conrad, the "highest kind of justice to the visible universe." Wescott's aspiration, like James' and Conrad's, is to portray life truthfully--to give, in his words, "a truthful account"--but as he matures, the didactic function of fiction becomes increasingly more important to him. The first essay in Images of Truth (1962) is developed from a lecture given twenty years before the book was published, and only three years before the publication of Apartment in Athens (1945); in an autobiographical note Wescott states that his "convictions about fiction writing have changed very little in the intervening years." Those convictions, summarized in the following excerpt from the essay, are far removed from the art-for-art's-sake attitude of his early work, but show his intentions in Apartment in Athens: "In order to last a novel must be functional. To be sure, it must entertain, and it must convince, and it must thrill somehow; but it must also help."¹⁰

Apartment in Athens is a functional novel--one that helps. In the twenty years since its publication many novels have been hailed as the finest novel of World War II--John Hersey's The Wall, Norman Mailer's The Naked and the Dead, and Joseph Heller's Catch-22--but none of them fits what Wescott calls the narrative of instruction and revelation, for him the "greatest or the gravest of the functions of

¹⁰Images, New York, 1962, pp. 309, 20-21.

fiction." (Images, p 17) Wescott lists Forster's A Passage to India and Maugham's Christmas Holiday as two examples of the narrative of instruction and revelation--as two examples of fiction as diagnosis. He goes on to admit that novels that have "prescribed something to relieve or cure the sickness" may not contain as much "beauty or kindness or fun as we should like." (Images, p 20) And, indeed, Apartment in Athens--like most war fiction--contains little beauty and kindness and fun.

But the novel does diagnose. It diagnoses and dramatizes a force germinal since man's beginnings but never fully realized until the 1930's: totalitarianism. It diagnoses and dramatizes western man's confusion and indecision in the face of this force--a force which seeks to impose upon mankind a world order in which dehumanization becomes a deliberate goal and in which human life, for both conquered and conqueror, is superfluous except as an instrument for the state.

In order to diagnose the sort of universal sickness which Apartment in Athens is concerned with, Wescott attempted to lose his identity as an individual, with individual preoccupations, and to become a twentieth-century Everyman. He attempted to achieve the classical writer's simplicity, objectivity, and restraint, leaving behind the romantic, autobiographical tone of his early prose and poetry. The deliberate suppression of his individuality in order to achieve anonymous didacticism through fiction cost Wescott much of his public, but it marked his development as a writer of myth. The writer of myth has no identity; his tale refuses to grow old because it is constantly re-lived. In the following passage from Images of Truth Wescott acknowledges his own attempt to attain a mythic anonymity:

We raise the dead and we make them speak; but for those of us who are true novelists it is not as a means of expressing our particular opinion. We ask the dead questions and pass the information on. We do not utter our experience through them. They are not puppets, they have voices of their own; and the heart of every matter as we see it seems to come to us from their knowledge, as it were independent of our knowledge, prior to our experience. (pp. 17-18)

Wescott's references here to a kind of Jungian archetype clarifies the essential difference between his early fiction and his last novel. The vivid characters of The Apple of the Eye--Bad Han, Mike, and Rosalie--bear little resemblance to Mr. and Mrs. Helianos and Major Kalter of Apartment in Athens because the Helianoses and Major Kalter "have voices of their own"--dim, ethereal voices, but their own--while the characters of The Apple of the Eye are drawn from Wescott's experiences.

The voices of Mr. and Mrs. Helianos and Major Kalter, however dim and ethereal, jointly project a prophetic and truthful account of an era that began in the 1930's but did not end with World War II--an era that diminishes man and attempts to make him meaningless except in his relation to his state. The creation of a new god--the state--requires the creation of a new myth. Wescott's Apartment in Athens creates that myth, symbolically places it in Athens, touchstone of western man, and veils it in the guise of war fiction.

Critics who see in Apartment in Athens a decline of Wescott's powers, a crudity of message, or a layer of propaganda are guilty of a misplacing of emphasis. Twenty years of dawning recognition of a disturbing new god should make it possible to evaluate objectively Wescott's dramatization of that god. If he portrays truth, if he--to use Wescott's verb--"helps," then the novel is as vital today as it was in the midst of the last great war.

CHAPTER II

WESCOTT'S DEVELOPMENT OF TECHNIQUES FOR APARTMENT IN ATHENS

The distinct change in prose style, structure, theme, and purpose that can be traced in Wescott's fiction separates his early prose from his last two novels, The Pilgrim Hawk (1940) and Apartment in Athens (1945). Both the approach and the intention of the Wisconsin author's prose are closely related to pertinent biographical facts, to the influence of other writers on his work, and to the degree of his alienation from, or acceptance of, society. Wescott's boyhood ambitions, his education, the pattern of his early fiction, his reading, his expatriation, and his return to America are all related to the changing direction of his fiction, and, because of the relation, shed light on the significance of Apartment in Athens.

Born on April 11, 1901, in Kewaskum, Wisconsin, Wescott attended public high schools in West Bend and Waukesha, where he was "slightly but inspiringly educated."¹ From 1917 to 1919 Wescott attended the University of Chicago, which he left, without a degree, during the middle of his second year. At the university, which was then experiencing what Frederick J. Hoffman calls the "Chicago renaissance," Wescott became a member, then president, of the Poetry Club. Wescott attributes to the members of this club, whom he describes as "snobbish,

¹Autobiographical Note, Images of Truth, p. 309.

impassioned, and clever," the influence which led to his desire to become a writer.² One of the major influences on Wescott's poetry between 1917 and 1920 was Yvor Winters, whom he met through the Poetry Club. Winters and Wescott became close friends, and when an attack of influenza caused Wescott to leave school, Winters arranged for his friend to act as his companion during a trip to Santa Fe, New Mexico. Wescott remained in New Mexico until rumors of his homosexuality reached Winter's father, who dismissed him as Winter's companion. The rumors were based on fact, according to Sy M. Kahn; as early as the age of fifteen Wescott had had homosexual relations.³

Wescott's early homosexual tendency is at least partially rooted in his devotion to his mother and his aversion to his father, a strict, puritanical man. Wescott felt that his father despised him and that his mother's feelings were torn between the two of them;⁴ his first two novels, The Apple of the Eye and The Grandmothers reflect the tension of his family relationships, for both are strongly autobiographical. His early poetry, like his prose, concentrates on his emotional response to his troubling personal relationships and to his search for a means of expression. Wescott admits, years later, that in his twenties he was a "fussy stylist";^{**5} his early poetry is characteristically without

²Fred Millet, Contemporary American Authors, New York, 1940, p. 631.

³"Glenway Wescott: A Critical and Biographical Study," Unpublished dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1957, pp. 8-9.

⁴*Kahn, unpublished dissertation, 1957, p. 2.

⁵**"The Moral of F. Scott Fitzgerald," 1941, The New Republic, p. 213.

"message," for his preoccupation was with a search for new form.

His first published work, aside from a short story published in The Megaphone when he was only fourteen, is a volume of poetry titled The Bitterns. (1920).⁶ Both The Bitterns and Natives of Rock (1925) are strongly influenced by the Imagist School, active at the university during Wescott's year and a half there. According to Ezra Pound, a central figure in the imagist movement, the first object of imagist poetry is a representation of "an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time." Pound's concept stresses exactness; the "Pound Period," during which Pound himself exercised the greatest influence, lasted from 1909 to 1914. Wescott, however, was more influenced by the second period of imagist poetry, the period in which a kind of poetry scornfully called "Amygism," after Amy Lowell, was born. Pound describes the chief defects of "Amygism" as "sloppiness, lack of cohesion, and lack of organic centre in individual poems."⁷

Wescott's early poems are marred by the same failure to achieve an organic unity that is attributed to "Amygism." Since Wescott attended the University of Chicago, the center of the imagist movement, during the period when Amy Lowell's influence was at its height, it is not surprising that his early poetry has characteristics which link it with the period. Westcott's poem "The Poet at Night-Fall" has the lack of cohesion that Pound criticizes:

⁶Bibliographical information is taken from "Glenway Wescott: A Bibliography," Sy M. Kahn, Bulletin of Bibliography, XXII (1958), 156-160.

⁷Frederick J. Hoffman, The Twenties, New York, 1955, pp. 97-98, quoting Ezra Pound.

I see no equivalents
For that which I see,
Among words.

And sounds are nowhere repeated,
Vowel for vocal wind
Or shaking leaf.

Ah me, beauty does not enclose life,
But blows through it--
Like that idea, the wind,

. . . .
Altering all, in that moment
When it is not
Because we see it not

But who would hang
Like a wind-bell
On a porch where no wind ever blows?

(A Little Treasury of Modern Poetry,
ed. Oscar Williams, New York, 1946,
p. 319)

The poet's frustrated attempt to capture beauty is first linked to the "unseen and useless" wind, then, as the wind is seen as "altering all," the poet likens himself to a wind-bell and emerges from his frustration. Wescott's use of an auditory image, the wind-bell, to indicate beauty is significant, for his first ambition had been to become a musician.⁸ As a high school student he had a clear soprano voice and sang solos in a Methodist church choir.⁹

His family, however, opposed his desire to make music his career and planned for him to become a minister. Although his early work completely rejects accepted moral standards in favor of the artist's exploration of sensation, Apartment in Athens marks the return to the role which his family--and especially his mother--had hoped he would assume.

⁸Millet, p. 631.

⁹Kahn, unpublished dissertation, 1957, p. 7.

Following the year with Ivor Winters in New Mexico, Wescott returned briefly to Chicago, where he shared a room with Monroe Wheeler. There Mrs. Harriet Moody recognized his talent and, in 1921, offered the use of her summer house in Massachusetts. While in Massachusetts, Wescott wrote the first part of The Apple of the Eye, but before the year was over sailed for Europe; the trip was financed by Janet Lewis, who was later to become Ivor Winters' wife.¹⁰

Europe was to be Wescott's home for the next eleven years. He was one of many midwesterners who expatriated themselves during the twenties, among them Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, Caroline Gordon, and Robert McAlmon. The forces which drove figures as dissimilar as Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and Wescott to reverse the pioneer's westward movement are on the surface very different. For Wescott it was ostensibly a search for a style and a need to leave the limited moral order of Wisconsin; for Fitzgerald it was, at least partially, an escape from the frantic life he and Zelda were leading in New York; and for Hemingway it was an inability to leave Europe after the war because neither he nor home were as they had been before.

But beneath the varying surface reasons for midwesterners roaming the world after World War I, as Wescott puts it, "a sort of vagrant chosen race like the Jews,"¹¹ lie several factors: 1. The close of the frontier and its stifling effects on restless pioneer stock; 2. The aura of a different kind of pioneering in Europe, and especially in

¹⁰Kahn, unpublished dissertation, 1957, p. 63.

¹¹Good-Bye Wisconsin, New York, 1928, p. 26.

Paris--experimentation in the arts; 3. The freedom Europe offered its artists; 4. The economic forces that made European life relatively inexpensive; 5. America's first involvement in a major European war, thus ending her isolation; 6. The double vision of sensitive men recovering from the impact of war--on the one hand freed from worn-out traditions, frantically gay, and buoyantly optimistic for the future, but at the same time shaken with terror that the world could never completely recover and with fear that man had dissolved his place in a meaningful universe.

Wescott and Fitzgerald share this double vision. Fitzgerald offers an image of America after the war going on "the greatest, gaudiest spree in history," but adds that all the stories that interested him at that time had "a touch of disaster."¹² Wescott's recollections of the twenties, written five years after Fitzgerald's, echo the dual viewpoint: "World War I . . . slaughtered a generation, shook the foundations of the world, loosed the whirlwind." Then, like Fitzgerald, he becomes optimistic: "We had hopes, high hopes, high enough!" (Images, p. 9)

The double vision explains part of the appeal of expatriation for Wescott and is reflected in The Apple of the Eye, The Grandmothers, Good-Bye Wisconsin, and The Babe's Bed: Wescott's frantic surge of interest in the arts, his fiercely individualistic post, his elaborate acceptance-rejection of American society and his relation to it, his experimentation in order to say in new ways what could not be said in the old, and his optimistic sense of the meaninglessness of life (in itself a contradiction). It was a trip to Germany in 1931 that alerted

¹²"Early Success," The Crack-Up, ed. Edmund Wilson, New York, 1959, p. 87.

him to the growing peril of the western world and caused him to shake off the preoccupations of the twenties in exchange for a sense of grave responsibility.

Wescott lived briefly in England and Germany, but the bulk of the eleven years abroad was spent in Villefranche, where he lived in relative seclusion until 1928, and in Paris, where he lived until he returned home in 1933. During the early part of his stay in Europe Wescott attended a blinding millionaire art collector, Henry Goldman, for a year, but except for this year's work and a brief teen-age job for a tailoring firm he has been dependent on the income from his writing and on the help of family and friends for his livelihood.

His first seven years abroad were the most prolific of his career, doubtless because of his youthful enthusiasm and his exposure to the literary activity characteristic of postwar Europe. His poetry appeared in Poetry, The Dial, Contact, Broom, The Hue and Cry, and The Little Review between 1921 and 1924, some of which was later included in his Natives of Rock (1925). Between 1924 and 1928 three prose works followed one another in rapid succession: The Apple of the Eye (1924), The Grandmothers (1927), and Good-Bye Wisconsin (1928). All three received generally favorable reviews, and many critics hailed Wescott as one of America's most promising young novelists.

Wescott's first prose work can only loosely be called a novel, for its three sections are linked only by their setting, the "fecund but useless" swamp, and by the brief roles which the major characters of one section play in the action of the other two parts. The novel's first section dramatizes the conflict between the primitive and the civilized; the second, the conflict between the pagan and the Puritan.

The third focuses on the initiation of Dan, a prototype of the young Wescott, on his struggles to reconcile his mother's Puritanism with his friend Mike's hedonism, and on his ultimate rejection of Wisconsin. Wescott's rejection of America, lasting until 1933, is reflected in Dan's musings as he leaves Wisconsin: "He loved them--the fields, farms, hills, and marsh--but they had given him all they had to give. He understood them now; and they were overborne by memories, a mass of memories, like the dark red and dim yellow autumn leaves, falling, confused."¹³

Violent death comes to the protagonist of the first section, Bad Han, but Hannah's death is not coupled with the corruption and decay found in the second and third part, for she represents the purely primitive. The epigraph for Hannah's story, from Defoe's The Fortunate Mistress, expresses the belief that no corruption of nature or sin of life can be offensive to God. Hannah's affair with Jules Bier and her life as a prostitute (after Jules' Puritan father persuades him to marry someone else) are treated by Wescott as natural and inevitable. Hannah's serene acceptance of life and her instinctive goodness, in spite of what Puritanism calls "sin," serve to contradict the book's epigraph: "Keep my commandments, and live; and my law as the apple of thine eye." (Proverbs, 7:2).

The Apple of the Eye continues to contradict itself, just as Wescott's double vision of the twenties contradicts itself. The second section treats the relationship between Mike Byron, a young hedonist;

¹³The Apple of the Eye, New York, 1924, p. 278.

Dan, Rosalie's cousin; and Rosalie, Jules Bier's daughter. Mike, who feels that any pleasure harming no one is pure and good, is contrasted with Rosalie and with Dan's mother, both fierce Puritans. Mike's "harmless" creed is fatal for Rosalie, for after an unsatisfactory love affair with him she flees into the swamp; after suffering the pain of an imaginary childbirth, she dies of exposure. Rosalie's vision of her child, "covered with sores," that "became a tiny relic of ashes, which, when she touched it with one finger, collapsed," repeats Wescott's description of the barren midwestern Protestant church: the "flimsy structure with empty windows in hideous symmetry." (Apple, pp. 195, 14.)

Rosalie's Puritanism, then, is no better than Mike's paganism, since both destroy. Rosalie symbolically kills her unreal child, while Mike, in his affair with Rosalie, ignores the conflict between her sensuality and her Puritanism and drives her to suicide. But there is a further paradox. Mike is attracted initially to Rosalie because she reminds him of Dan; his keenest pleasure from the affair comes as he tells Dan about it. (Apple, p. 133.) The homosexual implication, which also occurs in Wescott's early poems and in some of the stories in Good-Bye Wisconsin, cannot be found in The Pilgrim Hawk and Apartment in Athens.

The third section of The Apple of the Eye, "Dan Alone," traces the adolescent Dan's initiation--his fear of life, his struggles to reconcile Puritanism with paganism, and his Oedipal relationship with his mother. Wescott has obviously been influenced by D. H. Lawrence's Sons and Lovers in both the style and subject matter of this section. The occasional use Lawrence makes of images of nature as harsh and brutal ("panting" flowers, "raw and coarse" perfume, the "fleshy throats"

and "dark, grasping hands" of the iris,¹⁴ becomes predominant in "Dan Alone." Dan's discovery of Rosalie's decomposing body in the swamp looses a flood of brutal, decaying nature images. The swamp becomes "an enormous grave, heaped with dead, everlasting flowers" and "a black land being consumed by fire--slime-green tongues, and fetid snakes in the shape of flowers." (Apple, pp. 259-260)

Wescott's extensive use of visual images to express Dan's horror is doubtless due to his earlier discipline as a poet. Years later Wescott was to lament that the "verse-trained" writer's prose is apt to be "too arresting, too conspicuously pictorial, too densely compressed, too euphonious, with effects of the music of the language." (Images, p. 16) In The Pilgrim Hawk and Apartment in Athens Wescott was still struggling to suppress the "pictorial" tendency that disrupts the narrative thread in his early prose.

Three years after The Apple of the Eye, Harpers published Wescott's second novel, The Grandmothers, and awarded it the 1927 Prize Novel Award. The novel, described by its author as a "family chronicle," is a novel of reminiscence. The point of view, like that of the last part of The Apple of the Eye, is that of an adolescent boy, a person for the young Wescott. But between the writing of the two novels Wescott has evidently been influenced by the experimental writing of the twenties which employed the time shift and the flash-back, for the novel weaves back and forth in time, treats several periods simultaneously, and, as Joseph Warren Beach points out, attempts the

¹⁴Sons and Lovers, 1963 edition, New York, pp. 293-294.

"deliberate interchanging of distinct planes."¹⁵

The literary device used is obvious but effective. Alwyn Tower, the fictional Wescott, turns the pages of an old family album, recalling or creating the lives of each of the dim figures as he does so. Each life ends in defeat by the land; the theme is reminiscent of Wescott's preoccupation with the dying American dream in his first novel. But in The Grandmothers Wescott's own relation--and that of the other expatriates--to that dream is more clearly defined.

Wescott, like Emerson and Whitman, saw the mystic beauty of America, but to the Wescott of 1927 it seemed that "the holiness was going out of the land."¹⁶ Wescott attributes to Puritanism--to midwestern Protestantism and its god of "resignation and forgiveness"--America's failure to fulfill her promise, to keep her holiness. There is a religious intensity in Alwyn Tower's avowal, in the conclusion of The Grandmothers, to make himself responsible for America's future; to succeed he must betray her. Wescott, through Tower, explains his role in the expatriate movement when he makes himself and the other children of "embittered hearths" the key to a new American dream. Those who understand its mystery must "betray their native land as a whole for love of some characteristically native land of their imagination." (The Grandmothers, p. 375) When Wescott eighteen years later in Apartment in Athens spiritually re-accepts his native land, the new vision that replaces the old is no longer a purely American dream,

¹⁵The Twentieth Century Novel: Studies in Technique, New York, 1932, p. 479.

¹⁶The Grandmothers, New York, 1927, p. 374.

but one which transcends national barriers and emphasizes individual moral responsibility. The tone of German irrational Gothicism is replaced, in his last two novels, by the classical Greek sense of balance and reason.

Wescott's collection of short stories, Good-Bye Wisconsin, continues the study of expatriation and of the vision of America's dying promise; but in these stories Wescott bypasses regionalism for the first time. Not only are characters drawn from other sections of America and from Europe, but the midwest itself is described as an "abstract nowhere," whose characteristics are broadened until "what seems Middle-Western is in the commonest way human."¹⁷ Already Wescott is moving beyond the concerns of the individual and his immediate environment toward the wider scope of his last novel.

In the first selection, "Good-Bye Wisconsin," which is closer to a sketch or an informal essay than to a story, Wescott predicts that American writing in the future will be that of "a reporter, an analyst, a diagnostician." For Wescott the late twenties and thirties were a period of transition for "an entire race," and thus required the "special sobriety of witnesses at a trial." It is significant that as early as 1928 he expresses the desire to achieve the dispassionate narrative--a desire that is partly realized in The Pilgrim Hawk but attained more completely in Apartment in Athens. The following passage from "Good-Bye Wisconsin" expresses more completely the style he wishes to attain--a style as graceful and as incapable of lost motion as

¹⁷Good-Bye Wisconsin, New York, 1928, p. 39.

semaphore:

For another book I should like to learn to write in a style like those gestures [semaphore]: without slang, with precise equivalents instead of idioms, a style of rapid grace for the eye rather than sonority for the ear, in accordance with the ebb and flow of sensation rather than with intellectual habits, and out of which myself, with my origins and my prejudices and my Wisconsin, will seem to have disappeared. (Good-Bye Wisconsin, p. 45)

But in spite of Wescott's desire to erase himself and Wisconsin from his prose, his next book, The Babe's Bed, a short story published in book form in 1930, has its setting in the midwest and uses the viewpoint of a sensitive young man, clearly another Wescott persona. The story of a poor midwestern family facing minor misfortunes is made the vehicle for a heavy load of shifting, unsatisfactory symbolism. If The Babe's Bed is Wescott's attempt to capture the "ebb and flow of sensation," as the above passages suggests, the attempt is a failure. The symbolic implications of the squirming baby, tied by his parents to his bed, fail as an attempt to link the expatriate with his heritage, becoming instead rather ridiculous as the young protagonist piles layer on layer of meaning.

In 1932 Wescott returned to the "intellectual habits" he disparages in "Good-Bye Wisconsin." With the publication of A Calendar of Saints for Unbelievers, a cryptic and cynical retelling of saints' lives, and Fear and Trembling, a collection of essays, Wescott's writing entered a new phase.

The more important of the two works, Fear and Trembling, grew out of a trip Wescott and several companions had made to resurgent Germany in August and September of 1931. The trip, plus Wescott's earlier travels in Germany, gave him a premature insight into the moral

implication of Nazism--an insight which permeates Apartment in Athens, written more than ten years later. In a letter to Lewis Gannet of Harpers, which was published before the appearance of Fear and Trembling, Wescott wrote that "either the good natured ones were quite helpless, or they were hopeless fools."¹⁸ The good natured but helpless character Helianos clearly existed in germinal form for fourteen years before his appearance in Apartment in Athens.

Fear and Trembling enabled Wescott to re-accept society, even that of the midwest, from which he had been attempting to flee for ten years. In the face of a greater problem, the new values being formulated in Germany in the 1930's, Wescott's love-loathing of America became a thing of the past. From 1932 his voice is no longer that of an expatriate, but that of a citizen-prophet and a representative of traditional western ideals. Words which had no meaning for him in the twenties--"honor," "loyalty," and "sacrifice"--began to assume new value in the troubled thirties.

Perhaps if Wescott had fictionalized the gnawing fears he felt in prewar Germany, as he had the trauma of rejecting Wisconsin, his prose might never have taken the direction it does in The Pilgrim Hawk and Apartment in Athens. The change to the essay form in Fear and Trembling allowed him to resolve with greater clarity inner conflicts which had given his earlier work, especially A Calendar of Saints for Unbelievers and The Babe's Bed, its confused shifts in symbolic implication and in basic meaning.

¹⁸Quoted by Sy M. Kahn, unpublished dissertation, 1957.

But for all its impact on Wescott's later fiction, Fear and Trembling suffers from a lack of control and order. Critical reception was generally unfavorable, with most critics in effect suggesting that Wescott return to his "ivory tower"--to his art-for-art's sake attitude. But the book's diffused, fragmentary quality is at least partly due to Wescott's searching looks at the problem which every major writer of the twenties and thirties faced: the establishment of values to replace those the first world war had destroyed. Although Fear and Trembling covers a vast range of topics--world unity, nationalism, birth control, the status of Russia, the failure of democracy and of Christianity--its enduring quality lies in its diagnosis of a period of transition and in Wescott's discussion of the problems the transition brought to literature.

His diagnosis of the writer's problem in the twenties is acute. Hemingway's The Sun Also Rises demonstrates the truth of Wescott's diagnosis, for it is one of many novels of the twenties which discards traditional values, replacing them with an individual code. Wescott describes the dilemma of the expatriates so accurately in Fear and Trembling that I will quote at length:

He [the postwar writer] has no creed, no church, nothing in the way of morality but tolerance, no political party, no relation to his state but a more or less troubled patriotic lyricism, or upon occasion, the reverse; nothing which connects him with the grave work the world has to do but a vague worldliness There is no one to tell him; perhaps no one knows. The various powers that once seemed worth dying for (he is likely to feel) are little more than established compromises, getting ugly in their old age. . . . The chances are also that he is a gentle soul; just as burning passion has been bred out of him, while sensibility and talent were being bred in, so also convictions that burn quite by themselves are not included in his endowment as a rule. . . . He . . . must not only make up his mind anew and alone about almost

everything, but perfect and get into circulation a practically new vocabulary--and still find strength to . . . preach his revolution or reformation or return to classic principles,¹⁹ or whatever else, dimly or gloriously, has been revealed to him.

Wescott recognizes in this passage two of the dominant characteristics of creative figures in the twenties and early thirties: the sense of isolation and the need to find a new approach to the problems of the age. The experimental writing of Stein, Joyce, and Dos Passos, as well as the distortion in painting and the dissonance in music, are logical expressions of the distrust, in the twenties, of the old traditional approach.

But in the closing lines of the passage quoted above, Wescott reveals the doctrine that will replace, in Apartment in Athens, his sense of alienation from society. That doctrine is a "return to classic principles." Nowhere in Fear and Trembling does Wescott make clear just what he means by classic principles, but in Images of Truth, published thirty years later, his discussion of the "functional" novel uses the episode of the questioning of Tiresias in The Odyssey as its springboard. Wescott uses the episode in which the ghost Tiresias tells Odysseus how to get back home to Ithaca as an illustration of the kind of literature which has "meant more and more to us as the centuries have passed." (Images, p. 20) Wescott is clearly referring to his concept of "classic principles" when he defines enduring fiction as that which "must be adaptable to, and serviceable in, people's lives as they lead them day in and day out." (Images, p. 21) Enduring fiction, then, must dramatize the particular without losing sight of the universal;

¹⁹Fear and Trembling, New York, 1932, pp. 225-227.

it must concern itself with a moral implication that does not become dated; it must, like Tiresias' message to Odysseus, teach its readers how to get back home.

Wescott's tentative acknowledgement of classic principles in Fear and Trembling marks the end of his thematic use of his adolescent years and his traumatic rejection of the midwest as being too highly personalized to be of lasting value. The themes with which he is concerned in The Pilgrim Hawk and Apartment in Athens are classic themes; in the former, the power of love, and in the latter, the power of an individual to expand when confronted with an abstract, terrifying force.

Fear and Trembling also marks the end of Wescott's early prolificacy and of his expatriation, for in 1933, discouraged by the slow sale and poor critical reception of the book and indebted to Harpers for advance royalties, he returned to America. Seven years passed before The Pilgrim Hawk appeared and during those seven years Wescott published only three articles and two leaflets for art galleries.

But in The Pilgrim Hawk (1940) Wescott demonstrates an artistic concentration which none of his Wisconsin collections possesses. The classic unities of time, place, and theme are rigidly adhered to; the action centers on one household, on a single day, from the point of view of the narrator, an American named Tower--the name given the central figure of The Grandmothers thirteen years before. In place of the lyric omniscient author of his earlier works Wescott confines himself to the detached view of his narrator, thereby achieving the journalistic dispassion he had deemed necessary in "Good-Bye Wisconsin."

The characters, like the narrative approach, differ sharply from those of the Wisconsin prose. The American narrator's tale concerns an

Irish couple, an Italian chauffeur, a French couple, and an English girl--quite an international assortment. The action, organized around the pilgrim hawk as a characterizing symbol, is deceptively simple. Mrs. Cullen, the owner of the hawk, loves her husband, but it seems to him that her love for the hawk is replacing him. He releases the bird, but Mrs. Cullen recaptures it and the couple abruptly leave the English girl's home. In the car, Cullen threatens his wife with a pistol, but she manages to take the gun from him and, returning to the house, throws it into a lake. Mrs. Cullen is calm about the incident and relates it to the hawk's bating, or frantically trying to free itself from its perch on her arm.

The hawk, sometimes as ambiguous as Melville's white whale, symbolizes many human characteristics--greed, lust, courage, rebellion, and fear--but its central implication is that of the responsibility of love. Mr. and Mrs. Cullen's relationship is symbolically indicated by the hawk strapped to Mrs. Cullen's wrist: "When love has given satisfaction, then you discover how large a part of the rest of life is only payment for it, installment after installment."²⁰

But Wescott, through his narrator, stresses the worth of love in spite of its cost and in doing so goes beyond the sense of isolation found in his novels of the twenties. His defense, in The Pilgrim Hawk, of love's enduring power marks, in fact, the author's re-acceptance of traditional values, a re-acceptance that is broadened and intensified in Apartment in Athens.

²⁰The Pilgrim Hawk, in Six Great Modern Short Novels, New York, 1962, p. 310.

Seventeen years after the publication of Apartment in Athens, which will be discussed in the following chapters, Wescott's last full-length work, Images of Truth (1962), was published.²¹ Images of Truth consists of eight rather informal critical essays, five of which had previously been published. Since it outlines Wescott's most recent critical views on literature, it offers a useful source for tracing his development as a critic and for noting influences on Apartment in Athens.

Wescott's interest in critical writing has paralleled his creative work since 1921. During that year, at the age of twenty, he reviewed six volumes of poetry in the magazine Poetry; between 1921 and 1930 his reviews and criticism were unevenly divided between poetry and prose, four articles concerned with poetry and ten with prose. During the thirties Wescott published only two brief critical articles, but in the forties nine appeared, among them the frequently anthologized "The Moral of F. Scott Fitzgerald," (1941) and reviews of Maugham's The Razor's Edge and Porter's The Leaning Tower in 1944. Since his admiration for both W. Somerset Maugham and Katherine Anne Porter began prior to the writing of Apartment in Athens and has continued, it seems likely that Wescott's last novel was influenced to some degree by either or both.

In Images of Truth, in which Wescott discusses the work of Thomas Mann, Isak Dinesen, Thornton Wilder, Colette, Somerset Maugham, and Katherine Anne Porter, the author describes his long friendship with and great admiration of Miss Porter. He further notes, in what seems to me an extension of his own view in Apartment in Athens, that Miss Porter,

²¹In 1954 Wescott's translation of Aesop's Fables was published by The Museum of Modern Art.

in "The Leaning Tower," saw the "dangerousness" of the Germans and that she understood "how risky it was to fear them or, on the other hand, to be simply prejudiced against them." (Images, p. 32) Like Apartment in Athens "The Leaning Tower" was written during the war. Wescott points out Miss Porter's awareness of the "aesthetic pitfall of propagandizing in any sense"; he clearly shared this awareness, even though critic Diana Trilling accused Wescott of making Apartment in Athens a "propaganda novel."²²

Later in his essay on Miss Porter Wescott defines "Pale Horse, Pale Rider" as a "unique record of the modern curse and ailment, horror of the Germans." (Images, p. 38) There can be no doubt that Apartment in Athens suffers from that same ailment, but Wescott's novel keeps an aesthetic distance from the disease that brings objectivity and that enables him to define a further ill. That ill is described by Wescott, in his discussion of "Noon Wine," as a "reminder of how evil may come of resistance to evil." (Images, p. 40) Although Miss Porter achieves this reminder in the frontier setting of "Noon Wine," it remained for Wescott to achieve it in relation to war.

Although Wescott's admiration of Miss Porter's objective, non-editorializing approach to literature has doubtlessly influenced Apartment in Athens, Somerset Maugham's Christmas Holiday (1939) has exerted, I believe, a more direct influence. At the outset of his discussion of the book, Wescott notes its "sociological and political" theme and admits that of all Maugham's novels Christmas Holiday "has meant most to me personally." (Images, p. 71)

²²"Mr. Wescott's War Work," Nation, CLX (1945), p. 313.

The story--that of an English boy, vacationing in Paris, who visits an old friend and through him meets a Russian prostitute who reveals that she is the wife of a murderer--explains, according to Wescott, "more of the human basis of fascism and nazism and communism than anything else has done." (Images, p. 71) Wescott's reading of the novel makes the English boy's dazed reaction to his friend's fascist beliefs symbolic of the entire western world, while the prostitute's fascination for her brutal husband demonstrates the appeal power holds for the powerless.

Wescott's receptivity to the idea of Christmas Holiday as a political allegory based on the "human equation," (Images, p. 73) coupled with his admiration for Maugham's work and his friendship with Maugham, is, I believe, the impetus behind Apartment in Athens--Wescott's last and most ambitious novel, his only non-self-explanatory novel, and his most misinterpreted novel.

CHAPTER III

APARTMENT IN ATHENS AS AN AMERICAN WAR NOVEL

Apartment in Athens is similar to three other important American war novels--Hersey's A Bell for Adano and The Wall and Steinbeck's The Moon Is Down--in that all four novels are didactic in tone. The "message" of each is different, but each approaches serious moral and social problems through the interaction of individual characters and each concentrates on a single theme rather than attempting to indicate the complexity of war experiences, as do Burns' The Gallery and Shaw's The Young Lions. There is, of course, an element of didacticism in all war fiction that attempts to make understandable the heightened intensity of life in war, since the pleasure principle is at low ebb in any novel that attempts to deal with global disaster--except for novels like Heggen's Mr. Roberts and Heller's Catch-22 that use war as a backdrop for the lighter side of man's existence.

The four novels listed above, however, center the action of the characters around the single issue involved. The Wall deals with the courage of the human spirit when faced with destruction; A Bell for Adano, with the impact of simple human kindness on a conquered people; and The Moon Is Down, with the capacity for good as well as evil in both aggressor and defender. The didactics of Apartment in Athens focus on the moral evil of totalitarianism and on the initial impotence of western man to understand or combat that evil, yet the didacticism is clothed

in such a simple narrative that the novel becomes a modern myth.

Apartment in Athens, however, is one of the lesser known war novels. Despite the fact that it was a Book-of-the-Month Club selection and received favorable reviews from Edmund Wilson, Eudora Welty, and Katherine Anne Porter, Apartment in Athens did not enjoy the popularity of Mailer's The Naked and the Dead, which had sold over 85,000 copies by 1948, and Heym's The Crusaders, which had sold over 70,000 copies and was entering its fourth printing in 1948.¹

The Naked and the Dead and The Crusaders are only two of the successful World War II novels written during and immediately after the war. A Publishers' Weekly survey in 1948 revealed that 270 novels whose central theme was World War II had already been published, and every year since the number has grown. Relatively few have received critical acclaim, however. Among the war novels that were generally well reviewed are Hayes' All Thy Conquests, Burns' The Gallery, Brown's A Walk in the Sun, Heym's Hostages, Cobb's The Gesture, Brooks' The Brick Foxhole, Bourjailly's The End of My Life, Shaw's The Young Lions, Mailer's The Naked and the Dead, Cozzens' Guard of Honor, Jones' From Here to Eternity, Heller's Catch-22, Hawkes' The Cannibal, Hersey's A Bell for Adano and The Wall, and Berger's Crazy in Berlin.²

Even in a selected list of the better war fiction there is little common ground for discussion, for the novels differ greatly in style,

¹"The Novels of the Second World War," Publishers' Weekly, CLIV (1948), 1802-1808.

²"The Novels of the Second World War," 1803-4.

scope, theme, and degree of optimism or pessimism. Styles range from the naturalism of The Naked and the Dead to the surrealism of The Cannibal; scope ranges from the single protagonist of A Bell for Adano to the use of the Jewish race as protagonists in The Wall. Themes include the bitter antagonism between officers and men in The Gesture, the grotesque blending of the two world wars in The Cannibal, and the racial prejudice of A Walk in the Sun. The degree of optimism varies from the sense of futility and despair found in From Here to Eternity, The Cannibal, and The Naked and the Dead to the tone of limited optimism of The Gallery, A Bell for Adano, Guard of Honor, The Gesture, and Apartment in Athens.

But few of the "best" war novels, as classified in Spiller's Literary History of the United States, project an optimistic tone. The prevailing literary approach of these novels--The Gallery, The Naked and the Dead, The Cannibal, From Here to Eternity, Crazy in Berlin, Guard of Honor, and Catch-22--³ is journalistic naturalism and a more or less ironic sense of futility inherited from the novels of the First World War, novels like A Farewell to Arms, Three Soldiers, and The Enormous Room. The novels are alike, too, in their attempt to capture the complexity of war experiences by focusing on a number of characters. Burns' The Gallery is less a novel, in fact, than a series of character sketches, and Hersey's widely-acclaimed The Wall treats an entire race as protagonist.

In addition, most of the best war novels are concerned with the impact of war experiences on personalities and on personal relationships

³Literary History, revised ed, New York, 1953, p. 1419.

rather than on ideological conflicts; this concern is the outgrowth of the fact that many of them, like the vivid and powerful The Naked and the Dead and From Here to Eternity, are highly autobiographical and the direct result of their authors' war experiences.

Frequently, however, the fictionalizing of personal war experience leads to a diffused and fragmentary quality, the quality of life itself. Few of the better war novels achieve what Joseph Remenzi calls a "psychology aesthetically made authentic." The more journalistic approach often fails to render war as memorably or meaningfully as the creative approach, for closeness to the scene of action interferes with the "perspective of expression." Even if there is an aesthetic distance between the writer and his subject, as there is in the more didactic war novels like A Bell for Adano, The Moon Is Down, and Apartment in Athens, there is sometimes a failure to assimilate the didactic.⁴

In general, however, the more highly praised war novels are those which use a conversational and naturalistic means of creating intense reality rather than those which maintain a creative distance from their subject and achieve artistic form. The illusion of reality in a universal experience like global war is evidently looked for by readers and critics alike, even if the illusion is achieved at the expense of the art form; the extreme popularity of journalistic accounts like Ernie Pyle's Here Is Your War (1943) and Brave Men (1945), both best sellers, shows how eagerly the public desired first-hand information about the

⁴"The Psychology of War Literature," Sewanee Review, LII, (1947) 138, 139.

war.⁵

War reporting, in fact, clearly contributed to the tendency of fiction of World War II to use the colloquial, conversational, and journalistic style. But part of the popularity of war fiction was due to the public's greater sense of involvement in the war, an involvement shared by participants and non-participants. The issues at stake were clearer than had been those of World War I, and much of the sense of involvement stemmed from a belief that the evil that must be destroyed made necessary the evil of war. Few novelists of World War II gave war the complete condemnation found in A Farewell to Arms and The Enormous Room and, significantly enough, fiction of World War I was far less popular than that of World War II.⁶

Despite their popularity many critics voice wholesale rejection of Second World War novels. Robie Macauley, in "Fiction of the Forties," finds World War II fiction inferior to that of World War I, flatly concluding that it is "only the second-best writers who have tried to recreate some experiences of the Second World War."⁷ Robert C. Healy, in an essay in Fifty Years of the American Novel, notes that the efforts of the war novelists "have added little to the body of permanent American literature," although he stresses the fact that World War II novelists were faced with an "immensity" of material that made treatment difficult.⁸

⁵Golden Multitudes, p. 315.

⁶"Novels of The Second World War, Publishers' Weekly, 1802.

⁷Western Review, XVI (1951), 66.

⁸"A Bunch of Dispossessed," Fifty Years of the American Novel: A Christian Appraisal, ed. Harold C. Gardiner, New York, 1951, p. 271.

One of the earliest studies on the effect of war on literary movements, John W. Aldridge's After the Lost Generation, also stresses the greater merit of World War I fiction. Aldridge contends that World War II fiction is primarily an extension of the literary traditions of World War I, primarily the traditions begun by Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and Dos Passos.⁹ Aldridge goes on to point out four ways in which World War II novelists seek to move beyond the tradition: (1) by asserting the need for belief--a "false note of courage," (2) by escaping into journalism, (3) by seeking new subject matter, such as homosexuality and racial conflict, and (4) by concentrating on pure technique--on elaborating the "manner of saying."¹⁰

But what Aldridge calls a "false note of courage" characterizes so many novels of the forties and fifties, including Hemingway's For Whom the Bell Tolls and Wescott's Apartment in Athens, that it deserves a more optimistic treatment. The attitude toward war found in Hemingway's A Farewell to Arms, one of the most influential novels to grow out of World War I, is very different from that of For Whom the Bell Tolls. Though the latter is concerned with the Spanish Civil War rather than global war, it is one of the first American novels to recognize the growing fascist threat and thus is directly related to World War II.

It is significant that Hemingway's epigraph to For Whom the Bell Tolls, the passage from Donne beginning "No man is an Island," stresses man's involvement with mankind, while in A Farewell to Arms Frederic

⁹Malcolm Cowley makes the same point in "War Novels: After Two Wars," The Literary Situation, New York, 1954, p. 314.

¹⁰After the Lost Generation: A Critical Study of the Writers of Two Wars, New York, 1959, pp. 90-91.

Henry turns away from the greater involvement of his role in the war to a personal relationship, only to have it too end tragically. Robert Jordan's involvement, in the later novel, means sacrifice--one of the words that had embarrassed Frederic Henry--but the sacrifice of Jordan's life has meaning, a meaning that the protagonist of A Farewell to Arms is unable to recognize, for death is as meaningless as life for Frederic Henry. Jordan's commitment, however, is as valid at the point of death as it had been during the days of fighting: "I have fought for what I believed in for a year now. If we win here we will win everywhere. The world is a fine place and worth the fighting for and I hate very much to leave it."¹¹

Robert Jordan's affirmation is repeated in many novels of World War II, novels which, like Apartment in Athens, reject the negativism of A Farewell to Arms, The Enormous Room, and Three Soldiers. But A Farewell to Arms is a far more important novel than For Whom the Bell Tolls, in spite of that novel's affirmation, for a novel should be judged in terms of its aesthetic worth. A Farewell to Arms creates its own life, forming an aesthetically satisfying whole, while For Whom the Bell Tolls remains too much a social history of the Spanish Civil War rather than a unified art form.

The temptation to treat fiction in terms of its contents apart from its form is much greater when dealing with war fiction, doubtless because of the universality and the intensity of the subject-matter

¹¹For Whom the Bell Tolls, New York, 1940, p. 467.

itself.¹² But a piece of literature cannot be treated as a "social document," according to William Van O'Connor, without first being considered as an "esthetic object." Even if the illusion of life the artist creates is intense, O'Connor feels, no novel can actually be a document of any event, since the writer of a work of art distorts for his own aesthetic purposes.¹³ Yet noted critics like Malcolm Cowley frequently separate form from content; Cowley defines the World War II novels based on their authors' experiences as a "collaborative history of World War II as seen by the fighting men."¹⁴

A work of art, however, is unlike life. It creates an illusion of life that, if successful, is more intense than life itself, but in order to do so it must establish an aesthetic distance and a sense of form. The more romantic and autobiographical novels of World War II fail to achieve this distance and form, but owe their appeal to the vivid narration of a series of events. Apartment in Athens forms an aesthetically satisfying whole that, while lacking the intensity of Jones' and Mailer's naturalism, maintains a creative distance that suggests more than verisimilitude.

Apartment in Athens is also noteworthy among World War II fiction for the timelessness of its prose style. Wescott's deliberate

¹²The failure of war novelists like Jones and Mailer to write significant novels outside the theme of war perhaps demonstrates their failure to assimilate the craft of fiction.

¹³"The Novel as a Social Document," American Quarterly, IV (1952), 173.

¹⁴The Literary Situation, New York, 1954, p. 311.

rejection of contemporary idioms, slang, and colloquialisms in favor of a classic simplicity of language and a restrained use of symbolism causes the book to be as contemporary today as it was in 1945; the repetitive use of the coarse speech of the fighting man stands the test of time less successfully.

But Apartment in Athens' primary significance as a war novel is its treatment, within the framework of a completely executed aesthetic pattern, of the complex of war in terms of a rigidly limited political allegory. The "enemy" in the majority of war fiction is either non-existent, or some nebulous frightening force, rarely defined in terms of individual character and personality, or a member, frequently an officer, of the American forces. But the significance of Major Kalter is not that he is a German Nazi, but that he dramatizes so accurately the totalitarian instinct. And because that instinct has such a compelling attraction for contemporary man as he searches for his identity and his relation to the universe, and because Wescott dramatizes the moral as well as the political implications of that instinct, Apartment in Athens is lifted above the political allegory into the realm of the myth.

CHAPTER IV

APARTMENT IN ATHENS: NARRATIVE, ALLEGORY, AND MYTH

Apartment in Athens contains three different levels of implication--the war narrative of Greek occupation, the political allegory, and the myth. On each of these levels the novel can successfully be given what William Van O'Connor calls the necessary consideration as an "esthetic object," rather than consideration as a social document of an event or a series of events. There is an underlying sense of wholeness in the narrative that is absent in a great deal of war fiction, especially that which has been created from the author's own experience. Apartment in Athens concentrates throughout on the inter-relationship of Mr. and Mrs. Helianos and Major Kalter; the principal place of action, the Helianos apartment, is left on only two brief occasions; and the lapse of time is only a little over six months. Wescott uses a Jamesian point of view which resembles that of The Golden Bowl, in which James limits the view to that of the Prince in the first half, and to that of the Princess in the second. Mr. Helianos' view controls the first ten chapters, and Mrs. Helianos', the last eight.

Although the novel may validly be criticized on aesthetic grounds--such as the contention made by several critics that Wescott's didactics are at times too thinly veiled--the charge made by R. P. Davis and Marjorie Bruce that the Helianos lack convincing Greekness is applicable only on the purely narrative level, for beyond this level

the Helianos become representative of western man. Even at the narrative level, however, the charge assumes that Wescott is writing a social document intended to portray Greek types accurately, rather than creating a work of art in which distortion is necessary to achieve the desired effect.

On the narrative level the novel is rigidly limited to the effects on a Greek family of sharing their apartment with a German officer. There is a rarefied air in the Helianos apartment in Athens. The reader is closed within its walls and is seldom reminded that the apartment is located in the heart of a busy Greek city. The strangely stultifying atmosphere is the first indication that the novel is no simple take of its five inhabitants: Kalter, the Nazi quartermaster captain; Mr. and Mrs. Helianos; and their two weak and abnormal children, Leda and Alexander. Kalter's occupation of the apartment forces the middle-aged Helianoses to share a narrow folding cot in the kitchen, to give up their sitting room, and to use the public bath.

Kalter, a silent, tight-lipped German, inflicts insidiously demeaning activities on the Helianos and their children. They must remove his boots; answer his midnight calls for the chamber pot; and deliver his leftover food, while they are starving, to the bull-terrier pet of another officer, Major von Roesch. They are bullied, harangued, and despised, but never physically harmed, with the exception of the adolescent Alex, who is accused by Kalter and von Roesch of eating the dog's food and is beaten by both men.

At night Mr. and Mrs. Helianos cling to one another on their narrow cot, renewing in their shared misfortune the closeness of their youth, and pour out their shame and humiliation to one another--shame

at their pitiful daughter Leda, who, almost completely silent since she had witnessed Nazi soldiers machine-gun Greek citizens in the street, nevertheless coquettishly adores Captain Kalter; shame at the impotent hate in their son Alex, a hatred for the Germans brought by the death of his older brother Cimon at the battle of Mount Olympus; and shame at their inability to love their children, stunted by war. Their humiliation stems as much from their awareness of the triviality and lack of honor of their suffering as from the needless degradation to which Kalter subjects them.

But Kalter's two-week absence from the apartment worsens the situation. Mrs. Helianos, a hypochondriac who has a very real heart condition, complains so bitterly during the captain's absence that the closeness brought to the Helianoses by their common tragedy is almost lost. Kalter's absence makes the aimless existence of their stunted children even more depressing, and Helianos' optimistic unwillingness to condemn Kalter and the German forces becomes a point of contention.

Kalter returns from his leave in Germany a different personality, however. Now a major, he at first seems unaware of the Helianoses, omitting his midnight demands and his bitter complaints. He then makes tentative friendly gestures; Mrs. Helianos is bewildered, then frightened by the change, for she has come to need the major's invectives to gauge her effectiveness in performing her duties. Helianos, on the other hand, accepts the change, becomes Kalter's listening companion, and joins him in nightly sessions during which Kalter expounds German philosophy. Mrs. Helianos, huddled in a closet in the adjoining room, listens during Kalter's passionate outpourings. Mr. Helianos' reaction to her secret vigil typifies their relationship: "Dear comforting though

exasperating presence; love in the wainscoting . . . the secret of a good old marriage like theirs, symbolized, he said to himself, in his fanciful humor."¹

On a night in early summer, 1943, over six months after Kalter's move into the apartment, Helianos makes a fatal error, and, significantly enough, Mrs. Helianos is not at her post in the closet. When Kalter reveals that his wife and two sons have been killed as a result of the war, Helianos, in a burst of sympathy, responds: "'Is it not intolerable? To think that two men, two men [Hitler and Mussolini] with too much power, fatal tragic men, should have brought all this tragedy upon us other men?'" (p. 131)

The remark enrages Kalter and eventually costs Helianos his life. Kalter's abrupt reversal comes as a result of two underlying factors: anger that he has placed himself in a position in which Helianos dares to offer him sympathy, and unwavering loyalty to the Nazi cause. Helianos is imprisoned and, on the strength of Kalter's suicide note, is tortured and shot as Kalter's murderer, despite the fact that he had been imprisoned eight days before Kalter's death. Although Kalter's note implicates the entire Helianos family, Major von Roesch intervenes in behalf of Mrs. Helianos and the children in the hopes that he will be able to use Mrs. Helianos as an informer against the resistance movement, in which other members of the Helianos family, Demos and Petros, are active. At the conclusion of the novel Mrs. Helianos has given permission for Alex to join the Greek resistance and

¹Apartment in Athens, New York, 1945, p. 103. Further references are from this edition and are in the text.

and plans to betray Major von Roesch with false information.

On the narrative level the book is structurally unified, with every action leading to Kalter's death, which precipitates Helianos' execution and Mrs. Helianos' self-discovery. But the novel is weakened by the initial lack of strong protagonists. Helianos is a weak and ineffectual man; Mrs. Helianos, a whining, selfish woman; and Alex and Leda, so abnormal due to the effects of war that to the reader the militant self-assurance of Major Kalter seems preferable. It is this initial lack of strength that makes critic C. E. Schorer find the characters unconvincing.² Although the characters are carefully drawn, their weakness and lack of determination are emphasized, and therefore no strong initial conflict is set up.

But if the lack of an initial conflict between "good" and "evil" weakens the reader's interest in the Helianoses' fate, it also creates a more valid opposition of values in terms of political allegory. Major Kalter represents, in the allegory, the moral implications of Nazism and the totalitarian ideology; Mr. Helianos, liberal and confused western man who attempts to understand and communicate with the Nazis. The western world's indecision at the Munich fiasco and at the invasion of Czechoslovakia is dramatized in Helianos' ineffectuality. Alex and Leda are individual children, but types as well. Wescott draws on a tradition of the Greek tragic theater when he suggests through their individual characteristics the devastation inflicted on human innocents by terror

²"The Maturing of Glenway Wescott," College English, XVIII (1957), 325.

and oppression, just as Sophocles' Antigone is an individual whose responses are stylized enough to link them with universal responses.

Mrs. Helianos allegorizes the awakening western awareness of the polarity between traditional values, rooted in Greek rationalism, and the disregard for individual man and for immediate reality, rooted in Gothic irrationalism, which characterizes the Nazi as well as the Stalinist and Chinese communist. In the eight chapters presented from her viewpoint, Mrs. Helianos slowly attains a calm strength symbolic of western everyman's growing sense of discovery and anger.

Anger toward the enemy is a typical by-product of war, but Mrs. Helianos' quiet rage, coming as it does after Helianos' imprisonment but before his death, is staged at a kitchen window which looks out on the Acropolis and is heightened in intensity until it reaches the scope of the myth. The allusions to the Furies (p. 142), to the beauty of the Parthenon (pp. 144-145), and to the Nazi attempt to become godlike (p. 150) fuse to form an impression of Mrs. Helianos' drawing her new-found strength from ancient Greek tradition. But Mrs. Helianos then deliberately turns her back on those traditions to live in the actuality of the present--not in Helianos' remembrance of the past nor in Kalter's vision of the future.

Mrs. Helianos learns to accept moral responsibility--a responsibility denied by totalitarian ideology--for her acts, but it is the threat posed by totalitarianism that awakens in her the sense of responsibility. Without Kalter's presence in the apartment Mrs. Helianos would have remained a selfish woman. Wescott's recognition of paired relationships--strength and weakness, vision and memory, acceptance and rejection, good and evil--weaves the novel into a remarkably intricate

pattern. Mr. and Mrs. Helianos' weakness makes possible Kalter's strength; Kalter's vision is coupled with Helianos' memory of the beauty of ancient Greece; Leda's complete acceptance of Kalter's presence opposes Alex's complete rejection of him, yet the two children are inseparable; and Mrs. Helianos' strength is the direct result of Kalter's evil.

Wescott broadens the significance of both the political and the mythical levels of the novel through the names he gives his characters. The name "Helianos" is linked to Hellas, or ancient Greece, and to the Greek word "helios," which means "sun" and to the sun god Helios, who was believed to see and hear everything and to be philosophical, sedentary, and conciliatory; Helianos, credited with "seeing both sides of a thing," (p. 2) fits the description. There is perhaps the added implication of the Greek word "nosos" (disease), especially since the interplay would set the "diseased, conciliatory warmth" of Helianos as the antithesis of Kalter, from the German word "kalte," which means "cold" or "indifferent." The juxtaposition of "sun" and "disease" may also be related to Mrs. Helianos' revelation of Kalter's radical evil as she suffers a mild sunstroke while at her kitchen window, intent upon the Parthenon.

Cimon, the Helianos' older son, killed at the battle of Mount Olympus in 1941, bears the name of a famed Athenian statesman and general, while Demos and Petros, members of the Helianos family active in the underground, are derived from the Greek word "demos" (the common people) and the Greek word "petra" (rock). Fittingly enough, Demos finds the courage to pretend to be a Nazi sympathizer while secretly working for

the resistance and Petros, the leader of the movement, is the character to whom the widowed Mrs. Helianos intrusts her son.

Wescott's most convincing and frightening character, however, is Kalter. Hannah Arendt's well-documented history of antisemitism, imperialism, and totalitarianism, The Origins of Totalitarianism (1958), traces the characteristics of the two primary movements toward world domination: Nazism (National Socialism) and Communism. Miss Arendt stresses the distinction between totalitarian motives and those of dictatorships, asserting that in twentieth century totalitarianism a new force was born, one based on replacing man's ever-present desire to achieve immortality with a belief that the movement possesses that deathlessness.³ Kalter, in one of his passionate speeches to the silent Helianos, attempts to explain that belief:

"So few modern people have any sense of ultimate future, of life after they die. Still, in this life, hardships have to be endured, and virtue has to be exercised. . . . Self-sacrifice is good, in fact it is necessary, anyway it cannot be avoided; and what is the recompense? Only we . . . have something else, to take heaven's place. . . . Although he [the German] dies, no matter; he lives in his . . . kind. What if one man is imperfect, still there is the type; and sooner or later the type will come to perfection." (pp. 119-120)

Each individual thus becomes like a cell in a giant body--constantly dying and being replaced--while the body itself continues to function. Kalter coldly takes his own life believing in that giant.

His suicide does not occur because of grief for his dead family, but because that grief will not allow him to function effectively as

³The Origins of Totalitarianism, rev. ed., 1958, p. 419.

part of the Nazi movement.⁴ His lapse into despondency at the loss of his family is, as his suicide note indicates, a moral failing: "I am unfit for the responsibility I bear as an officer, I pass judgment, I sentence myself to be shot, I shoot." (p. 180)

Although Kalter takes his own life, the last line of his suicide note expresses his "faith in the superior will and supreme destiny of the German people." (p. 181) That destiny is, of course, world rule--in Kalter's words, the formation of "a Utopia . . . everything new, everything creative!" (p. 110) Kalter's idealistic vision, with its irrational Gothic rejection of immediate reality, is nevertheless too sophisticated to be a racist vision. For him, "all the talk about race, Aryan and otherwise . . . is an effective point to make in propaganda, but it is all relative and imaginary." (pp. 117-118) Rather than racism, Kalter believes in human omnipotence:

"To be a German is simply the way we live; it is love of government and orderliness, for one thing, and confidence in ourselves and in each other. Above all, it is a role in history, and a preparation for our role; it is an education and a belief. It is the hope . . . that one day at last the world will be well-governed." (p. 118)

Kalter's mystic vision of the future, his passionate belief in human omnipotence, gives him a strength against which the Helianoses are powerless. But Kalter's dream for the future is so intoxicating that there is no place in it for the present and the real. Human life,

⁴Wescott uses the German people as an equation for Nazism; Miss Arendt notes that Nazism veiled itself in nationalism and racism; communism, in the class struggle. The Origins of Totalitarianism, pp. 366, 386.

even his own, becomes superfluous.

It is this abstraction of values--an abstraction in which the dream has more reality than the waking--that Mrs. Helianos is jarred into recognizing at Kalter's death. In the distortion she sees radical evil. And with the knowledge and the accompanying anger, she feels herself "lifted up above who she was and what she was." (p. 183) In spite of her recognition that she owes to the Germans her individual capacity to expand, to exchange her "circumscribed, stagnant passive existence" (p. 184) for self-knowledge and a "new heart," (p. 183) she refuses to be grateful to them for her new strength, for she feels that "to admit that a good thing has derived from an evil thing is to bend the knee to evil to some extent." (p. 184) Instead she mentally thanks Helianos, and in doing so admits that she at last comprehends the meaning which ancient Greece has had for him.

For Helianos the beauty of ancient Greek culture, as epitomized in the temple of Athena, was its "human character," its sense of proportion:

"They made it to fit us," he said, "the way a chair or a bed fits when one is tired. The way a man's embrace fits the soft woman he is embracing; do you remember, when we were young? The way a mother's arm fits her child's weakness, and her breast fits the greedy mouth; do you remember, when the children were babies?" (p. 144)

The man-oriented beauty of the temple of Athena is the antithesis of the narrow folding cot in the kitchen, which Kalter's occupation of their bedroom forces the middle-aged Helianos to share. The cot becomes the characterizing symbol of the novel's action. It is linked to the bed of Procrustes, the giant of Greek myth who seized travelers and forced them to fit his bed:

She [Mrs. Helianos] told them [Leda and Alexander] about the bed of the brigand of Eleusis, Procrustes; how, when it was a tall traveler who lay on it he cut his legs off, when it was a short traveler he stretched them, so that it was a perfect fit for all who came, willy-nilly. She said that it was her own folding cot there in the kitchen which reminded her of this. She and their father were so uncomfortable together on it that she was afraid they might wake up one morning and find themselves misshapen forever. (p. 210)

The Procrustean bed has come to represent the desire to force conformity at any cost; it is therefore a fitting symbol for the totalitarian ideology as well as for the desperate clinging to life of a conquered and powerless people.

But before Kalter's suicide Mrs. Helianos turns away from the man-centered Greek culture with its "tumbledown temples, dead religion, obscure dramaturgy, foolishness and cruelty of myth" and numbly contends that "her Hellas [is] contemporary Athens." (p. 151) Only the shock and anger at Kalter's mutilated body can sharpen the distinction in her mind between Helianos' man-oriented Hellas and Kalter's man-ignoring Utopian Reich.

Three years before Apartment in Athens appeared Wescott summarized his political and moral philosophy in a single sentence: "I do not believe in falsification of facts for any purpose whatsoever, nor in the least infringement of individual morality today for the sake of imaginary general benefit tomorrow."⁵

Wescott's didactic intent throughout Apartment in Athens is revealed in this line, but the method of narration lifts the meaning of the novel past its political implications and into the realm of the

⁵Twentieth Century Authors, eds. Stanley J. Kunitz and Howard Haycraft, New York, (1942).

myth. In the myth, according to William Van O'Connor, the interplay is between the "construction of the mind and the immediate presentation of experience at any given moment of history, between the principle of form and the principle of life."⁶

Two worlds exist in the myth: the immediate private world of its characters and the larger world of universal experience. Traditionally, the myth is a tale of an individual, but the myth didactically imposes on the acts of that individual an implication for all men; while the myth stresses man's kinship with other men, it does not deny that individual man's worth.

The fusion of quality and object, according to Richard Chase, produces an impression not of "unreality, but of more than usual reality--an aesthetic reality."⁷ The strange and stifling atmosphere of the Helianos apartment maintains that aesthetic reality throughout.

Today there are, according to Donald A. Stauffer, two bases for the myth: the myth of science and the myth of the state. Stauffer, like Wescott, believes that the state "rears up a giant more terrible than any Gargantua or Micromégas or Erobdegnagian."⁸ Apartment in Athens is a modern myth of that giant and of the devastation it inflicts on ordinary man.

⁶An Age of Criticism: 1900-1950, Chicago, 1952, p. 151.

⁷"Myth as Literature," English Institute Essays, New York, 1948, p. 10.

⁸"The Modern Myth of the Modern Myth," English Institute Essays, New York, 1948, p. 31.

The novel possesses the myth's timeless magic because its central theme is modern man's loss of awareness of his own identity. On the one hand, he attempts to find that identity and his relation to the world by sublimating himself in the state--in that Procrustean bed, the Nazi movement--as does Major Kalter. On the other hand, he clings to the past, as does Helianos, and meets destruction; or he comes to self-knowledge, as does Mrs. Helianos, and with that self-knowledge finds a relation to a meaningful universe.

Mr. and Mrs. Helianos' children also act out a vital part of Wescott's myth. Although the horror of oppression deprives Leda and Alexander of their childhood, it cannot completely destroy them. Alexander, the spindly adolescent filled with impotent hatred of the Germans, at the novel's conclusion replaces his father on the Procrustean bed, but now the bed fits him. When he awakens to find his mother asleep on the floor at his side, he assumes his manhood and affectionately orders her back to bed. He has finally become worthy of the Greek meaning of his name--"defender of men."

Leda, with her "pearly white skin," (p. 3) is given the name of the Spartan queen, wife of Tyndareus and mother of Clytemnestra, who was visited by Zeus in the form of a swan. An almost sensual closeness exists between the imperceptive Leda and the godlike Kalter. But in the midst of the despondency brought by his family's death, the changed, more human Kalter expresses the desire to bring Leda's case to the attention of German doctors; Kalter's impulse arouses in Helianos, for the first time, an overwhelming desire to kill the German.⁹

⁹The episode in which Kalter becomes a Zeus figure who descends in mortal form is reminiscent of Sartre's portrayal, in the 1943 play

In spite of the war-terror Leda has witnessed and in spite of the strange fascination Kalter holds for her, she finds the courage during the crisis of her mother's heart attack to run through the streets of Athens to seek help. At the conclusion of the novel Leda is left to follow Alex through the streets as he performs his "deadly errands" (p. 266); her loyalty has detached itself from Kalter and symbolically embraces Alexander and his new purposefulness.¹⁰

From its opening line, "All this happened to a Greek family named Helianos," a line reminiscent of Homer's opening sentence in The Odyssey, "This is the story of a man," Apartment in Athens is marked by starkness and simplicity. The Athens that represents to western man the balance, clarity, harmony, and completeness that the word Greek has come to stand for is reduced in the novel to "dust, stench, fatigue, disgust, fright, constant fright, and beggars and cadavers." (p. 152) But in the end Mrs. Helianos achieves what Edith Hamilton calls the Greek ability to see "both sides of the paradox of truth."¹¹

"The Flies," of the Nazi as a god-figure. In a letter I wrote to Wescott (which he has not answered) I asked if he was familiar with the play at the time Apartment was written; so far as I know there is no direct influence.

¹⁰The destructiveness of war to the innocent is introduced through children other than the Helianos. An old woman whom Mrs. Helianos meets at market during her one brief absence from the apartment prays for her children--prays that they will die more quickly. The Red Cross, too, becomes part of the evil born of evil in that it has chosen one child from the woman's family to feed, a child who will live at the expense of the others. But the frightening image of the neighbor's child who learns to relieve its hunger by sucking blood from an open sore on its palm (p. 30) more vividly than any other image presents the immediate reality which Kalter must ignore in order to cling to his dream of a beautiful, ordered world of the future.

¹¹The Greek Way, rev. ed., New York, 1942, p. 248.

Her final serenity, her forgiveness of herself, lead to her symbolic acceptance of her son, "doomed to heroism," (p. 255) asleep on the cot of Procrustes, "now that she had thought of a way to prove to him that life had taught her to understand and love him." (p. 266) When Mrs. Helianos draws the kitchen shade to shut out the Parthenon, "her great reminder, her worst keepsake," (p. 267) she does so with a renewed awareness of the balance and clarity which had been the vision of ancient Athens.

CHAPTER V

WESCOTT: A REASSESSMENT

Wescott's myth of modern man's dilemma, Apartment in Athens, contains a positive commitment not found in his earlier work. The author has made that commitment in his own life as well as in his last novel. Since his return to the states in 1933 Wescott, calling himself a "man of letters" rather than a novelist, has worked to improve the condition of the writing profession. He was president of the National Institute of Arts and Letters from 1958 to 1961, has served on the Council of the Authors' Guild and on the UNESCO National Commission, and has worked to eliminate censorship regulations and adverse tax laws for writers. The sense of rejection of contemporary society and of the double view of his own alienation has disappeared from his life as it did from his work in Apartment in Athens.

In his dissertation on Wescott, Sy M. Kahn has termed Wescott's work an "aesthetic pilgrimage" which undertakes the "progressive exploration of every American theme."¹ If Wescott's work has been, as Kahn suggests, a pilgrimage, then Apartment in Athens is its culmination. Wescott's humanistic insistence on man's capacity to expand and to successfully relate himself to the world around him has been achieved

¹Unpublished dissertation, p. 451.

only after long and bitter struggle. The lonely and confused artist of The Apple of the Eye has been transformed into the affirming and anonymous story-teller of Apartment in Athens.

Critics who attempt to judge Wescott's last novel as an extension of his earlier art-for-art's-sake attitude are overlooking Wescott's creative intent in his last fiction. In Images of Truth he calls the creative spirit "a flashing of our small individual light, as best we know how, into the general darkness," and adds that some authors have "an especially acute sense that mankind is in the dark, in innocence or ignorance. . ." (p. 10) In Apartment in Athens Wescott's creative spirit became "especially acute" to man's groping toward a frightening god--the state--and to the deceit of that god. Against the new god Wescott pits a weakened Greek woman who summons up from her heritage the strength to resist.

Apartment in Athens must be evaluated as the author's attempt to reveal to man, as the prophetic mutterings of Fear and Trembling tried to do, the nature of man's new struggle, and as the attempt to conceal his didacticism within the movement of the narrative. And for Wescott himself the didacticism of Apartment in Athens proved to be the end of a search. His alienation ended, he at last became in spirit the minister his mother had hoped he would become. With his last novel his pilgrimage was over, for, like Odysseus, Wescott had come home.

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