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AN INTERPRETIVE STUDY OF ARCHIBALD MACLEISH'S PLAYS

by

Edward Arthur Morin, Jr.

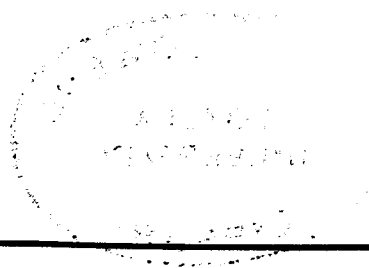
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
INTRODUCTION	i
Chapter	
I. HILLARDS AND MACLEISHES.	1
II. CHILDHOOD EDUCATION.	20
III. <u>TURRIS EBURNEA</u> : THE YALE WRITING, 1911-1915	48
IV. "OUR LADY OF TROY".	90
V. <u>NOBODADDY</u> : A DRAMATIZATION OF EXILE	143
VI. A SOCIAL DRAMA OF THE THIRTIES	197
VII. TWO ANTI-FASCIST RADIO PLAYS.	254
VIII. DRAMATIZING A PUBLIC PHILOSOPHY: THE WAR YEARS.	295
IX. TWO VERSE DRAMAS OF THE EARLY FIFTIES.	345
X. <u>J. B.</u> : POPULAR TRIUMPH OF THE FIFTIES	413
XI. CONCLUSION.	473
BIBLIOGRAPHY.	482



INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to interpret Archibald MacLeish's thirteen plays for a reading audience which may be familiar with only a few of them. Until J. B. was published in 1958 and produced in 1959, Mr. MacLeish was not very well known as a playwright, most critical attention having gone to his poems. While he has achieved and sustained his literary reputation with his poetry, his contribution to public life as a journalist and office holder have gained an at least equal public notice. The plays, written down through the years since the beginning of his career, reflect the dual interests of the private artist and the public man. In some of them he has been satisfied to write verse dramas for a limited public; in others he has purposely reached out for mass audiences, exploring media such as radio and television which were virtually untouched by literary people when he first started writing for them. The plays reflect the development of a complex artist, and of all his works they show his greatest range as an innovator and craftsman. They are also a favorite medium of his for expressing artistic, social, and personal problems which have concerned him through the years.

The work of a complex and diversified artist deserves to be approached with as much latitude of method as is prac-

tical. It is true that some brief studies of MacLeish works have employed a single method: e.g., essays in formal criticism by Allen Tate and Cleanth Brooks and Morton Zabel's mainly biographical study. But a full length study must either be comprehensive in its approach to this material, or else run the risk in a single, unified approach of by-passing much valuable criticism which might not fit together with the a priori limitations of a single method. Previous writers of long works on MacLeish's writing have had to deal with this dilemma. The only significant long works on MacLeish so far have been doctoral dissertations by Colin Campbell and Viola Wendt, which in the handling of their subject have used a diversified approach, and one by Richard Carrington which has approached Mr. MacLeish's poetic works solely from the standpoint of oral interpretation.

It is then mainly the subject, Mr. MacLeish's work itself, which has required me to use a combined biographical, critical, and historical approach. Biographical considerations play a role throughout the study, but they are dominant in the early chapters dealing with the artist's family background and the development of his literary interests. Biography also comes to the fore in the section dealing with his public life during the 1940's, when his literary output was not very great.

The largest part of this study is a formal analysis of plays which includes discussion of thematic development, dramatic structure, characterization, symbolism, diction, and

prosody. Throughout the analysis I am in quest of meanings, which are often elusive because of vague or multiple significance Mr. MacLeish attaches to language. This is a study of the plays, yet the amount of cross-fertilization which takes place in Mr. MacLeish's lyric, epic, dramatic, and journalistic writing necessitates looking into some other works besides his dramas to render a complete picture of the plays. I have therefore drawn freely on any of his works which cast light on the plays. My use of the rather extensive body of critical works has been selective according to the exigencies of interpreting an individual drama or work related to a MacLeish drama.

This study applies historical method to the phenomena of the artistic and public worlds which Mr. MacLeish responded to with great sensitivity. The esthete's private world of the '20's, the involvement of the social critic in the '30's, the public concern for morale during World War II, and the anxieties of liberalism in the post-War years are reflected in the works Mr. MacLeish wrote during these periods. Therefore, I have supplied historical background where it illuminates the context in which Mr. MacLeish's dramas were written. The close correspondence between Mr. MacLeish's development as a dramatist and the changing fashions and needs of his times has made a chronological survey of the plays advisable.

The sum of these three methods--biographical, critical,

and historical--leads to a comprehensive understanding of two lines of development in Mr. MacLeish's dramatic career: essays into verse drama which reflect his private concerns as a poet humanist, and his appeal through the mass media as a social mentor who for forty years has had the benefits of working in rather close concert with the representatives of official thought and culture.

It has often been noted that Mr. MacLeish's works are highly derivative. Thus, attention in this study has been given to resemblances between Mr. MacLeish's plays and the works of other authors. A few of these are acknowledged sources, as for instance the debt Mr. MacLeish has admitted owing to James Frazer's The Golden Bough via the poetry of T. S. Eliot. Other resemblances have been noted by critics in the past; e.g., Charles Poore's and Louis Broussard's feeling that J. B. derives from Philip Barry's Here Come the Clowns. I believe I have found other hitherto unnoticed sources for some of Mr. MacLeish's works; there are, for instance, borrowings from G. B. Shaw, Ernst Toller, and the prosody of Gerard Manley Hopkins.

Colin Campbell's bibliography of works by and about Mr. MacLeish up to 1960 has been especially helpful to my own study of the subject. I am also grateful to Mr. MacLeish for his patient correspondence with me while this dissertation was in progress.

CHAPTER I

HILLARDS AND MACLEISHES

Archibald MacLeish's family background says much about his development as a thinker and poet. My first chapter outlines that background, to some extent even beyond the immediate family, so as to show the part which environmental factors have played in setting the direction of the poet's sensibility. Many insights and factual details presented here derive from the rare, enlightened autobiography of Archibald's mother, Martha Hillard MacLeish. Her education and social concerns, the focal point of this chapter, furnish preliminary material for the discussion of her influence upon her children which follows in Chapter II.

Martha MacLeish's family, the Hillards, are interesting for their adventuresome history, liberal intellectualism, and moral courage. Archibald MacLeish has called them

a seafaring family from the Connecticut Coast about Norwich; a very passionate people with some insanity among them; a very strong family resemblance from one generation to the next--small dark eyes and high cheek bones and similar voices.¹

¹ Portraits and Self-Portraits, collected and illustrated by Georges Schreiber (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1936), p. 61.

The greatest of the seafarers was Martha's grandfather, Captain Moses Hillard, a blockade runner during the war of 1812. Martha's delight in telling of Moses' voyages--especially his abortive attempt to smuggle Napoleon out of France after Waterloo--and Archibald's adult interest in Moses¹ suggest that Martha's children must have indeed been fascinated by these romantically tinged sea stories out of family history.

Elias Brewster Hillard (1825-1895), Martha's father, was a Congregationalist minister for thirty-four years in Connecticut and then finally for several years in Conway, Massachusetts. A man of liberal social and political ideas, he was, in one of his parishioner's words, always in the "forefront of any move to make New England a better place in which to live."² He was a Yale graduate, classics scholar, humanist, and the author of one book--Last Men of the Revolution.³ A passage from one of his sermons reveals

¹Martha MacLeish's pride in being able to synchronize the legend of the "Napoleonic" voyage with another woman's report before a women's club is evident in her autobiography (Martha Hillard MacLeish, Martha Hillard MacLeish New York: Published by Archibald MacLeish, 1949, p. 44); in the introduction he wrote to this work, Archibald MacLeish has devoted several pages to a detailed account of Moses' career as known from private correspondence and family tradition, ibid., pp. vii-xxx.

²Marshall W. Leach, Annals of an Old New England Church (Brattleboro, Vermont: Vermont Printing Co., 1939?), p. 56.

³Martha Hillard MacLeish, p. 17; for a description of Last Men of the Revolution see Archibald MacLeish, "Last Soldiers of the Revolution," Life, XXIV (May 31, 1948), 88-96 and "Thirteen Candles: One for Every State," Freedom is the Right to Choose (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1951), pp. 3-14.

his perspective on life which many anecdotes from Martha's autobiography illustrate:

The greatest thing, and one which shows some hope for our generation, is that men are coming to believe that they are not to live to make money, but to make money to live; that life is greater than money and may be lived independent of it"¹

Elias had been a respectable abolitionist before the Civil War and an active promoter of the Union cause during the war. At South Glastonbury after the war he lost his church appointment because he showed insufficient respect for the textile war profiteers who happened to be the "pillars" of his church. He anticipated their move to get rid of him by announcing his resignation during a fiery sermon condemning those sanctimonious tycoons.²

Elias was descended from Elder Brewster of Plymouth and had eight generations of Puritanism behind him. His Puritan Brewster mother had brought him up in a religion of fear:

A sensitive, imaginative little lad, he lay abed every night in fear and trembling, afraid that he might die before morning, and knowing that much³ as he wanted to do right, he did sin every day.

He determined to bring up his own children in "a more natural and liberal interpretation of religion and was drawn

¹Leach, Annals, p. 63.

²Martha Hillard MacLeish, pp. 6-7.

³Ibid., pp. 9-10.

to Oliver Wendell Holmes and Whittier."¹ His religion was founded on confidence and love and was applied to everyday life by habitual works of charity. Martha's mother, Julia Whittlesey Hillard (1835-1899), who was descended from the first settlers of Plymouth Colony, had a remarkable reputation for unselfishness and warmth of personality.²

Elias Hillard's older half-sister, Ann Brewster, was a burden and a blessing to Elias's family. Childless in her own marriage, she adopted her young step-sister after the death of Captain Moses Hillard. Ann developed a passionate devotion to the child, who subsequently died of tuberculosis. Martha MacLeish says the child's death was a fact Ann could not accept:

She rebelled against the Lord who had taken from her her treasure. I remember how during this little visit, eight years after the event, she cursed God and rebelled, and how my father paced the floor trying to persuade her that God's acts must be accepted.³

Martha records that Ann's loss of her husband completed the wreckage of an "unsettled. . .religious faith."⁴ Her husband had been one of the founders of the Fall River Line of steamboats. According to Martha, the trustees of his estate "did not know what to do with a woman emotionally unbalanced," so they committed her to a mental institution. Martha recounts:

¹Ibid., p. 10.

²Ibid., pp. xxxi, 1, and 9-10.

³Ibid., p. 5.

⁴Ibid., p. 14.

Father was outraged. He had both affection and respect for his sister Ann. She was the member of the family who had sympathized with him in his desire for a college education and had helped him to secure it. In later years she had turned to him for help in her religious difficulties.¹

Elias and his wife got the trustees to release Ann into their care. Despite Ann's pathological condition, she proved to be harmless and lived many years in the Hillards' home. She contributed greatly to the family finances, enabling several of Elias's children to attend good colleges.

Ann's religious conflict is a vivid example of the problem of God's will and the existence of evil which is debated in Archibald MacLeish's J. B. Considering Ann's many years with the Hillards and Martha's personal debt to Ann for schooling she provided, we may conclude that Martha made the outlines of Ann's problems and personality as clear to her growing children as she has to the mature children, who were meant to be the readers of her autobiography.

Martha Hillard (1856-1947) was the first of Elias and Julia Hillard's nine children. In a home atmosphere of harmony and cooperation, Martha was schooled in piety without the fear-inspired, fundamentalist Calvinism of earlier generations. The family was fun-loving, tolerant, and dedicated to the service of others. Martha attended public grade schools and thus broadened her experience by contact with a school population made up predominately of Irish

¹Ibid., p. 15.

immigrant children whose Democratic politics, bad manners, and lice had previously been unknown to her.¹

With financial help from her Aunt Ann, Martha attended Vassar from 1874 to 1878. Vassar was then pioneering in an academic program for women which was comparable to those offered at the best men's schools. She led a lively collegiate life and majored in astronomy under the renowned Professor Maria Mitchell. As one of ten students with highest class standing, Martha gave a commencement address which contended that although

science was proving hoary theological beliefs untenable, . . . science fully known and the Bible intelligently interpreted could not be antagonistic.²

After graduation Martha taught three years in public schools and then returned to Vassar as an assistant teaching mathematics. In her second year of teaching she undertook study for a master's degree in medieval history. But after two years, with the history program almost completed, she left Vassar to become principal of Rockford (Illinois) Seminary for women.³

In 1884 Martha went to Rockford where she gradually replaced a vapid finishing school program with robust academic subjects. A growing majority of girls, seeing the value of the new program, elected it. The faculty was

¹Ibid., pp. 3-4.

²Ibid., p. 23.

³Ibid., Chapter II, "Vassar College: Student and Teacher (1874-1884)," pp. 17-26.

improved by the addition of qualified academicians. From the beginning Martha Hillard strove to change the school discipline "from a system of constant espionage to one of trusting the students' honor and making them responsible for their acts."¹ The trustees were won over to the change and it was inaugurated successfully. Student self-respect and morale had greatly improved and the school was ready to become a college when Martha Hillard resigned her post in 1888 to marry Andrew MacLeish. Martha's spectacular career of educational reform during four years at Rockford is important for this study because it illustrates her administrative ability and ideas on free development in education which she used with her own children.

Andrew MacLeish (1838-1928) was a Scotsman from Glasgow County descended from a long line of merchants and some clergymen. While he was a young man his family fortunes suffered during a depression, so he emigrated to the United States and moved to Chicago, where he became an original partner in the large department store, Carson Pirie Scott and Company.² Brought up a Presbyterian, he began a continuous active affiliation with the Fourth Baptist Church of Chicago. Thrift, self-reliance, and piety were his dominant

¹Ibid., p. 28; cf. p. 36.

²Ibid., p. 119 and Andrew MacLeish, The Life of Andrew MacLeish, 1838-1928 (Chicago: privately printed by The Lakeside Press, 1939), pp. 50-54.

qualities, and he eventually gained considerable wealth and social prominence. Martha MacLeish says that her husband was also a good story teller gifted in the choice of words and well versed in Scotch ballads.¹ Archibald has described his father as "one of the early settlers of Chicago; fifty-four when I was born, a merchant: a cold, tall, rigorous man of very beautiful speech."² Writing after her husband's death, Martha says he had "shown himself a father of deep, though rarely expressed, affection and of absolute justice."³

Andrew MacLeish was twice a widower and fifty years of age, and Martha Hillard was thirty two, when they were married in August, 1888. They had first known of each other through two of Andrew's daughters who had been Martha's pupils at Vassar. The courtship was fervent but carried on chiefly by mail because of respective business and professional concerns. When Andrew MacLeish visited the Hillards' home for the first time, Martha's sister Millie reported,

Father and Mr. MacL. [sic] sympathize thoroughly in everything and Mr. McL. is a remarkable entertaining talker.⁴

Martha's brother Will remarked good-naturedly within the family, "I hope Pattie will last him better than the other

¹Martha Hillard MacLeish, pp. 41, 120, and 121.

²Schreiber (ed.), Portraits and Self-Portraits, p. 69.

³Martha Hillard MacLeish, p. 119.

⁴Ibid., p. 34.

two have."¹

The MacLeishes lived on West Adams Street near Paulina Street in Chicago. Andrew MacLeish was well-established at Carson's and was the leading layman at the Fourth Baptist Church. Martha, still a Congregationalist, accompanied her husband regularly to church where--in her spare and guarded phrase--she "began for the first time to know the tenets of the Baptist denomination."² Without Martha's going through the catechetical preliminaries, her influential husband briefly confronted the "good Baptist deacon of fundamentalist proclivities" during a communion ceremony and cowed him into giving Martha communion.³ Martha maintained her Baptist affiliation throughout Andrew's life. She was in fact a national leader in Baptist-sponsored educational and mission work. After Andrew's death in 1928, she resumed affiliation with the Congregational Church.

The liberal theology Martha had assimilated in her father's home and at Vassar, her understated distaste for fundamentalism, her optimistic view of human nature and its potential for development by natural means, her lack of obeisance toward Baptist doctrines of divine election and its connection with material prosperity all show an influence of religious and secular humanism. No corresponding attitudes, either in her husband's autobiography or in

¹Ibid.

²Ibid., p. 37.

³Ibid., pp. 37-38.

Martha's always respectfully stated remarked about him, are evident in Andrew MacLeish. Martha had encountered in her husband much of the pristine Calvinism which her father had rejected in his own upbringing. It seems reasonable to ask how there could be any kind of intellectual compatability between them.

First, Martha was a very shrewd judge of human relations. She could smile at her husband's Victorian tastes and Scotch authoritarianism,¹ but never at his religion. She

¹The following anecdotes from Mrs. MacLeish's autobiography illustrate the spouses' differences in taste: "Although Mr. Zimmerman the architect of Craigie Lea always spoke of the place as 'the house in the woods', he conceived the idea of giving it an exterior on the order of a French chateau, a thing which never appealed to me. Because Andrew, brought up in the Victorian period and being tall, loved high ceilings, we had them, and they do give dignity and spaciousness to the house." (Ibid., p. 41.)

"One day when Andrew visited his office, Mr. Zimmerman said, 'I have something for your newel post, showing him, a small woodcut of a German bronze, 'Der Verliebter Faun.' Andrew liked it very much but asked, 'Have you anyone who can reproduce this in wood?' 'Yes,' said Mr. Zimmerman, 'the man who is doing your wood carving is quite equal to it.' And so 'Der Verliebter Faun' has stood smirking at the foot of our stairs for over fifty years (a constant temptation to the young of the family to dress him up with hats and other gear.) (Ibid., p. 45.)

The account of how Andrew MacLeish's meeting with Lady Aberdeen inspired him to name his new daughter, Ishbel, after her is too long to relate. But Mrs. MacLeish's shock and resignation is expressed tersely: "When I did hear the name, although I fully appreciated the honor done the MacLeish family, 'Ishbel MacLeish' seemed a terrible mouthful for my tiny daughter. Still, I knew I must like it." (Ibid., p. 49.)

Andrew MacLeish's Scotch authoritarianism is illustrated by an incident from one of those rare periods of continuous contact with his family while they visited Scotland in 1910: "When we had gathered at the boat landing, Father asked in

understood that her husband was a stable family man who put a priority upon those domestic virtues which Mathew Arnold and G. B. Shaw have characterized as the philistine element of the Victorian world picture. She made it her business to excel in her new task of bringing up children and making a happy home.

She also devoted much effort to religiously inspired philanthropy and educational work--areas in which the spouses frequently had a common interest. This involvement, which reflects the general shift in Protestantism from doctrines to charitable works, contributed much to the harmony of the marriage. That Andrew felt at home with fundamentalist piety while his wife dutifully followed the convention of taking her husband's religion as her own until she could return to a more liberal church after his death illustrates a temperamental flexibility in Martha which her hierarchy of values justified fully.

Beyond any expedient wish to make a happy home at whatever cost, Martha seems to have believed firmly that good works emanating from sincere ethical purpose were more important than dogmas. She chose to make her own religious

some consternation, 'Where is Norman?' I told him and shall never forget his Scotch fatherly reply, 'Have we come all this distance only to separate and each go his own individual way?' I thought we might as well face facts at the beginning, so I said, 'Yes, I'm afraid that is the case, for we are of different ages and interests.'" (Ibid., p. 74.)

life a practical example of the spiritual charity advised in St. James's Epistle. Sincerity and a common purpose shared, not only with her husband, but with a variety of people whose intimate convictions differed from her own, was all that seemed necessary for Martha to live and cooperate with them. Words which her friend of many years, Dr. Samuel Harkness of the Winnetka Congregational Church, delivered at her funeral service explain the quality of her religion:

She was a creative Christian. I doubt that she was bound by any dogma. But she had something better, a sense of all-rightness and beyondness in the universe. . . . She had something steady and sure at the core of her nature. She believed in putting her ideals to work. That is why her time and strength were never her own. She was constantly brought in for counsel long after she had theoretically retired from the leadership of many causes.¹

Martha's irenic personality enabled her to seek out quietly a semi-private intellectual life for herself which compensated for the chasm between her own erudite interests and the business concerns dominating her husband. She derived satisfaction partly from her work in religious education, partly from cultural activities, but especially--and for as long as possible--from her efforts to form the minds of her children.

During the first winter of her marriage Martha MacLeish joined the Chicago Women's Club, the Fortnightly, and the Tuesday Club. With Jane Addams and Mrs. Conger she organized service for Chicago's West Side by the newly

¹Ibid., p. 144.

formed Visiting Nurse Association and took her regular turn visiting homes of the poor. With her husband she worked to establish the Baptist college which was soon to become The University of Chicago.¹ Martha's other educational responsibilities included being Trustee of the National College of Education, President for a while of the Central Council of Nursing Education, and Trustee for many years of Rockford College. Throughout the rest of her life after her marriage, Rockford remained her greatest interest in the field of education.²

Martha MacLeish's gift for molding organizations and her statements of personal opinion expressed a strong desire for unity among people who are indifferent toward human improvement or hold conflicting outlooks about it. As chairman or president she often acted as primary agent for smoothing relations within women's social clubs. She organized almost singlehandedly the unresponsive women who were supposed to direct the mass meeting in 1911 of the Baptist Foreign Missions Boards.³ She had a major hand in uniting the East and West divisions of the (Northern Baptist) Women's Foreign Mission Society prior to 1913⁴ and arbitrated successfully between factions of the Chicago Woman's Club who were arguing in 1927 whether to build or

¹Ibid., p. 144.

²Ibid., pp. 38-39.

³Ibid., pp. 79-80.

⁴Ibid., pp. 68-69.

not to build a meeting place on a particular site.¹ In 1935 she was one of the founders and original committee members of The National Conference of Christians and Jews.² For work with this group and others she was the first woman in the mid-West to be honored with a citation by the Annual Institute of Human Relations.³

Martha's account of a trip she took to Spain and Italy in 1933-34 includes remarks supporting the Spanish Republican government and condemning the Fascist exhibition in Rome during the Holy Year as "one great glorification of war."⁴ Viewing a castle fortified by its isolation on a mountain cliff, she could moralize:

It was a startling picture of the distance we have come from the days when every man's hand was against his neighbor, to the present when safety lies in learning to live with our neighbors.⁵

At Perugia, recalling the wars between Italian cities, she said,

They were stopped by the formation of the national governments over them that could protect them, just as we must be by the One World government which alone can protect us.⁶

In 1947, her last year alive, she was asking, in a letter to Archibald:

¹Ibid., pp. 115-118.

²Ibid., p. 136.

³Ibid., pp. 136-137.

⁴Ibid., pp. 125 and 127.

⁵Ibid., p. 127.

⁶Ibid., p. 128.

How can democracies be trained in political efficiency? It means training of the whole people, not of the few political leaders. It won't come in my day.¹

It is no surprise that Archibald MacLeish, raised by this woman of vast involvement with organizations seeking human betterment, should have been attracted to the kinds of humanitarian goals adopted by various progressive groups and by the New Deal. It is somewhat curious, in fact, that he stayed away from social causes as long as he did--until the early 1930's, when world political problems began superceding others among Martha MacLeish's (and many other Americans') social concerns. In general, the correspondence between Martha MacLeish's socio-political outlook and that of her son was very close.

The quality of Martha Hillard MacLeish's mind--her practical ability to apply it to a task, to maneuver organizations, and to persuade--is epitomized in this further observation which Dr. Harkness delivered at her funeral:

To read the factual record of Mrs. MacLeish's life fills me with amazement. She did so many different things and did them so well: Educator, social philosopher, administrator, gardener, wife, and mother. Her mind was like a powerful but delicately adjusted tool. She could do with it exactly what she wanted. This sounds rather frightening, but she was humble and gentle. I have watched her rescue an idea which had been subjected to that kind of fuzzy discussion so dear to the American board or committee, restate it, and show what it could do if used thus and so. She had an uncanny gift for that. When she was emotionally stirred she had a² natural eloquence that captivated an audience. . . .

¹Ibid., p. 140.

²Ibid., p. 144.

While her four children were growing and again in the late twenties, when her husband became feeble before his death, Martha MacLeish allowed her organizational work to slacken considerably.

The autobiography leaves little doubt that Martha MacLeish's main intellectual and emotional fulfilment came through the children and social groups. Colorful anecdotes and the ideas of a well-developed mind occur throughout the book; the vast majority from the years after Martha's marriage are related to experience with the children and with social groups. With the exception of the courtship and the brief period before the children arrived, while the MacLeishes were moving into their family estate; except for a rare anecdote like the time "Father" discovered Bruce smoking¹ or attempted unsuccessfully to impose an authoritarian regimen upon the children during a trip to Scotland,² there is hardly any mention of Andrew MacLeish's relationship with the children. Not once does Mrs. MacLeish record that Andrew MacLeish exchanged a substantial idea with her or the children. Martha, on the other hand, sustained throughout her life a highly intellectual relationship with her children. As already stated, there is no sure basis for saying the marriage was unhappy; there may have been the happiness of Victorian private communication between spouses which

¹Ibid., p. 42.

²Ibid., p. 74.

does not reach the children in spoken, or the outside world in written, words. What is important for this study is that Andrew MacLeish seems to have played little part in the intellectual stimulation of the children, while Mrs. MacLeish skillfully carried out virtually the whole responsibility of home education.

Mrs. MacLeish remained mentally alert until the last days of her life. At ninety-one she had begun reading Toynbee's A Study of History. In the early part of 1947 a broken rib developed into complications of pneumonia and a stroke. Her son Norman describes one of her last lucid moments during two and a half months

in a sort of twilight existence during which she talked much about her past life at Craigie Lea, but especially her association with Rockford College. . . . She told Ishbel, Archie, and me that she was ready to go at any time. Every life, she said, must come to an end, and she was now leaving it to us to carry on. Then she said, "It is all right. I am ready. You understand?" Later that day, when she was alone with Ishbel, she said, very evidently referring to her life, "It has been worth while; it has been very worth while."¹

The example Martha MacLeish gave her son Norman in the way she met death occasioned his conversion back to belief in God after years of agnosticism. Norman records his feelings in the postscript he wrote for Martha MacLeish's Autobiography, and the fact of his conversion stands as one instance of the strong maternal ties between Martha and her children and the enduring influence she had upon them.

¹Ibid., p. 142.

Andrew MacLeish had died in 1928 after several years of physical and mental decline. Archibald's public recollections of his father are few, but there are some. During a personal interview the author asked Mr. MacLeish about his recollections of Andrew MacLeish. Mr. MacLeish referred briefly to the fifty-four-year age difference between them and the large amount of time his father had to spend at his business, concluding, "I never got to know him very well."¹ Another recollection, which Mr. MacLeish also mentioned during the interview, is documented in an interview-article by Jean White: Mr. MacLeish recalled with apparent irritation: "My father, a Scott, . . . was always talking about the fear of God."² Taken together, Andrew MacLeish's remoteness because of advanced age and what Archibald has called a "cold" personality, his adherence to a paternalistic religion which has always been unattractive to Archibald, and evidence of dogmatic rigidity in his attempts to govern the children, there emerges the kind of image of Andrew MacLeish which would have inclined a young son to identify the pater familias with an indifferent, perhaps hostile, deity looking in occasionally on the boy's circumscribed universe.

¹ Interview with Mr. MacLeish at the Sheraton Hotel, October 18, 1961 on the occasion of filming by Chicago station WBKB-TV for a program featuring Mr. MacLeish.

² Jean White, "Will to Live is Key to MacLeish's 'J.B.'," Library Journal, LXXXIV (January 1, 1959), 37.

At the conclusion of this chapter on the Hillard and MacLeish families, it would be well to recapitulate two facts and to add a third which point to a conclusion I will develop in later chapters: that there is a kind of atavism toward the mother's side in Archibald MacLeish's artistic temperament. First, Ann's place in family tradition as an unfortunate person plagued by the problem of the existence of a (good) God who allows evil is an analogue of the theological problem central to Mr. MacLeish's most important play, J. B., and present in others:

If God is God he is not good,
If God is good he is not God. . . .¹

Second, as the hero and voyager of the Hillard family traditions, Moses Hillard is the psychological prototype of the hero-voyagers in such works by his great-grandson as "The Admiral" and other seafarers in the radio play, The American Story, in Conquistador, and in other literary productions which have a journey motif. Finally, Archibald MacLeish is settled permanently and has done much of his writing during the last thirty-five years in Conway, Massachusetts, the small village where his grandfather Elias Hillard had his last parsonage.²

¹Archibald MacLeish, J. B.: A Play in Verse (Sentry Edition; Cambridge, Mass.: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1951), p. 14.

²Martha Hillard MacLeish, pp. 43-44.

CHAPTER II

CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

To Andrew and Martha MacLeish were born five children: Martha Louise who was born in 1889 and died of meningitis a year later, Norman born in 1890, Archibald in May, 1892, Kenneth in 1894, and Ishbel in 1897. Norman became an architect; "sunny-natured,"¹ imaginative Kenneth was killed in the First World War; and Ishbel became a successful student, then suffered for years from a leg injury and tuberculosis, and finally married well. A first child, born in 1889, had died in infancy from cerebro-spinal meningitis. Of Andrew MacLeish's three children by former marriages Bruce, the youngest, lived during his adolescence in the home of Andrew and Martha and later took the place of his father in the family business. In 1890 the MacLeishes had moved to the Chicago suburb of Glencoe, where they had built for them a home modeled after a French chateau. The copied architectural plan, "Victorian" high ceilings, and some of the decorative furnishings offended Martha MacLeish's taste. Yet she liked the sense of freedom and seclusion which the large estate gave her. There was a view from every room of Lake

¹Martha Hillard MacLeish, p. 48.

Michigan, and so Andrew MacLeish named the estate Craigie Lea.¹

Martha's detailed account of her children's home education throws light upon Archibald's development as a person and as an artist. When Archibald was born his mother saw the need for increasing her knowledge of children's emotional and mental development. She joined a Mother's Class in connection with the Kindergarten Training School of the well-known educator, Elizabeth Harrison, a disciple of John Dewey. Meeting once a week, the group had "two years of extremely interesting and valuable study of Froebel's philosophy of child education," which advised stimulating the child's curiosity to learn, never using force, and providing such occasional discipline as would make "the punishment fit the deed."²

The Froebel method worked well with Norman, who is said to have been "from the first a little philosopher, a gentle soul, very sensitive to beauty, full of imagination and keen interest."³

When Archie came I found I had an entirely different proposition. There was a tremendous force and will power, a high-strung, nervous system, easily disturbed, a sensitivity and imagination more inhibited than Norman's. Froebel's methods did not work so well. I soon found that when his temper overcame him, what he needed was quiet and seclusion. This usually brought him happily to himself, but never shall I forget the time when it failed utterly and in despair I turned him over my knee and applied a

¹Ibid., pp. 37-43.

²Ibid., p. 47.

³Ibid.

good, old-fashioned spanking. The effect was magical. The yells of rage turned suddenly to a sharp cry of surprise. I picked him up, set him on my knee, and began talking of a bird on a tree outside. Suddenly he turned, threw his arms around my neck and cried, "Oh, Mama, I do love you." My explanation was that he, entirely beyond his own control, appreciated the fact that I had controlled him. Also the physical effect of the spanking had been to draw the blood from his head to a less vital spot and so relieve the pressure.¹

The anecdote is humorous as a classic instance of the clash between old-time violence and the "new-fangled" permissiveness advised by child development handbooks and often ridiculed in story and cartoon. From a serious viewpoint, it illustrates a mother's conscientious desire to develop her children in the best possible way and, by a combination of textbook method and expediency, to achieve firm control over the child's malleable personality.

The Mother's Class Martha attended was enriched by a program of lectures by Denton J. Snyder on the "Literary Bibles" of the world: the Odyssey, The Divine Comedy, Goethe's Faust, and Shakespeare's plays. Other speakers were the educator William Torrey Harrison, Dr. Moulton of the University of Chicago, and William Dean Howells.

The literary schools and Dr. Snyder's lectures were of the greatest value to me later, guiding me in literary experiments which I tried out with Norman and Archie.²

At this time Martha came in contact with teachers at the experimental school which John Dewey had just begun at the

¹Ibid.

²Ibid.

University of Chicago.

It was really the beginning of both scientific child study and progressive education, and for me, who had just finished¹ the study of Froebel, it was the next logical step.

She kept up with the school's program and made use of it in her home reading program for the children.

The autobiography contains a six-page article called "Literature in the Home," an account written in the first person for a Child Study meeting of Martha's experimental reading program for her children. She explains:

This is in no sense a dissertation upon literature and its relation to children, but rather a simple statement of what the author has tried to do toward forming in her own children a good literary taste and a love for that which is beautiful and ennobling.²

The following intensive review of Mrs. MacLeish's reading program for the children would not receive the emphasis it does if it were a mere succession of titles with isolated superficial or impersonal comments. Being much more than that, the article is a telling personal expression of Mrs. MacLeish's value system and her perspective on child development. It furnishes some of the best data we have regarding her efforts to mold the minds and personalities of her children. Its very existence is one of those rare accidents among literary sources which give insights into the earliest formative years of an artist's development.

¹Ibid., p. 48.

²Ibid., pp. 50-51.

The reading program was strongly directive, geared to form the children's taste in reading with the moral purpose of getting "at the heart of that writing which deals honestly and simply with the great problems of life."¹ Mrs. MacLeish began her article by deploring the "mental dissipation" of reading which is merely diversional, "mawkishly sentimental, or which depicts in life abnormal or unnatural aspects."² If literature is to do its full part in training the child, it should make demands upon his mind:

It must hold his complete attention and stimulate his powers of imagination and reasoning. It should rouse his sympathy and his dramatic instinct. It must come over into his own life and take possession of him. He must be, for the time being, the character of whom he reads. All this involves much reading aloud, especially to the younger children, and if such reading is done by one who has sympathy and imagination and some dramatic power, it is astonishing how far afield a little child may be carried, with keenest interest and enjoyment.³

From the time the children had been able to listen, their mother had a regular story half-hour for them which included some tales from the Bible. Then when Norman was seven and Archibald five years old, Martha began reading them Charles Kingsley's The Water Babies, whose characters became household words; the character of Little Tom

with his selfishness and meanness sticking out in sharp spines all over his poor little body, making it impossible for any one to cuddle him, or to play with him.

¹Ibid., p. 50.

²Ibid., p. 51.

³Ibid.

was "a telling picture of the isolating effect of selfishness."¹

Like her own father, Martha MacLeish had a fondness for Greek classics. So, beginning in Archibald's preschool years the MacLeish children were read Kingsley's Greek Heroes, Hawthorne's Tanglewood Tales, James Baldwin's Old Greek Stories, and "other forms of Greek myth and hero tales."² After a summer's respite with Kipling's Jungle Book, they took up Baldwin's Story of Siegfried, Hamilton Mabie's Norse Stories, and Dasent's Popular Tales from the Norse. By this time the children "could see very plainly how the conceptions of Norse and Greek had grown out of the different conditions under which the two races had lived."³ The boys were interested in comparing Hebrew, Greek, and Norse ideas of creation and thought the Hebrew version superior. During the second summer the children were read Uncle Remus stories, Ernest Thompson Seton's Wild Animals, and Howard Pyle's The Merry Adventures of Robin Hood which

incidentally, . . . and by contrast, . . . shows the value of law in the land and helps to develop in the child a respect for that which must to a certain extent restrain him.⁴

Saving the grim story of The Iliad for a later date, they read The Odyssey, which went hard at first, but

¹Ibid.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., p. 52.

⁴Ibid., p. 53.

when the boys at last got into the spirit of the poem and had grasped the style, they hung with open mouthed interest, night after night, the whole winter upon the adventures of Ulysses.¹

A dramatization by "some of the Greeks of Chicago" led to the children's own enthusiastic dramatization, with young Ishbel playing all the women's parts.

The children took special delight in recognizing characters and stories they had heard before, as for instance in the mythology of The Odyssey and the appearance of Robin Hood and his men in Ivanhoe. Sidney Lanier's The Boy's King Arthur made "knighthood the beau ideal and led to Scott's Tales of a Grandfather (which they read themselves) and Ivanhoe."² The Tempest introduced Shakespeare, followed by that embodiment of the beau ideal of patriotism, Henry V. After hearing Henry V Norman asked, "Were Shakespeare's plays written for children?" Receiving a negative reply, he added, "I thought they were not written for children, but they are interesting for children, aren't they?"³

The children had had Bible stories reserved for Sundays from the beginning of the reading program, when Archibald was three years old. At first Martha read isolated stories and then, when the children asked her to begin at the beginning and read the whole Bible, she began with Genesis,

reading ahead and selecting the passages to be read each time. I was greatly surprised to find how complete the story could be made, and how

¹Ibid.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., p. 54.

beautifully, with the omission of intervening matter, one story could be fitted into another. Here and there a few words of connection were necessary and sometimes a little explanation must be made, but in general the Bible told the story completely, simply and with absorbing interest.¹

The Old Testament after the division of the kingdom became too complicated for the children, so they turned to the New Testament, hearing the events of Christ's life harmonized from all four Gospels. Later came the history of the Christian Church from the Acts of the Apostles and some of the Epistles. But with these last, "I concluded I was attempting something a little beyond the children's maturity and dropped it for a later time."²

Mrs. MacLeish "cannot speak too strongly of thus reading from the Bible."³ It is broadly cultural because the children's other reading would carry many allusions to biblical characters and stories. Old Testament stories are particularly suitable for children because

the pictures are painted with bold lines and strong colors and an absence of detail that fixes the thought upon the main truth.⁴

The life of the simple people "comes so near the child plane that it is easily understood"; most important, the Old Testament stories "should come into the ethical training of every child" because they inculcate "moral truths and right

¹Ibid.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., p. 55.

⁴Ibid.

principles."¹ The difficulties which come into Bible reading because of varied or liberal interpretation of, for instance, the story of creation are "few, . . . unless they are imported":

The little child accepts the story as written, just as he does everything else. The child is a born poet, and he looks at everything through the poet's eyes. When the critical and scientific spirit begins to develop in him, he will ask questions, and questions concerning the Bible can certainly be answered as directly and as honestly as any others. I think it is important to refrain from giving him a superstitious feeling regarding the Bible, or a belief that all parts of it are of equal authority. We must picture for him the low state of civilization of the old Hebrews, which accounts for so many of their savage deeds. They were but faulty human beings like ourselves, or rather like our ancestors of many centuries ago. Their one distinguishing work was to develop and at last give to the world a knowledge of the one God. We must use discrimination and common sense as freely in the study of the history and literature of the Bible as in that from other sources. . . . The necessary study requires time, but what subject is better worth of it?²

Mrs. MacLeish closes the section of the article dealing with the Bible by emphasizing the right to "individual conceptions of God and religious truth," even for one's own children: we need to exercise the greatest care in the formation of opinions which much influence those of our children."³

The discussion of the children's reading-hour syllabus concludes with a reference to their reading Pilgrim's Progress and mention of the fascination one of the boys had for Dore's illustrations in a volume of Dante's Inferno,

¹Ibid.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

Martha was uneasy about reading this book to young children and for a while put off requests to explain the pictures. When she finally did explain them, the boys prevailed upon her to read the book. She comments:

I think I would not repeat the experiment with so young children, and yet they have probably gotten from it a clearer conception of . . . sin than anything else could have given. Some of the mental pictures have been of real help to them in overcoming of their own weaknesses, as for instance the sullen ones, smothered in the ooze of the swamp, and the violent standing in the river of blood to a depth merited by their sin, showing so plainly how violence begets violence.¹

By this time the boys were reading for themselves, and the list consisted of Howard Pyle's Men of Iron ("a good picture of life in the days of chivalry"), Catherwood's In the Days of Jeanne d'Arc, Brooks' The Story of King Arthur, Sidney Lanier's The Boy's Froissart, Cox's Tales of Ancient Greece, Church's Stories from the Persian Wars, Gulliver's Travels, Huckleberry Finn, Frank Bullen's The Cruise of the Cachalot, de Amichis' The Heart of a Boy, The Swiss Family Robinson (Robinson Crusoe was read at school), Cooper's Spy, Scott's Talisman, and Stevenson's Treasure Island.²

Anyone would be impressed at once with the intellectual scope of Mrs. MacLeish's program for her children. Her efforts to develop their literary and moral taste led to the selection of many substantial, often difficult, classics, at least half of which are not read even by good

¹Ibid., p. 56.

²Ibid.

students of today until the college years--if these works are read at all. Mrs. MacLeish says that with the reading program she was able to form the boys in "the habit of independent reading"; she set up a time during the summer vacation when each one could be by himself and read. The boys developed

a real love for their own reading, and I know that they are more intelligent about it because of the broad ground that we have covered together. One happy result from our reading together is that I so fully have their confidence in their independent reading. They expect me to sympathize with them in all their literary interests, and naturally turn to me¹ for advice as to the books which they may best read.

This passage suggests, perhaps inadvertently, that the children enjoyed little real independence from their mother in their choice of "independent reading," that a pattern of childhood dependence on and dominance by one parent continued in the formation of the children's intellectual interests. More will be said on this point later. Now that my summary of Mrs. MacLeish's article on her reading program is finished, I will discuss this early reading as an impetus to the intellectual and psychological growth of Archibald MacLeish as an artist.

Occurring as it did between Archibald's fifth and ninth years and in an informal but supervised way on into his adolescence, with the Bible readings beginning when Archibald was three, the program reached a climax when the

¹Ibid.

young mind was most impressionable for the formation of lifelong habits. The total effect of this reading, as Mr. Kenneth Campbell observes, was to give the MacLeish children exposure to varied interpretations of life so as to increase their own knowledge and tolerance. The expressed purposes were "to inform and elevate the ideals, sympathies and tastes of her offspring" and imbue them with the idea that

books, the printed word, could change men's minds and help them to act out the solution to their problems, a belief which in time became a sovereign conviction in the thinking of her son Archibald.¹

Mr. Campbell also points out the connection between the boy MacLeish's extensive childhood "reading" in the classics and a proclivity for Greek "images and allusions in his poetry over three decades"--particularly the journey metaphor of The Odyssey.² The influence, general as it is, seems to have lasted the whole fifty-five years of Mr. MacLeish's career as a publishing poet.

¹Colin Chandler Campbell, Jr., "The Poet as Artist and Citizen: A Study of the Life and Writings of Archibald MacLeish through 1958" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Dept. of American Studies, University of Pennsylvania, 1960), pp. 13-14.

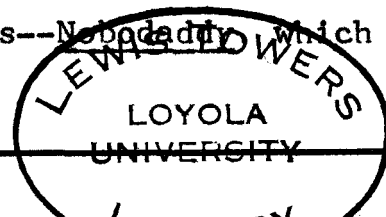
²Mr. Campbell mentions the poem "1933" (Poems, 1924-1933) as an instance of a tie between Archibald MacLeish's early reading of The Odyssey and the journey motif of his poetry (Campbell, p. 14). One could begin a list of Mr. MacLeish's works showing the influence of The Odyssey with The Trojan Horse, which borrows mythical materials from it. There are also resemblances to the journey motif of The Odyssey in Mr. MacLeish's work with modern settings such as "Immortal Helix," "You Andrew Marvell" and others; in that odyssey of the New World, Conquistador; and in journeys of the microcosm such as Einstein and The Hamlet of Archibald MacLeish.

The other types of old literature in the reading program also appear to have affected Archibald MacLeish's art and thought strongly. The large proportion of medieval works in the program may not be unusual when compared with the number of stories on chivalry other children read at the turn of the century. Yet Mrs. MacLeish was exceptionally well qualified to teach her children the literature and values of the medieval period; her work at Vassar on a master's program in medieval history, which she was forced to abandon in order to become president of Rockford College, had developed a love for things medieval which she was able to work out in her children's reading program. No one can doubt her intense satisfaction in seeing manifestations of the chivalric ideal in the children's play.

The chivalric ideal, dominant in the mother's and the children's own choice of early family reading, contributed something to Archibald's lifelong idealism. The chivalric element is most obvious in the mannered Arthurian pose and imagery of the college poems and the first poetry collection, Tower of Ivory. Later, chivalric love conventions assume modern dress in the poems of The Happy Marriage and in individual poems of later collections. Themes of loyalty, honor, and pride of clan common to chivalric literature burst forth gloriously in Mr. MacLeish's verse and prose of the 1930's and 1940's.

It goes without saying that chivalric idealism, if integrated into the value system of a modern man, must undergo a good deal of transformation. The loyalty to a liege lord is easily subsumed, as it was historically, into national patriotism (vid. Henry V, which was the second of Shakespeare's plays the MacLeish children knew). Western concepts of romantic love in the courtly love tradition have undergone endless variations among middle-class people since the original appearance of courtly love as an economically disinterested extra-marital relationship; the tradition now includes the ideal of external fidelity in marriage and a modern psychoanalytical interpretation of the courtly love stories as thinly veiled symbolism for a son's tabooed courting of his mother. With characteristic persuasion, Mrs. MacLeish was able to construe for her children the moral of respect for law from stories of folk chivalry depicting the romantic anarchism of Robin Hood and his men. As we shall see in the next chapter, the chivalric ideal, both in its content and by the fact that it was presented by Archibald's mother, was an especially strong compensation for the stern, paternalistic outlook of the family religion.

The penchant Archibald MacLeish has shown for materials from the Old Testament suggests that it was, along with the readings in chivalry, a most dominant influence of the home reading program. The most ambitious plays--~~Nobodaddy~~ which



is a rewriting of the Cain and Abel story, and J. B., a rewriting of The Book of Job--together with the volume of verse, Songs for Eve, and Old Testament material in certain other poems all reflect the MacLeish family's interest in the Old Testament and Archibald's steady exposure to it from his third year onward. That as a writer of narratives he should prefer Old Testament images and situations to those in the New Testament is not remarkable because the Old Testament simply has more stories written in the spirit of ancient myth and readily available for a modern remolding. Historically, the number of literary works based on the Old Testament far exceeds those based on the New. Yet it is very significant that large doses of the Old Testament were part of Mr. MacLeish's imaginative equipment at a most impressionable age. They represent a fund of unconscious associations rife with the poet's most personal conflicts of childhood and of the mature years as well.

It is well known that Mr. MacLeish makes extremely free use of the story lines in the traditional myths he employs for his works. He appropriates a myth and revises it to meet the needs of personal expression. He writes into these plays and dramatic monologues conflicts he considers personal to himself as a man and artist. One bewildering effect this practice has upon literary critics is that the personal meaning somehow gets lost in the superstructure of myth:

The distinctive feature about MacLeish's use of these borrowed materials is that he usually attempts to make them bear a meaning arbitrarily infused into the action by him, and a meaning frequently remote from their traditional significance as legend or semi-legend. Faust, Adam and Eve, Hamlet, Job, the stories about these people he uses very privately. . . . The point about all this is that it makes explication difficult. Are the public and conventional meanings of the stories to be taken into account or not? MacLeish says they are not, but how many readers are able to perform the semantic acrobats which his procedure requires, especially in the case of a richly significant story like Job's or like the Eden legend?¹

Consistent allegory, if only it were present in these works, would aid explication. The plays, sometimes imitating traditional religious myth and sometimes diverging from it, are indeed confusing if we should divide our attention among the many sideshows, the "semantic acrobatics" which move action and thought forward little by little with flashes of lyrical display. The acrobatics, which constitute interesting conscious verbalizations of a particular insight or of a phase of the dramatic conflict, are of some importance, but ought not to obscure the unconscious motive force which gives a whole work unity, intelligibility, and to a large extent its raison d'etre. Therefore, it is a primary purpose of this study to trace the few essential unifying threads of the poet's personal, often unconscious, psychological conflicts as they develop through the sequence of his works.

¹Campbell, p. 37.

The Old Testament content in Archibald MacLeish's work is important because it is bound up with his personal childhood associations of both parents. These "biblical" works are a virtual playground of free associations which manifest alternate fixations upon father and mother. Specifically, the Oedipus conflict which includes fear of rejection by the father undergoes transference into theological terms. For instance, the protagonist of Nobodaddy rebels against God, the paternal symbol of earthly justice, and at the same time cringes in fear of rejection by an indifferent or perhaps non-existent Father; J. B. develops the same conflict further but somewhat illogically restores confidence in God the Father by proving his worth, if not his existence, in terms of mother love. On the other hand, a strong mother fixation is revealed in these two plays, in numerous lyrics including most of the collection Songs for Eve, and in the political lyrics and plays which transfer the mother fixation into what Erich Fromm calls "the incestuous ties to blood and soil."¹ In its various manifestations, this fixation is often manifested in Old Testament settings, language, and analogues.

Home Bible readings represent the strongest "literary" associations which the young boy Archibald could relate with both parents because it is the only literary interest they

¹Erich Fromm, The Sane Society (New York: Rinehart, 1955), pp. 41, 57-60.

are revealed to have shared in common. We have seen Mrs. MacLeish's stated preference for the Old Testament as an instrument of moral instruction. From a memorial speech given by Andrew's pastor, Dr. James L. Stifler, at the burial service for Andrew MacLeish, there is evidence that he had a strong interest in seeing his children taught the biblical morality of his own value system. For, Dr. Stifler, evidently familiar with the MacLeish household routine on Sundays or holidays, says that Andrew MacLeish "was a good student of the Bible and had a rare skill at teaching it; . . . a good father--it was a pleasure to spend a day in the atmosphere that he gave his home. . . ." ¹ His favorite prayer, according to Dr. Stifler, was:

Now unto Him who is able to keep you from falling
and to present you faultless before the presence of
his glory and exceeding joy to the only wise God
. . . glory and dominion both now and forever. ²

This Calvinist prayer suggests the demands for righteousness which Andrew MacLeish made of himself and others. The parents' differing temperaments and respective family roles lead to a hypothesis verifiable through an analysis of Archibald MacLeish's biblically grounded works. That hypothesis is that the father represented negative, repelling elements of the Old Testament, but the mother had created

¹ Andrew MacLeish, The Life of Andrew MacLeish, pp. 70-71.

² Ibid., p. 72.

an aura around certain elements of the book which became so attractive in her son's eyes that he would often be drawn to the Bible for an answer to specific psychological needs. It is a fact that the father's Calvinistic values are precisely the ones which Archibald rejected and frequently attacked with violence in his later life. In contrast, Mrs. MacLeish's general permissiveness, her avoidance of Scripture-inspired guilt feelings in her young children, and her approach to Scripture by means of enticement made the stories vital and palatable. As Archibald MacLeish derived an ethical perspective from two parents of strong ego, the Old Testament contributed imagery of a paternally inspired authoritarian ethic and, conversely, some elements of a maternally inspired humanistic ethic, both of which fused and conflicted in the development of the artist.

A final psychological consideration is the relationship which Mrs. MacLeish had to her children during, and as a result of, the reading program. As mentioned previously, she said, "One happy result from our reading together is that I so fully have their confidence in their independent reading."¹ From the time they were able to "choose" their own books, the children expected their mother's advice and approval "as to the books which they may best read."² This maternal influence, the establishment of trust, is normal and wholesome for a

¹Martha Hillard MacLeish, p. 56.

²Ibid.

growing child, and the relationship of trust between mother and son seems to have been normal in the formative years. This mutual trust, according to Erik Erikson,

forms the basis in the child for a sense of identity which will later combine a sense of being "all right," of being oneself, and¹ of becoming what other people trust one will become.

That Mrs. MacLeish showed a broadmindedness in understanding her children's individual needs and guided them toward a desire for freedom and a knowledge of different ways of life is proof that she was a wholesome influence.

However, these obvious truths ought not to obscure the fact that Martha MacLeish was in her quiet way a dominating woman. As already noted, her friend of many years, Dr. Harkness, in speaking of her manipulation of organizations and people described her mind as "a powerful but delicately adjusted tool" with which she "could do exactly what she wanted." He added, "This is rather frightening, but she was humble and gentle."² And we might add "subtle." Although the content of the reading program and of the children's home education generally provided a variety of experiences which would lead to developing independent judgment, there are indications that the relation also developed prolonged dependency.

¹Erik Erikson, Childhood and Society (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1950), p. 221.

²Martha Hillard MacLeish, p. 144.

A core problem in child development is the transition from mother-child love, which is a relation between two unequal persons, to a productive relation between the child and other "equal" persons of either sex. In order to grow, the child

must become more and more independent, until he does not need the mother any more. Thus the mother-child relationship is paradoxical and, in a sense, tragic. It requires the most intense love on the mother's side, and yet this very love must help the child to grow away from the mother, and to become fully independent. It is easy for any mother to love her child before this process of separation has begun--but it is the task in which most fail, to love the child and at the same time to let it go--and to want to let it go.¹

Martha's statement about the children's judgment being very dependent on her own, without any suggestion that she wished to let a child choose a book independent of her own opinion,² is the first clue that Martha MacLeish was not eager to loosen her hold upon the children. It hardly makes sense to talk of prolonged dependency merely in terms of early childhood, when dependency is normal. Therefore, a summary of biographical facts, some of which will be handled in detail later, is in order now so that the pattern of dependency may be noted in its breadth.

According to her autobiography, Martha was the intel-

¹Fromm, pp. 33-34.

²Martha's concession to the children in allowing them to have The Inferno read to them seems to have been given unwillingly; she simply miscalculated her ability to divert them away from the book by explaining the pictures.

lectual stimulus for her growing children, and this situation encouraged emotional dependency simply because she was their mother. Mrs. MacLeish does not comment upon the quality of education at the Glencoe public school, which her sons attended,¹ and she mentions nothing about the relationships of her children with their teachers. But for a comparison of intellectual stimulus at home and at school, it is enough to say that by the time the children were reading Robinson Crusoe in grammar school they had already had the equivalent of a high school education in literature at home. Mr. MacLeish's well-known poem "Ancestral" poignantly illustrates the depth of the mother-son relationship.²

In adolescence Archibald decided to impress his father with his business sense by raising chickens, and it was Mrs. MacLeish who gave advice, trudged to the basement with Archibald during winter to check incubator temperature, and performed surgery upon the fowl.³ Through the years Archibald sought his mother's advice on many matters: a Keats paper in high school, his choice of the legal profession, a host of details involving courtship, marriage, and family life. Mrs. MacLeish also gave her son the strongest encour-

¹Martha Hillard MacLeish, p. 63; Schreiber, p. 61.

²Archibald MacLeish, "Ancestral," The Collected Poems of Archibald MacLeish (Sentry edition; Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1963), pp. 43-4.

³Martha Hillard MacLeish, pp. 65-66.

agement of any family member during the hard early years when he struggled to establish himself as a poet.

These facts do not single out Mr. MacLeish as an abnormal person tied to apron strings; the mother-son relation is substantial throughout life, and in American society Mr. MacLeish would be considered normal. What is important is that Mrs. MacLeish had an influential hand in her son's life until she died. Strong maternal attachment, especially in developing years, has been characteristic of many artists. Yet, the prevailing lifelong tie between mother and son borders on the exceptional for an artist and does show up to a considerable extent in Mr. MacLeish's work.

There is evidence of prolonged dependency in at least two of the four of her son's adult poems which Martha MacLeish quotes in entirety at the end of Chapter V of her autobiography. First there is Mr. MacLeish's vivid recollection of his early youth in the poem "Ancestral," published in Streets in the Moon when he was thirty-four years old:

. . . I was small. I lay
Beside my mother on the grass, and sleep
Came--
 slow hooves and dripping with the dark
The velvet muzzles, the white feet that move
In a dream water
 and O soon now soon
Sleep and the night.

And I was not afraid.

Her hand lay over mine. Her fingers knew
 Darkness,--and sleep--the silent lands, the far
 Far off of morning where I should awake.¹

These lines which conclude the short poem and depict dependency in a small child are remarkable fantasies for a man past thirty. The quick succession of the images "velvet muzzles" and "the white feet that move / In a dream water" are pretty obviously symbolic references to the breast and pre-natal stages respectively. The situation presented by the whole context of the poem seems to be one of the son's feeling overpowered by the mother in an incestuous relationship, if indeed the passage does not represent the farthest stage of regression, that of returning to the womb.

Another poem in Streets in the Moon, but not quoted in Mrs. MacLeish's autobiography, has the profound title "Some Aspects of Immortality" and suggests the dependency and childhood fears similar to those expressed mildly in the first part of "Ancestral":

A nursemaid with a carriage steers
 Across the vista, pushes, nears
 The brink, goes over, disappears.

Too ignorant, think I, for fears!²

The poem is less rich in symbolism than the one just cited, yet it shows a kind of detached recollection of dependency and characteristically associates mother protection with

¹Archibald MacLeish, "Ancestral," Ibid.

²Archibald MacLeish, "Some Aspects of Immortality," Ibid., p. 45.

thoughts and fears of immortality, as the poet frequently associated these ideas in the poems and stories of his late adolescence.

Finally, the other poetic recollection from Streets in the Moon quoted by Mrs. MacLeish probably presents her son's adult recollections of the prescribed reading program after the children had learned to read. The "three chairs" would refer to Norman's, Archibald's, and Kenneth's--the three MacLeish children old enough to read. The title of the poem is "Eleven":

And summer mornings the mute child, rebellious,
 Stupid, hating the words, the meanings, hating
 The Think now, Think, the Oh but Think! would leave
 On tiptoe the three chairs on the verandah
 And crossing tree by tree the empty lawn
 Push back the shed door. . . .¹

The boy would then sit in the dark, damp shed and observe all the tools, and finally at noon the gardener would come "like a priest, like an interpreter, and bend / Over his baskets." The poem concludes:

And they would not speak:
 They would say nothing. And the child would sit there
 Happy as though he had no name, as though
 He had been no one: like a leaf, a stem,
 Like a root growing--²

The opening lines corroborate the other evidence (page 45 of this study) that Archibald MacLeish was an inhibited child. The poet recalls the distasteful effort of reading when

¹Archibald MacLeish, "Eleven," ibid., p. 36.

²Ibid.

he did not want to read, together with a wish for greater freedom than the family reading allowed him at that particular time. The boy seems to make a half-hearted attempt to identify with the mysterious gardener, a father substitute, and failure is indicated partly by the gardener's refusal to communicate and then overwhelmingly by the boy's feeling that he lacked a self. Yet there is a kind of happiness in having escaped the rather mild regimentation of group reading. There may also be a feeling of masochistic compensation, for if he cannot identify with people, either his peers who are presumably still reading or else the silent gardener, then there is the opportunity to attempt identifying with things--at first with the tools (symbols of the male self or the father) in the shed and then with leaf, stem, and root. The last two half-lines resolve the conflict of the poem with the pleasant feeling of quick, renewed attachment to the parent stem, a renewed tie with mother and the soil. The feeling of protection in this incestuous tie is basically the same as the one experienced in "Ancestral."

A recent interview, in which Mr. MacLeish describes his early attempts to write, is worth quoting at length:

I didn't want to write as a boy: I wanted to do what everyone else my age in that little Illinois village wanted to do--swim in Lake Michigan, explore the Skokie marsh, raise Buff Orpingtons and fight--mostly fight. But there were always words in my ears--words as sounds and sounds dragging enormous shadows of meanings which I rarely understood. It wasn't so much that I wanted to write down words as

that words kept pestering me. I went dutifully to the Chicago Auditorium to listen to what were then called the Thomas Concerts but the sounds that haunted my mind weren't these sounds--they were the sounds of the words as my mother read the Divine Comedy--I don't know what translation--and the Tempest and "Chapman"--even "Hiawatha." The sounds came first then and they have continued to come first: cadence before words and words before meanings. When I began (at Hotchkiss) to write verses or pages of prose it wasn't a question of paper and pencil but of that tune in the head which could sometimes be caught but most often not. You speak of pressures. The precise word. As long as the tune went on there was no peace until it found its line. I don't want to make it sound more witless than it must but that, more or less, was the nature of the compulsion. Not an urge to write but a need to set words to the music. And my difficulties, as you can understand, came from the same source as my necessity. For to be always listening is to be hopelessly suggestible. And I was. A master at Hotchkiss innocently loaned me Swinburne's Laus Veneris and I was lost to my own ear for years after. That sort of thing was always happening and it was primarily for that reason that I left the law a few years after I had begun to practice and dragged my young family off to France. I had to find my own tongue and the best place,¹ I thought, to find it was among strangers.

Mr. MacLeish's tribute to the influence of his mother and to the reading program is apparent. He describes his "will to form" in musical terms which suggest that from the beginning he thought of art primarily as a means of expression rather than communication.

It is noteworthy that the writing urge began during the first periods of long separation from his family, when the

¹ Archibald MacLeish, "The Limits of Creative Writing Courses," Art and the Craftsman: The Best of the Yale Literary Magazine, 1836-1961, ed. Joseph Harnet and Neil Goodwin (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1961), pp. 281-282.

thirteen-year-old boy was sent to fashionable Hotchkiss Preparatory School because his mother thought the new schools near Glencoe inadequate preparation for college.¹ Mr. MacLeish reports that he attended this Connecticut school four years (1907-1911) "and hated it."² After several more years spent at Yale, Harvard Law School, and in a brief law practice, he again sought to find his poetic talent by enforcing separation with an even further move to Paris in 1923.

¹Martha Hillard MacLeish, p. 65.

²Schreiber, p. 69.

CHAPTER III

TURRIS EBURNEA: THE YALE WRITING, 1911-1915

The period from 1907, when Archibald MacLeish began attending Hotchkiss "Prep," to 1923, when he set out for Europe determined to become a professional poet, constitutes the apprenticeship of his writing career. His one book during these years, Tower of Ivory (1917), is a collection of verse in which his first published drama, "Our Lady of Troy," stands most prominent. Lyrics of this volume include many written for the Yale Literary Magazine, and these set the tone for most of the work written before expatriation. Other, uncollected short stories and essays from the decade preceding 1923 merit analysis because they reveal early concerns which Mr. MacLeish was to develop in his verse plays.

This chapter will illustrate these concerns by surveying briefly the poems and stories which Mr. MacLeish contributed to the Yale Literary Magazine. Dominant themes will be shown to coalesce in "Our Lady of Troy," which will be treated in Chapter IV. The present chapter will conclude with comments on a few other poems from Tower of Ivory which had not appeared in the Yale "Lit."

The major events of Mr. MacLeish's life from 1907 to 1923 can be sketched briefly. After the family trip to Europe in

1910 and his senior year at Hotchkiss (1910-1911), Archibald began a liberal arts program with the class of 1915 at Yale, his grandfather Hillard's alma mater. As a member of the football, water polo, and swimming teams, Phi Beta Kappa, the senior society, and the staff of The Yale Literary Magazine, he became known as the most versatile member of his class.¹ Despite his claim, "I had little life of my own,"² he contributed seventeen rather introspective pieces of poetry and prose to the magazine. He became editor in his senior year, won the annual poetry prize of the University, and delivered the Class Poem of 1915.³ He took another European trip, this time with classmates, before his senior year and just before the outbreak of the War.⁴

Upon graduation he went to study law at Harvard, according to an agreement with his parents, and was allowed to marry Ada Hitchcock after a year. They had first met during Archibald's last year at Hotchkiss school. Ada Hitchcock was the daughter of a businessman of Farmington, Connecticut and

¹History of the Class of Nineteen Hundred and Fifteen, I, pp. 469-470; cited from Campbell, p. 21.

²George Schreiber, Portraits and Self-Portraits, p. 69.

³Archibald MacLeish, "Class Poem," The Yale Book of Student Verse, 1910-1919, ed. John Andrews et al., with an Introduction by Charlton M. Lewis, Ph.D., and an Epilogue by William Rose Benet (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1919), pp. 151-154.

⁴Martha Hillard MacLeish, p. 82.

had studied music. For the next year they lived in a little house which Archibald's Aunt Mary had found for them in Cambridge. The MacLeishes had one child when the U.S. entered the war in April, 1917.¹ Archibald wanted to go into active service after his brother Kenneth had enlisted as a flyer, but because of family responsibilities he thought of serving as a civilian in Washington. Not finding anything there for a young man to do, he joined an ambulance unit, went to Europe, and then transferred to an artillery unit.²

After the war he finished law at Harvard, graduated with highest honors in 1919, and stayed at Harvard for a year to teach International Law. A second son, born in the winter of 1920, died the following summer. A daughter named Mary and called Mimi was born a year and a half later and survived. From 1920 to 1923 Mr. MacLeish practiced law successfully with the firm Choate, Hall, & Stewart of Boston. Finding the law too jealous a mistress for an aspiring writer, he gave it up, to his father's chagrin, and moved with his family to Europe.³

Mr. MacLeish's writing up to 1923 is fairly uniform. The verse shows a consciousness of models. Among the lyrics there are a number of sonnets and the irregular, shorter rhymed stanzas common to Romantic and fin de siècle poets. The verse play, "Our Lady of Troy," borrows its "poetic"

¹Ibid., pp. 86-89.

²Ibid., p. 91.

³Ibid., pp. 106 and 113.

diction, blank verse, and Faustian situation from Renaissance authors, Shakespeare and Marlowe. The early poems abound in images of chivalry, alchemy, the Petrarchan tradition, and the idyllic Georgian descriptions of the countryside. Diction is elevated, and the tone is usually that of a reverent whisperer concerned with the ideals of Western literary tradition or the pathos of "unique" personal experiences.

The short stories of the college years are the only ones of Mr. MacLeish's that are available. They are fairly well plotted and a little more colloquial than the verse. Invariably they deal with the conflicts of young people, and they owe at least a little to the genteel tradition of Howells, James, and Wharton. Two very early sketches are florid and thoughtful descriptions of the countryside. The two editorials written for The Yale Literary Magazine and the few articles written before 1923 are passionate exhortations in language of strong "literary" flavor. The college writing fulfils ordinary expectations and forms the bulwark of a respectable corpus of juvenilia which Mr. MacLeish has been properly ashamed of. There is an awareness of genre; the mild tones of the verse are written in a manner to be overheard, the rhetoric of the prose to be heard.

The work published from 1911 to 1915 in the Yale "Lit," as the magazine was called, is Mr. MacLeish's earliest extant writing. Our main interest in it is its themes. In particular the creative writing of these years introduces themes which

show the beginning of a life-long preoccupation with three subjects and the problems they raise: (a) religious faith and altruism, (b) the meaning of human love, and (c) the problem of knowledge. By accepting these standard, well-worked themes within the framework of a literary tradition, Mr. MacLeish begins developing into an academic writer. He examines and doubts the views on religion and altruism which he learned at home. He tries to see the relation of scientific technical knowledge to intuition in art, and concludes that the two kinds of knowledge are antagonistic. He explores the meaning of love as fact and ideal. If for no other reason, the play "Our Lady of Troy" is important because it resolves all three problems for the time being with an air of conviction and finality.

When Archibald MacLeish arrived at Yale he seems to have possessed fairly intact the belief in God and in the idealization of love and poetry, all of which he had imbibed from his mother's example and the readings discussed in the previous chapter. A poem published in his second year illustrates his optimistic theism:

I laugh at the shears of Atropos and the
 shadowy nothing of Time,
 For a dreamer am I, and I follow my dreams
 over the world and away
 To a land as far as the last faint¹ star,
 the Land of the Dawning Day.

¹Archibald MacLeish, "Wanderlust," The Yale Literary Magazine, LXXVIII (April, 1913), 281.

"Gifts," the first poem he published at Yale, is an idealistic love poem which could have been addressed to anyone including his future wife, whom he had met the previous year, or it could have been a literary exercise. Taking an abject Petrarchan stance in the first two stanzas, the poet concludes:

The whole world lays its treasures forth for thee;
 My treasure is thine image in my heart,
 A cross upon my breast that none may see,¹
 A sacred vow, a white shrine set apart.

"Gifts" is a love poem which, without necessarily implying a belief in God or religious ritual, at least assumes the sacredness of religious things and makes human love conditional to their worth. In this poem the writer feels a positive identity between love and religion.

But a number of other works published after his first year at Yale show scepticism about love or religion, or both together, and there is also a pronounced tendency for the young writer to regard them as mutually antagonistic. The short stories of the Yale years are the best record of this attitude toward the inter-relationship of love and religion.

A. The Revolt against "Altruism"

Mr. MacLeish's first published story, "The Charity of Love,"¹ portrays John Claverhill, a young poet type, infatuated with natural beauty and ideal love, but frustrated in his courting relationship with pious, altruistic Emily.

¹Archibald MacLeish, "The Charity of Love," The Yale Literary Magazine, LXXVIII (March, 1913), 253-260.

She confides to her mother, Mrs. Dudgeon that she hopes to marry John and reform him away from his frankly admitted conceit and "pagan hedonism," which includes indulgences like drinking wine, smoking cigarettes, and caring nothing for recipients of Emily's charitable acts.

Emily and John try to convert each other, each to his own way of life, and after John's humorous and successful attempts to embarrass Emily on their visits to the lame and the sick they come to a showdown on the Dudgeon front porch:

" . . . But I think you put altogether too much time on altruism in theory and practice. You don't think of yourself enough. How any girl with hair like the dusk and eyes like stars drown'd in still pools can--"

"Don't be silly John. It isn't possible to think too much of other people. Every precept of religion teaches that."

"Oh, precepts! I believe in a religion that speaks to the heart, not the head." John had forgotten the half-cynical tone that veiled his customary speech, and his eyes were eager and intent. "What do you suppose the ancient prophecies were but the heart-hunger of priests and burning poets? How else can a power we do not see speak to us save through the longing of our hearts? And we long for happiness, beauty, love, the witchery of the spring. The throbbing glow of the sunset on those drifting clouds speaks to your heart more fervently than any truth of philosophy or any tenet of religion.¹

Emily indicts John of paganism and John gleefully pleads guilty, adding to Emily's surprise that he had been trying to convert her, but that she is beyond hope. Mrs. Dudgeon, who has been eavesdropping all the while, comes from behind french windows, calls John a brute for trying to convert the

¹Ibid., pp. 258-259.

tearful Emily away from Christianity, and concludes: "This is our reward for sacrificing everything to the salvation of your soul. Emily, come!"¹

Mrs. Dudgeon resembles Mr. MacLeish's own mother insofar as she was, in her son's mind, the defender of traditional religious faith and a practitioner of charity; her last speech sounds more like that of a mother than of a potential mother-in-law. Emily is her spiritual twin. The son in the pose of rebel seems to be "playing to the wings" as if wishing that his mother would take to heart his categorical denunciation of institutional religion and charity and his acceptance, in their place, of the values of a poet, esthete, and lover. Insofar as it is a love story at all, "The Charity of Love" is framed in the young writer's consciousness of mother love as represented in ideas and acts which the mother is well known to have approved. The young hero tentatively had a religion substitute. Throughout the story, however, the writer whose image the hero is feels ambivalent to the extent that John Claverhill is portrayed "conceited and . . . proud of it,"² too much the slave of "the half-cynical tone that veiled his customary speech."³ Significantly, the writer portrays ambivalence in the hero's very confidence, as the end of the story shows:

¹Ibid., p. 260

²Ibid., p. 254.

³Ibid., pp. 258-259.

For some moments John sat back in a wicker chair contemplating the stars with a puzzled countenance. Then he rose, breathed deeply, and smiled with a delicate expressiveness at the sweet shadows of the night.¹

The young man's rejection of altruism and religion together in "The Charity of Love" becomes much more richly developed as the theme of a story published two months later.

"The Virtues of Vice"² attempts to distinguish religious dogma, which is by now untenable, from practicable moral goodness. An elderly, mildly sarcastic, agnostic narrator and Will Target, a "most optimistic" young man with "a heart impervious to cynicism,"³ enjoy a dialogue on theism and the good life, first in an academic setting and then in a cheap bar. The narrator has watched all the young men of the "club" succumb to "the epidemic of atheism, cynicism, iconoclasm and various kindred mental and moral disorders."⁴ He has assumed that Will alone has some type of durable religious belief underpinning his idealistic, cheerful manner. A shock comes when Will earnestly takes the narrator aside:

"You believe in immortality, don't you?"
His tone invited and discouraged argument.
"I take it you don't, Will?"

Upon request the older man states his opinion:

¹Ibid., Italics mine.

²Archibald MacLeish, "The Virtues of Vice," The Yale Literary Magazine, LXXVIII (May, 1913), 352-359.

³Ibid., p. 352.

⁴Ibid., p. 352.

"I've decided at last that immortality is the riddle which fools solve and wise men despair of. Perhaps you've embraced the cause of atheism, too?" I was harsh. It is not pleasant for an old man to find himself mistaken.

Perhaps the narrator feels sad because he must reject the vicarious enjoyment of seeing another happy in a false belief. Or is he a disguised atheist? For he asks, "You didn't bring me here to recite your damnable propaganda of ifs and nos?"²

Will has refused to argue any basis for his views, but he offers his conclusions fervently:

"No, it wasn't to recite my creed, as you call it. It was to say good-bye. There's only one conclusion to all this, you know. If there's no afterlife, if there is no rewarding or punishing power, the natural conclusion is that happiness is the only thing worth while. To me happiness is freedom to live lavishly and gloriously, freedom to breathe and act and talk—all that the wildest Bacchante ever sang into his 'carpe diem.' And such happiness I am going to find. It will mean the loss of my friends, and what the world calls 'my good name,' but it is worth a thousand times more than that. It is the only compensation for living."³

The narrator characterizes Will as "a man of few ideas, . . . the enthusiast, the scorner of half-measures"⁴ ready to "put his doctrine of disbelief to the test and prove its virtue by its very vices."⁵ Will's assuming that theism automatically excludes pleasure and happiness and that respectability is impossible for nonbelievers may be a

¹Ibid., p. 353.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., p. 354.

⁴Ibid., pp. 354-355.

⁵Ibid.

reduxio ad absurdum of commonly held fundamentalist opinions. The narrator seems to see the irony and lack of realism in Will's statements, but Will certainly misses these insights. The narrator has a simple answer to the long speech of Will's quoted above: "If life needs a compensation I guess you'd better go."¹

Feeling responsible and curious as well when Will rushes off, the narrator searches all the town's bars until he finds Will blissful before an empty wine glass. Will chides the narrator, who is now a well established symbol of science or philosophy, for his "smoldering fire and long face."² Will then describes in highly idealistic phrases a dancer whom he had revived and cheered up after she had fainted near his table during her act. He recounts how he had explained to the unhappy girl his own source of happiness: freedom from superstition, doubt, and "threadbare convention." Now, he had told her, "I'm living with every beat of my heart."³

After Will had rhapsodized on the "wonderful world," stars, and the night, the dancer "half pityingly" asked, "Can just those things make you happy?"⁴ Will said, "Those things and necessity. . . . The present is all we are any of us sure of,"⁵ etc. The girl finally rises "with a

¹Ibid., p. 354.

²Ibid., p. 356.

³Ibid., p. 357.

⁴Ibid., pp. 357-358.

⁵Ibid., p. 358.

vague smile in her eyes":

"'Thank you,' she said. 'You have been kinder than you know,' and she went quickly across the room and out through the door."¹

The narrator interprets Will's act of consolation as "one of the most Christian acts I have ever heard recounted."²

Will is disappointed and explains,

"Christian! Why, I just wanted her to be happy. I couldn't be happy with her so miserable. I tell you it was the sheerest Paganism, the sheerish [sic] selfishness."³

Their differences of opinion are left unresolved. But the story closes with the narrator emphasizing that the act "has made you happy, too,"⁴ even though he leaves Will "sitting alone with all the happiness gone out of his face and his dreams turned to ashes about him."⁵

Like his earlier "The Charity of Love," this story by the young MacLeish attacks what its author sees as weaknesses of Christianity, but it goes further in its summary assault on immortality, which is now explicitly in the area of dogma; the author is looking for a way to resign himself to unbelief. His effort to find a satisfying value system independent of his religious upbringing is extremely painful.

First, the author, through his hero Will Target, expresses a need to sanctify the pleasure principle in spite of the threat which he thinks Christianity poses to it. He be-

¹Ibid.

²Ibid., pp. 358-359.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

gins with a narrow working definition of pleasure or happiness--i. e., self-satisfaction through those "carpe diem" pleasures most likely to deprive him of the respectability which church membership bestows. For Will, man must be a saint or a rake; there is no middle ground. Lurking in his mind is the assumption that virtue is impossible outside a Christian framework. The narrator's interpretation of Will's virtuous act reinforces the fears of the "virtue" Will had sought to escape. Like his Puritan forebears, Will denies the existence of "natural morality" or the plurality of moral systems, admitting no distinction between orthodox theism and moral goodness. He believes that, once he has discarded the dogma and practice of organized religion, he will be freed from the demands of any moral system. The situation is not unlike the arguments Huckleberry Finn has with his "conscience," but young MacLeish's rendition of the conflict is understandably humorless, immature, and frustrating. MacLeish's narrator, in his use of the label "Christian," provides neither irony nor a way out of the dilemma. He simply accepts the criteria his immature friend began with: i.e., that all morality is inevitably "Christian."

Secondly, Will's reaction to the narrator's rationalistic interpretation of a good deed inspired by self-love brings no consolation to Will. The narrator makes a feeble attempt to rid Will's mind of untenable categories of moral experience and the fears that accrue to them. Will is shocked

because the apparent opposites, self-love and altruism, appear identical in their effects, despite Will's effort to invert their traditional value. Although Will's fears about broadening the principle of self-love to include charity toward others can be explained partly by the rational and theological categories which the young hero revolts against, these fears ultimately defy a rational explanation.

"Altruism" (the word itself is despised in "The Charity of Love" and is not even used in this story) is inevitably associated in Will's mind with Christian dogma, and Will's reaction is that of a person who fears that Christianity is tracking him down in "Hound of Heaven" fashion. The elder pagan philosopher is consciously portrayed as being more mature than Will because he can accept the moral validity of the pleasure principle, the "good heart," and even the anima naturaliter Christiana. (Despite the narrator's admitted agnosticism, which young MacLeish calls "atheism," his sentiments often show through as those of a church-goer.) Neither Will nor his young creator can find emotional satisfaction in accepting the narrator's views, which the events of the story have demonstrated; the story expresses tremendous anxiety and guilt over the abandonment of organized religion. The underlying feeling that no non-Christian or "non-religious" person can be, or ought to be, moral can be explained psychologically from data of the story which the young writer seems to have expressed unconsciously.

Mr. MacLeish is ambiguous in his characterization of the dancer. She functions according to type and is essential to the plot insofar as she furnishes the occasion for Will's unconventional and supposedly disreputable act of charity. Yet the author also has Will recite his new found creed to her and only afterwards has him report it to the philosophical narrator. The dancer's responses are precisely those which the young MacLeish would have expected from his mother, and again as with Mrs. Dudgeon in "The Charity of Love" he expresses the fantasy of his mother reacting to his new ideas and life style. Behind the disguise of youth, makeup, and the non-maternal profession of a dancer, the woman of "The Virtues of Vice" is idealized as a person irreproachably innocent and chaste, the object of admiration but not desire.

Her first reaction when she comes near the young man is to fall into a dead faint, and Will's manner of describing the event to the narrator reflects the son's feelings after having hurt his mother. It also shows his need for a security to compensate lost mother love:

For the first time Will's voice lost its joyous tone and he stared vacantly at the glass in his hand.¹

Seen closehand, her eyes are "very weary, . . . her cheeks under the carmen were dead white," and "her hands . . . trembling."² The "weariness had left her eyes, . . . but

¹Ibid., p. 357.

²Ibid.

her lips were trembling suspiciously." The reasons for the young dancer's suspicion do not preclude a mother's suspicion of her son's new creed, which Will proceeds to expound. When he finishes, her question "Can just those things make you happy?" implies doubt about his being able to do without the consolations of religion, a problem which dominates the dialogue of the story. Finally, the motive of the dancer as dancer is completely obscure when the author tells us:

"Thank you, she said. 'You have been kinder than you know,' and she went quickly across the room and out through the crowd about the door."¹

The author apparently means the front door. Are we to suppose that she is going next door for a cup of coffee? or leaving the dancing profession after a dramatic moral conversion? The words "kindlier than you know" are an enigma suggesting that beyond the charitable act of picking her up off the floor and cheering her up, Will made arguments which offered some consolation. But nothing previous to these lines gives a clue that she has agreed with his arguments. In fact, her going out the door suggests a mother's rejection of the son's arguments for hedonism. Throughout her response to Will's ideological discussion, the dancer's vraisemblance and function as a dancer give way to her role as an unconsciously designated mother-listener. When she had asked, "'But why are you happy?' she spoke "without curiosity, half to herself."²

¹ Ibid., p. 358.

² Ibid., p. 357.

She is sceptical of his new creed and the possibility of its making him happy, or else as a mother she has some other concern. There is in these lines and in her "Thank you" and exit the vague suggestion that Will's attempt at mother seduction has been properly turned down. She thanks him for the kindness of his offer but still disapproves.

After Will's suppression of this phantasy, the elder narrator's Christian interpretation of the young man's act of charity and his emphatic "it has made you happy, too" is no consolation because (a) it cannot bring back religious faith or innocence, and (b) the very notion of altruism and its association with Mr. MacLeish's mother's involvement in organizational Christian charity bring out spectres of unpleasant, guilt-inspired religious experience. The religious creed young MacLeish has rejected is basically his father's, and the narrator of the story is a father symbol at least at those points where he seems to defend the orthodoxy of the elder MacLeish. Although the young man's rejection of orthodoxy does not in itself cause unbearable anxiety, it is a symbolic rejection of the father which automatically brings the mother's disapproval, and this is a source of great anxiety. Mrs. MacLeish's charitable work is in her jealous son's mind the strongest bond between her and her husband. More than a religious bond, it is symbolic of the marriage union itself. In her fictional role as dancer, the mother gives her son a reason for rejecting his seduction fantasy,

and the reason is simply her loyalty to her husband expressed in religious terms. Therefore, the very thought of "Christian altruism" is an obstacle to the son's "selfish" desire for the mother, more universally expressed as a desire for pleasure; "altruism" is an obsessive reminder of the marriage bond and a source of the depression which Will and his prototype feel when, at the end of the story, Will's "dreams turned to ashes about him."¹

The son's emotional unwillingness to accept love of others as a normal extension of self-love, his denial that "altruistic" behavior can be even theoretically separate from theistic belief, has as its basis the most intimate ties of a son to his mother and father. This type of conditioning is stronger than the mainly intellectual conditioning of abstract religious percepts. The original dichotomies are translated into other kinds of experience. But generally, Mr. MacLeish's attempt to play the role of iconoclast, his rational attempts to break down dilemmas similar to the one described above, do not erase the guilt which the man feels in his very attempt to violate the taboos implicit for him in the relationship he attacks. In the above instance, to deny religious dogma is to attack the father; to deny the validity of "altruism" is to attack the mother's relationship to him through the marriage bond and through

¹Ibid., p. 359.

their shared belief system, which is philanthropically oriented Christianity.

As an intellectual statement, the narrator's attempts to distinguish moral conduct from a Christian belief in immortality show an important and necessary achievement in the artist's intellectual development. But Will's reaction and even the agnostic narrator's partial retreat from his own position indicate that the young writer gives assent to these new ideas of his with only part of his ego. The scars of an unresolved emotional conflict are apparent throughout the story. "Altruism," with its many unpleasant associations, will remain a bugbear in the artist's conscious and unconscious mind for many years. In "The Virtues of Vice" the argument for humanistic self-realization is furnished consistently by the academic, rationalistic narrator. But he too is ambiguously characterized when he slips out of his anti-theist (or "un-theist") role by expressing sentiments favorable to religious dogma; his sadness at learning of Will's rejection of religion and his Christian interpretation of Will's action--an interpretation inconsistent with an agnostic value system--force him to incongruously defend dogmas symbolic of the elder MacLeish which his son had attacked through statements of both characters early in the story. The narrator could possibly be functioning at some parts in the story as a true father symbol; however, he seems to reflect some kind of professorial father substitute. The young MacLeish seems

caught between loyalty to a teacher-father or to the mother, and the intellectually plausible compromise offered by the elderly narrator proves unsatisfactory because young MacLeish interprets it emotionally to mean rejection of the mother. Yet this compromise is not without its appeal in the form of escape from dominant parental influence. The young man's subsequent rejection of rationalism, which will soon be discussed, is an attempt to reject the father (symbol of theistic belief and rationalism) without rejecting the mother altogether. For, as a symbol, Martha MacLeish could support her son's rejection of rationalism even though she could not sanction a rejection of theism. Estheticism continues the escape from rationalism and also furnishes a way to escape her dominant influence without direct confrontation in the "altruism vs. selfishness" dichotomy illustrated above.

B. A Romantic's Creed

The five remaining stories of the Yale period shift thematic emphasis away from religious altruism to a variant form of "selflessness"--the idealistic love of woman. They show in varying degrees a disillusionment with mother symbols, cynicism above love, and a desire to escape the mother. It is interesting that disillusionment with theism is one phase of a general sourness toward all ideals and, as suggested earlier, that young MacLeish's personae find it easier to believe in all ideals, especially theism and love, or none of them, rather than to distinguish and select between acceptable

and unacceptable ideals.

"The Age of Chivalry"¹ deals with a young man who has a wife and child and is impressed into his majesty's army. The setting is a medieval port town, and there is a surface piety in dialogue and description which reflects the familiar ideals which the young writer had been exposed to at home. His conflict is that he has been forcibly taken from his family (as Archibald was when sent to boarding school) and that he is disillusioned about his own and his wife's fidelity when he returns. His return is melodramatic: while walking the wharves of the town where he had left his wife, he finds that she has become so desperate to provide for their child that she unknowingly solicits her husband in the dark. He accepts and draws her out to a place where there is more light. When they recognize each other, Mary (the wife) flees and goes back to where she has left the baby "on its bed of rags crying pitifully."² Thematically, the story blasts the ideal of faithful love, rejecting out of hand the mother's claims of self-sacrifice for the child. On a deeper level it also reflects horror at the recognition of an incest fantasy. The guilt each feels is self-explanatory. The son is proved unworthy of the mother because he has gone away, and the mother has proved unworthy of the son because she has tried to lure

¹Archibald MacLeish, "The Age of Chivalry," The Yale Literary Magazine, LXXIX (November, 1913), 71-75.

²Ibid., p. 75.

him back. The author may also be identifying with the fore-lorn child of the story.

Another story with a medieval setting is a romantic allegory entitled "The Shears of Atropos,"¹ which was published in Mr. MacLeish's second year at Yale. A soldier, a poet, and an innkeeper spend a convivial evening together drinking, and they pledge their friendship before the first two depart in the morning. The lusty soldier sees a woman in the forest and offers her a red rose. He is summarily killed by brigands. The poet sees a beautiful woman in a town and follows her to a feast at a castle. He is ill-clad and has not been invited to the feast (cf. the guest without a wedding garment, Matt. 22: 11-13); when he goes to the front of the hall to offer the lady a white rose, the elderly regal man at her side kills him. In the winter following these events, the innkeeper's daughter becomes ill and tells her father that if he can find roses for her she knows she will get well. The desperate father searches everywhere until finally, just as he leans to pick some yellow roses on a wintry cliffside, he falls and is killed by a landslide.

The soldier and poet clearly represent impure and pure love respectively. The innkeeper seems to represent family responsibility. The section of the story dealing with the poet is the most intensely portrayed, while the innkeeper's

¹Archibald MacLeish, "The Shears of Atropos," The Yale Literary Magazine, LXXVIII (October, 1912), 14-20.

portion is bathetic and anticlimactic. Of the two women in the story, the woman in the castle has greater splendor. She seems to be a mother figure: when the young poet makes his spiritual gift to her by offering a white rose, the elderly gentleman, probably her husband and certainly a father figure, retaliates by killing the boy with a sword. The apparently undeserved fate of the innkeeper may reflect the author's feeling that the innkeeper shares guilt by association with the other two men who had both committed punishable offenses.

"Laus Veneris"¹ begins with a conversation in the Marsyan Club which is so cynical about all ideals that the hero, Jared, calls the men's talk "a fitting preamble for suicide."² Exasperated with everybody's cynicism including his own, Jared insists that "half the ideals of life rest on man's adoration of woman"³ and that love is spiritual and ennobling and distinct from carnal desire. The conversation stops when one of the members reminds Jared that by common consent members of the club may not speak on any subject they have no first-hand knowledge of. So Jared, "a scientist at heart and a poet by nature,"⁴ agrees "by way of penance-- and adventure"⁵ to go in quest of his ideal. He has already

¹Archibald MacLeish, "Laus Veneris," The Yale Literary Magazine, LXXVIII (April, 1913), 292-298.

²Ibid., p. 292.

³Ibid., p. 293.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

decided that love in the town and among the middle classes "breeds a fine contempt,"¹ so he sets out for the countryside and meets a sallow, overworked girl upon the hillside. As they look out on the scenery, Jared is appalled that the girl cannot respond to its beauty and has no faith in the existence of love. People in the country, she says,

don't know what love is. They were evil-minded when they were children and they're mean and selfish now they're grown up.²

She concludes that love exists only in storybooks and among the rich, beliefs which Jared has already rejected. The dichotomy between "altruism" (i.e., "real" love) and selfishness appears once more, with the implications which have already been explained.

The sum of Jared's and the girl's negative attitudes about love lead to the conclusion that "real" love does not exist. The irony of the conclusion is managed with skill surpassing anything in young MacLeish's fiction so far:

. . . Jared, being scientist at heart, turned and went up over the hill to search for his ideal. . . . But she did not move. And against her wet cheek she held a flower he had picked and dropped.³

The girl's reaction is sentimental but, more important, it is an unexpected show of emotion after the rest of the story gave the impression that she was insensitive. Implied in the last lines is a value judgment against scientific knowledge and those who use it to discover the truth about human

¹Ibid.

²Ibid., p. 297.

³Ibid., p. 298.

emotions. If the girl of the story functions as a mother symbol, she may be lamenting the son's partial belief in science as an escape from God, the family, and herself. The son would unconsciously feel that full acceptance of a scientific mentality, if this threat to the mother were to materialize, represents "godlessness" or the rejection of the father and would become a quest for a substitute. But neither the hero of the story nor the writer in real life chooses this ultimate unkindness. The attempted compromise is well expressed in epithets assigned to Jared: "a scientist at heart and a poet by nature."¹ The first phrase implies the young writer's desire to reject the father and make science his new father; the second implies that he will remain loyal to the mother by accepting the knowledge of "femine" intuition--knowledge through poetry.

"The Man Who Played God"² is one of the longer and more complex of the seven Yale stories. The pattern of characterization is by now familiar: Allan, an idealistic college senior often referred to as the "boy," struggles futilely to keep alive his faith in one last ideal; Claire Calvin is his ideal and fiancée who once remarks that he is "young. . . . so young,"³ and Duncan Lindsey, Allan's best friend, is older

¹Ibid., p. 293.

²Archibald MacLeish, "The Man Who Played God," The Yale Literary Magazine, LXXVIII (April, 1913), 292-298.

³Ibid., p. 163.

in years and cynicism than Allan is. In a short essay which introduces the story, the writer apologizes for his frankness in dealing with the demi-monde and uses the word "altruism" to refer obscurely and sarcastically to Lindsey's act of friendship.

Although Allan's "actual ideals were gone long since,"¹ he has been, in his own words,

"searching for the one true thing in this world of leaves that fall and skies that change. From the day when I learned one's mother wasn't--wasn't an angel--till the day my faith in heaven collapsed like a pricked cloud, I balanced on stones that rolled out from under my feet."²

In this passage and in the following, religion and love are closely associated, and idealization of the mother coincides with the hero's oscillation between "altruism" and its opposite, "selfishness."

He no longer read respectability in a frock coat nor piety in a pair of side whiskers. He no longer believed all good women were beautiful, nor, alas! that all beautiful women were good. Not that he ever indulged in such treasonable surmise concerning Claire. He knew in his heart she was good, and as for her beauty--but was not all April reflected in her eyes? However, Claire was excepted from all rules--as we shall set [sic] at no great length. Yes, Allan's ideals were quite, quite gone; but not so his idealism. All the strength of his first glittering fancies had returned upon himself and worked in his heart much after the fashion of yeast in a loaf that needs little enough urging to begin with, until that organ was enlarged beyond reason and filled with as much hopes and ambitions and dreams as would have regenerated the world could they have been all freed at once. And now they were finding as complete an

¹Ibid., p. 159.

²Ibid., pp. 160-161.

outlet as is ever vouchsafed to stumbling mortality in the love, almost the worship, of Claire.

Callous Lindsey shows Allan that his ideal "isn't good, nor true, nor--pure."² He tells Allan to drop in unexpectedly on a meeting he will have with Claire that night in the library. What follows is a vague and nearly incomprehensible dialogue between Lindsey and Claire. She asserts that she loves Allan and will marry him but that for some reason she needs Lindsey's help. In a roundabout way they reveal that they have been having a love affair. Lindsey insists altruistically that she should not marry Allan because then his idealism will be shattered. Clair says:

"Yes, I must, I must, I must. Oh, Duncan, Duncan, don't you see what it means? Won't you see?" Her arms went round his neck and she clung to him, breathing hard. "It was not my fault; I was mad, mad," she was babbling breathlessly, "and I'll be good to him--and true to him. Oh, say he shall never know! Duncan, say he shall never know! . . . Duncan, be good to me. You can be very good to me."³

Claire may be going to have a baby. Duncan becomes impassive and actually forgets the plot he had worked out with Allan, who appears at the door in time to hear only the last two sentences. He closes the door and goes away and shoots himself.

But the scene between Lindsey and Claire goes on about the same as before. Claire insists that they must do some-

¹Ibid., p. 160.

²Ibid., p. 161.

³Ibid., p. 164.

thing now that Allan is dead or else "they" will "know" her secret and think "Allan killed himself because--because--"¹ (of the liason which might now become public). But Lindsey's concerns are all for Allan: "Don't you care--Haven't you ever cared about Allan, then?"² Claire reminds Lindsey that Allan is dead now, but Lindsey's reaction is "Selfishness with Claire was a passion."³ Lindsey's disgust with himself comes from the revelation that in attempting to do his friend a service by demolishing an ideal he not only ended his friend's life, but destroyed his honor as well:

Miserable, broken, without hope, he dropped into the low chair and stared at the shattered embers dying on the cold hearth.⁴

The story is too diffuse to allow a detailed psychological interpretation, but there are a few points worth noting. As a typical worldly wise college cynic, Lindsey represents the personal ties of peers and teachers in the environment of science and rationalism which pulls the young MacLeish away from a "belief" in his parents and their ideals. Lindsey is a father-substitute considerably altered from the original religious model. His secular "altruism" is a grotesque version of "selflessness" which the young author wishes to believe in but cannot. He hates "selfishness" in himself, for it is redolent of tabooed incest fantasies. He projects this

¹Ibid., p. 166.

²Ibid., p. 165.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid., p. 166.

"selfishness" to Claire the mother figure who shows what the "boy" feels is an inexcusable attachment to Lindsey the father figure, and then, after the "boy's" unfortunate quietus, to her own security. The ideal of "unselfishness" is attacked like a totem in the symbolic characterization of the very person who inspired it--his mother.

The final Yale story for consideration is "The Roads of Riga Mountain."¹ The very aged Mother Thurston lives with her son Reuben, already an old man, in a New England mountain ghost town. Travellers going up the mountain remark:

" . . . Have all the people gone?"
 All but one family, and that's sadly degenerated.
 Yes, the old mountain stock is pretty well gone."²

Reuben is greatly humiliated, will not be consoled by his mother, and after lingering awhile leaves maternal security to find his first job after a lifetime spent on the mountain. The townspeople he meets are sceptical about his amounting to anything. The story ends with Mother Thurston's reflections:

To Mother Thurston the road to the valley is quite turned about. She never thinks now of those who have gone over the shoulder of the mountain into Salisbury town, but she watches from early morning until . . . dusk, for the slight figure of her knight of the grail. Whether he returns tomorrow or with the fall or winter, or even at the breaking of another spring he will come back a man, for is he not a Thurston of Riga Village and the son of seven generations of men?³

¹Archibald MacLeish, "The Roads of Riga Mountain," The Yale Literary Magazine, LXXVIII (June, 1913), 403-409.

²Ibid., p. 404.

³Ibid., p. 409.

The extraordinary plight of an old man in search of his first job suggests at once that the story functions at a level beyond literal narrative. The phenomenon of growing old with his mother is a phantasy the young MacLeish wishes for even while recognizing its impracticability. The incest guilt of expressing this wish is compensated for in the writer's sentiments as he expresses them through Mother Thurston's closing thoughts. He can prove himself to his mother, be her "knight of the grail," and atone for the incest guilt by achieving some unspecified life goal according to the dictates of his own judgment.

It is noteworthy that of all the Yale stories, only this one shows the mother figure's unconditional approval of her son, even though in this story he has abandoned her against her wishes. The remark made early in the story that the family is "sadly degenerated"¹ may refer unconsciously to the young man's incest fantasy or else to the inadequacy of the hero's father, who significantly has already died when the story takes place. The young MacLeish seems to be suppressing or "killing" the image of his real father in order to take up new father images and by emulation prove himself a worthy "son of seven generations of men."² This portrait of the artist as an old man is his most confident assertion of independence in the writing of the college years.

¹Ibid., p. 404.

²Ibid., p. 409.

Six of the eight Yale stories have just one female character, and all eight have in common a thinly disguised mother figure. All of these stories show the young author's guilt over his "selfishness," some instances of which can be more specifically designated as incest fantasies. Others show a desire to develop independent of parental direction and influence, and still others show a need to give up some of the family's most cherished beliefs. Besides the concern shown in most of the stories for intellectual problems, the most interesting thing about them is their peculiar development outside the logic of plot or theme and along paths of unconscious associations. These appear so clearly to be allegories of his personal psychic experience that they deserve a psychoanalytical interpretation.

The foregoing analysis certainly runs the risk of committing fallacies of "biographical" criticism, but these early stories, written without the objectivity of a mature artist, are so full of naive self-revelations that the risks of psychological and biographical criticism are reduced and well worth taking. Mr. MacLeish, as he is seen in his earliest stages of developing his artist's personality, is not the "pure" artist who can objectify experience and avoid the incongruity of intruding artistically irrelevant personal needs. At his best he was to become this kind of artist, which Otto Rank calls the "Classic" type. But in these stories it is as a Romantic artist that he functions, not

only in the ordinary senses of the word, but also in the special sense which Rank has explained:

For the Romantic stands . . . as the pioneer and earliest specimen of the individual artist-type, whose art-ideology is the cult of personality with its idea of liberty. Not only is he an individual-revolutionary in creation, but he confuses life with art: he is dramatic or lyrical, he acts the piece instead of objectifying it, or rather he is obliged to act it as well as merely objectify it. His art is as chaotic as his life, whereas the pure art ideology is based on order, law, and form--in fact, on traditional and therefore collective ideologies.¹

The stories do not show a primary interest in "collective ideologies," such as the estheticism which is a dominant interest in Mr. MacLeish's poems, including many of the early ones. Instead, the stories record, first, the personal trauma of throwing off the inhibiting elements of personal ties and, second, the throwing off of, or struggle against, old ideologies.

The Yale stories constitute the only prose fiction which Mr. MacLeish has ever published. As "Romantic" art they bear striking resemblance to many of the plays because, just as Mr. MacLeish used these early short stories to express personal "irrelevant" conflict early in his career, he made the plays vehicles for similar, if not identical, conflicts. The same cannot be said for the majority of his poems, which are true examples of "objective" or "classical" art. It

¹Otto Rank, Art and the Artist: Creative Urge and Personality Development (New York: Charles Scribner & Sons, 1932), p. 83.

would be nonsense to assume that the sexual experience reflected in the Yale stories is their only interesting or important element. The writer believes that other experience besides sexual experience "causes" the formation and development of an artist. The complexity of Mr. MacLeish's experience is well illustrated in later works, especially in the plays.

At the beginning of this discussion of the Yale writing, I specified religion and altruism, human love, and the problem of knowledge as the three major intellectual concerns of the early work. The stories reveal most important aspects of Mr. MacLeish's thinking about the interrelation of the first two categories. What remains to be said about human love and knowledge can be classified under the appropriate heading of estheticism. In forming an art ideology of his own, the young MacLeish felt the influence of the nineteenth century movement which sought to understand beauty through art for art's sake. But from his early writing years through his career, Mr. MacLeish's concern for beauty was sometimes for art's sake, but it was also expressed often as an effort to find truth in beauty and thus to arrive at some broad philosophical truth. The esthetic problem for him was in large measure the problem of knowledge. The relation of truth and beauty to poetry provides a framework for dramatic conflict which is manifested in "Our Lady of Troy" and occurs again even in such late works as The Trojan Horse

(1952) and The Music Crept By Me Upon The Waters (1953).

Mr. MacLeish approached the problem of knowledge for the practical purposes of testing religious belief and experience and then of interpreting the experience of beauty in the world through his poetry. A lyric, "The Many Dead,"¹ which may allude to the "good pagans" in Dante's Inferno (Canto V), poses a dilemma between the fact of death and immortality:

God, we believe. Help thou our unbelief!
 Thy law is just. Thy dead are dead.
 But yet--
 And lo, these innocent made wise by grief
 Find comfort in a shattered faith. And
 yet--²

But another, italicized stanza which begins and ends the poem simply describes the seemingly infinite but mindless sea (probably a conscious symbol of God) whose "wan waves perish on the parching sand."³ Attitude and effects in this poem are the same as those of another lyric, "The Silence,"⁴ in which the poet, after a search for God, Truth, and Beauty, finds no answer in "the muffled voices of the sea" until "thou cam'st to me / From out the silence born of voiceless pain."⁵ Throughout this poem the antecedant of "thou" is

¹ Archibald MacLeish, "The Many Dead," The Yale Literary Magazine, LXXVIII (June, 1913), 402.

² Ibid., 11. 13-16.

³ Ibid., 11. 4 and 20.

⁴ Archibald MacLeish, "The Silence," The Yale Literary Magazine, LXXVIII (April, 1913), 299.

⁵ Ibid., 11. 16-20.

uncertain, but whatever answer is to be had for the mystery of life must be sought through insight into physical things. The results are painful, doubtful, and vague.

In a Yale "Lit" editorial, "To the Patient Few," Mr. MacLeish had concluded a discussion of letters as a vocation with the remark, "But what the 'if the Real lives only in the Vague?'"¹ This attitude informs his search for answers to theological and human problems. Standard theological, philosophical, and scientific solutions to problems of immortality and the meaning of life may be clear and systematic, but they are too abstract to be of value to this young writer of lyrics. Instead the beauty of the world and the enchantment of love absorb his attention and help allay the somber musings of philosophy.

"The Grail,"² his most ambitious Yale poem aside from the less interesting valedictory "Poem of the Class of 1915," illustrates the alternating focus upon philosophical musings and the writer's attempts to console himself with insights into Love, Nature, and Beauty. The poet begins:

¹Archibald MacLeish, "To the Patient Few," The Yale Literary Magazine, LXXIX (April, 1914), 286.

²Archibald MacLeish, "The Grail," The Yale Literary Magazine, LXXX (June, 1915), 401-402; also published in Joseph Harned and Neil Goodwin (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1961), pp. 32-33.

"Would I could touch the Truth
Lay hold of it, pluck petalled-
leaves apart
Till all its dew-drenched heart
Glowed coolly to my parching lips."¹

"Youth" tells the poet he is merely seeking his own "dry desires," but that if he will drink deep of the cup of life "that fires / The jewelled chalice and the rusting pool" he will thereby "Drink deep of Truth."² The poet looks to nature and sees beauty, but "nowhere Truth." "Sorrow" advises him to look again, but when he does he is led to ask:

O God, does no thing true remain?
The old gods hear not; will the new
distain?³

He then kisses "the lips of Love," but

Still, still there rose eternally
The vision, and the longing and the fears,
The bitterness of half-belief,
The mocking years,--
Till Love grew heavy-eyed with grief,
And dim tears.⁴

The religious experience in this poem consists of memories and longings which the poet cannot believe in now, and a fear of the Almighty which he wants to get rid of. The fear associates God the Father with the poet's real father. The personified "Love" of the last two lines states abstractly his anticipation of the mother's reaction to the young man's

¹Ibid., ll. 1-4.

²Ibid., ll. 5-11.

³Ibid., ll. 33-34.

⁴Ibid., ll. 42-47.

rejection of the personal as well as the heavenly father.

The conclusion of this poetic and religious experience records the poet's suffering from "the ready-rending tooth / Of doubt," his beating "with bleeding blows / The bars invisible of Heaven," and his praying to

Christ who loves and knows,
And knowing still can love,
That my night may be riven
With lightning of His truth,
and might thereof. . . .

Christ, whose unconditional love is maternally protective, stands opposite God the Father, who inspires fear and is hostile and forbidding behind "the bars invisible of Heaven."² But there is a change in the last five lines, which are addressed to both Persons of an inaccessible deity:

So sought and striven
And so prayed--
Lord, till the work is marred,
The spirit broken, the stick
charred,
Shall be no answer made?³

The content and feeling of these lines is identical to the closing speech of the play Nobodaddy, as we will note again in Chapter V. As an exploration of the God problem, "The Grail" relies on intuitions of nature, human love, and theology. Yet none of these sources yields an answer. The poet's attempts at finding an answer, whether by standard or "unorthodox" methods, lead him to a dead end. It is no

¹Ibid., ll. 49-55

²Ibid., ll. 48.

³Ibid., ll. 56-60.

wonder then that poetic reflections upon nature and love eventually will exclude theological material. Sentiments the author expressed in a prose description of the joy of sailing and of the natural beauty on shore indicate his preference for nature as against theology: "There is not in all Scotch Presbyterianism a stability like that final stroll on shore."¹ And again in an article published shortly before his departure for Europe in 1923 Mr. MacLeish tentatively states his position as a secular humanist: "Heaven is no longer our business, perhaps, but this world is."²

In the college poems and in some later poems, love is an abstract quality which represents mother love, the love of man and woman, or the Grail quest through poetry. The goal of that quest, whether presented in personal or artistic terms, is unknown. Poetry and love are seen to be similar insofar as they both operate according to instinct and involve sorrow and melancholy.

The relation of love to knowledge seems more important to the young artist than any idea of love by itself. For "knowledge" is taken in a very personal sense to be the prerogative of the artist, the object of a quest by which he

¹Archibald MacLeish, "The Cruise of the Domino," The Yale Literary Magazine, LXXX (February, 1914), p. 213; cf. a similar statement at the end of John Claverhill's long speech, p. 53 of this text.

²Archibald MacLeish, "Professional Schools of Liberal Education," Yale Review, X (January, 1921), 369.

achieves an identity and some business in the world. This near-identity of love and knowledge, and the poet's special concern for them, is evident in "Our Lady of Troy," and it can also be seen in some of the other early pieces. In the editorial already cited and again in "The Poem of the Class of 1915," Mr. MacLeish sees a dilemma facing him and his classmates: either they allow the quest for knowledge and ideals begun in college to stagnate once they take the usual path to the business world, or else they follow their dreams of art and love. The choice is "between assured success in a paternal office and the hazardous pilgrimage whither the heart leads."¹ Thus one group applies scientific knowledge to the practical business of making a living as brokers, lawyers, merchants, and manufacturers, but have little contact with ideas, and "their dreams" are "as dead leaves in the rain."² They have what the young MacLeish calls "Happiness." But the second group, consisting of educators and poets, exists in the following way:

" . . . The desire of things remote, let it once pass into the heart, becomes at once a spring of joy and a fire of never ceasing torment." A spring of joy not of happiness.³

Pain and pleasure are mixed in this quest of dreams, love and knowledge. The quest is a rejection of the paternal model.

¹Archibald MacLeish, "To the Patient Few," The Yale Literary Magazine, LXXIX (April, 1914), 285.

²Ibid., p. 284.

³Ibid., p. 285.

The young writer shows considerable tolerance toward the other side; he gives credit to the pursuit of practical business, calling it "a most sensible, a most rational plowing."¹ Yet his personal feelings about his own career choices reflect antipathy toward "rational" business pursuits and the pursuit of rationalistic or scientific knowledge as well. Seeing himself at the parting of the ways, he must choose between the sensible, rational (if not rationalistic) goals who "touch the earth and see the fruits of it," and the sheep who follow their hearts intuitively in pursuit of "the rest--the rest is mist of dreams and vague."²

"The Poem of the Class of 1915,"³ last of the Yale poems to be considered here, is for the most part a verse restatement of ideas sketched a year earlier in the editorial, "To the Patient Few." When published in Tower of Ivory, the poem was divided and given two separate titles, "Baccalaureate" and "Realities," but thematic development continues from one section to the next. In the iambic "Baccalaureate," the poet mentions eleven representative authors (or their works), characters from the ancient and modern classics who will become "shard of broken memories"⁴ when the graduates enter the

¹Ibid., p. 286.

²Ibid.

³Archibald MacLeish, "The Poem of the Class of 1915," title changed to "Class Poem" in The Yale Book of Student Verse, 1910-1919; quotations above are from the version in Tower of Ivory (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1917), pp. 67-71.

⁴Ibid., p. 67.

great world. Images from nature and memories of the college yard where "endlessly / The dead go up and down"¹ will become enchanting symbols

of eternal truth,
 Symbols of dream and imagery and flame,
 Symbols of those same verities that play
 Bright through the crumbling gold of a great
 name.²

The section later called "Realities" continues the theme of mutability and in conclusion exhorts the graduates to find satisfaction in natural beauty, poetry, and the "Dream" as alternatives to riches and fame:

Yet when the splendor of the earth
 Is fallen into dust,
 When plow and sword and fame and worth
 Are rotten with black rust,
 The Dream, still deathless, still unborn,
 Blows in the hearts of men,
 The star, the mystery, the morn,
 Bloom agelessly again.

Older than Time with ages shod,
 The matins of a thrush,
 Deeper than reverence of God,
 The summer evening's hush.
 Than trampling death is grief more strong,
 Love than its avatars,
 And echo of an echoed song
 Shall shake the eternal stars.³

These lines of Romantic and philosophical idealism which exalt ideal love to the point where it is no longer embodied in human beings or in God, which express belief in poetic "Joy" rather than in ordinary "Happiness," which have a

¹Ibid.

²Ibid., p. 68.

³Ibid., pp. 70-71.

Goethean longing for an infinite unnameable and unidentifiable outside the mind, are a fitting introduction to the Faustian theme and mood of the play we will now consider, "Our Lady of Troy."

CHAPTER IV

"OUR LADY OF TROY"

Published in November, 1917, as the first piece in Tower of Ivory, the verse play "Our Lady of Troy" is a summation and further development of the poet's intellectual and emotional experience which has been analyzed in the survey of the undergraduate writing. Mr. MacLeish has said he wrote the play while at Yale or shortly afterwards.¹ Mr. MacLeish again makes statements on the themes of religious belief, love, and poetic knowledge. The first play is a useful introduction to Mr. MacLeish's well-known technique which has been employed in nearly all the verse plays: the appropriation and revision of a traditional myth as a vehicle for the expression of personal attitudes and emotional conflict. The very lack of sophistication in this play allows statements of contemporary and personal relevance to show through the historical and mythic texture. Not only is Faust a reflection of young MacLeish's spiritual experience, but minor characters refract the belief system which the author is forging and the

¹In answer to the writer's question, whether Mr. MacLeish wrote "Our Lady of Troy" while at Yale or afterwards, Mr. MacLeish wrote: "Just about--Yale I think." (Letter-questionnaire, Antigua, W. I., February 1, 1966.)

emotional conflicts he is acting out.

The theme of the play, stated in Faust's last speech, is that the alchemy of the imagination leads to the discovery of a world of spiritual truth in spite of unacceptable traditions in religion, philosophy, and science. Conflict in the realization of this theme occurs by the fact that Faust is represented in the first half of the play as a confident rationalist, but must go through a conversion in the second half to a belief in anti-scientific intuitional idealism. For its material, the play draws most heavily from Marlowe's Dr. Faustus, but its attitudes and intellectualizing are closer to those of Goethe's Faust. The language and verse form throughout the play is an approximation of Elizabethan blank verse. Like many of the short stories, "Our Lady of Troy" uses its fictional situation to dramatize the opposition of poetic intuition to scientific rationalism.

The play takes place in the tavern of Rimlich near Wittenburg during the half hour before midnight on the twenty-third of October, 1538, when Faust is reputed to have been carried off to hell by devils. MacLeish's version of the story shows Faust far less concerned about his ultimate and impending fate than he is about the fact and myth of his famous past deeds and about the validity of his achievements in learning. That is, he shows remarkable detachment from any overt death fear, and, in keeping with the concerns of his young creator, he reflects a preoccupation with the cult of

beauty and poetic genius. By giving the play the title of "Our Lady of Troy," Mr. MacLeish creates an aura of modern-day sacredness which emphasizes the spirituality of the poet's quest for ideal truth and beauty. Our Lady of Troy is Helen, Christianized, as it were, in order to become the mediatrix between the poet and his ideal.

The action begins with a drinking song by Christopher, Matthiolus, Fritz, and Wagner, students whose lines are antiphonal responses to the musings of the hero, Faust. The play has just one act, all these characters remain onstage the full time, and no other characters come on until Helen's entrance late in the play. Faust has been recounting his glimpse of Eden from the Caucasus. His opening statement is a reply to Matthiolus's question, "Saw you the serpent?" Faust says:

I saw naught to fear.
There's naught to fear from Heaven through to Hell;
Nothing that mind can't solve. Mind is the king.¹

Faust's lines during the first half of the play reiterate the theme, "Mind is king." but his statements in support of scientific rationalism are ambivalent from the very beginning, thus undercutting the structural irony in his final conversion away from rationalism. The language of his second speech in the play implies an aloofness from

¹Archibald MacLeish, "Our Lady of Troy," Tower of Ivory, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1917), p. 3.

the very proposition he asserts:

Ah, you've the true mathesis, sir, the pure
 Sciential. Step by step your logic mind
 Works to the core of things; seeks me out first
 An elixation, seething of the thoughts
 Hot in the stew-pan of the brain before
 Elixer's had. All true philosophy
 Progresses thus; expulsion here, and here
 Assation till the pure digested truth
 Turns into fire,--else there is myopsy
 And phantoms seen.¹

Fritz adds, "His Faust's eye / Reflects a certain doubt
 upon his tongue."²

Faust's next speech shows detached cynicism toward
 religious orthodoxy and scientism as well:

The Epicuran, Leo Decimus,
 Had such a mind. He questioned how the soul
 Which was not, was, and then not again
 Should be immortal; so he summoned him
 His doctors and his clerks and bade them speak
 Backward and forward, he digesting all
 Their doctrines and logomachies and rules,
 Believing here, denying there, and ending
 With Gallus': "Redit in nihilum quod ante
Nihil." And judged uncommon well. The soul,
 Or, as your Paracelsus saith, the four
 Seed covers of the spirit--what are these
 But though ill-elixate, a crapula
 Troubling the brain?³

¹ Ibid., p. 4. The discussion of "elixation," "assation,"
 etc. in these lines is a very free appropriation of a section
 dealing with "The Soul and her Faculties" in Robert Burton's
The Anatomy of Melancholy, ed. by Floyd Dell and Paul Jordan-
 Smith (New York: Farr & Rinehart, 1927), p. 136. I am thank-
 ful to Colin Campbell, whose dissertation, "Archibald Mac-
 Leish: The Poet as Artist and Citizen," lists page references
 for five of the passages in "Our Lady of Troy" borrowed from
 Burton. (Campbell, p. 36.)

² Archibald MacLeish, "Our Lady of Troy," Tower of Ivory,
 p. 4.

³ Archibald MacLeish, "Our Lady of Troy," Tower of Ivory,
 p. 5; for the material down to Gallus' statement, cf. Burton,
 p. 136.

The lines recording the dispute before Pope Leo X are adapted from Robert Burton's, The Anatomy of Melancholy¹ and the language and tone of Faust's speech is reminiscent of the elderly narrator's reaction to a similar discussion in "The Virtues of Vice":

"I've heard every boy in this club hold forth on the subject and I've been an appreciative audience to the most conclusive of arguments. . . . I've decided at last that immortality is the riddle which fools solve and wise men despair of. . . . You didn't bring me here to recite your damnable propaganda of ifs and nos?"²

Finally, the lines in Faust's speech are not a mere recording of an opinion of Paracelsus cited from Burton. The phrase "four / Seed covers of the spirit" seems to be Mr. MacLeish's own image, alluding either to Paracelsus's arguments against psychosomatic phenomena as the ancients thought of them within the tradition of the "four humors and complexions,"³ or else to plain statement of Paracelsus's belief that man has four souls (i.e., three animal faculties and a spiritual soul).⁴ If the poet intends either of these attributions, he has distorted the source. Another possibility is that the last four lines use physical images to describe Paracelsus's neo-platonic view of soul-illness as described

¹Burton, p. 143.

²Archibald MacLeish, "The Virtues of Vice," Yale Literary Magazine, LXXVIII (May, 1913), 352-359.

³Burton, p. 151.

⁴Ibid., p. 135.

by Burton:

Paracelsus is of the opinion, that such spiritual diseases (for so he calls them) are spiritually to be cured, and not otherwise. Ordinary means in such cases will not avail: we must not wrestle with God.¹

Whatever the young poet has "your Paracelsus saith" is a far cry from the meaning of anything Paracelsus really said, yet the verbal resemblances cited above, together with MacLeish's pattern of appropriations from a concentrated portion of less than fifty pages in Burton, leave little doubt that he responded somehow to material on Paracelsus in Burton's work.

The reference to Paracelsus is a good illustration of MacLeish's habit of free appropriation. Since no meaning in Paracelsus (via Burton) gives the poet what he needs for his context, he creates an image ("four seed covers of the spirit") out of Paracelsus materials and reduces his own meaning to the commonplace idea that the soul's existence and activity resemble or depend upon bodily stimuli. The undefined words "soul" and "thought" constitute a tautology, and the least that can be said about the whole passage is that mood predominates over meaning. Faust's opinion actually contradicts Paracelsus's views that spiritual sickness requires spiritual cure, and Faust's error on this point is made clear upon his conversion later in the play.

Faust checks moralizing on great questions in an attempt to get back to the story of his adventures:

¹Ibid., p. 157.

But I digress somewhat
 From Eden; so did mother Eve, but she
 Was woman. Man must ever set his face
 Toward the sunset, make his pilgrim way
 Into the West. There is no pause for dream
 With all the shining kingdom of the mind,
 All truth, all science, all the stars to reap,
 And Time forever clattering at the heel
 Like bones the children tie to yelping curs.
 So then, our true mathesis, next and next.¹

Cynical wit and idealism blend, and what began as a discussion of the "true mathesis" of scientific rationalism now has strong characteristics of intuitional, poetic idealism. Faust continues the summary of his travels, borrowing Marlowe's account of Faust in Rome.² The discussion now gets bogged down on the question of whether devils exist, and Burton again supplies material for the discourse.

Matthiolus argues, "I follow Scaliger, who says / The devil's dead," and he recites the nine orders of devils from Burton.³ Faust's sarcastic reply puts the alleged rationalist

¹Archibald MacLeish, "Our Lady of Troy," Tower of Ivory, pp. 5-6.

²Christopher Marlowe, The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus, in Eight Elizabethan Famous Plays, intro. by Esther Cloudman Dunn, (Modern Library Edition New York: Random House, 1950), pp. 35-38.

³Burton, pp. 158 and 164. Burton attributes no such opinion to Scalinger; instead, Burton says, "Scalinger in some grants" that Aristotle did not believe in the devil (p. 158) and "Scalinger justly laughs . . . to scorn" Cardan's notion that devils "are nourished and have excrements, that they feel pain if they be hurt. . . ." Mr. MacLeish's distortion of the source may be due to a mistranslation of a Latin text or a deliberately free appropriation.

in a rare predicament because he must argue against a belief
in disbelief:

Your sciolist in truth!
Your true agnostic! "Unseen, Unknown"
Is sacred text for schoolmen. I myself
With deepest cabalistic--metaphysic--
What have I found o'midnights in the flame?
.

Nothing of these.--but one who is sheer mind,
The globing crystal of the world wherein
All knowledge gleams and darkens, one who knows
The eagle's way in air, the snake's on sand,
And man's way who is eagle both and worm.¹

The "one who is sheer mind" may be an almighty Universal Will
or Life Force which sustains the world, but it is not an im-
personal God of deists. By its knowledge of individual crea-
tures and the (implied) compassion it has for them, the
Universal Will resembles

Christ who loves and knows,
And knowing still can love,
That my night may be riven
With lightning of His truth and might thereof.²

This is the feminine god of compassion whom young MacLeish
habitually associates with the Dream.

Asked to tell how he impersonated Mahomet, Faust describes
himself dressed in linen and concludes:

but Moslem faith
Is no theology for scholars. Phew!
I'll warrant there were heretics enough
Fouling the sacred porches where I taught.³

¹ Archibald MacLeish, "Our Lady of Troy," Tower of Ivory,
p. 7.

² Archibald MacLeish, "The Grail," Yale Literary Magazine,
LXXX (June, 1915), 402.

³ Archibald MacLeish, "Our Lady of Troy," Tower of Ivory,
p. 9.

These somewhat incoherent lines suggest the following personal feelings of the poet. First, his own youthful faith was not a theology for the scholar, which he wished it to be. Second, his own experience with education brought him in contact with "heretics enough." Third, there is something vile or unpleasant about propagating unorthodoxy, a feeling of guilt for having participated in the dialogue of "heretics."

Next, the students ask Faust about other wonders he performed--the changing of a golden snake to gold and the "burning of fiery ice."¹ But Faust quickly restrains their supernatural leanings by insisting that the apparent miracles were done by correct application of the science of alchemy. For the first time since the opening speech, Faust approaches consistency in his role of scientific rationalist.

Fritz and Christopher ask for some details about Faust's raising Alexander from the dead,² but Faust replies:

No word. You understand my science ill
 Who think I raise the dead. The dead are dead.
 They lie who say that Iamblicus once wrought
 Centurions of Caesar out of air,
 That battled and were stricken and could strike.
 The dead are dead;--but metaphysic knows
 How smoke may shine like armor and be blown
 To features of dead kings. 'Tis so with all
 Man knows or ever shall know to the end.
 Mind shall be king, shall break through the glass
 That shows itself, itself; shall analyse
 And test and know and fashion into word

¹Archibald MacLeish, "Our Lady of Troy," Tower of Ivory, p. 9.

²Ibid., p. 10; cf. Marlow, Dr. Faustus, scene x.

The thing that Is; but no thought ever shall,
 Until this siderated sphere be burst
 Into a million twinklings, build new thing,
 Nor call up life or beauty from the void,
 Nor make the dead whose flesh is dead, alive.¹

But Fritz goads Faust toward a belief in miraculous visions:

But still
 There's miracle in that apparent smoke
 You hold so lightly.²

Christopher asks to see Alexander again. Matthiolus, ex-
 claiming that a repeated apparition would help make Faust's
 name immortal, shows misgivings about seeing Alexander:

But no smoke
 Of Alexander. 'Twas a tearful king,
 A bulk of griefs.³

These lines show the beginning of a marked preference among
 the young men for a vision of a female rather than a male.

Christopher adds a puzzling version of a legend about
 Alexander:

The Apostate Julian
 Declares his soul had entered into flesh
 Before he conquered Persia. He would be
 No better than a lion.⁴

Mention of Julian the Apostate as a source for the anecdote
 has no basis in Burton, yet Mr. MacLeish's use of a heretic's

¹Archibald MacLeish, "Our Lady of Troy," Tower of Ivory,
 pp. 11-12.

²Archibald MacLeish, "The Many Dead," Yale Literary
 Magazine, LXXVIII (June, 1913), 402.

³Archibald MacLeish, "Our Lady of Troy," Tower of Ivory,
 p. 12.

⁴Ibid., p. 13.

name supplies connotations which fit this discussion of belief, miracles, and the black arts. The enigmatic statement about Alexander's soul entering into flesh, thus showing him to have been better than a lion after all, seems to derive from this anecdote in Burton's Anotomy:

And it is the common passion of all lovers to be overcome in this sort by seeing the beloved. For that cause, belike, Alexander discerning this inconvenience and the danger that comes by seeing, when he heard Darius' wife so much commended for her beauty, would scarce admit her to come in his sight, foreknowing belike that of Plutarch, how full of danger it is to see a proper woman; and though he was intemperate in other things, yet in this he carried himself bravely.¹

The poet seems to have reduced the erotic content of the story to a single image which is a phallic symbol suggesting coitus: Alexander's "soul" has "entered into flesh." But soul has conquered phantasies of bodily desire, and so the subject--Alexander, Faust, and/or the poet--is above animal desire (i.e., "better than a lion"). Faust's speech shows a conflicting desire to express masculinity and purity. The desire to conquer lust is the theme of Burton's anecdote, and the theme of Faust's arguments with the carnal students, before the apparition of Helen may occur, is that lust must give way for higher inspiration.

¹Burton, p. 772. The sentence immediately preceding Burton's anecdote on Alexander echoes MacLeish's idealization of women in the context of the play: "Hermotinus a young man . . . had forgot his mistress quite, and by his friends was well weaned from her love, but seeing her by chance, he remembered his old flame, he raved amain, she did appear as a blazing star, or an Angel, to his sight." (Ibid.)

Alexander's caution parallels Faust's, for, when Fritz seconds Matthiolus--

We'll have a woman. What's an age-dead man?
 Old heroes are as thick as water-cress.
 But women, Ah!--the roses that are fallen,
 Stars that are dust, old sorrows and old songs!
 What woman?¹

--and Matthiolus asks for Helen of Troy, Faust says,

Nay, she would be but smoke, a puff of smoke,
 Smoke and a shadow, woman and no flesh;
 What fool desires a woman that no arms
 May crush the wine of, and no lips find sweet?²

But Matthiolus insists on seeing what "mind can fashion out of air," and Faust is persuaded.

Just then Wagner reminds Faust that "The Clock whirs for the hour. Oh make your peace / With heaven, if there still be--"³ Wagner, too, seems to be an agnostic. But Faust, wishing to mock time and give the students a final example of the power of mind, speaks as high priest of both science and the imagination:

Silence thou!
 The mind knows no conclusion, finds no end,
 But its own seeking; and my seeking was
 The true entelechy, the living seed,
 The root wherefrom this universe is blown
 A golden flower. Shall I stand because
 Time threatens me? Shall I not rather flaunt
 My learning in the face of him and say:
 "Here see how I make mock of you, how I
 Have digged this richest treasure from the soil
 Of old forgotten centuries of time;
 How I, whom you shall conquer, yet strike down

¹Archibald MacLeish, "Our Lady of Troy," Tower of Ivory, p. 13.

²Ibid., pp. 13-14.

³Ibid., p. 14.

Your mystery and set this little brain
 The worms shall spoil, above your awfulness--
 And all with science--ashes and a smoke!"?
 Shall mind fear death that knows within itself
 All life and all begetting and all end?¹

Amid stage effects of rain, thunder, and darkness, Faust leans over the table, suddenly stands erect, and flings a handful of ashes on the fire. The stage directions read:

The flames sink, then rise in a great flare. Helen of Troy stands on the hearth. She is naked and her limbs shine like silver in the light. Her hands are at her breast. Faust steps back.²

The vision of a naked Helen is beyond the precedent set by Marlowe and Goethe.³ Faustus is overawed by, if not fearful of, his vision of ideal Love and Beauty. Christopher says, "O the wonderful / Sad eyes, the lips like prayer!

Fritz's statement--

Her beauty seems
 As all the tides of ocean ebbing down
 Out of the heart to her.⁴

--suggests, through its haze of metaphysical vagueness, the poet's love for this vision, the "heart" being the poet's heart; for the sense of the passage makes it no more incongruous to say that it is his heart than to say it is Helen's or the Ocean's.

¹Ibid., pp. 14-15.

²Ibid., pp. 15-16.

³Marlowe, pp. 43-46; Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Faust, tr. by Bayard Taylor (Modern Library Edition; New York: Random House, 1912).

⁴Archibald MacLeish, "Our Lady of Troy," Tower of Ivory, p. 16.

For about two pages Faust tries to convince the young men that the apparition is a mere trick of alchemy:

Oh blind!
Ye eagerly deceived! Ye gladly tricked
To dull believing.¹

Faust then argues for a cult of rationalistic experience at the expense of faith:

And I have sold
My flesh and old rebellious hope of Heaven
To doubt what you run panting to believe.
I have forsworn all peace to keep aflame
The will you quench in faith--the will to try
All life and living in the Alkahest
Of thought, to set the single mind above
All seeming, all appearances, to match
With sense all emptiness, to crumble faith
Into its ignorance. . . .

Ye blind who live in darkness and believe!
I wrought the maid to mock you.²

His intention to mock men's belief furnishes an additional motive, the first being his previously stated desire to mock time and death by showing the power of mind. However, in the very act of mocking the students' belief, Faust will demonstrate the power of man's mind. Yet he is sorrowful because of the students' credulity and also because of his own predicament. He and his vision are misunderstood and, however lightly he claims to regard the "trick" vision, he is still disturbed that he must share the magnificence of this object

¹Archibald MacLeish, "Our Lady of Troy," Tower of Ivory p. 16.

²Ibid., pp. 16-17.

of his personal love and longing with a fleshly, inappreciative audience. Faust's "scientific" arguments cover up and rationalize his suppressed veneration and love for the vision which he has caused to appear:

Now almost
I weep that you have suffered such content
When such great light illumines. Mind has torn
The veil that hangs before the Riddler's lip,
Has found the riddle answered,--time and space
And life and very dying has the brain
Ground to their atoms and their ancient laws;
And soul, and mystery, and stuff of dream
Are rainbow-winking bubbles in the bowl
That vanish and are nothing. Lo, this ghost
That makes a mock of them! This thing of air,
Smoke-wrought and smoke enduring! Such as she,
Appearances and shadows, are all things
That flesh may not acknowledge,--yet the mind
Has conquered even these, has found them vain,
And nothingness, an emptiness, a smoke.¹

There is an attempt to make Faust an anti-poet in this speech; mind can demonstrate that the things men believe in are "an emptiness, a smoke." There are no "real" visions.

As the play nears its conclusion, Faust is made a sitting duck because his alchemistic trick, equated with his scientific rationalism, will be exploded when the product of this science proves to be, not adroitly managed phenomena, but a real person. Science is proved wrong for having done its work to perfection, and this perfection can, within the terms for the problem set by the author himself, only be ascribed to spiritual causes. Just before the error of rationalism is to be exposed, Faust confidently and unequivocally relates it to

¹Ibid., pp. 17-18.

an atheistic position, the first time he has expressed this viewpoint during the play:

It's worth the taste of death
To know that death is silence, and the dust,
Is all and end of our eternity.
Nay, death has had no hostages of me;
I hope no morning from him and I fear
His darkness nothing. It is time. I wait.¹

The vision surprises everybody when she moves and then speaks:

Yea, I am she whom men call Helen,
: : : a stir of cornflowers by that sea
Where memory is a tide and summers fade
Into the past like shadows.²

This metaphorical comparison of ideal feminine beauty (or "love") with landscape scenery is rather typical of MacLeish.

For instance, in "The Virtues of Vice," Will Target says:

"She had come dancing down between the white tables, carried on the mad tide of the music like a whirling leaf in an autumn breeze. Down and back, down and back. . . . It was as though the wind had suddenly fallen and the leaf circled down into a quiet hollow of the wood."³

In "The Charity of Love" John Claverhill tries to persuade his love away from altruism by invoking feminine beauty and nature in a single line of argument:

How any girl with hair like the dusk and eyes like the stars drown'd in still pools can--" . . . The throbbing glow of the sunset on those drifting clouds speaks to your heart more fervently than any truth of philosophy or tenet of religion."⁴

¹ Ibid., pp. 18-19.

² Ibid., p. 19.

³ Archibald MacLeish, "The Virtues of Vice," Yale Literary Magazine, LXXVIII (May, 1913), 356-7.

⁴ Archibald MacLeish, "The Charity of Love," ibid., LXXVIII (March, 1913), 258-9.

"The Silence," a lyric written at Yale, describes a quest for ideal truth, beauty, and love in imagery of nature and femininity not unlike that of the later poem, "Ancestral."

The last stanza of "The Silence" reads:

Yet in the muffled voices of the sea,
 On singing downs where purple shadows stain
 The breasting hills, by word or melody
 I found thee not, until thou came'st to me
 From out the silence born of voiceless pain.¹

An example of a later poem which fuses imagery of nature and feminine beauty is "Landscape as a Nude," a lyric of six stanzas which fuses description of an ideal midwestern landscape with the conventions of portraiture.²

Faust is non-plussed at Helen's speaking because his defense of his science rested on a belief that Helen was not more than an optical illusion brought about by shining smoke. His alchemy evidently did not include audial effects.

'Tis a trick!
 A dream! A phantasy! The dead are dead
 These are no words! A shadow--³

In a long speech Helen explains that she is in fact immortal only as a dream:

I am she
 Whose flesh is dust, whose flesh can never die;
 Helen I am, and yet not Helen, I,
 The maid that was, the proud bewildered girl

¹ Archibald MacLeish, "The Silence," ibid., LXXVIII (April, 1913), 299.

² Archibald MacLeish, "Landscape as a Nude", The Collected Poems of Archibald MacLeish, (Sentry Edition; Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1963), pp. 77-78.

³ Ibid., p. 19.

A world made battle for,—she only sought
 Long silence, long forgetfulness of wars,
 And burning moon-fire, and the nightingales.
 But even dead ye troubled me, ye brought
 The wide flare of your searching through the stars
 To harry me, my name was driven leaf
 In winds of your great longing, I became
 All songs that all men sang me, all faint dreams
 That sought back into time for me, all grief
 Of hearts but half-forgetting,—I am these.¹

Faust's ability to raise this dream, then, depend on his belief in the Dream of ideal beauty, belief which the other men who see the vision also have, belief Faust has previously chided them for because it is not scientific. Helen continues:

I am the pain of young men memorous
 Of beauty that they never knew, and loss
 They have suffered. I am love that flames
 Sometimes at twilight when forlorn sweet names
 Of beautiful dead women make a tune
 Like lost Sirenicas. I am the fire
 Your passion builded, shadow of your hearts,
 A fallen leaf of dusk the riding moon
 Of your adoring shakes upon the grass.
 Lo! I am she ye seek in every maid
 Ye love and leave again. I am desire
 Of woman that no man may slake in woman
 This thing am I,—a rose the world has dreamed.²

¹Archibald MacLeish, "Our Lady of Troy," Tower of Ivory, p. 20; cf. Helen's opening lines with those Helen speaks at the beginning of Goethe's Faust, Pt. II, Act. III.

"I, much admired and much reviled,—I Helena,
 Come from the strand where we have disembarked
 but now,
 Still giddy from the restless rocking of the
 waves. . . . (Ibid., p. 132.)

²Archibald MacLeish, "Our Lady of Troy," Tower of Ivory, pp. 20-21; cf.

"Happened have many things, which people far and wide
 So fain relate, but which so fain hears not the one
 Of whom the legend rose, and to a fable grew." (Goethe,
 p. 133.)

and

"Make wholly not confused my clouded, wandering sense!

This last phrase of Helen's--echoing lines from Yeats' collection, "The Rose" (1893) and particularly "Rose of all Roses, Rose of all the World!"¹--is the motif for Faust's next speech, the closing lines of the play:

'A rose the world has dreamed'; and I, I stood
Peak high in those grey mountains of my mind
And saw all truth, all science, all the laws
Spread out beneath my feet. I sold all things
To know that all I knew was all the world
Of knowledge; and I bought--why, nothing then,--
Or only this last--a space to know
That out beyond my farthest reach of thought
All knowledge shines--a radiance of stars.²

The outcome of Helen's great speech and Faust's awed reply is to furnish reasons under the most sensational circumstances for Faust's (and the author's) turning away from belief in one type of mental activity, the "true mathesis" of rationalistic science, to the loftier pursuit of the Dream through poetry.³

Mr. MacLeish's afterthought about his youthful writing, that "sounds came first. . .; cadence before words and words

Even in this moment, who I am I cannot tell.

• • • • •
To him, the Vision, I, a Vision, wed myself:
It was a dream, as even the words themselves declare
I vanish hence, and to myself a Vision grow." (Ibid.,
p. 145.)

¹W. B. Yeats, The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1957), p. 37.

²Archibald MacLeish, "Our Lady of Troy," Tower of Ivory, p. 21.

³Cf. Lawrence Mason, "Foreward," Tower of Ivory, pp. vii-viii.

before meanings,"¹ must be taken with some reservations. If, within the individual speeches, sound has carried meaning along divergent paths, this whole play has nevertheless marched relentlessly over the obstacles of meaning, situation, and diction to the final goal of pre-established convictions as presented in the conclusion. Lawrence Mason, the Yale teacher who wrote the preface to Tower of Ivory, came close to the mark when he cautioned the reader against reading

these poems for their lilt and melodic charm alone without ever penetrating beneath their surface. Since this would be a grievous vexation to Mr. MacLeish himself, for in his eyes lyrical tunefulness is far less important than vital underlying idea.²

Mason even calls "Our Lady of Troy" a tragedy because Faust suffers for having structured his whole life around a misconception: "his purblind reliance upon positivistic science to the exclusion of the visioned aesthetic gospel proclaimed by Helen."³ Yet the ordinary reader or theatre goer could hardly respond strongly to this tragic implication, uttered as it is in the space of ten lines before the end of the play.

Furthermore, young MacLeish's entire handling of the Faust story argues against its being a tragedy. Just as readers ordinarily expect that "choosing or not choosing" is

¹Archibald MacLeish, "The Limits of Creative Writing Courses," Art and the Craftsman: The Best of the Yale Literary Magazine, 1836-1961, ed. by Joseph Harned and Neil Goodwin (Carbondale: University of Southern Illinois Press, 1961), p. 282.

²Mason, pp. vii-viii.

³Mason, pp. vii-viii.

essential to tragedy, they also expect that different actions and consequences would have followed alternative choices (or decrees of fate, as in classical tragedy). But the implications of Faust's late discovery affect his theoretical value system without there being any indication that he would have acted differently, had he had the choice and the time to use this last-minute knowledge. Faust's recognition or "choice" is vague and theoretical for lack of development. A reader might ask: Would Faust have sold his soul (or its secular equivalent) for the Dream if he had known about it earlier? and if he had, would it have made any difference? Due perhaps to inexact language Faust concludes that "all knowledge" is the goal of both scientific knowledge and pursuit of the Dream. Since neither he nor anyone else in the play concedes that Faust rationalistic method failed to achieve its goal, the conflict is between two modes of cognition each valid in its own right. The play is not a tragedy. It is not even so much the "imitation of an action" as it is the dramatized statement of an intellectual position. Platonic dialogue concludes by the appearance of a woman who personifies abstract qualities like the character Philosophy in Boethius' The Consolation of Philosophy.¹ Understandably for the work of a young artist in search of an art ideology, Faust's conflict asserts

¹Boethius, The Consolation of Philosophy, with an Introduction by Irwin Edman (Modern Library Edition; New York: Random House, 1943), pp. 5 ff.

MacLeish's preference for the career of a speculative philosopher, mystic, esthete, or poet rather than that of a scientific alchemist-wizard. The very classification which the play sets up includes characteristics of the Renaissance and twentieth century which would somehow have to be resolved in the life of a modern man.

Little need be said about the play's poetic language and verse technique, nor about theatrical effects. Among several indications that the play is a closet drama are the facts that it was never performed and that the directions calling for Helen to appear naked onstage would have been unacceptable for legitimate theatre in New Haven or even New York.

The reason for discussing "Our Lady of Troy" and for quoting nearly half its brief text is that it is an invaluable introduction to Mr. MacLeish's method of expressing ideas and private free associations through drama. The survey of dramatic method in "Our Lady of Troy" will deal in order with theological material, the use of sources and the role of the unconscious and preconscious meanings, and finally with philosophical content.

The theological problems raised and left unresolved in the conflicting statements of the characters, though not necessarily in Faust's own statements, lead to a final abstraction altogether from theological or, more properly called, dogmatic concerns. Religious dogmas are brought into the play by means of a few simple assertions: in passages already

quoted Faust denies man's immortality,¹ turns the students' conversation away from a denial of the existence of devils to an affirmation of the existence of an apparently sympathetic supreme being,² and finally forsakes the rationalistic method by which he says he arrived at the first two convictions.³ By the time he has arrived at a belief in poetic intuition, he directs it solely to man's terrestrial concerns. It is noteworthy and paradoxical that with his penchant for eschatological materials Mr. MacLeish either becomes sidetracked by them, as in many lines of this play, or else, as in later religious plays, he uses them as metaphors or analogies to reinforce one of his early attitudes: "Heaven is no longer our business, perhaps, but this world is."⁴ The difference between the handling of religious or eschatological materials in this play and in later ones is that "Our Lady of Troy" deals with religious beliefs in fairly literal fashion, yet any attempts to make analogies between belief and heaven and the poet's "earthly" belief in inspiration by the Dream are not sufficiently developed or made explicit. The play drifts from discussion of one type of belief to discussion of a second kind.

In "Our Lady of Troy," Faust speaks of his religious

¹Archibald MacLeish, "Our Lady of Troy, Tower of Ivory, pp. 5 and 19.

²Ibid., pp. 8-9.

³Ibid., p. 21.

⁴Archibald MacLeish, "Professional Schools of Liberal Education," Yale Review, X (January, 1921), 369.

conflicts as past experience, problems which have already been resolved, and hence they bring little dramatic tension into the play. Eschatological materials have a certain appeal to readers with conventional as well as unconventional religious interests, and there is something of grandeur in a protagonist who struggles even with these weighty concerns. But the search can almost be predicted beforehand to yield no results in eschatological terms; the searcher must inevitably tighten down his rigging and pursue a practicable, mundane, or at least secular, goal. It is necessary for Mr. MacLeish to present reality as he sees it, and it is also important for readers to see that a most intense internal conflict over religious dogmas of immortality, etc., eventually progresses toward the attitude that dogmas are in themselves idle speculation or else may provide handy moral illustrations for practical life. Characteristic of all the religious plays, this phenomenon greatly simplifies the development of religious themes as an ordinary audience would ordinarily think of them, yet the intellectual "yield" of private or unconscious meanings is a far different matter.

The words and anecdotes which constitute the lore borrowed from Burton's The Anatomy of Melancholy function dramatically to make Faust look like a true Renaissance scholar. MacLeish's approach to this source could be called casual, with just enough accuracy to make the speeches sound well and to provide a mood and setting. Once the authenticity of character and

scene have been given and the play gets into its climax, which takes up the whole second half of the text, there are no more borrowings from The Anatomy of Melancholy. Burton's lore is a substantial part of the base from which MacLeish rises to his contemporary and personally relevant theme, which unfortunately is not clearly announced until almost the end of the play. Historical material from Burton and the Faust legend are ancillary to the theme which the poet believes to have current or universal relevance. But the relevance of this "Romantic" (Rank's term) play is mainly personal.

MacLeish achieves peculiar effects in the use of Burtonian anachronisms. Faust's almost snobbish recitation of words like "elixation," "assation," "mathesis," and "sciential" all in one speech¹ bring quaint and obscurantist connotations into the passage which depreciate the very argument Faust makes in behalf of scientific method. And the implied subject of the speech is not just "science" as the alchemists practiced it, but positivistic science as it is practiced in our century. To the derogatory force of these connotations, MacLeish adds an even more direct expression of his attitude toward scientific "mathesis":

An elixation, seething of the thoughts
Hot in the stew-pan of the brain before
Elixir's had.²

¹Archibald MacLeish, "Our Lady of Troy," Tower of Ivory, p. 4.

²Ibid.

There is mild dramatic irony in Faust's defense of ideas which the connotations in the speech clearly show the author disapproves of. But in this speech and elsewhere the author shows his hand, because the artificiality of his speeches makes them sound more like lyrical monologue than lines in a play.

A speech in almost the same vein as the last is the description of a debate on the soul's immortality attributed to Pope Leo X. MacLeish follows his source accurately until, for a conclusion and statement of attitude, he wrenches Paracelsus out of context to make his name a link, if not an imputed authority, for a personal attitude toward the soul or toward speculative opinions about the soul:

The soul
Or, as your Paracelsus saith, the four
Seed covers of the spirit--what are these
But thought ill-elixate, a crapula
Troubling the brain?¹

Both this speech and the one previously cited express Faust's and MacLeish's soul weariness after struggling with weighty scientific and theological problems; the old names and archaic words, together with direct statements and unpleasant images, supply connotations which express this attitude. Borrowed material is given a new emotional coloration. Connotations of this kind seem intended because

¹Ibid., p. 5; cf. Burton, pp. 135, 151, and 157, also pp. 93-95 of this study.

they are readily communicated; they are private but conscious meanings. But sources are also used with a more private and an unconscious significance.

As already shown,¹ MacLeish does not always make the borrowed materials in this play correspond in verbal details to their original source. Yet inaccuracies occur in only a fraction of the material taken from Burton and, since the verse and thought structure show a general, painstaking effort to make the work clear and cohesive, we ought not to assume automatically that verbal inaccuracies are the result of slipshod research and writing, though of course some of them could be. I am talking about verbal inaccuracies and not modifications of the Faust legend which follow the logic of an altered plot to fit a new theme. But the dialogue, especially in the early half of the play, is forced and strained in a different way. The author is trying to piece together borrowed material with his own thoughts. If material in the original source is not relevant to the context of the play, it is often suppressed or distorted to fit its new context. But the interesting fact about most of the verbal distortions in borrowed material is that the meanings in the original text can be seen to have thematic or emotional relevance to the context of the play. Thus a passage takes on private meaning. I prefer to think that some of the meanings are unconscious,

¹Ibid.

though of course I have no way of knowing.

We are not dealing with meanings that function like Eliot's "objective correlative" (a technique MacLeish imitated in the '20's), in which a reader finds a borrowed phrase or passage from a perhaps well-known or accessible prototype, reads the source and its context, and then explores its meaning in relation to the work in which the allusion occurred. These meanings become public if the reader is given enough clues to proceed to the "objective" meanings which the author intends to convey. On the other hand, Mr. MacLeish's reliance on a source is clouded to the extent that clues are partially removed, and through distortion the meanings remain essentially private and "subjective." A recent essay by Mr. MacLeish shows him attempting to give some literary status to private meanings. In his piece on "Metaphor," he says:

A symbol is always what George Whalley has called "a focus of relationship." Unless it is felt as a focus of relationship with both its related parts in play it will not work. It will not indeed exist. . . . Both symbols and metaphors make sense of the world by showing relationships we had not seen. And unless the relationship is shown, neither has sense to make. That gross beast at the end of "The Second Coming" is not a symbol for that simple reason: the second figure of the intended pair is missing--is not there.¹

My contention is that private meanings exist in some lines of Mr. MacLeish's works just as he implies that Yeats has withheld the meaning of the concluding image of "The Second

¹Archibald MacLeish, "Metaphor," Poetry and Experience (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1961), pp. 79-80.

Coming" from his audience (many, however, would say that Yeat's image makes a clear enough reference to a second term).

The method of detecting private meanings, at least for the few examples I will give, is simply to examine distortions of the borrowed material. My investigation of these "mistakes" rests on the assumptions that enough evidence exists to prove that the poet was actually rewriting a particular passage of source material, and that emotional needs and preconscious associations were likely to have motivated the distortions, exclusive of or in addition to any impulse toward hasty or slipshod composition in the writing of the play. It is easier to be aware of the existence of private meanings in distorted passages than it is to be certain that one's own explanations for such "slips" and distortions is correct. But in the examples to be studied, the poet is guessing or revising for his own reasons, and the task of critical interpretation is to approximate his conscious or unconscious motives for distortion.

Two simple instances of distorted borrowings are references to Scalinger and to Julian the Apostate. Matthiolus says, "I follow Scalinger, who says / The devil's dead."¹ Scalinger's opinions on devils are found in a section of The Anatomy (Section 2, Member 1, Subsection 2) which MacLeish uses several times. On facing pages in one edition² Burton says

¹Archibald MacLeish, "Our Lady of Troy," Tower of Ivory, p. 7.

²Burton, pp. 158-159.

that "Scalinger in some sort grants" that Aristotle did not believe in devils, and also that Scalinger "laughs . . . to scorn" the opinion that devils "are nourished and have excrements, that they feel pain if they be hurt." This second opinion follows from the question of whether devils "are mortal, live and die," but Scalinger himself is not said to question or deny the existence of devils.

One can see from these passages how Scalinger's cautious interpretation of Aristotle's denial and the question of whether devils "live and die" led to the terse line in MacLeish's play: "Scalinger . . . says the devil's dead." It is a faint echo of the material in Burton and in the context of the play is meant literally. Allowing for the misreading or haste, we can see the words "live and die" changed to "dead," while the words "in some sort" of the original source are suppressed by MacLeish and thus indicate some doubt or impatience in the poet's mind which he has not chosen to communicate in the text of the play. If the author was unconscious of the discrepancy between the source of his own text, his misreading could be due to doubt or guilt over his own beliefs. If he was aware of the discrepancy, he could have seen it as a private joke, illustrating fakery or ignorance in Matthiolus's "scientific" opinion. For his own benefit, the author could be showing Matthiolus the same kind of contempt he expressed for the fellow Yale students in

"The Virtues of Vice"¹ who scoffed at eschatological beliefs.

A more obscure passage is the speech of Christopher:

The Apostate Julian
Declares his Alexander's soul had entered
into flesh
Before he conquered Persia. He would be
No better than a lion.

These words are unintelligible by themselves, but a source for the anecdote in The Anatomy³ tells how Alexander the Great showed self-understanding when he avoided seeing the Persian queen whose widely praised beauty would have been attractive and at the same time politically dangerous. The first discrepancy in this passage occurs when MacLeish gratuitously throws in the name of Julian the Apostate as the source for the anecdote; this distortion shows a preoccupation with, if not guilt for, heterodoxy. (Cf. Faust's " . . . there were heretics enough / Fouling the sacred porches where I taught,"⁴ and the many evidences in the short stories of guilt over religious disbelief.)

More important, the passage quoted above suppresses the minimal sexual data which was included in the source and would be necessary to make any sense of the story Christopher refers to. There may be several reasons for this omission. The poet may be motivated by haste or the esthetic appeal of the images

¹Archibald MacLeish, "The Virtues of Vice," Yale Literary Magazine, LXXXVIII (May, 1913), 352-359.

²Archibald MacLeish, "Our Lady of Troy," Tower of Ivory, p. 13.

³Burton, p. 772.

⁴Archibald MacLeish, "Our Lady of Troy," Tower of Ivory, p. 9; also pp. 96-7 of this text.

"soul," "flesh," and "lion," which he invents for this poetized anecdote. He may be inhibited by Victorian propriety or else may wish to purify the dialogue before the appearance of the ideal, symbolic Helen. The context in which these lines appear shows an explicit intention to keep Helen from appearing as an object of sexual desire. For in the speech which follows, Fritz cries, "circe then! We'll have a woman"¹ (who turns her lovers into swine). And then in his next speech, with caution similar to that attributed to Alexander by Burton, Faust says: "What fool desires a woman that no arms / May crush the wine of, and no lips find sweet?"² The repression of sexual meanings in one passage and their occurrence in two speeches in the same context may seem insignificant. But the debate which can be seen on the surface of Fritz's and Faust's lines are two voices within the poet arguing for and against designating the apparition an object of desire. Repression of sexual content in the Alexander anecdote is one indication that the poet is inhibiting his own phantasies of desire.

Even if there are artistic purposes for MacLeish's selection and suppression of material, the existence of unconscious desire and repression can, and in the modification of the Alexander anecdote very likely do, motivate the artistic "choice" of materials; the passage in Burton triggers the artist's unconscious associations which are first suppressed

¹Ibid., p. 13.

²Ibid., p. 14.

and then work themselves out more explicitly in succeeding dialogue and action; e.g., the debate between Faust and Fritz, and the stage directions which call for Helen to appear naked. The Alexander anecdote, together with the three sentences immediately preceding it in Burton's version, contains the basic elements of the last half of MacLeish's play: the poet's determination to idealize the lady as "star" or "Angel," his repression of physical desire for her, and a reproachful reference to his "intemperate" seeking of experience:

Hermotinus a young man . . . is all out as unstaidd, he had forgot his Mistress quite, and by his friends was well weaned from her love, but seeing her by chance, he remembered his old flame, he raved again, she did appear as a blazing-star, or an Angel, to his sight. And it is the common passion of all lovers to be overcome in this sort. For that cause, belike, Alexander discerning this inconvenience and danger that comes by seeing, when he heard Darius' so much commended for her beauty, would scarce admit her to come in his full sight, foreknowing belike that of Plutarch, how full of danger it is to see a proper woman; and though he was intemperate in other things, yet in this he carried himself bravely.¹

The esthete's vision of Helen will appear at the end of the play as an angel with "lips like prayer," personifying knowledge which is "the radiance of stars."²

MacLeish's drastic reconstruction of the legend about Alexander whose

¹Burton, p. 772.

²Archibald MacLeish, "Our Lady of Troy," Tower of Ivory, p. 21.

. . . soul had entered into flesh
 Before he conquered Persia. He would be
 No better than a lion.¹

compresses the story in a way that suggests the incestuous fantasies and the guilt expressed in religious imagery which have already been seen to occur in the short stories. The images which Mr. MacLeish adds to the anecdote symbolize the Oedipal triangle. "Soul" represents the revered mother figure, "flesh" the guilty desiring son, and the "lion" the threatening figure of the father. Helen is, after all, the classic type of forbidden woman.

Another of MacLeish's distortions of Burton reinforces the hypothesis that the poet is expressing guilt over incestuous fantasies. Before recommending Helen for their vision, the students have asked for King Alexander. Faust shows trepidation at their request for any vision in a speech which includes these lines:

The dead are dead
 They lie who say that Iamblicus once wrought
 Centurions of Caesar out of air,
 That battled and were stricken and could strike.²

Two passages in Burton seem to prompt this seemingly arbitrary and freely distorted borrowing. First, Burton says that several magicians, including Iamblicus, could "for a time . . . build castles in the air, represent armies, &c, as they are said to have done."³ No mention is made of

¹Ibid., p. 21.

²Ibid., p. 11.

³Burton, p. 178.

Caesar, which name occurs in MacLeish's text and may be written off as a handy alliteration. In a second passage close by, Burton discusses the power magicians have had over human bodies, concluding a series of names of diabolically aided magicians with these words:

. . . Iamblicus & Trithemius of late, that showed Maximillian the Emperor his wife, after she was dead (saith Godolman) so much as the wart on her neck.¹

Iamblicus is not the one who Burton says performed this miracle, but the appearance of his name, together with the name of an emperor, are details closely enough related to the Faust story to draw the poet's imagination to them. This last anecdote parallels Marlowe's Faust (scene x), in which the Emperor asks for a vision of Alexander and his paramour and remarks that she was said to have a wart on her neck. In MacLeish's text, then, the name "Iamblicus" links the miracle of the soldiers to a more appropriate story of Maximillian's wife, which in turn reflects back on the Emperor's request in scene x of Marlowe's Faust. MacLeish's choice of the inappropriate allusion, when the appropriate one was available and adjacent to passages he had already used, may be due to suppressed incest fantasies. The Maximillian story resembles the Faust's resurrection of Helen in all but one important respect: the principal character envisions a wife, but such a relation with an imagined mother figure was not proper for

¹Ibid., p. 167.

the young artist's rendition of the Faust-Helen scene.

From the standpoint of artistic technique, the process MacLeish goes through to combine and distort source material achieves a unique "focus of relationship" between the text and its sources. The core of meaning, at least in the sources he used in this early play, becomes so diffused that their meaning is mainly private. This much the reader may grant even if he does not agree with some of the points made in my psychological interpretation of individual passages. The dynamics of free association in the construction of dialogue show more variety in later plays as the artist calls upon a wider selection of sources and as he achieves greater sophistication in obscuring them.

Having seen the loose ends and distortions in the dialogue of "Our Lady of Troy," we can summarize the psychological content and the dynamics of the creative process as they work themselves out in the play. As in the short stories, the poet's concept of love is made abstract, but it is also increasingly repressed and sublimated into a socially acceptable art ideology--the esthete's pursuit of ideal truth and beauty. The symbol of this ideal is a thinly disguised mother figure. The essentially "Romantic" poet-playwright is acting out his conflict through the play, and one might surmise that the solution he achieved in this play was more satisfying to him than in any of his previous works. Guilt over "selfishness," which he previously expressed either as overt, unlawful

desire of the mother or else as a rejection of the family value system which would make him feel alienated from her, are present in "Our Lady of Troy" under new guises. Conscious restraint of physical desire, without his knowledge of the unconscious incestuous implications, gives him proof--to use Burton's phrase--that "Though he was intemperate in other things, yet in this he carried himself bravely."¹ The new object of sublimated love, the Dream, is a slight variant of mother love which he has sought the short stories "The Charity of Love" and "The Roads of Riga Mountain."² The sublimated love object which is now an art ideology is faint enough in its resemblance to mother love so as not to be a very troublesome source of guilt in the artist's unconsciousness. Yet the quest of the Grail which Reuben of "Riga Mountain" set out for is essentially the same, and its purpose and reward will be to win mother love or the symbols of mother love.

Feelings of guilt over having rejected mother love in the form of religious loyalties and belief are eased by the fact that the new art ideology is seen as a satisfactory substitute for them. The immortality wish essential to the Christian soul belief of the MacLeish family has its counterpart in the wish expressed by the closing lines of the play: ". . . out beyond my farthest reach of thought / All knowledge shines--a

¹Ibid., p. 772.

²Archibald MacLeish, "The Charity of Love," Yale Literary Magazine, LXXXVIII (March, 1913), 253-260; "The Roads of Riga Mountain," ibid., LXXXVIII (June, 1913), 403-409.

radiance of stars."¹

The young poet's continued suspicion of scientific rationalism can have many explanations, the most obvious being that the poet feels temperamentally and intellectually unsuited for a scientific mentality, or simply that he has been conditioned to regard science with hostility. There is also the strong possibility, suggested throughout Faust's speeches, that just as scientific rationalism threatened and perhaps destroyed religious convictions, it is now a potential threat to the new belief system which has taken the place of religion--poetic idealism.

An interpretation of "Our Lady of Troy" would be incomplete without a recognition of its roots and implications as a positive intellectual statement. This aspect has not received much emphasis in my analysis of the play's religious and psychological content. Lawrence Mason's remark that MacLeish's play and the poems of Tower of Ivory are

passionately appealing for an intuitive apprehension of reality as against² the baffling limitations of the reason and the senses²

suggests that the poet was to a degree aware of modern theories of intuition. Although Colin Campbell, in his study of MacLeish, dismisses Mason's foreward as being "too Bergsonian" to reflect the true spirit of Tower of Ivory,³ I find several

¹Archibald MacLeish, "Our Lady of Troy," Tower of Ivory, p. 21.

²Lawrence Mason, "Foreward," Tower of Ivory, p. vii.

³Colin Campbell, p. 30.

attitudes and ideas common to both "Our Lady of Troy" and the writings of the intuitional philosopher, Henri Bergson.

The examination of Bergsonian parallels in "Our Lady of Troy" which follows does not fit together with interpretations given so far, but it may show an additional, independently valid explanation of attitudes expressed in the play. In my correspondence with Mr. MacLeish I have been unable to pin down very many titles of books he has read, long ago or recently, except for those relatively few titles he has spoken of in his writings. He has, however, acknowledged that as an undergraduate he had an interest in Bergson's writings.¹ My contention that there are Bergsonian parallels does not rest on the fact of his having read any particular work I use for illustration. Bergson repeats many of his basic concepts throughout his works, and they are often general enough, to the point of vagueness, so that a young man could have picked them up from anthologies of modern philosophy, from college lectures, or from conversations with teachers and fellow students.

The function of the "philosopher" and "philosophy," in many of Bergson's pronouncements, is similar to the idea of the "poet" and "poetry" conveyed in "Our Lady of Troy." Bergson thinks intuition is "far removed from the sterile idealism" of the nineteenth century," which he says "tries to assimilate

¹Letter-questionnaire answered by Mr. MacLeish, Antigua, W.I., February 1, 1966.

perception to dreaming."¹ Instead, intuition is a primary experience of the real world including its sensibly perceptible data. Bergson has said that intuition cannot be described by formula or definition,² yet he clearly regards it as a combination of "intelligence" and feeling. From his many descriptions, which often have a mystical and hortatory tone, here is one of the more concise:

I say intelligence, I do not say thought, I do not say mind. Alongside of intelligence there is in effect the immediate perception by each of us of his own activity and of the conditions in which it is exercised. Call it what you will; it is the feeling we have of being creators of our intentions, of our decisions, of our acts, and by that, of our habits, our characters, ourselves.³

MacLeish's attempt to find some middle ground between the limitations of "thought" which he represents in theology as "myopsy / And phantoms seen"⁴ and the limitations of sense data which he believes the "mathesis" of physical science interprets inadequately, finds a similar habit of mind in Bergson's outlook. Moreover, in accepting Bergson's emphasis on the intuitional feeling of freedom, MacLeish could escape

¹Henri Bergson, "Philosophical Intuition," Lecture given at the Philosophical Congress of Bologna, April 10, 1911, reprinted in Henri Bergson, The Creative Mind, tr. Mabelle L. Andison (The Wisdom Library; New York: Philosophical Library, Inc., 1946), p. 115.

²Ibid., p. 109.

³Bergson, "The Possible and the Real," The Creative Mind, p. 93.

⁴Archibald MacLeish, "Our Lady of Troy," Tower of Ivory, p. 4.

the determinism of his own childhood theological system as well as the scientific determinism he encountered in his college studies. "Our Lady of Troy" dramatizes the conflict of a character traditionally doomed to damnation and allows him to feel freedom and at least momentary release in the recognition of a glorious symbolic vision.

Bergson as a philosopher and MacLeish as a poet have basically the same simplified and optimistic approach to reality. Similar in spirit to the last lines of "Our Lady of Troy," Bergson says:

Whether we contemplate the philosophical spirit in its works or in itself, . . . we always find that any complication is superficial, that the construction is a mere accessory, synthesis a semblance: the act of philosophizing is a simple one.¹

Faust's assessment of his scientific effort was that step-by-step "mathesis," complication, and synthesis amounted to "nothing then,—/ Or only this last—a space to know/ That out beyond my farthest reach of thought / All knowledge shines. . . ."²

Intuition, which is supposed to correct and expand the severely limited knowledge of the senses and of abstract theorizing, is described by Bergson in these works which suggest Faust's method of envisioning the image of his intuition:

¹Bergson, "Philosophical Intuition," The Creative Mind, p. 126.

²Archibald MacLeish, "Our Lady of Troy," Tower of Ivory, p. 21.

What is this intuition? If the philosopher has not been able to give the formula for it, we certainly are not able to do so. But what we shall manage to recapture and to hold is a certain intermediary image between the simplicity of the concrete intuition and the complexity of the abstractions which translate it, a receding and vanishing image, which haunts, unperceived perhaps, the mind of the philosopher, which follows him like his shadow through the ins and outs of his thought and which, if it is not the intuition itself, approaches it much more closely than the conceptual expression, of necessity symbolical, to which the intuition must have recourse in order to furnish "explanation."¹

Bergson and MacLeish are both perturbed about the inability of modern man to succeed in an "accumulation of all human knowledge in a single mind,"² yet Bergson doggedly insists that the philosopher, while MacLeish requires that the poet, remain

The man of universal knowledge, in this sense, that if he can no longer know everything, there is nothing that he should not have put himself in a position to learn.³

Twice in the play Faust has been in a position to learn everything: first as a historical anachronism successfully learning all human knowledge of the Renaissance and then as a character symbol of the author-poet who, while he does not have time to learn "all knowledge," is still receptive to his vision--i.e., is in "a position to learn."

Faust's abandonment of science at that point where intuition begins is precisely the method for philosophy pre-

¹Bergson, "Philosophical Intuition," The Creative Mind, p. 109.

²Ibid., p. 122.

³Ibid.

scribed by Bergson. Bergson says that intuitional philosophy generalizes where science leaves off, but he denies that the "philosopher" can advance "farther than science in the same direction as science. . . ." ¹ Anyone who attempts to be a philosopher by generalizing the same materials as science deals with and by carrying them further to what Bergson calls "philosophy" is making a mistake, for he is

still a scientist. It is no longer a question, as it was a moment ago, of setting up philosophy as a synthesis of the positive sciences and of claiming, in virtue of the philosopher's mind alone, to raise oneself above science in the generalization of the same facts. ²

Contrary to a popular opinion, Bergson says, the philosopher does not begin where certitude leaves off, but rather where scientific certitude leaves off. Although philosophy "risks" the possibility of error in the new method of intuitional philosophy,

the philosopher runs these risks only because he has insured himself and because there are ³ things of which he feels himself unshakeably certain.

MacLeish's Faust, probing the existence of traditional gods and spirits, said he found unshakeable certitude only in his discovery of "one who is sheer mind," ⁴ and then later he showed the certainty of belief in the apparition of Helen.

¹Ibid., pp. 122-123.

²Ibid., p. 123.

³Ibid., pp. 123-124.

⁴Archibald MacLeish, "Our Lady of Troy," Tower of Ivory, p. 8.

Helen, as object of knowledge and symbol of divine truth, is in the play an incarnation of the "one who is sheer mind." Faust and the other mortals envision Helen first as a mirage of smoke and then as flesh and blood reality. This act has a generally stated parallel in Bergson's belief that intuitionists (himself and Berkeley) perceive matter "as a thin transparent film situated between man and God"¹:

Let us look closely at this shadow: by doing so we shall divine the attitude of the body which projects it. And if we try to imitate this attitude, or better still to assume it ourselves, we shall see as far as it is possible what the philosopher saw.²

The discovery of God (i.e., "one who is sheer mind") and of Helen being essentially the same kind of activity, the "philosopher" of MacLeish's play--in Bergson's words--"did not arrive at unity, he started from it."³

Faust's assertion that all his efforts to learn had led to "only this" (the vision that contains "all knowledge"), his weak, final attempt to sum up all of reality in one statement, coincides with Bergson's view that the life work of the most labyrinthian thinkers, even for instance Berkeley, can be reduced to a single proposition:

A philosopher worthy of the name has never said more than a single thing: and even then it is something he has tried to say, rather than actually said. And he

¹Bergson, "Philosophical Intuition," The Creative Mind, p. 119.

²Ibid., p. 109.

³Ibid., p. 125.

has said only one thing because he has seen only one point: and at that it was not so much a vision as a contact: this contact has furnished an impulse, this impulse a movement, and this movement, which is as it were a kind of swirling of dust taking a particular form, becomes visible to our eyes only through what it has collected along its way. . . .

It is probably coincidental that Helen begins her long speech with the image of dust ("I am she / Whose flesh is dust"²), but the play is so structured that Faust's meandering expressions of doubt and his account of his philosophical experience are a commentary on the maxim Bergson cites: "we first raise a dust and then complain we cannot see."³

Faust the scientific magician has manipulated nature through craft and step-by-step "mathesis"; his attitude has been cautious and sceptical. But as intuitionist, Faust achieves a relationship with nature more like that of a lover. Bergson says,

While the scientist, obligated to take immobile views along a path where nothing is repeated. . . , is obliged to use craft, to adopt toward it the wary attitude of an adversary, the philosopher treats nature as a comrade.⁴

Yet the intuitionist possesses one habit of mind in common with the scientist, a scepticism about traditional and

¹Ibid., p. 112.

²Archibald MacLeish, "Our Lady of Troy," Tower of Ivory, p. 20.

³Bergson, "Philosophical Intuition," The Creative Mind, p. 119.

⁴Ibid., p. 126.

currently-accepted ideas. As Faust had doubted both the religious creeds and the new rationalism of the students, Bergson's intuitionist goes through the following process to develop his views:

Is it not obvious that the first step the philosopher takes, when his thought is still faltering and there is nothing definite in his doctrine, is to reject certain things definitely? Later he will be able to make changes in what he affirms; he will vary only slightly what he denies. And if he varies in his affirmations, it will still be in virtue of the power of negation immanent in the intuition or in its image. He will have allowed himself lazily to deduce consequences according to the rules of rectilinear logic; and then suddenly, in the face of his own affirmations he has the same feelings of impossibility that he had in the first place in considering the affirmations of others.¹

An intuitionist, for he behaves like one through most of the play, Faust doubts others' affirmations and then as a finally matured seer, he at first doubts the vision which brings his one great insight. Bergson's intuitionist is as emphatic:

Impossible! Impossible, even though the facts and the reasons appeared to invite you to think it possible and real and certain.²

Faust's action throughout the play could hardly be epitomized better than in Bergson's characterization of the intuitionist going about his life work:

Of these departures toward an affirmation and these returns to the primary intuition are constituted the zig-zagging of a doctrine which "develops," that is to say which loses itself,³ finds itself again, and endlessly corrects itself.

¹Ibid., p. 110.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

The "zig-zagging" between scepticism and belief is the essential thought structure of "Our Lady of Troy," and Faust's doctrine "corrects itself" literally to the end.

MacLeish's personalized reconstruction of the ideas implicit in the Faust myth is the chief condition for intellectual conflict in "Our Lady of Troy," and an invitation to reconstruct the history of ideas according to one's own insights and the needs of his era is furnished by Bergson:

Thus a thought which brings something new into this world is of course obliged to manifest itself through the ready-made ideas it comes across and draws into its movement; it seems thus, as it were, relative to the epoch in which the philosopher lived; but that is frequently merely an appearance. The philosopher might have come several centuries earlier; he would have had to deal with another philosophy and another science; he would have given himself other problems; he would have expressed himself by other formulas; not one chapter perhaps of the books he wrote would have been what it is;¹ and nevertheless he would have said the same thing.

The intuitionist's feeling of freedom from the limitations of time and historical accident is a recurrent motif in Mr. MacLeish's works, and this freedom is a rationale for breaking down divisions between words and thoughts in a source like Faust, Hamlet, Bernal Diaz's Diary, or the stories of Scripture which he has given the freest and most personalized altered meanings in "historical" adaptations as varied as "Our Lady of Troy," "The Hamlet of A. MacLeish," Conquistador, Nobodaddy, and J.B. Armed with a confidence that the poet can move

¹ Ibid., p. 112.

freely between eras far removed in time and culture, the intuitive poet need feel little disparity between content or context of a source far removed in time and what he chooses to write in and of the twentieth century. He can defend himself with the illusion that if he had been alive several centuries earlier he would have written altogether different kinds of works from what he is writing now, and yet both these "would have said the same thing."

From this position, it is easy to derive the corollary which Bergson propounds, which also seems implicit in MacLeish's adaptations. An idea or theory (and perhaps a literary work) of past times is in the process of evolution, and the man who restates it several centuries hence may express it truly for his times in whatever form his intuitions dictate:

The truth is that above the word and above the sentence there is something much more simple than a sentence or even a word: the meaning which is less a thing thought than a movement of thought, less a movement than a direction.

In the theories which the modern intuitionist expounds, "one might even find, by looking for them, the ideas of his contemporaries and his predecessors" which in his work look like a "pretty piece of mosaic."² But "in the very place where the philosopher seems to be repeating things already said, he is thinking them in his own way."³ Thus, the

¹Ibid., p. 121.

²Ibid., p. 111.

³Ibid.

present day genius combining the thoughts of the past with his own represents "a moment of an evolution":

a philosophy represents an organism rather than an assemblage, and it is still better¹ to speak of evolution in this case than of composition.

"Our Lady of Troy," as well as several of MacLeish's other freely adapted mystical versions of past myths and thought systems may look like assemblages according to ordinary literary standards. An attitude which an artist-thinker may have--that his assemblage or composition of apparently heterogenous doctrines allows him to share in a valid "moment of evolution"--frees him from the conventional boundaries of "word." "sentence." "movement of thought," and even from semantic changes as they occur through time. An "idea" after all is seen as a fluid and evolving thing: free of verbal limitations to carry the evolutionary process a step farther from its source, the artist-philosopher need only maintain the same "direction," i.e., preserve the roughest outline of the original idea, plot, or myth.

A final group of parallels between MacLeish's work and Bergson's essay, "Philosophical Intuition," includes certain verbal resemblances suggesting, by the way, a closer relationship of the essay and the play than I have chosen to defend in discussing the above general resemblances. Bergson concludes his essay by exhorting the intuitionist to raise dead

¹Ibid.

matter in the effort of forcing forward a living, creative evolution. The exhortation could be taken to apply as much to artists as to "philosophers":

Let us . . . grasp ourselves afresh as we are, in a present which is think, and furthermore, elastic, which we can stretch indefinitely backward by pushing the screen which masks us from ourselves farther and farther away; let us grasp afresh the external world as it really is, not superficially, in the present, but in depth, with the immediate past crowding upon it and imprinting upon it its impetus; let us in a word become accustomed to see all things sub specie durationis: immediately in our galvanized perception what is taut becomes relaxed, what is dormant awakens, what is dead comes to life again. Satisfactions which art will never give save to those favored by nature and fortune, and only then upon rare occasions, philosophy thus understood will offer to all of us, at all times, by breathing life once again into the phantoms which surround us and by revivifying us. In so doing philosophy will become complementary to science in practice as well as in speculation. With its applications which aim only at the convenience of existence, science gives us the promise of well-being, or at most, of pleasure. But philosophy could already give us joy.¹

Faust the scientist insists repeatedly that "The dead are dead," but as intuitionist he revivifies matter and achieves the joy of understanding which in MacLeish's early works was the intellectual object of the Grail quest.

The reward for Bergson's philosopher is a joy akin to that of the artist, as described above, which MacLeish had strongly recommended to all the graduates of Yale in the editorial, "To the Patient Few." The practical application of science in order to enjoy "the earth and see the fruits of it" was, according to MacLeish in that essay, a source of

¹Ibid., pp. 128-129.

pleasure or "Happiness." But the poet and the philosopher were given "a desire of things remote," which passes "into the heart" and

" . . . becomes at once a spring of joy and a fire of never-ceasing torment." A spring of joy, not of happiness.

MacLeish's pursuit of "the real . . . in the vague," avowed in this same essay, reflects the spirit of "Our Lady of Troy," and again coincides with Bergson's thinking.

That MacLeish had somehow absorbed the Bergsonian spirit is indicated by their similar attitude toward experience, which includes these parallels I have pointed out and now summarize:

- a) intellect functions to achieve the truth by other methods than the following of traditional a priori principals or the findings of positivistic science;
- b) cognition is far simpler than theorists make it out to be;
- c) the intuitionist is a quasi-universal man;
- d) the sum of the intuitionist's knowledge derives from and ends with "one thing" or idea, of which he is "unshakeably certain;
- e) throwing off the confusion of philosophical and scientific systems, the intuitionist is no longer the adversary of nature but the comrade of nature;
- f) the cognitive act consists of zig-zagging endless affirmations and denials of others' beliefs and one's own until a true philosophy has evolved;

¹Archibald MacLeish, "To the Patient Few," Yale Literary Magazine LXXIX (April, 1914), 285-286.

- g) even if the intuitionist had lived centuries earlier he would have expressed the same idea he does now because differences in time are more apparent than real;
- h) since an idea is simpler than and independent of words and sentences (simpler than time as well), the thoughts of one's predecessors can be enunciated now and still have essentially the same meaning;
- i) in restating older ideas the intuitionist participates in "a moment of evolution"; and finally,
- j) the intuitionist is superior to the scientist because he alone can achieve joy rather than mere pleasure in the act of revivifying dead matter.

No attempt has been made to see Mr. MacLeish as a doctrinaire Bergsonian because I do not believe that he ever adhered rigidly to any doctrine. Yet the attitudes he shares with Bergson indicate that at the period in his life when "Our Lady of Troy" was written, he felt the maximum influence of Bergson. His handling of the relationship of science and creative art during the twenties shows further evidence of Bergsonian formulae, but similarities are less sharply apparent as the years proceed. MacLeish has obviously been an intuitionist of some sort (though not necessarily a Bergsonian) through most of his life. This fact is illustrated in the plays and in many essays, including a recent one in which he pleads that a "feeling for," in addition to a knowledge of, facts is necessary:

Great poems are instruments of knowledge—a knowledge carried alive into the heart by passion, but knowledge nevertheless. Feeling without knowing never made a work of art and never will. . . . Poems so composed

are like kites without strings. They cannot bear up against the carrying away of time,¹ because they have no attachment to a point in time.

¹Archibald MacLeish, "The Poet and the Press," Atlantic, CCIII (March, 1959), p. 44 and passim.

CHAPTER V

NOBODADDY: A DRAMATIZATION OF EXILE

Mr. MacLeish's second verse drama, Nobodaddy, is one of five books of verse written or published during the period of European residence (1923-1928). With the appearance of The Happy Marriage and Other Poems (1924), The Pot of Earth (1925), Nobodaddy (1926), Streets in the Moon (1926), and The Hamlet of Archibald MacLeish (1928) Mr. MacLeish was acquiring a literary reputation. Reviewers such as Conrad Aiken, Allen Tate, and Leonie Adams¹ gave the poet generally favorable reviews.

Yet of all these works, Nobodaddy is probably the least known. Mr. MacLeish's present-day attitude toward the play is indicated by the omission of this title from the list of "Plays in Verse" mentioned at the beginning of the 1963 edition of The Collected Poems. The play had been included in similar lists up to and including the publication of J. B. in 1958. The only other verse play not listed in the 1963 edition was

¹Allen Tate, "Rhetoric, Mysticism, Poetry," New Republic, XLIV (October 14, 1925), 209-210, and "Toward Objectivity," Nation, CXXIV (February 16, 1927), 185-186; Conrad Aiken, "Another Murex," New Republic, XLIX (February 9, 1927), 337, and "The Poetic Scene," Independent, CXVIII (February 26, 1927) 246; Leonie Adams, "Poetic Drama," New Republic, XLVIII (Sept. 15, 1926), 99-100.

that work of early apprenticeship, "Our Lady of Troy."

Nobodaddy did attract some notice in its day. An anonymous reviewer of Independent magazine wrote that the play is "a single poem seventy pages long actually sixty-seven in blank verse," not one of "most difficult of modern marriages, a verse drama that is at once a poem and a play," but

a poetic piece for those rare readers who value a profound and intelligent comment upon human personality in a medium of authentic poetry.¹

While the play is a statement about "human personality" or the universal human condition, it continues the pattern already established in earlier works of saying something about the poet's struggle for identity. Besides showing development in Mr. MacLeish's dramatic style, Nobodaddy takes up motifs from "Our Lady of Troy" which are also dealt with in some of the lyrics published after 1917 and before the play was published in 1926.

A. Poetry of the Exile Period

The Happy Marriage and Other Poems, published just a year after the MacLeishes arrived in Europe, includes love poems and elegies that had appeared in magazines between 1918 and 1924. The war experience rendered in these lyrics pertained chiefly to the death of Mr. MacLeish's brother Kenneth,

¹Annon., Review of Nobodaddy, Independent, CXVI (May 29, 1926), 639.

who had been killed in a flight over Belgium a few days before the Armistice. "On a Memorial Stone" was published in Lyric in 1919; in the same year "A Belgian Letter," "Kenneth," and "The After Spring" appeared in Martha MacLeish's memorial volume, Kenneth, and two of these were reprinted in Parabalou,¹ a "little" magazine which Mr. MacLeish and a few friends published in 1920 and 1921.

The poems reflect the family's grief. Though the workmanship is mediocre, these poems personalize the human facts of war more sharply than had the abstract poems in Tower of Ivory which dealt with war themes. In these four poems, an earlier concern for dedication and heroism was replaced by absorption in thoughts of death and its meaning to those who survive the death of a loved one. At least one commentator² believes that Kenneth's death had a sobering effect on his poet brother. This experience, in the writer's opinion, seems to work on two levels. In mature lyrics of the '20's and '30's like "Memorial Rain," "Immortal Autumn," and "Lines for an Interment," there is a strong sense of bitterness over the

¹Archibald MacLeish, "A Belgian Letter," Parabalou, no. 1 (1920), 5-6; "Kenneth," Parabalou, no. 3 (1921), 3-4; "On a Memorial Stone," Lyric, III (April, 1919); "A Belgian Letter," "The After Spring," and "To K. McL.," Kenneth, ed. Martha H. MacLeish (Chicago: By the author, 1919), pp. 109-110, 120-121, and 123-124; "To K. MacL." reprinted with changes in The Happy Marriage, and Other Poems (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1924), pp. 71-74.

²Viola S. Wendt, "Archibald MacLeish: A Study of His Art and Ideas" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Department of English, University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1947), pp. 23-24.

needless loss of a loved one. Yet in more abstract prose pronouncements of the '30's,¹ the poet attempts doggedly to assure himself and others that the dead of the First World War had not died in vain. It is reasonable to assume that a preoccupation with death in Nobodaddy and in many lyrics has a strong basis in the poet's and the family's loss of Kenneth. In The Happy Marriage and Other Poems, a preoccupation with death is more prominent than in any of the pre-war verse.

It is worth noting that in the poem, "Kenneth," Mr. MacLeish modified earlier agnostic tendencies by affirming a kind of personal immortality for his brother:

O Rosa Mundi--in the rose that dies
 Something there is, not mystical and far,
 But dear, familiar, sure,
 As in a dream the hazy voices are,
 Something that lives, that lives, that
 lives, that does endure.²

Like the love poems of Tower of Ivory, poems published in magazines shortly after the war continued to chant in Swinburnian accents of Love as an abstract ideal. Little could be said of them that has not already been said of the college work. But with the series of poems under the title, "The Happy Marriage," Mr. MacLeish's love poetry reached a new

¹Archibald MacLeish, Review of Lawrence Stallings, The First World War, New Republic, LXXVI (Sept. 20, 1933), 159-160; cf. poems "Memorial Rain," "Immortal Autumn," and "Lines for an Interment," The Collected Poems of Archibald MacLeish, pp. 46-47, 63, and 96-97.

²Archibald MacLeish, "Kenneth," Parabalou, no. 3 (1921), 4.

measure of emotional and technical maturity.

The Happy Marriage is a sequence of thirteen sonnets and passages of trimeter and tetrameter couplets, all of which have enough coherent development to be read as a continuous poem. Although the form corresponds to the Petrarchan tradition of intersticing sonnets with canzoni, the un-petrarchan subject matter is married love. The poet searches for his own and his spouse's identity, and his own personal conflict is between ideal and actual love. The opening sonnet shows the lack of communication between the poet's quest for ideal love and the wife's lack of commitment to this cause:

He followed love, she waited her true lover:
 She waited what she need but wait to find;
 He followed what pursuit could not discover
 Nor time disclose nor death surprise and bind.
 Over the hills, he sang, and far away--¹
 She never knew that land nor where it lay.

These lines echo many earlier poems from "Wunderlust" onward, and the motif and imagery can even be found in Nobodaddy: the poet roving the hills in search of ideal truth and beauty, the ultimate impossibility of achieving the remote grail.

Echoes of "Our Lady of Troy" occur in the second and third sections of "The Happy Marriage":

Take Helen,--all you hear of her
 In lectures is a learned slur
 Of couplets solemnly undressed
 To indicate the female chest,

¹Archibald MacLeish, "The Happy Marriage," Collected Poems, p. 7.

Till Helen's lost and nothing's sure ¹
 But that she had, praise God a breast.

Faust's boyish vision of Helen undressed is repeated, along with his revulsion for academic discussions of holy mysteries. The choice of Helen as symbol of ideal love reflects the profound impression which childhood reading of the Troy story had on Mr. MacLeish. The image of Helen prompts fantasies similar to those noted in "Our Lady of Troy":

Helen, he said,--but was it she?
 Somewhere he'd seen serenity
 Drawn smooth as this across a flame
 As bright to hide, and brows that tame
 Eyes as unapt to secrecy,--
 Nay, he had known these eyes, this same
 Young breast, this throat. There was
 a name. . . .²

The next lines of the poem, beginning a new sonnet, reminisce on boyhood pleasure and guilt:

He had used love or lust or what's between
 Long, long before. When he was still a boy
 Old hairy love that hugs his knees for joy
 And quavers tunes, ecstatic and obscene,
 Grey goatish love that whistles to the fauns,
 Had whistled fever through his aching flesh
 And let him giddy down his nerves' dark mesh
 To lie with empresses and leprechauns.³

Then the problem of reconciling ideal and actual love is solved simply by identifying them in one person, apparently the spouse:

But she was both,--she was both loved and love,
 She was desire and the thing desired,

¹Archibald MacLeish, "The Happy Marriage," The Collected Poems of Archibald MacLeish, p. 8.

²Ibid., p. 9.

³Ibid.

She was Troy flame and she was Troy town fired, 1
 She was hope realized and the hope thereof. . . .

As in Donne's "The Cannonization," physical reality intervenes without nullifying the idealized picture: "But now she slept and was herself and seemed / More than his love and less than he had dreamed."²

Midway in the poem the poet stops making references to the anomaly of his dream, but turns to consider the lack of communication between the lovers. "She was not his, but he was only hers," he says. The woman asks, "But was not I myself--was not the same!"³ in reference to the poet's insistence that it is she that he loved before and still does love. And communication breaks down further over the distinction between the beloved as person and image:

Oh, yes, the image will return
 Being an image--yet the sky has tumbled
 However, bright the sky itself may burn--
 That cannot fall you say? Her fingers fumbled
 Against his arm and in the touch he knew
 Her heart₄ had guessed the truth that was not
 true.

The next lines echo T. S. Eliot's line "That is not what I meant at all," as well as the moribund rainy city scenes in Eliot's "Preludes" and "Morning at the Window."⁵ MacLeish's lines are--

¹Ibid.

²Ibid., p. 13.

³Ibid., pp. 14 and 16.

⁴Ibid., p. 17.

⁵T. S. Eliot, The Complete Poems and Plays, 1909-1950 (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1952), pp. 12-13 and 16.

He leans against the window-sill:
 The dusk has drizzled down to rose.
 Delicious damps and odors fill
 The musings of his thoughtful nose.

The soft wind slides seductive touch
 Along the shoulders of the oak.
 My dear, I love you, dear, so much--
 He cannot think of whom he spoke.¹

Pathos in the poet's recognition of failure to realize the ideal in married life does not prevent the poem from living up to its title. His formula for "the happy marriage" is the old one used for the achievement of poetic ecstasy in "Our Lady of Troy"--the pursuit of wisdom through love--but this time through the moderate expectations of married life:

There was a way of being wise
 That was not wisdom: one might love
 Too loftily and fall above
 As well as one might fall below.
 And there were things a man might know
 That were not knowledge either.

For instance.²

Truth

The poet assures himself that

A woman is no lawyer's brief
 Compounded to persuade the sense
 Of things beyond experience
 No woman's body could fulfil,
 But Holy Writ that can distil
 The very peace it promises.³

The image "Holy Writ" is used in a way typical of Mr. MacLeish's work: it is something which causes turmoil because its literal "promises" cannot fulfil the expectations they create.

¹Archibald MacLeish, The Collected Poems of Archibald MacLeish, p. 17.

²Ibid., pp. 18-19.

³Ibid., p. 19.

Theorizing ends with the line, "He yawned and shuffled off to bed."¹ and after describing the humid weather the poet understands their love when, in an exchange of looks, he sees her "quick assent / That promised all his eyes had asked."² In the second last section of the poem he recapitulates his now apparently successful effort to reconcile the dream of love with the reality of love:

He thinks he has composed his dream
Of love upon as slight a theme,
And all the arduous obscure
Perfections of his overture,
Unravelling part from varied part,
Were but the drumming of his heart.

But still the clacking clockwork spins
Music of marvellous violins.³

Happiness is achieved by recognizing the subjectivity of dreams, a definite change of view from the philosophical idealism of the first ten sections of the poem, and a change from the argument of "Our Lady of Troy." Nevertheless, the last short section of the poem reiterates the enigma of this dual experiencing of love:

Beauty is that Medusa's head
Which men go armed to seek and sever:
It is most deadly when most dead,
And dead will stare and sting⁴ forever--
Beauty is that Medusa's head.

In context with the rest of the sequence, "beauty" seems to refer to both actual and ideal love. The private world of the poet crowds in on the shared experience of the married couple

¹ Ibid.

² Ibid., p. 20.

³ Ibid., pp. 20-21.

⁴ Ibid., p. 21.

and is for him an essential part of his motivation to love at all. His dream of the ideal is what is "dead," but the symbol of ideal love is perhaps only temporarily suppressed and may be evoked by the presence of the real lover. This problem of the poet's identifying himself and his dreams and distinguishing them from the beloved as a distinct individual is paramount in the first two acts of Nobodaddy.

"The Happy Marriage" and Nobodaddy both express the poet's search for identity through married love, and these works show development of his ideals of love and beauty since their statement in "Our Lady of Troy." Another poem of the exile period has Mr. MacLeish's own endorsement as one which bears some relation to Nobodaddy, for Mr. MacLeish concludes the introduction of the play by saying:

I think it should be added, for the reason, among others, that the emotional experiences treated in the two books are not unlike, that the present poem was written some time before The Pot of Earth.

This poem also comments on the poet's search for identity; therefore a brief explication seems justified.

The Pot of Earth (1925), a three part narrative and lyric poem using as a historical source the Adonis myth from James G. Frazer's The Golden Bough,² resembles Nobodaddy in both

¹Archibald MacLeish, "Forward," Nobodaddy, p. 6.

²James G. Frazer, The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion, 3rd edition, revised and enlarged in twelve volumes (London: Macmillan and Co., 1920), V, 224 ff.

like "The Happy Marriage," which expressed the male's fears of marriage and of the artist's counterpart to childbirth, poetic creativity.

The three-part poem begins with "The Sowing of the Dead Corn," relating the primitive virgin's planting of short-lived corn (a totem of human fertility), and this act is roughly equated with modern courtship. A fear of life, spoken by the woman but also expressing the artist's fear of producing, occurs in the lines:

And why, then, must I hurry?
There are things I have to do
More than just to live and die
More than just to die of living.
I have seen the moonlight leaving
Twig by twig the elms and wondered,¹
Where I go, where I have wandered.

Part II, "The Shallow Grass" parallels the primitive girl's waiting for grass to run its life span with the experience of a modern woman being married and waiting her term of pregnancy. Her delivery, which will be a kind of death similar to the dying of the ritual grass, prompts death fears for herself--

she dreamed of one
Buried, and out of her womb the corn growing²

¹Archibald MacLeish, The Collected Poems of Archibald MacLeish, p. 209; cf. images in the last three lines of "Ars Poetica," ibid., p. 50:

"Leaving as the moon releases
Twig by twig the night entangled trees,

Leaving as the moon behind the winter leaves,
Memory by memory the mind."

²Archibald MacLeish, "The Pot of Earth," The Collected Poems of Archibald MacLeish, p. 216.

and also for those killed in battle, reflecting perhaps the poet's sorrow for his brother Kenneth and others killed in the war:

Above the trolley bridge the market gardens
 Are charnel fields where the unburied corn
 Rots and the rattling pumpkin vines lift
 brittle fingers
 Warning--of what?--and livid, broken skulls
 Of cabbages gape putrid in a pond. . . .¹

In Part III, "The Carrion Spring," the delivery of the child is equated with a figurative death of the mother, and the somber impression of this climatic part of the poem, not to mention the equally somber Part II, may reflect the MacLeish's sorrow in retrospect over the death of their first son before he had reached one year of age:

In March, when the snow melted, he was born.
 She lay quiet in the bed. She lay still,
 Dying.

. . . I have borne the summer
 Dead,² the corn dead, the living
 Dead.

Finally, the mother searches for identity, just as the husband had in "The Happy Marriage":

And what is this to be a woman? Why,
 To be a woman, a sown field. Let us
 Attribute a significance perhaps
 Not ours to what we are compelled to be
 by being it: as privately forestall
 The seed's necessity by welcoming
 The necessary seed; likewise prevent
 Death with the apothegm that all men die.

¹Ibid., p. 219.

²Ibid., pp. 221-222.

Yes, wake, and of the close, unusual dark
 Demand an answer, crying, What am I?
 Ah, what! A naked body born to bear
 Nakedness suffering.¹

The last half dozen lines are precisely the kinds of questions recited by Adam and Cain in Nobodaddy. They are also the thematic question of the long poem, The Hamlet of A. MacLeish (1928), which we need not analyse.

As we shall see later in this chapter, the solution to the new mother's quest for identity is the same as Cain's in Nobodaddy--a general statement of confidence in and an acceptance of the mystery and the dignity which comes of being human:

Listen, I will interpret to you. Look now,
 I will discover you a thing hidden,
 A secret thing. Come, I will conduct you
 By seven doors into a closed tomb.
 I will show you the mystery of mysteries.
 I will show you the body of the dead god
 bringing forth
 The corn. I will show you the reaped ear
 Sprouting.

Are you contented? Are you answered?²

The last five lines fade off into hazy natural description which ends with "silence / Settling and stirred and settling in an empty room--."³ The Pot of Earth stops short of a significant answer to a modern woman's problem of identity, for the "reaped ear / Sprouting" refers, it seems, to the new life of the child without answering the more basic question of

¹Ibid., p. 219.

²Ibid., p. 223.

³Ibid.

what the woman's identity is as an individual. Yet despite its lack of a specific definition of the individuality of a human being, the poem asks the same questions about human identity that Nobodaddy does.

B. The Response of Critics

Reviews of The Happy Marriage, The Pot of Earth, and Nobodaddy which appeared at the time these works are published are few enough to survey for the insights they offer into Mr. MacLeish's stylistic development up to the mid-twenties. Reviewing Streets in the Moon for New Republic, Conrad Aiken said he had felt from the beginning that MacLeish

had a very exceptional talent, and that if he might once escape from the several "influences" which have in succession so deeply stained him, and succeed in discovering his own identity (most difficult of the modern poet's tasks), he might become one of the most exciting of contemporary American poets.

He thought The Pot of Earth impressive despite its "monstrous debt" to Eliot's The Wasteland, while Nobodaddy did not show MacLeish's development because

It was from a more formative and more academic period in his growth. It was good, but it was not, in the same way, exciting.²

The poems of Streets in the Moon seemed least derivative to Aiken, yet he regretted MacLeish's yielding to

¹Conrad Aiken, "Another Murex," New Republic, XLIX (February 9, 1927), 337, and "The Poetic Scene," Independent, CXVIII (February 26, 1927), 246.

²Ibid.

contemporary taste for typographical and punctuational oddity--devices which, as he shows us himself, he can better dispense with.¹

--a warning, perhaps, that MacLeish had entered a Cummings phase. Aiken hoped MacLeish would avoid "the fragmentary and asymmetrical" and work instead on "the full and rounded, . . . the richly organized, that he finds his natural expression." Aiken admired MacLeish's blank verse and his "Elizabethan" love of fine phrases, his "power to grasp the metaphysical in sensuous terms."² He set no limits on what the poet might do in the future.

Allen Tate shared Aiken's concern about the derivative quality of MacLeish's verse. Tate said that The Pot of Earth

is a derivative of blank-verse passages in The Waste-land: the excess of splendid rhythmical periods in long sequences of run-on lines, depriving the verse of solidity, which makes one suspect that Mr. MacLeish rather unwisely studied Mr. Eliot's very personal use of Webster's and Ford's textures without³ having given much attention to the models themselves.

Tate discussed all the works of the exile period except Nobodaddy, but some of his general remarks throw light on that work also:

His chief character as a poet is his seriousness, which includes . . . an intellectual grasp of his position in the contemporary situation. He moves toward a set of objective values upon which his poetry

¹ Ibid.

² Aiken, "Another Murex," New Republic, XLIX (February 9, 1927), 337.

³ Allen Tate, "Rhetoric, Mysticism, Poetry," New Republic, XLIV (October 14, 1925), 209-210.

can lean. The importance of these values, once articulated, will depend upon the degree to which their successive contexts (separate poems) are valid as aesthetic experience.

While Tate thought that the content of MacLeish's work seemed valid, he still felt that the lack of "solidity" he noticed in the verse hampered MacLeish's efforts to achieve "objective values":

The Happy Marriage continued the familiar Meredithian situation with the attempt at universalizing it through merely personal terms. These values were internal to Mr. MacLeish; they never emerged in clean outline in the poems; there was a futility in the nice technique because it erected no stable significance in the end. The realization of this defect must have been the starting point, the skepsis, of a more fundamental attack upon his problem.²

The problem of objectifying personal experience was further complicated, according to Tate, when MacLeish turned to a historical or literary source as the basis for his personal statements in verse.

Tate commended the advancement in technique of The Pot of Earth, which he said tried "to restore to the myth a quality of experience of which the historical method of Frazer deprived it."³ He thought the poem "definite" and "unabstract," but added:

The poem fails because the myth is for some reason too deep in the modern consciousness to be revived with a full sense of its implications; the experimental quality . . . remains external, parallel to

¹Allen Tate, "Toward Objectivity," The Nation CXXIV (February 16, 1927), 185.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

the symbol. The poem exhibits once more the dissociated contemporary mind.¹

Going on to discuss the long poem, Einstein, Allen Tate said that it too showed a failing for about the same reason as The Pot of Earth failed: "the poet does not assimilate the abstractions, and his style is a mixture of scientific restatement and image."²

Aiken and Tate, who have since gained reputations as eminent critics, may perhaps be too facile in their poet-critic's penchant for finding "influences," and Tate's invocation of "dissociated" sensibility may seem dated. Yet they point out a difficulty which was particularly troublesome for Mr. MacLeish at this time and would cause further trouble in later works. Mr. MacLeish was indeed having trouble assimilating his influences; the fact was to become a by-word with critics through the next two decades. Imitation often proved a stimulus to Mr. MacLeish's originality, but he seemed at cross purposes when imitating the real or imagined attitudes of others and then trying to give them some sort of personal and universal application. The remarks quoted above were from mainly favorable, hopeful reviews. Tate, for instance, thought that fifteen poems of Streets in the Moon were "completely successful."³ And Aiken was not alone in approving Mr. MacLeish's efforts to be "cosmic."

¹Ibid., p. 185-186.

²Ibid., p. 186.

³Ibid.

Leonie Adam's review of Nobodaddy is one of the best general introductions to the play. She thought it "not a play, but . . . a genuine and distinguished poem. . . . in play form."¹ She thought there was some mastery of conception, MacLeish's distortion of the Eden story being "wholly satisfactory, not implausible or disturbing."² She liked the rendition of "this perplexed Adam, tormented Cain, Eve earthy and fawn-like, a little quaintly conceived in genus femina,"³ but seemed at a loss for anything to say about Abel. She felt, however, that the poem was "stretched" with "too much repetition of feeling, a sameness in the experience without cumulative intensity to justify it." She said the scene where Adam and Eve recall the animals seemed "trivial," and the play's "conscious naturalism" was now and then flat and inane. She judged that the verse was "easy and sophisticated and charming almost throughout," yet contained some evidence that "Mr. MacLeish rubbed his lines the wrong way with a brush of finest selected bristles."⁴ Her strongest, perhaps most favorable, reaction was to the tone of the poem as an emotioned cosmic statement:

However, his despair over the human dilemma is neither rugged nor tempestuous. It is chill, creeping,

¹ Leonie Adams, "Poetic Drama," New Republic, XLVIII (September 15, 1926), 100.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

numb, the unplumbed fascinated fear of a child alone with his--body. This sort of feeling he gives with beauty and restraint in many passages and for this sort¹ of feeling his cadence is excellently toned.

Nobodaddy was written for an elite readership; Aiken's and Leonie Adam's responses to it are representative of the few statements about the play which have appeared in print.

C. Backgrounds of Nobodaddy

Nobodaddy, a closet drama which has never been produced on the stage, was published in 1926, while the author lived in France and just after young French dramatists had popularized experimental plays for reading (pièces à lire). In the new traditions of the Dadaist and Surrealist movements. Armand Salacrou's A Circus Story (1922), Rene Daumal's En Gggarrde! (1924), and Roger Gilbert-Lecomte's The Odyssey of Ulysses the Palmiped (1924) strained the limits of non-realistic theatre to the point where these plays were incapable of stage production. Properties and actions were too fantastic to be realized on a stage; dialogue consisted of free association.² In contrast, the properties and actions of Mr. MacLeish's play were not impossible for a stage, the mode of presentation is realistic, and the author's private meanings have little to do with ordinary notions of free association. The play seems to

¹Ibid.

²Modern French Theatre: An Anthology of Plays, ed. and trans. by Michael Benedikt and George E. Wellwarth (New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, 1964), pp. xxvi and 197-220.

have been completely independent of the new, short-lived pièce à lire movement; yet the movement may have benefited Mr. MacLeish in offering a precedent for unstageable drama and perhaps a tolerance among a small avant-garde audience for such works.

In theme, imagery, and diction, the play resembles The Happy Marriage and The Pot of Earth more than it does any other of MacLeish's works; it has the highly subjective quest for identity and the meaning of love shown in The Happy Marriage and the images of plant growth and fertility which are the dominant symbols of an identity quest in The Pot of Earth. The diction and rhythm of all these works are similar--usually a smooth-running iambic pentameter with frequent enjambment but a minimum of punctuation within the line. By contrast, the language and rhythm of "Our Lady of Troy" is pieced together, far more rigidly syllabic, somewhat over-punctuated, and more frequently end-stopped--not unlike its Renaissance model.

The chief similarity in Mr. MacLeish's first two plays is that they are both built around the expectation of a vision. In "Our Lady of Troy" the expectation is fulfilled, but underdeveloped; in the much better developed discussions of Nobodaddy, the expected vision of self-awareness is fulfilled at the end of the first and second acts, but in the third act new expectations are created in a new environment, and they are frustrated anticlimactically. Although the plays both present a poet's quest for identity, Faust's dramatic

conflict rages mainly within himself, whereas the protagonist Adam-Cain has god and a changed environment as antagonist. Structural similarities of the two plays seem superficial. "Our Lady of Troy" is a one-act play with a climax of sudden awareness at the very end emanating from Helen's appearance, which is the only real event of the play. The play has no denouement. But with Nobodaddy, Mr. MacLeish is provided with a myth that has significant events around which to develop a story and dialogue. Even Cain's cries of frustration and defeat in his anticlimatic realization that there is no vision for him outside of his own self-awareness, contain more dramatic tension than any part of the story in "Our Lady of Troy."

Mr. MacLeish has recently stated the date of composition for Nobodaddy as follows:

I should guess it was when I was at the Law school-- probably after I got back from France in 1919 or 1920.¹

The texture of the language, the imagery, and the thematic preoccupations are so different from the work Mr. MacLeish was doing in 1919 and 1920, and so much like the language and themes of The Pot of Earth (1925) and The Happy Marriage (1924) that a date later than 1920 would seem more probable. Moreover, Mr. MacLeish's two years at the Harvard Law school did not allow much leisure time for writing a long work.

Another factor in dating this work is the high probability

¹Questionnaire-letter mailed by Mr. MacLeish, Antigua, W. I., February 1, 1966.

that Mr. MacLeish depended upon G. B. Shaw's Back to Methusalah as a model for Nobodaddy. If this inference, which I will soon substantiate, is correct, then Mr. MacLeish could not have completed his play earlier than 1921, when Back to Methusalah was published. Since Mr. MacLeish informed the writer that he saw the play but did not read it,¹ he could have seen a Theatre Guild production at the Garrick Theatre in New York beginning February 27, 1922, or a Birmingham Repertory Theatre production between October 9 and 27, 1923. There were no other productions of the play before 1929.² Taking these factors and Mr. MacLeish's statements into consideration, and allowing for a memory lapse after so many years, we may conclude that Nobodaddy was written sometime between February, 1922, and the publication of The Pot of Earth in 1925.

In amplifying the Eden and the Cain and Abel legends, Mr. MacLeish was using the same materials which G. B. Shaw had put into Part I of his play, Back to Methusalah (1921); there are as many as eight ways in which the plays resemble each other. First is a structural similarity which owes much, but not necessarily everything, to the original sources. Shaw's "In the Beginning" devoted one long act to the temptation of Adam and Eve and a second and final scene to Cain's

¹Ibid.

²Archibald Henderson, Bernard Shaw: Playboy and Prophet (Authorized; New York and London: D. Appleton and Company, 1932), pp. 803-4 and 805-6.

defiant encounter with Adam and Eve after Abel's death. Nobodaddy tells the story of Adam and Eve in two acts and then shifts in the third act to Cain's defiance of God. Thus both Shaw and MacLeish use a basic two-part structure, and both feature a defiant Cain in a climactic part. A second similarity is that Adam in both plays is motivated by conclusions he draws about the fact of death; Shaw's first act shows Adam and Eve introduced to death by their discovery of a dead fawn, while MacLeish's pair discuss death after the tempter has reported a behemoth's death and the implications this has for them.¹ Third, both authors present God as an unconscious cosmic force, but whereas Shaw's play implicitly assumes this phenomenon as fact, MacLeish's play spends much time establishing and demonstrating it.² Fourth, in the first act of Shaw's "Part I," Eve grasps Adam's knees; in MacLeish's last act "Able clings to Cain's legs, dragging him down."³ Fifth, the Garden in both plays is full of voices which prompt the main characters to have new thoughts.⁴ Sixth, in both plays imagination is seen as the beginning of human creativity, but

¹Cf. George Bernard Shaw, Back to Methusala, A Metabiological Pentateuch (New York: Brentano's, 1921), p. 1, and Archibald MacLeish, Nobodaddy, p. 15.

²Cf. Shaw, Methusalah, pp. xxiii-xxxiv ("The Advent of Neolamarckians" through "Discovery Anticipated by Divination"), and MacLeish, Nobodaddy, pp. 14-17.

³Cf. Methusalah, p. 2 and Nobodaddy, p. 65.

⁴Cf. Methusalah, p. 3 and Nobodaddy, pp. 10-11 and passim.

whereas Shaw makes imagination lead to "wishing" new phenomena according to Lamarckian principles of evolution, MacLeish's "imagination" is identified with self-awareness and an abstract self-realization (i.e., development of human potential) which seems futile and unproductive in its effects during the play.¹ Seventh, in both plays the tempter, treated sympathetically, teaches, or endows man with, the ability to laugh.² Eighth, the characterization of Adam is essentially the same in both plays: in Shaw's first act and in MacLeish's first two acts Adam shows vitality and imagination, but in Shaw's second and MacLeish's third act Adam is characterized as a cautious farmer whose chief interest is digging.³

As a work of Romantic expression, Nobodaddy conveys the artist's, and by intention modern man's, search for identity. A particular problem exists in the conflict between publicly accepted interpretations of the myth and the new ones which the artist tries to bring into the material. Mr. MacLeish's Foreward to the play broaches this problem of communication and at the same time underscores the play's thematic content. His rather backhanded statement of purpose could conceivably be misinterpreted as a definition by negation. But all the

¹Cf. Methusalah, pp. xviii-xix ("Voluntary Longevity") and p. 9 with Nobodaddy, pp. 19-20, 28-30, 39-40, and 49-50.

²Cf. Methusalah, pp. 5, 10, and passim with Nobodaddy, pp. 25, 52, and passim.

³Cf. Methusalah, pp. 21 and 38 with Nobodaddy, p. 53.

elements he mentions are found in the play, and once he calls attention to them he merely makes the point that they are his own thoughts and not necessarily inherent in the legends of Genesis:

. . . I have not assumed that the legend as a legend symbolizes the accident of human self-consciousness and the resultant human exclusion from nature, animal and inanimate. I have not taken the God of Genesis to be the mysterious universal will which man at that point in his history ceased to understand. I have not seen in Cain the beginning of the human effort to occupy a man-made, man-conscious, universe within or without the other. On the contrary, having to deal with the dramatic situation which the condition of self-consciousness in an indifferent universe seems to me to present, I have appropriated, for its dramatic values, the story of Eden, and given to such of its incidents as I have used an arbitrary significance in the interest of my poem which I am very far from believing them to bear to the anthropologist.¹

The play deals then, as previous comentators have noted,² with the evolution of human consciousness and a corresponding estrangement from nature; with a controlling force in the universe called "universal will"; and with modern man's struggle to adjust to and control his man-made, man-centered world without the help of a personal God.

¹MacLeish, "Foreward," Nobodaddy, pp. 5-6.

²Anonymous review of Nobodaddy, Independent, CXVI (May 29, 1926), 639; Leonie Adams, "Poetic Drama," New Republic, XLVIII (September 15, 1926), 99-100; Viola S. Wendt, "Archibald MacLeish: A Study of His Art and Ideas" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1947), p. 51; and Colin Chandler Campbell, Jr., "The Poet as Artist and Citizen: A Study of the Life and Writings of Archibald MacLeish through 1958," (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, 1960), pp. 80 ff.

In "An Anonymous Generation: Notes from a Notebook of the Twenties," published three years after Nobodaddy, Mr. MacLeish speaks of a conflict which could very well stand as the theme statement of the play:

The whole law of human thinking is the necessity of believing that of the universe which will make consciousness supportable. Consciousness in an unconscious universe, ignorant of man, obscurely and inanimately logical--consciousness in a universe over which consciousness has no possible control, is the unendurable tragedy.¹

Constant awareness of alienation from God and society makes this central problem of the play distinctly contemporary. Mr. MacLeish says in "Anonymous Generation" what he is probably trying to dramatize in the play:

The restoration of man to his position of dignity and responsibility at the center of his world--not at the center of one of the arbitrary worlds of science--must first occur.²

And according to Mr. MacLeish the poet seems most likely to succeed in this task. His optimism, as well as his pathos, on this point echoes one of his Yale Literary Magazine editorials and suggests that the feeling of alienation may have a cultural and even geographic dimension as well as spiritual or religious one:

¹ Archibald MacLeish, "An Anonymous Generation: Notes from a Notebook of the Twenties," A Time to Speak: The Selected Prose of Archibald MacLeish (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1941), pp. 156-7; reprinted from Saturday Review, VI (December 7, 1929), 503-4.

² Archibald MacLeish, A Time to Speak, p. 154.

There remains to us our emotional convictions that the universe is real, And we attempt to enter it again with our minds, with our bodies, by representations of it in art--we, the intelligent, the forever exiled, who have made our lives outside of life.¹

The solution which the play seems to offer for this problem of alienation, while it may have likely produced only further alienation from society, is appropriate to the poet's search for identity during the "exile" years in Paris: to find one's individuality through rebellion against the mores of a god-fearing, science-worshipping society.

D. Analysis of Nobodaddy

Nobodaddy is an adaption in three acts of the first four chapters of Genesis. Most of the play is in blank verse, but there are passages of shorter lines and some passages are rhymed. The title appropriates William Blake's coined sarcasm for God, the father who is no father; any of Blake's distinctions between the good God of creation and the Nobodaddy of rationalists, diests, or people of "This world" do not seem to be operative in the play. Nobodaddy is the only god in Mr. MacLeish's play--the unconscious force behind creation. Since the name "god" is spelled in lower case throughout the play, it will be spelled the same way throughout the rest of this analysis.

The play's epigraph, also from Blake, characterizes god's incommunicative, inactive non-appearance throughout the play:

¹Ibid., p. 157; cf. concluding sentences of "To the Patient Few," Yale Literary Magazine, LXXIX (April, 1914), 286.

Why art thou silent and invisible,
 Father of Jealousy?
 Why dost thou hide thyself in clouds--¹

Likewise, the serpent is dispensed with--perhaps for the sake of dramatic realism or because of the author's distaste for what amounts to a theological anthropomorphism--but instead a "Voice," like the "muted trilling" which is part of the arcadian setting of Eden, "sifts through the air from nowhere in particular."² The first dozen pages of text constitute a temptation scene in which Adam could conceivably be carrying on a monologue with his own innate promptings. Speech directions read: "ADAM" and "VOICE."

The Voice argues persuasively that by tasting the forbidden tree Adam would for the first time see--Adam.³ In a noble posture of defiance he would cease to be a beast and would enjoy self-consciousness which even god does not have. The Voice adds to its promise:

You would see more than Adam. You would see
 In Adam's eyes Eve you have never seen,
 Eve desirable, Eve with the strange breast,
 Eve to answer you with silence in the night
 When the stars march and there are no words
 to say.⁴

Adam is afraid of death, the stated penalty for defying god, but the Voice persuades Adam that God does not know what death is, that He would not hear or understand the conversation going on even if he were within earshot, that he is in fact some

¹Nobodaddy, p. 1.

²Ibid., pp. 9-10.

³Ibid., p. 18.

⁴Ibid., p. 19.

kind of mechanical unconscious force which has the job of sustaining the universe. Adam is sceptical of these arguments to the point where he remains unwilling to act.¹

In a long rhymed speech² the Voice explains how man has been created without real awareness of himself or the world and that defiance alone can bring knowledge. The Voice disappears. Shortly after Eve appears and begins talking with Adam, the "Voice seems to speak from his mouth,"³ repeating and developing the arguments Adam had just resisted. Only the fear of death now holds Adam back from disobedience, for he now accepts the Voice's arguments as truth. Eve resists Adam's interpretation momentarily and then says these words as she decides to take the fruit:

If we should take just one
And taste it, only taste it. Do you see
Where we two grow together? He would never know
There had been two there.⁴

First Eve and then Adam taste the fruit. Adam observes:

You were my flesh
Eve that was taken from my side, familiar
As my own hands. Now--now you are still
Eve, but not my flesh now. You have become
Only yourself, not mine, not anything
But only Eve.⁵

The core of the brief argument which closes Act I is the self-evident truth of Adam's statement: "You are / . . . Adam's

¹Ibid., pp. 14-20.

²Ibid., pp. 19-20.

³Ibid., pp. 23 and 24-25.

⁴Ibid., pp. 25-26.

⁵Ibid., pp. 28-29.

other self / And therefore not himself."¹

Act II is the most derivative section of the play; it is almost the sum of ideas and images taken from The Happy Marriage, The Pot of Earth, and a few lyrics. The scene of the afternoon (Act I) is continued into twilight and evening; Adam and Eve can now communicate as two separate individuals capable of loving, but they have no communication with god or nature. The act begins with a select catalogue of created things in reverse order from the biblical account: animals, reptiles, and then plants.² Eve is compared to the moon, Adam fears to look at Eve, and later both express fear of the moon.³ Images are repeated from the poems "Ancestral" and "Eleven" which recall the poet's childhood and the maternal relationship. The context in the play, however, is altogether new. Trying to remember the names of shapes half-forgotten, Eve (echoing a line from "Eleven") asks Adam, "Have you forgotten? Think now, / Think, Adam--"⁴ Adam describes his change of vision as he had described falling asleep in "Ancestral":

Yet I see
As though I saw through sleep now, under
 sleep,
As under water I have seen blurred shapes
Of shadow gather and dissolve, I see
Sleep, faces in sleep, the darkened faces,
The muzzles blunted with dumb hair, the no
Eyes--I cannot look into their eyes--

¹Ibid., p. 30.

²Ibid., pp. 31-32.

³Ibid., pp. 33 and 40; cf. other moon imagery associated with fear, pp. 29, 41, 42, and 43.

⁴Ibid., p. 35; cf. "Eleven," line 3, The Collected Poems, p. 36.

And yet I knew them.¹

He speaks of the "moist roots," pebbles, and earth which give an immediate sense knowledge like that he had described in "Eleven":

not I
That knew and they that I₂ had known, but all
One, one knowledge. . . .²

Toward the end of this speech are three lines reminiscent of The Pot of Earth.

. . . The grass that grew up out of me, the
stones
That touched me with their bodies, were all
strange,
All dangerous, all secret,--now I fear them.³

These reflections on their own identity and relationship to nature continue through Act II in a kind of counterpoint with another idea that constitutes an immediate physical threat: Will god punish them for sin?

The answer would seem logical enough according to the already established definition of god as an unconscious force. He could hardly have any moral sense. But for a while Adam is satisfied with the idea that god would not find them in the dark. Eve says god is kind. These reflections of a purposely superstitious or of an orthodox nature are rejected to-

¹ Ibid., pp. 35-36.

² Ibid., p. 36; cf. last four lines of "Eleven," The Collected Poems, p. 36.

³ Nobodaddy, p. 36; cf. The Pot of Earth (fifth last line), The Collected Poems, p. 216, also p. 223.

gether by the couple's recollection that, just as god has made
 masks of dumbness, unremembering eyes,
 Mouths that cry out in sleep . . .
 cry and none answer,

so he himself must be unconscious. The lovers think they hear his approach, but it is only the wind in the trees. Adam nervously stands in a clearing and shouts his confession, but he receives no answer. Nature, however, appears to have heard god's answer.

The trees
 Seem to have heard him and the earth is
 sealed,
 Silenced against us, and the small white moon
 Looks down as though she feared us.²

Eve has suggested that, while they are thinking god cannot hear them, it is perhaps "we / That cannot hear."³ Their punishment seems wholly automatic: a lack of communication with god and nature, a self-awareness that amounts to loneliness, and a desire to leave a paradise which is no longer suitable for them. God has, as it were, cast them out by default. Adam decides that they should go somewhere else to be at ease and able to sleep again. Eve, the more superstitious of the two, says:

The dark goes with us secretly. The moon
 Follows. And he too follows. O make haste,
 Go quickly, Adam.⁴

Nobodaddy has a composite hero, for in Act III the defiant

¹Archibald MacLeish, Nobodaddy, p. 38.

²Ibid., p. 43.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid., p. 44.

Adam of the first two acts sinks back impassively into the role of a minor character (in fact, he does not even appear) and Cain takes up the burden, the conflict, and the glory of mankind's experience of self-consciousness. Differences in the characterization of the two are marginal; the only significant difference seems to be in the degree each has of self-awareness and alienation from nature. Adam had at least the memory of his oneness with nature, and his lapses into superstitious assumptions made him less confident of the Voice's new theory; Cain, however, must look upon nature in its relationship to god as a closed book, and hence he shows greater confidence in his opinions than Adam had.

Act III is set in a desert east of Eden, and Cain, a man of about thirty-five, digs clumsily in a dry field beside Eve, who is dressed in a wolf skin. A drought is said to threaten the crops, as might be expected of a desert. After briefest exposition about their new mode of life, Eve and Cain engage in a long dialogue mostly about the strange ways of Abel. Abel purposes to return somehow to Eden. He is prophet and poet by virtue of his immediate, unconscious knowledge of the workings of god in nature. Cain thinks him superstitious, while Eve reluctantly admits that she too feels nostalgia for Eden and remorse for their loss. In lines again echoing the poem "Eleven," Cain admits that human self-consciousness has prevented him from having the childlike poet's contact with nature such as the poet of "Eleven" experienced. Cain says:

I cannot touch
 The earth as Abel touches it. Sometimes
 Digging my rows I find a growing root
 And pick it up and feel it: heavy--firm--
 Living. Taste it: salt--sweet. I finger
 it.

Well I cannot. It denies me. There it is
 Motionless, dumb, asleep at the ends of my
 fingers,

Against my tongue and it denies me. So,
 I am a man. My mind is not like Abel's
 That knows nothing and knows what I cannot
 guess.

My mind is not a tree's mind. I am a man.
 I think. But not as Abel, not as a tree.
 I think about myself. I think of my
 thoughts.

I think of things that I can see. Of
 things.

I remember. I think, what are these
 things I see?

Why are they? Meaning, why to me, to Cain.
 And so they do not answer me. They cannot.
 They cannot understand. They understand
 Abel for god is in him and he thinks
 As god thinks without knowledge, and god
 is in

These things I question. God is like the
 sap

Running in corn and grass and trees and
 brambles

That does not know itself but somehow knows
 How it must run.

This speech explains the elements of conflict between Cain and god, who is seconded by his representative Abel. This antagonism is the direct cause of Cain's impulsive killing of Abel and the final defiance of the unanswering god.

When Cain concludes his speech by saying that if he could discover god's "thought / It would be numb to me as roots are,"² he implies that his own lack of power as a believing inter-

¹Ibid., pp. 47-48.

²Ibid., p. 49.

For whom no ways go outward. And between
That land and this that god has made, there
is
No speech, no word, no meaning.¹

The struggle between reality and the poet's dream, as we have seen it from Mr. MacLeish's earliest works through "The Happy Marriage" continues, and it is both a security symbol and a source of confusion.

Eve sympathizes with Cain's ability to dream of a better world, and she mentions that Adam's will to realize new worlds according to his dreams was broken as he grew older. The fiery hero of Acts I and II is now mentioned as a tired old man with feet of clay. Next, by inference from the fact that they must all die, Cain says that god

. . . is the god of dust; well, let him
rule it.
I am not dead things only. I am Cain.
I do not fear him.²

Reminded that there is not other god than Abel's, Cain retorts, "I have myself."³ While admitting that his influence on nature is puny alongside god's power, Cain cites (as Adam did in Act II) the ways in which he excels the insensitive god:

. . . I am the god,
Godhood is in me blossoming. Not dread,
Not awe, not power over suns and stars,
But godhood, godhood to be pitiful,
Godhood to laugh,--to see my body's shadow
Wriggling and jerking on the quiet earth
And laugh at it and pity my own laughter
And so be god.⁴

¹Ibid., p. 50.

²Ibid., p. 51.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid., p. 52.

Eve says she fears Cain's pride more than she feared Adam's because Cain would be "more than a god of gardens."¹ and she fears that man would destroy himself if he followed Cain's way, which increases the chasm between man and nature. But Cain ends the discussion by saying that men must stop living like trees, as they lived formerly, and must be men "serving the god within us."² Even death and burial, he says, cannot change him to earth.

Abel's entrance almost half-way through the act brings on the final scene of the play. He walks "gracefully like an animal with his head bent a little forward."³ As he carries a live sheep onstage, Cain asks him whether it rains in Eden, and Abel answers that it does and that he had been able to see rain and green foliage the night before by going "As far as where you see the sword that turns / Though no hand turns it."⁴ Abel admits that he could not see god, even though he called out to him; yet he knows that he can find him and be granted his wishes if he offers blood sacrifice. He will pray for rain and for his admittance to Eden. Cain calls him a fool, though he expresses no doubt in Abel's ability to get god to make rain. Cain shows a twentieth century attitude toward blood sacrifice:

¹Ibid., p. 53.

²Ibid., pp. 53-54.

³Ibid., p. 54.

⁴Ibid., p. 55.

The ram has done
 Nothing to harm you. It is not the ram
 That brings the drouth here, Abel.¹

Abel replies with a traditional argument that sacrifice from the best of the fold will please god. Cain sarcastically says that he will himself offer god the withered beans and corn that have been destroyed by god's drouth. Abel misses the sarcasm ("You do not speak / The way your eyes look, Cain")² and remarks that Cain hates and does not love god. Cain describes Abel's love of god and his wish to return to him as simply a desire to "lie / crumpled again within the womb."³

Cain reiterates the old argument he and Adam have used: men cannot renounce their humanity by going back into earth, the womb, or by becoming beasts as Abel would:

Crawl if you love him. On your hands
 and knees
 Crawl back to Eden. Bow like a beast,
 he'll give you
 Water enough. I'd rather die of thirst
 A man and standing as a man than drink
 The spring of Pishon on my belly. Stoop,
 Stoop to be fed. I will not.⁴

The play has reached its climax. Cain taunts Abel to ask god to kill the trusting ram, since "Only god can kill the things / That trust him."⁵ Abel does kill the ram. Cain screams out in horror. While Cain challenges Abel to cry out till hoarseness to the unhearing god, Abel goes through incantations:

¹Ibid., p. 56.

²Ibid., p. 57.

³Ibid., p. 58.

⁴Ibid., p. 59.

⁵Ibid., p. 60.

I am your lover, Earth. Why are you still?
 I am your lover, do you know me not?
 Have you forgotten how, on Gihon's hill,
 At mid-day on the tree-less hill, the hot
 Bare hill of Gihon, the expectant thrill
 Of fingers moving--did you answer then?
 And will not now? And will not speak again?¹

Cain feels the influence on himself of Abel's prayer and must exorcize himself of the suppressed tendency to believe:

As though my body tied still to the womb
 That feeds it--that has food for me no more--
 Cried out! O Abel crying to the earth
 You are the flesh that wraps me and your fears
 Darken about me as an unknown something,
 Touched in the night, darkens the sacred brain
 Until it drives itself beyond itself
 Free. O free! I will go free, I will
 Break through this Abel in me and go free.²

Abel incants a few lines whose subject matter and parallel rhetoric echo Eliot's The Waste Land; spectacular thunder and rain begin.

As the rush of wind subsides, the stage directions describe "the voice of Abel like the voice of a man talking in sleep":

The word of god within the thunder saying
 Because I heard the prayer of my servant, Abel,
 Because I had respect unto his prayer,
 Are you thus wroth, are you thus cast down,
 Cain?
 If you do well shall it not be accepted?
 But if you do not well it is a sin
 Crouches before your door and unto you
 Is its desire.³

Speaking thus, Abel is in character as interpreter of the

¹Ibid., p. 61.

²Ibid., pp. 61-62.

³Ibid., p. 63.

divine will. Cain gives an answer as if he were addressing god through Abel, yet the naturalistic mode of the stage directions (i.e., Abel "like . . . a man talking in his sleep"¹) and the personal motives for the above speech which Abel could possibly have made it unlikely that Mr. MacLeish expects the audience to believe that a direct revelation has come from god, be he person or "unconscious life force." Cain addressed god in the second person, arguing that he is unjustly expected to give god something when god has already taken all. He claims not to know god's "justice" and asks release from subjection to god:

Oh, sever this thick vein
That knots me to the body of the earth,²
That cannot feed me now, and let me go.

Significantly, Abel crawls over to Cain and in his own voice asks Cain to kneel. Cain asserts his independence once more:

I will not have
Roots in the earth. I am a man to walk--
Take your hands from me.³

When Abel "clings to Cain's legs, dragging him down,"⁴

Cain seizes the sacrificial knife and stabs him.

Blame for the murder thus seems to be attributed to both men, not merely to Cain as in the Biblical version. Cain's violent temper has led a violent act, but Abel has clearly provoked the act by his tenacious, physical insistence that

¹Ibid.

²Ibid., p. 64.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

Cain do something he feels is repugnant.

Eve, who has been watching, asks Cain what has happened and then grieves for her loss of Abel:

Will you not say my name--not once--
 Not even dying? Have you no need of me?
 There was a name you called me long ago
 Before you learned to hate the name of Eve.
 I have not changed--these are the breasts
 you sucked.
 These are her arms--O Abel look at me,
 Turn back your eyes and look at me. Not
 now.
 Not ever now.¹

Her guilt for earlier alienating Abel seems related to the guilt she has expressed elsewhere for having become alienated from god. Her next lines are even more melodramatic than those quoted above, and they include an implied recognition that Abel is, as he always was, not quite human because he "belonged to earth":

Look! You have killed him, killed him. Do
 you hear?
 This is your brother, Cain, this dead thing.
 No!
 No! Look at it! Look down at it! The rain
 Mixes his blood with blood of the dead beast--
 Do you not hear?²

Guilty about murder and his desecration of holy things, Cain loudly asks god for punishment, as Adam did at the end of Act II, and claims he will continue to ask "So long as he has breath."³ His next lines--a poetized series of rhetorical

¹Ibid.

²Ibid., pp. 65-66.

³Ibid., p. 66.

questions which carry a tone something like the mock expectancy of Ingersol's stage speeches, minus the watch--close the play:

No word. No sound.
Only the thunder farther off that dulls
Dumbed into silence. Is there no one there--
Behind the low clouds nothing--

I have killed
Your priest. I have profaned your sacrifice.
I stand against you cursing you. Lift up,
Lift up your hand and slay me.

.
Have I struck against
Nothing--the wind? Yet I will find him.

God!
Where are you, god? Where are you, god?
Speak to me--¹

The conflict of this play, particularly in its development during the climactic third act, is a religious and dramatic anomaly. In theory god is presented as an unconscious life-force who by definition would take no cognizance of men's crises or their moral choices. He refuses to save his own (Abel) or inflict punishment on his enemies (Cain). Moral righteousness seems to consist in acting contrary to the haphazard, senseless way god has allowed creation to develop; man is the sole arbiter of morality and progress. Yet the good characters, Adam and Cain, can hardly convince themselves that the world isn't made in the old (i.e., traditionally biblical) way: created, directed, and judged by an omniscient god who is the arbiter of good and evil.

¹Ibid., pp. 66-67; cf. G. B. Shaw, "Defying Lightning: a Frustrated Experiment," Back to Methuselah, pp. xxxv-xxxviii.

If a reader misses the intellectual contradiction between Mr. MacLeish's "new" presentation of an unconscious life force and the leavings of his traditional religious beliefs, the many instances of guilt and uncertainty which the composite hero Adam-Cain experiences in striking out on his own theogony should remove doubt. Stated another way, how could either the characters or the author expend such emotion and anxiety as they do in exploring their relationship with god, if he is really felt to be an unconscious (and indifferent) life force. The whole burden of the play seems to demonstrate that a world without a personal god is a fact too demoralizing to accept without much wishing for the existence of a personal god who would lift some of the burden of moral judgment off man's shoulders. The only other explanation would be that the author is arguing through his characters for complete uncertainty about accepting an old or a new belief system; in a classic agnostic stance, he would then allow that the question of (a personal) god's existence could be proved both ways.

The ambivalence of Eve's role is also interesting. According to the story line already established in Scripture, she is given a major share of blame (or credit) for depriving mankind of Eden. In the last act she first applauds Cain's moral individualism--just as she and Adam once exercised theirs--and then without explicitly rejecting this position or acknowledging old error she suddenly endorses its contra-

dictory by trying to reconcile her unhappy son Cain to God. She would seem to be a complete pragmatist in desiring happiness for her children. She asks her dead son to forgive her neglect and then plays the mediator between the guilty son (Cain) and a remote but punishing father (Nobodaddy).

Like the heroine of the short story "The Charity of Love," Eve endorses belief in a personal God in language with fundamentalist overtones.¹ And like the heroine of "The Man Who Played God," she displays guilt at not having been worthy of her son's (Abel) idealizations. Even the structure and characterization of the last of Nobodaddy follow the pattern of the latter short story. Cain, like Lindsey in the story, is the worldly-wise cynic; Abel is naively innocent in his beliefs; and Eve must mediate and choose between the personalities and values of both. She finally chooses those of the more naive person, Abel, who like Allan in the short story dies at the end.²

Mr. MacLeish may be identifying Eve the mother with "mother" nature, one who ultimately belongs to god the father and the unconscious spirit of earth. Her loyalty would then ultimately belong to him, and estrangement would be complete for Cain. At the end of the play Eve is "for" nature and traditional belief and "against" Cain's self-realization which

¹ Archibald MacLeish, "The Charity of Love," Yale Literary Magazine, LXXVIII (March, 1913), 253-60.

² Archibald MacLeish, "The Man Who Played God," Yale Literary Magazine, LXXIX (January, 1914), 164-65.

must be expressed in self-consciousness through rebellion. Eve's character consistency is sacrificed perhaps for no other reason than to make Eve a passing symbol on the chart of the author's predetermined theme.

In addition to the thematic unity achieved by continual insistence upon the dichotomy of man's self-consciousness and his estrangement from nature, there is another emotional element of unity in the play. Despite the change of focus on protagonists, first on Adam in Acts I and II and then on Cain in Act III, the composite hero maintains a consistency of role which leads the audience through an experience and even gives the feeling of experiencing the alternative effects of that experience. Adam is introduced in a dilemma over whether to submit to or resist god. He is uncertain about his choice but then reinforces his decision at the end of the first act and throughout Act II. Then Cain and Abel represent more extreme stages of Adam's earlier actions. Abel is totally submissive and illustrates the results of submission: approval by authority and death. Cain brings Adam's resistance to completion, and his lot is the ultimate destruction of authority (god) through the killing of authority's representative (Abel), but guilt and unhappiness follow the destructive act. It may be added that the play maintains emotional unity by reducing the number of characters during any of the three acts to those which represent a primary Oedipal relationship. The Oedipal relationship need not be traced out in detail as it

was in earlier works, but it is there. The only characters are the triangle itself: the abstract god is father (Abel is his spokesman), Eve is mother, and Adam-Cain is the guilt-ridden but challenging son. The Voice (i.e., the tempter) merely expresses the ego of Adam-Cain.

The two biblical plays, Nobodaddy, and its more famous successor written thirty-five years later, J. B., resemble each other in thematic content and stage technique. The second act of Nobodaddy presents conjugal love as a means of gaining personal identity, communication with mankind (an antidote for alienation), and reconciliation to the fact that the universe is directed by an unconscious force. Love plays precisely the same role as the final solution to these problems in J. B. In argumentative technique, Mr. MacLeish's use of a devil's advocate to favorably propound unorthodoxy occurs in his use of the "Voice" early in the play. A rather similar technique occurs late in the play when "The Voice of Abel" speaks as if prompted by supernatural agency while Abel stands over his sacrifice. Abel is a god mask serving to convey divine displeasure without necessarily violating the realistic conventions already established in the play: it remains uncertain whether he speaks in his own person or god speaks through him. The Voice of the tempter and the voice of Abel speaking as if asleep are early antecedents of the more concrete characterization of Nickles and Zuss in J. B. In each play the protagonist, Adam-Cain and for a while

J. B., becomes the tempter's disciple. These methods of advancing philosophical argument through "revelation" undergo great refinement by the time they are used in J. B. For a weakness in Nobodaddy is that the audience is purposely kept uncertain about who is supposed to be talking; the theological assumptions of the play almost require this ambiguity. But in J. B. the use of masks breaks through narrow conceptions of stage realism and makes certain that god or satan is supposed to be talking; the expressionistic convention of the masks allows the audience to suspend disbelief.

A number of interpretations could be given Nobodaddy, and these should be reduced to the fewest and most plausible. One cannot deprive the author of his intention, stated in the Foreward, to say something about the evolution of human consciousness and the struggle to adjust to a world in which man is cut off from the universal will or god. In the abstract the play is about these things; the composite hero suffers because of the cosmic fact. It is also reasonable to assume that Mr. MacLeish is not merely writing a historical romance but is interested in saying something about twentieth century man. The "statement" the play makes has its final shape in the antithesis between Abel and Cain.

Abel is clearly a representative of a theistic belief system no longer thought useful or tenable. Cain is a more scientifically oriented secular humanist. Thus the characters represent theological arguments. But each also embodies

traits which illustrate a broader philosophical and esthetic approach to reality. In his characterization of these two, and to a lesser extent of Adam in the second act, Mr. MacLeish again tries to contrast different approaches to the problem of knowledge, as he did in "Our Lady of Troy." Viola Wendt has noted that Abel is an intuitional romantic dreamer, an esthete, and an idealist; Cain a rationalist, an activist, and a pragmatist.¹ Faust embodied all these qualities at various stages in "Our Lady of Troy." Miss Wendt offers the syndrome of traits in each character as one of an opposed pair of personality images which Mr. MacLeish tried to emulate at various phases of his career; or--as seemed more often the case--they provided a continual conflict in his attempt to realize an image of himself as an artist. This interpretation provides her with an excellent metaphor to use in describing general tendencies in the poet's career. It has limitations, however, as I think Miss Wendt would agree, if it requires the characters of the play Nobodaddy to stand consistently as symbols in an allegory.

The difficulty of any symbolic interpretation of Nobodaddy is that it cannot explain the characters' actions often enough to matter. For instance, Cain is as much a poet as a "scientist" or rationalist; He envies and in his own way

¹Viola Wendt, pp. 52-53 and 56-57.

copies Abel's intuitive activities as poet-prophet. Furthermore, the first two acts of the play have virtually nothing to say of modern man as scientific rationalist, although they deal heavily with freedom from authority, which must be a prelude to scientific investigation. Moreover, the problem of intuitionism vs. rationalism is not only left unsolved; it is left in utter confusion. Abel and Cain both are finally portrayed as intuitionists. The main difference between them is that Abel had peace of mind with his invalid belief system, whereas Cain must believe in his own dreams to the detriment of his peace of mind. Such an outcome hardly needs symbolism. The chief function of the characters seems to be that they talk about and act out opposed value systems and modes of knowledge without necessarily symbolizing them.

The painstaking observance of realistic convention in Nobodaddy keeps it from being a modern morality play. This fact, which the text amply demonstrates, is reinforced by the theoretical views Mr. MacLeish expressed throughout the '20's in which he insisted that poetry is an object with an existence in itself, not a vehicle for communicating a message. As he says in "Ars poetica," "A poem should not mean / But be."¹ Yet he could reconcile the dichotomy of imagism on the one hand and didacticism on the other with the belief that words

¹Archibald MacLeish, "Ars Poetics," The Collected Poems of Archibald MacLeish, p. 50.

in poetry tend to become their meanings.¹ Since words tend to become meanings, they might communicate a great many things, and their function as referents is not clear. The "influences" at work in this play create static; there is a penchant for the kind of character symbolism such as Faust of "Our Lady of Troy" represents--a habit of mind or set of abstract value systems in conflict within one person. But the poet also shows a preference for imagism without an always clear reference to ideas, and at the same time he seems to have used as his model G. B. Shaw's very didactic Back to Methusalah. The total effect inhibits clear symbolism, and meaning generally.

As in "Our Lady of Troy," the hero seems to contain within himself the major components of conflict and characterization. There is an attempt to unify the composite hero, Adam-Cain, and to give him more than one role or function. One commentator has observed of Mr. MacLeish's "Einstein":

the hero is a double symbol: the scientist who explains₂ nature and then tries to rebuild man's stature in it.

This explanation also applies to Adam's effort to find himself through achieving self-awareness, and it accurately describes attempts by Adam and Cain to realize their dreams for

¹ Archibald MacLeish, reviews of Elinor Wylie, Black Armour, New Republic, XXXVII (December 5, 1923), 16 and 18; and "Amy Lowell and the Art of Poetry," North American Review, CCXXI (March, 1925), 508-521; also "Ars poetica," The collected Poems of Archibald MacLeish, pp. 50-51.

² Colin Campbell, p. 110.

a better life. The process of rebuilding man's stature was to be the work of a poet-intuitionalist, as Mr. MacLeish explains in various places including the statements already quoted from the essay, "An Anonymous Generation." Scientific man, whom Cain represents some of the time, cannot give direction to nature. "Unconscious," primitive Abel even does better as a believing rainmaker. It is precisely here that the "science vs. belief" metaphor changes and blends with another set of terms which concern man's stature in the universe. Modern man's ability to manipulate nature, a function portrayed vaguely in the play, seems less important to the playwright than modern man's stature in the universe. Abel is shown to have stature or dignity because he feels at ease with god and nature. Yet he does not fulfil his human potential because he lacks self-awareness and is inhumane (he slaughters innocent animals and performs the equivalent of a barbaric rain dance). Modern man (Adam-Cain) loses contact with god and nature, but does attain self-awareness, the ability to love another individual, and a humane outlook toward other living things. Yet he lacks stature or human dignity insofar as he cannot assume that the universe is purposefully guided or that he has an indispensable place in it. These are general or philosophical considerations which the play illustrates, and beyond which its philosophy hardly goes.

But the problem of man's identity and his alienation from god and nature seems to have an additional personal signifi-

The determination of Adam-Cain-MacLeish to defy god, father, and tradition is impressive. His play is a first-person lyric. His desire for "another land," which ultimately could not be satisfied by the European exile, might perhaps be fulfilled in future reworkings of American materials. In many poetic endeavors he would follow the route of Walt Whitman in trying to be a representative American poet. The quest would still be for a system of noble beliefs. The importance of Nobodaddy is that Mr. MacLeish was still seeking "another land," and the term can mean a personal belief system, a poet's mythology, or a congenial locale or nation. Like other works already analyzed, the play again documents an antagonism toward the father (real and heavenly) and an ambivalence toward the mother: she is felt to be an original inspirer of his rebellion and at the same time a check upon his iconoclasm.

CHAPTER VI

A SOCIAL DRAMA OF THE THIRTIES

The outstanding change in Mr. MacLeish's poetic writing of the 1930's is his transition from introspective concerns to social problems; in this period he shows a declining interest in the "pure poetry" which is akin to imagism, and he allows his poetry to serve other ends outside itself. Like many other American poets practicing in the Eliot School of moral isolation, Mr. MacLeish is confronted with the "outer" facts of the Depression and with the social and economic machinery which make America an industrial nation. However, the transition is very gradual for Mr. MacLeish, as can be seen in the first collection of poems published after his homecoming, New Found Land (1930), and in his major verse play of the decade, Panic (1935). New Found Land marks the beginning of the author's search for something positive in the American experience, but the total effect of these fourteen poems--which were all written during his exile period¹--is a nostalgia for the best in his European experience; their imagery constantly reflects the mood of a modern-day Odysseus,

¹Letter-Questionnaire, Antigua, W. I., February 1, 1966.

and "home" could as well be Europe as America. The dominant theme of personal isolation continues through Panic, a play on social themes which is shot through with the theme of the hero's moral isolation. With the radio plays The Fall of the City (1937) and Air Raid (1938), social concerns take over completely, and the author's lack of self-consciousness in these works suggests that he has finally found a new identity in didactic writing.

In the early summer of 1928, Mr. MacLeish brought his family back from France to the United States, and they settled at Uphill Farm in Conway, Massachusetts. Ada MacLeish's family obtained the farm for them in this town of Elias Hillard's last vicarage, where the MacLeishes have made their home even to the present time. Before leaving France, Archibald MacLeish had begun reading The Diary of Bernal Diaz concerning Cortez's conquest of Mexico; with the idea in mind of turning the narrative into an epic of the conquest of America, Mr. MacLeish set out for San Juan de Ulua, Mexico, to retrace the route of Cortez and his men. When Conquistador appeared in 1932 it won the Pulitzer Prize and a degree of critics' admiration which has hardly been equaled by any of the author's other works. The verse technique in particular impressed many; Allen Tate called this "first successful example of terza rima in a long English poem . . . the only considerable metrical achievement by a poet of this generation."¹

¹Allen Tate, "MacLeish's Conquistador," Collected Essays (Denver: Allan Swallow, 1959), p. 370.

But Tate's conclusion that the "'culture' in Conquistador is purely literary" and that its "craftsmanship hovers over a void"¹ bears out the kinds of difficulties Mr. MacLeish was having with the critics and with the actual practice of his craft.

Characteristically, Tate lists formal inadequacies which point toward what he thinks are "philosophical" defects. He notes that Conquistador has little action of any kind, that the real subject of the "epic" is the personality, sense experience, and memories of the decrepit warrior Bernal Diaz, whose narrative is given large implications for the twentieth century. But doing without the external idea, theme, and typical action which are traditional in the objective epic style (which also present great technical problems for the epic writer), the poet is said to depend for dramatic tension on the narrator-hero's "fear of death" and "the gradual disappearance of sensation":

The dramatic quality of the poem--a quality that has little to do with the story as such--lies thus in the hero's anxiety to recover his sensuous early years, upon which his identity as a person and hence his life, depends.²

Tate claims that Conquistador implicitly argues the futility of individual action; one might add that The Hamlet of A. MacLeish (1928) was notable for this same attitude. Diaz is

¹Ibid., p. 370.

²Ibid., p. 366.

unable to accept the public versions of the Conquest and, Tate says, "unless he can recapture the sensation of action, the action itself must fade into the obscure shuffle of abstract history."¹ Lamenting that "not one moment of action" is "rendered objectively in the entire poem," Tate concludes that the poet must fall back on "a sentimental view of experience."² He notes the cleavage between historical events and the narrator's solipsisms with this summary of the poet's romantic outlook:

The poem recovers perceptions but it does not place them against a coherent stream of events. The hero is concerned with his personal survival. He is modern and sentimental; not tragic and ironic.³ The motivation of his story is the fear of death.

The difficulties explained here are to be found in the play Panic and in other works of the 30's. For instance, Mr. MacLeish could not accept "public" historical versions of the First World War--either the patriotic generalizing of the war years or the later (particularly Marxian) debunking of war profiteering and hidden political motives; the poem Conquistador reflects the dilemma, as Tate suggests,⁴ and so does Mr. MacLeish's debate on the war with Malcolm Cowley in the pages of New Republic during 1933.⁵ Panic illustrates a similar im-

¹ Ibid., p. 367.

² Ibid., p. 369.

³ Ibid., p. 369.

⁴ Ibid., p. 367.

⁵ Archibald MacLeish, review of The First World War, ed. by Laurence Stallings, New Republic, LXXVI (September 20, 1933), 159-160; reply by Malcolm Cowley, ibid., pp. 160-161; Archibald MacLeish, ibid.

passee in the author's refusal to accept either Marxian or capitalist interpretations of the Depression. Caught without an answer, he attempts to write something like a classical tragedy about the downfall of a banker, yet the ambivalent hero is not characterized objectively, and the play is indeed given to explorations of the banker McGafferty's sensations of the fear of death. Diaz and McGafferty are remarkably alike in their spiritual and social isolation, which prompts them to interpret external reality personally and sentimentally.

Mr. MacLeish had expressed his long-standing hostility toward science in the lengthy poem Einstein (1929), and what many felt to be his unjust choice of Albert Einstein as whipping boy can be explained simply as the poet's defense against a personified science, the enemy of his humanistic beliefs.¹ As he looked outward on economic ruin during the '30's, he developed fear and hostility toward the "machinery" of capitalist society. Now, it was not so much science, but the capricious banking and credit system, which he came to see as the barrier between man and nature. Yet feelings of isolation continued to be expressed at both personal and social levels and there developed a conflict between the poet's desire for freedom and his sense of social responsibility.

Mr. MacLeish says he "met the depression head on."²

¹Colin Campbell, p. 105.

²George Schreiber, Portraits and Self-Portraits, p. 70.

Faced with the necessity of earning a living, he went to work for Henry Luce's new Fortune Magazine in 1930. He finally left Fortune in 1938, when he received a year's leave of absence to act as curator of the Nieman Collection of Contemporary Journalism, a program in which he supervised eight journalists in the study of their respective interests at Harvard. With Fortune, writing as many as three feature articles a month on a range of topics which included the lives of tycoons, Japan's military built-up, Rivera's murals for the Rockefeller Plaza, and the films of Joris Ivens, Mr. MacLeish increased his knowledge of practical affairs. Dwight MacDonald called him the most efficient member of the Fortune staff; Mr. MacLeish could salvage as much as three solid months out of a year for his own writing, yet there is evidence that the years with Fortune were a frustrating drain on his resources.¹ His own hand often could not be distinguished from the copy editor's, but he continued to publish articles of his own in New Masses, New Republic, Nation, Saturday Review of Literature, and other magazines. These articles on a wide range of social and literary subjects are part of the stream of journalistic writing which has flowed from Mr. MacLeish's pen down to the present time. A characteristic which most of them have in common is that they are usually at least mildly controversial in original ways. Colin Campbell has summarized

¹Dwight MacDonald, "'Fortune' Magazine," The Nation CXLIV (May 8, 1937), 527-530.

their cumulative effect:

His devotion, as a humanist and liberal, to ideals --and this sometimes at the expense of fact and statistic--abets in him another habit which in this writer's judgment tends to weaken his thinking. He has a penchant for simplifying complexities by the device of lumping them under the rubric of a few, uncomplex notions. This in turn generates a certain rigidity, a lack of tentativeness, of friendliness to qualifying contrarities and distinctions.

One evidence of this simplistic bent may be seen in his repeated use in his prose over a period of three decades of a rhetorical device which might be called the device of the "real question." This is a strategy which proceeds by discovering that the issues before the public are deceptive. Beneath them lies the real issue, a single question of large scope to which all aspects of a very complex condition may be linked and which, if successfully answered, will unshackle the public from its infirmities. . . . The danger, . . . despite the convenience of this strategy as a means for organizing speeches and essays, is the danger of oversimplification, and in using it MacLeish frequently loses more than he gains.

After reading several hundred of his essays one is prompted to admit that, as Riesman hints, there is a need to fend off the perfervid rhetoric. . . .¹

Mr. MacLeish's tendency to phrase questions for debate in ways that few people would have argued them was combined with a talent for substantiating a basic idea with catch-phrases and evidence that would appeal to partisans on any side of an issue. This quality is also apparent in the dramatic writing of the '30's.

¹Colin Campbell, pp. 232-233. Campbell cites four instances of the device known as "the real question" in Mr. MacLeish's essays: "The Poetry of Karl Marx," A Time to Speak, p. 46ff.; "A Stage for Poetry," ibid., p. 76ff.; "Propaganda vs. Hollywood," Stage, XVI (January, 1939), 11-12; and "Poetry and the Public World," Atlantic Monthly, CLXIII (June, 1939), 823-30. Also see David Riesman, "Some Observations on Intellectual Freedom," American Scholar, XXIII (Winter, 1953-1954), 9-25.

Mr. MacLeish won the John Reed Prize in 1929 and the Shelley Prize in 1932, both from Poetry Magazine. Two short collections of poems appeared after 1930: Frescoes for Mr. Rockefeller's City (1933) and Public Speech (1936). In addition Mr. MacLeish wrote a scenario for the ballet Union Pacific (1934) and with Ernest Hemingway and Lillian Hellman wrote a script in English to accompany Joris Iven's film, The Spanish Earth. Since these works are not essential to an understanding of the plays, they will not be analysed here.

Mr. MacLeish came to the conviction that the bank failure of 1933 and the Depression generally were the result of an ineffective credit system. He believed that this "machinery" had failed because of the people directing it. He usually did not lay accusations of sin at their doorstep, but felt that industrial "technocracy" takes away individual freedom and responsibility. As he had always wanted to believe in free choice in individual affairs, he now saw a moral need to discover or restore freedom in the country's economic affairs. This approach was not the tack being taken by most contemporary economists and reformers.

Mr. MacLeish had little background in economics, but he felt strongly attracted by the ideas of C. H. Douglas, who favored abandoning laissez faire capitalism while keeping political democracy, which would result in "true industrial democracy"; i.e., government subsidation of the consumer by

a system of social credit.¹ MacLeish's understanding of "industrial democracy" is developed in his article "To the Young Men of Wall Street" and in three articles he wrote on "technocracy."² In a general way, the play Panic implies Douglas's critique of the status quo credit system in America, but the play does not offer a specifically economic solution. Mr. MacLeish's concern for the individual freedom of his banker-hero in Panic is predominantly moral and literary, with economics serving as a condition or backdrop for a personal tragedy attempted along classical lines.

Three articles on theatre³ published shortly after the production of Panic indicate the direction of Mr. MacLeish's thinking about poetry in the theatre. His own play coincided with the controversy over Maxwell Anderson's Winterset; some reviews even discussed the two plays together, since both

¹ Archibald MacLeish, "A Preface to Social Credit: the Economic Ideas of C.H. Douglas," Harvard Graduates Magazine, XLII (December, 1933), 85-89.

² Archibald MacLeish, "To the Young Men of Wall Street," Saturday Review, VIII (January 16, 1932), 453-454; "Technocracy," Ibid., IX (January 4, 1933), 373-374; "Technocracy Speaks," Ibid., IX (January 28, 1933), 400; and "Machines and the Future," Nation, CXXXVI (February 8, 1933), 140-142.

³ Archibald MacLeish, "Theatre against War and Fascism," New Theatre, II (August, 1935), 3--reprinted as "Question of Audience," A Time to Speak, pp. 70-73; "A Stage for Poetry," Stage, XIII (November, 1935), 38-39--reprinted in A Time to Speak, pp. 74-80; and "Starvation Amidst Plenty," Stage, XIII (January, 1936), 31-32.

playwrights had similar technical problems to solve. For instance, Mr. MacLeish's praise for Anderson's new turn in subject matter could well apply to his own play, since Panic was the first of his plays to do without legendary history:

Mr. Anderson, with unusual courage, has left his easy, unimportant historical romances behind him and turned to the life and mentality of his own time. He has faced some of the difficulties inherent in the effort to present that life and mentality in verse. And the result is a play which cannot help being technically ¹ useful and substantially encouraging to other writers.

Yet Mr. MacLeish cautioned against transposing Shakespearean conventions and idiom onto the American stage; he had learned something from Anderson's mistakes. He also showed a standard dismay over Broadway's banalities and commended Odets' and the Group Theatre's experiments with social theatre off Broadway.

He saw poetic theatre not as an ornamental veneer which he said Broadway patrons expect, but as a mystically intuitive report of contemporary experience in the cadences of modern speech:

Poetry is not ornament, is not flowers, is not the pumping up of language with metaphors, is not a lovely embroidered cover drawn across a dirty fact, is not beguiling and pleasure-giving fancy, is not a charm to make the mind forget, is not a paint, an enamel, a veneer. Poetry--and I mean poetry the thing itself as one or two men living write it--is revelation, is discovery. Its essence is precision, but precision of

¹Archibald MacLeish, "A Stage for Poetry," A Time to Speak, p. 79.

the emotions, not the mind. Its quality is to illuminate from within, not to describe from without. Its language is not communication, but experience.¹

The introduction to the printed play states more clearly than these remarks Mr. MacLeish's objectives in poetic diction. But, whatever his poetic objectives, they were not thought incompatible with the realistic presentation of a social situation. His third article on theatre, "Starvation Admist Plenty," written for Stage,² argues that playwrights have so far not portrayed industrialism convincingly because they have lacked knowledge of capitalist economics. His work with Fortune had somewhat improved his qualifications to write on this subject.

A. Panic: a Play for Responsible Revolutionaries

The printed text of Panic appeared early in 1935 before the play was produced. Since Mr. MacLeish's four-page introduction deals almost entirely with poetic diction, it seems reasonable and convenient to begin analysis with remarks on diction and then on the stage production. Analysis of the text will be followed by the reactions of critics, a study of possible sources, interpretation, and a summary.

Mr. MacLeish thinks that blank verse does not adapt the accents of American speech, which is "nervous, not muscular;

¹Ibid., p. 80.

²Archibald MacLeish, "Starvation Amidst Plenty," Stage, XIII (January, 1936), 31-32.

excited, not deliberate; vivid, not proud."¹ The voices of men talking in offices and mills "descend from stressed syllables; they do not rise toward stressed syllables as do the voices of men speaking in Shakespeare's plays."² Mr. MacLeish therefore favors predominantly trochaic and dactylic rhythms to iambic. He observes in American speech an "accentual strength" which the "more toneless, British tongue rarely achieves."³

He then announces, without giving credit to his predecessor, a theory of accentual rhythm with all the basic prosodic elements introduced by Gerard Manley Hopkins, whose influence on modern poets had grown since the publication of his works in 1918.⁴ Mr. MacLeish says:

¹Archibald MacLeish, "A Note on the Verse," Panic: A Play in Verse (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1935), vii.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

⁴An introduction to Hopkins' prosody can be found in Poems and Prose of Gerard Manley Hopkins, Selected with an Introduction by W. H. Gardner (The Penguin Poets; London: Penguin Books, 1953), pp. xxxi-xxxvi, 7-11, and 184-185 and passim. Also see Walter J. Ong, S.J., "Hopkins Sprung Rhythm and the Life of English Poetry," Immortal Diamond: Studies in Gerard Manley Hopkins, ed. Norman Weyand, S.J., with the assistance of Raymond V. Schoder, S.J., introduction by John Pick (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1949), pp. 93-174; and W. H. Gardner, "Hopkins and Modern Poetry," chap. ii in Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889): A Study of Poetic Idiosyncrasy in Relation to Poetic Tradition, with a foreward by Gerard Hopkins (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), pp. 245-281. The greatest number of imitations of Hopkins cited by Gardner occurred between 1930 and 1935; bibliography in Weyand, pp. 405 ff. indicates that the boom in Hopkins scholarship began in 1930 and reached a peak in 1935 which was not equalled until after World War II. Mr. MacLeish's imitation of Hopkins seems to have been part of a trend in the English-speaking world.

I have adopted for the principal scenes--scenes to be acted by bankers, radicals, lawyers--a line of five accents but unlimited syllables: the accent falling always in the position suggested by the sense. Some lines have as few as five syllables--all of them accented; others have as many as fifteen or seventeen syllables. But the pattern of five accents, five beats, is as regular as any convention in any form. Moreover, in almost all the lines of the play, the rhythm descends from strongly stressed first syllables to weak final syllables in a manner directly opposed to the manner of blank verse. What should appear is the regular pattern of five accents with a rhythm falling away from the tension of the stress.¹

Chorus parts spoken by voices in a street crowd employ the same principles in a three-stress line, the "only major difference" being that they are "written for the most part in couplets linked by assonance."²

The rather consistent use of accentual, alliterative rhythm can be seen in these lines of a chorus speech by a girl in the crowd:

Mén in the dúsk--and they stánd there
 Léttíng the gírls go bý with the
 Sweét scént: sílent:
 Leáníng heavíly: bént to the
 Páínted sígns on the fénces
 They that in óther tímes
 Cállíng áfter us clímbed by the
 Steép stáír for the síght of a
 Gírl's knée delíghtíng her.³

¹Archibald MacLeish, Panic, pp. ix-x.

²Ibid., p. x.

³Ibid., p. 6.

My scansion of these lines indicates the "descending" rhythms of dactyls and trochees. Alliteration is obtrusive and the play on vowel sounds is apparent. Assonance and half rhyme and occasional full rhyme ("stand there"--"with the"; "silent"--"bent"--"fences"; "times"--"climbed"; "sight"--"delighting") forge the lines into couplets. The variations of vowel and consonant sounds in this passage and in the following are reminiscent of Hopkins' "chiming" (i.e., the placing of similar sounds through a line). The next lines are from McGafferty's tirade against the timid bankers:

The sick souls
 Herding like hogs in the hang of the dark
 to be rid of the
 Man's burden of living their forefathers won
 for them!--
 Rid of the liberty!--rid of the hard choice!--

The free man's choosing of the free man's
 journey!

Running as lost hogs run--from the fear of
 their loneliness:

.

Death in the comfort of each other's dung:

Safe from themselves: safe from the risk and
 the run of their

Own lives. The Revolution--the nunnery!¹

Repetition of words like "hogs," "rid," and "free" are a part of the rhetorical structure, as are sound repetitions (the consonants "h," "d," and "u" as in "run" and "comfort"); and the

¹Ibid., p. 48.

play on open vowels is most obvious in the line immediately preceding the elipsis and in the last three lines. The sound patterns help solidify the lines to give them substance, yet throughout the play there is a slackness in rhythm and sentence structure. Mr. MacLeish may have been aware of this effect and tried his best to avoid it, for he says in his introductory note:

The critic who tells a playwright that his verse is so free as to leave the audience doubtful whether it is prose or verse does not compliment him. Verse, after all, is not an arrangement upon the page: it is a pattern in the ear. If¹ it does not exist in the ear, it does not exist.

After his discussion of prosody, Mr. MacLeish closes his introductory "A Note on the Verse," which is dated "Conway, November 1934," with a single comment on "the construction of the play as a whole."²

His "attempt to use the crowd as an actor has resulted in a chorus speaking, not with the single voice of the Greek chorus, but with the many voices of the American Street."³ In this comment on the antiphonal effects of the principal speakers as against the individual minor characters speaking from the crowd, Mr. MacLeish gives a clue, borne out by the text, that diction rather than action is the real basis for

¹Ibid., p. 9.

²Malcolm Cowley, "Men and Ghosts," New Republic LXXXII (March 27, 1935), 190.

³Ibid.

structure in Panic.

Panic was presented at the Imperial Theatre, New York City, on three successive nights, March 14-16, 1935. The season was not one for long runs and packed houses, for paychecks were too scarce and thin. The third night, Saturday, was climactic because it was a benefit for the left-wing magazines, The New Masses and The New Theatre; audience reaction was especially strong at curtainfall and during the symposium onstage following the play.

Mr. MacLeish was fortunate to have the best production talent putting his play on the stage. Mr. Jo Mielziner designed the two sets: a street scene with plinths of white light fading into a more everyday scene, and an office scene with well-painted flats, direct and free lighting, and decor which mixed smooth lines with stark functional realism.¹ Director James Light is said to have understood the play's emotional emphasis. Martha Graham's arrangement of the crowd groups reading the news on the flashing signs in Times Square was called by one commentator the best thing about the play.²

B. Analysis

Although Mr. MacLeish's play dealing with the Banking Crisis of 1933 is written according to the conventions of

¹Stark Young, "As Panics Go," New Republic, April 3, 1935) p. 217.

²Ibid.

realism, it rests on an assumption which is implausible and requires the audience's firm suspension of disbelief. McGafferty, always mentioned only by last name, is interpreted by all the people in the play (and apparently by the author as well) as the backbone and symbol of American capitalism. Other characters express the hope that if this one very rich man can maintain his bank and industrial holdings while encouraging lesser financiers to do the same, the credit system will be saved. His power and prestige derives as much from strength of character as from money. The others, of course, are cowardly in their refusal to act, and so McGafferty becomes demoralized and goes down. The strain on plausibility from an economic standpoint is the assumption that there was or ever could have been any one man in twentieth century American finance who could make or break the economy. Mr. MacLeish's portrayal is at variance with standard accounts of the 1933 Crisis.¹ However, what emphasis he gives to the need for courage and cooperation among all the financiers is well placed. His cry for cooperation among these impulsively competitive bankers constitutes a singleminded approach to the problems of the Depression; other equally important aspects such as distribution, changes in credit rates, speculation, wages, and mass unemployment are not dealt with directly.

¹Walton Hamilton, "When the Banks Closed," America in Crisis: Fourteen Crucial Episodes in American History, ed. Daniel Aaron (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1952), pp. 267-284.

Panic, a full length play, takes place in a single set: McGafferty's office,

raised by several steps and enclosed on the sides by open square columns, at the back by a double door, consists of a long table, chairs, a news ticker. The whole scene is impersonal, bare, huge--on a scale to dwarf the shapes of men and women.¹

The stage has an apron which represents the street outside the office; from here people look up under the proscenium arch, which hides a supposed electric news bulletin. Action alternates between street and office scenes and is supposed to take place from five-thirty to past seven o'clock "of an evening in late February, 1933."² There are no act and scene descriptions written into the script. The ticker tape recording the news for the bankers inside the office and the moving blur of light from the news bulletin outside operate continually.

Members of the crowd, designated simply as "A Man," "A Girl," etc., comment on the crisis. Inside, the bankers, "rigid in their short black jackets and piped trousers (London model),"³ react to their news ticker. McGafferty's manager and confidant, Immelman, reads off place names where banks are closing around America; this roll-call continues sporadically throughout the play. The roll-call technique gives a function to Mr. MacLeish's Whitmanesque fondness for

¹Archibald MacLeish, Panic, p. 3.

²Ibid., p. 3.

³Ibid., p. 8.

American placenames and is similar to the catalogue technique he used in the lyrics "Background with Revolutionaries" (1933) and "Colloquy for the States" (1943). McGafferty insists that the closings are the work of individual financiers misguided in their maneuvering for profit. He voices this suspicion several times in the play, and though it is never substantiated he thus has the opportunity of conveying his belief that the human brains of an elite can always keep the economy under control. McGafferty, with his tremendous capital, is known by all to be less vulnerable than the other bankers.

The bankers blame "economics," while the people outside see the crisis as a natural calamity or an act of God. People read on the billboard that the government has asked McGafferty to stabilize the crisis. But the bankers want to close down. McGafferty appeals to them:

Look here--
 A hundred million's easy round this table.
 A hundred million does it--stops the runs--
 Flattens the fear out. It's been done before.
 Our fathers did it.

. These things pass

The Wind falls.¹

"The Unemployed," a mob of ten or twelve, "all young, all bareheaded all in leather jackets,"² barge in past the guards and demand an interview. All the bankers except McGafferty want them ejected; he not only wants to hear them, but in

¹Ibid., p. 24.

²Ibid.

210

their behalf he rails against his colleagues for their cowardice and greed. McGafferty shows himself to be just "plain folks"; the Celtic idiom of his diction also resembles theirs. The young unemployed deliver their own Marxian ultimatum:

Ever study the histories Empire Builders?
Ever read in the books how your world would run?
Runs like a hare in a hunt: ye can name the circle!
Runs in the groove with the crack of a gun at the
end of it.

Nothing can help you now Captains. It's our world!
History's back of us! Time's bearing us! Life is a
Full flood in our hearts and in yours hollow.¹

These arguments constitute a threat which conscientious financiers dare not ignore.

The author's interest in Time and History takes a classical rather than a Marxian turn as other commentators elaborate on the themes of time and fate. The wisdom which is henceforward delivered on these subjects applies more and more to man generally, even particularly to the Artist; McGafferty begins losing dimensions as a symbol of the private enterprise economy and begins emerging as a specimen of Man suffering a personal tragedy along the lines of classical Greek drama. In this respect, he fits into a mold created by Faust and Cain in the two earlier plays. A young man in the street has already given a bit of philosophy which distinguishes the social interest from the loftier tragic implications of the

¹Ibid., p. 26.

play:

To be frightened--to fear death--is
Nothing: is man's lot: is
Many ages' wisdom!
Fear of hunger is misery!¹

The proletarians and even the scared bankers fear hunger, and so their predicament is hardly appropriate material for classic tragedy. McGafferty, however, will contemplate death and, in overcoming his fear of it, will achieve the human dignity and triumph of a tragic figure.

The Unemployed allow an older, blind man to speak for them, and like a soothsayer of old he seeks McGafferty out to deliver a personal message of the fates. He allays fears of the poor men's revolution, explaining that the docile poor, who fear hunger most, are incapable of mighty social change:

You need not fear them!
Greatness they have forgotten and pride and
the envy of
Nobler lives than their own and the service
of honor.
To suffer for no gain: to invite death in the
Hope only of good is a fool's fate to them.
The man they praise is the man who has gotten
away with it--
The slave with the wise slave's tricks--the
cleverest victim.
Virtue and nobleness: honor and love they
laugh at! . . .
Their speech is irony: the whipped man's speech:
They've lived a long life in the world you
made them.
They've learned well in your world. You need not
fear.²

This neutralization of the proletariat, and of its Marxist

¹Ibid., p. 19.

²Ibid., p. 29.

champions as well, points to the personal, tragic theme. The bankers' quick replies--"Soap box speeches . . . / Radicals . . . "¹ may throw the listener off the scent, but when the Blind Man resumes talking about "Time" and nemesis he is no longer a Marxist, but simply Tiresias in modern dress. The young men in leather jackets do not realize their spokesman has sold them out. Neither is there an indication that the author knows this fact or that he expects the audience to recognize it.

The Blind Man says,

But when the day comes. . . .
 You'll see our hunger. . . .
 and you'll fear us!²

But fate will be abstract, without human agency, yet a thing which functions subjectively in the mind:

. . . Frighten you! It is not we who kill. . . .
 . . . It is not we who threaten you! Your ill is
 Time and there's no cure for time but dying.
 You yourselves in your own minds will make the
 Fate that murders you.
 As water pursues on the grooved earth its channel
 Choosing without choice so man his fortune--³
 Choosing without choice. Yours is disaster.

The message is clarified later when McGafferty chides the bankers for giving up the freedom their forefathers won. The

¹Ibid.

²Ibid., p. 30.

³Ibid., pp. 30, 33, and 34.

lines ("Herding like hogs . . . ," etc.) have already been quoted in connection with prosody.¹ Their implication is that a banker's fear and greed take away freedom. McGafferty adds that the "Love of humanity" which the radicals profess causes them to hate individual people, and their impersonal dogmas of revolution rob them of personal freedom.²

The common people outside read of the radicals' confrontation with McGafferty and throw their sympathies with him; one of the crowd warns of the three Fates with a classicist's precision. An old woman sees in the stars that nemesis is coming; a man laments "The great McGafferty suffering."³ In a long private dialogue with Immelman (the bankers have already run, declaring that it's every man for himself), McGafferty shows a classical protagonist's confusion by erroneously attributing the cause of the crisis to unknown individual financiers, and by refusing at first to take the Blind Man's prophecy seriously. But given the assumptions of the play, McGafferty could also be correct in both suppositions. That is, the rugged individualism of all the bankers is assumed to be responsible for continuing, if not for starting, the crisis, and it is only McGafferty's belief in the Blind Man's fatal prediction which would precipitate nemesis, since all fate is taken to be subjective anyway. Mr. MacLeish's

¹See this text, p. 213.

²Ibid., p. 49.

³Ibid., p. 40.

assumptions about how freedom ought to operate not only qualify but even negate his use of the classical conventions of fatalism.

As Immelman feeds McGafferty the latest news of the bank closings and McGafferty harangues on the theme, "It's always one man makes a world," Ione enters. She is McGafferty's mistress, thirty years old, exuberant, too well-dressed, wearing lipstick which is too red, and having "a vivid quality of life and intelligence in her face and movements."¹ She has come for the scheduled dinner date and must wait till McGafferty finishes the business of the day. Realizing that this may take some time, she offers to leave, but McGafferty asks her to stay. Immelman wants to tell McGafferty something in private, but cannot, so he leaves. Ione is a bored member of the leisure class, not unlike Fitzgerald's flapper heroines of the '20's. She says with a yawn:

Pink's a hell of a color to wait in--a pink
Room! A pretty pink room! A pretty
Pink girl in a pink room! A pink
Punk. Pink punk paces apartment. . . .
The years I've waited in pink for five-thirty!²

Ione, the objectification of McGafferty's emotional needs, razzes him and shows sympathy by turns. When she realizes his morbid state of mind (he has begun believing the Blind Man's prophecies), she assures him that she will still love him even if he loses all his money, but she acknowledges that her

¹Ibid., p. 53.

²Ibid., p. 62.

love heretofore has been in large part an admiration of him as a great financier. McGafferty's morale dives to a new low. When McGafferty describes himself as a decrepit wash-up, Ione tries to jolly him up:

It's beautiful, darling! Don't you think it's beautiful?
 Mr. McGafferty's done for! Isn't it beautiful?
 Could I have a glass of Scotch? You know I'm
 Sad to think you're done for!¹

As McGafferty and Ione engage in a long personal discussion on the themes of fate and love, a bank moratorium is declared.

A financier named Griggs arrives to let McGafferty know he has been elected chairman of the bankers' board and that only his name can stop the crisis. But Griggs also tells the news Immelman had wanted to reveal earlier: a very hard-boiled financier named Shelton has shot himself. McGafferty grows more morbid than before. He mulls over details of the suicide: Shelton had gone to a washroom and put a pistol into his mouth, blowing his brains out. McGafferty's monologues (i.e., he tends to ignore Griggs and Ione) are full of phallic and excremental images. While Griggs waits to see whether McGafferty will accept the chairmanship, McGafferty realizes that his time is up:

Time! You think there's ever time to trick them?
 They keep the time too.²

"They" is evidently a reference to the Fates. The bankers are ready to follow McGafferty's leadership now, but he has given

¹Ibid., pp. 65-66.

²Ibid., p. 88.

up.

When Griggs leaves, McGafferty takes his leave of Ione in lines that argue a familiar theme. Just as admiration for McGafferty's achievement was not a solid foundation for love, so now McGafferty thinks that Ione's professed love for an aging, poor man is pity or "charity":

No. You keep your gifts for those that beg them.
 Love that can be given or not given--
 Love like that's not love but gift and says so--
 Pity's proof: the final verdict: sentence! . . .
 Love for the loser!¹

McGafferty's ego and his relationships with others have been supported by his sense of power, his practice of the art of the financier. Love on any other basis has been suspect until now. This absorption of his ego into his "art" may be considered his tragic flaw, for his recognition of the lack of love and of solid human relationships is the principal motive for his losing the desire to live. If the emphasis in the closing speeches with Ione has any significance, it is clear that these personal motives outweigh the external threat of the crisis, which toward the end of the play has become very remote in McGafferty's consciousness. McGafferty's businessman's individualism has the qualities of total dedication and egoism of the (fine) artist. His pride must suffer a mortal blow if his work of a lifetime brings public scorn.

¹Ibid., p. 94; cf. Archibald MacLeish, "The Charity of Love," The Yale Literary Magazine, LXXVIII (March, 1913), 258-259 and passim.

McGafferty explains to Immelman on the phone that he is one man "they" won't find around for bankruptcy proceedings and the public insult that comes with them. The lights go off on McGafferty's part of the stage, and the crowd outside reads of his suicide. Members of the crowd run about and in final comment many voices say: "Man's fate is a drum!"¹

The social message, which is all but lost in these last "personal" scenes, is implicit in those parts of the play dealing with the group of bankers and with McGafferty as banker rather than as suffering Man: the wealthy and powerful as chief agents of social stability and (potentially) of social change must act responsibly, and if they do not Time will judge and destroy them. The thesis looks like a middle-class American variation of Marxian dialectic. The proletarians are extracted from the dialectic. Under the favorable conditions given in the play, their part--like that of their expiator, McGafferty--is to suffer and wait

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¹Archibald MacLeish, Panic, p. 102.

In all events, Mr. MacLeish's play is not given to contemplating sweeping changes in the American economic system.

C. The Critics

The play's three nights at the Imperial Theatre are the only performances known to have occurred. The response of audiences and critics to these performances provide a valuable context for further analysis of the play. Malcolm Cowley describes the third and most interesting night:

I was surprised to find that, in spite of its mysticism and abstraction and unrelieved tensivity of emotion, "Panic" was effective on the stage. "Effective for whom?" you might ask after reading the generally hostile reports of the dramatic critics. Well, it was certainly effective for those who saw the play on its last evening--that is, for a strange audience composed partly of society people, partly of second-string critics, but chiefly of radicals, readers of *The New Theatre* and *The New Masses*, the two magazines for whose benefit the performance was given. I have to report that even this audience found some passages tedious or unmotivated; one could hear coughs and rustling papers. In his last scene, however, McGafferty was as wintry and tragic as King Lear; and a moment later the triumphant mood of the chorus swept over us, even though we could not always understand what was being said. There was a long ovation after the curtain fell, interspersed with half a dozen boos and fifty shouts of "Author!"--agreement, sharp dissent, enthusiasm; in short, the definite reaction for which any writer hopes.¹

Mr. MacLeish is reported to have been greatly moved by this response and to have said at the time, "Now I have found my

¹Malcolm Cowley, "Men and Ghosts," New Republic, LXXXII (March 27, 1935), 190.

audience."¹ But Cowley added that

everybody who read or attended the play . . . felt in his own fashion that there was something wrong with it,² some fault on which he could put his finger.

A symposium on the Bank Crisis and the play took place on-stage after the third performance, and there was a lively exchange of opinion.

Cowley's own diagnosis points to the fusion of "social" material and an "ivory tower" theme:

Essentially he is writing about the Artist and the World, about the conflict between a sharply realized individual and a vaguely depicted and terrifying collectivity. There is only one real character in "Panic," and the only conflict is the conflict within the mind of the hero-villain. Everything else is nebulous. The street crowd, representing "the external world against which the action of the play takes place" is composed of shapes in darkness, speaking as A Man, A Woman, An Old Woman, A Girl. The bankers are likewise wooden and symbolic figures. ". . . They move and gesture together but not with mechanical precision." The radicals. . . . are "all young, all bareheaded, all in leather jackets; one of them is blind with a white ecstatic face. Like the bankers they move and gesture roughly together: speak out one after the other in rotation." Even Ione, who appears in several scenes, is not really a person: she is simply the Woman, the Eternal Mistress, the depersonalized object of McGafferty's lust. "Panic" might be called a passion play of capitalism, but it is a passion play without Judas, without Pontius Pilate, without Mary Magdalene.³

It is apparent that the abstract Ione belongs to the geneology

¹Maxine Block (ed.), Current Biography: Who's Who and Why, 1940 (New York: H. W. Wilson Company, 1940), p. 542.

²Malcolm Cowley, "Men and Ghosts," p. 190.

³Malcolm Cowley, p. 190; quotations are from stage directions in the text of the play.

of Helen in "Our Lady of Troy" and Eve in Nobodaddy. The idea that McGafferty is a veiled figure of the Artist, alienated from society and searching for identity, is not implausible.

As Cowley saw Panic as a passion play, Joseph Wood Krutch saw in it elements of a morality play, and it may have been these qualities which appealed to radical members of the audience. But Krutch felt that "classic" elements outweighed the "revolutionary." The "moral is not Marxian but Aeschylean: man's fate is still in the lap of the gods."¹ Krutch observed that "time and fate are bigger" than any of the characters, "and it will be time and fate, not bankers or proletarians who will decide what the end shall be."² Krutch was pleased that the play's ending was "not action but realization" of a cosmic order. He recognized that orthodox radicals would be as exasperated with this work as they were with some of MacLeish's others. He thought MacLeish was still "more a poet than a teacher":

What he broods upon is the situation itself; his chief object is to penetrate its emotional meaning; and if he seeks at times to understand it intellectually also, that is, primarily in order that he may feel it more acutely.

¹ Joseph Wood Krutch, "Man's Fate," The Nation, CXL (March 27, 1935), 370.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., p. 369.

It is worth noting that Mr. Krutch and Mr. MacLeish had a common interest in the alienation of the modern artist; in his book The Modern Temper (1921),¹ Mr. Krutch had elaborated upon this problem.

Horace Gregory, in a review he wrote for Poetry Magazine, concentrated on the diction of Panic. He commended the author's enthusiasm and his desire to avoid Shakespearean blank verse, but added:

Doubts, however, arrive before the play begins; on the dedication page we read: "as though the mind were, as it well may be, I do not know, a swarm of invisible apprehensions which like insects devour in silence, and secretly the whole house." Are these Mr. Anderson's blind worms of the earth? They are very like; it would be difficult, I think, to dissociate them; the quality of the image is the same; there is the same heavy, hollow intonation of the voice in reciting it. . . . For it is difficult to say whether the emotion is inflated because the imagery is false or whether the imagery is false because the emotion is inflated. Throughout the play, Mr. MacLeish's preference for open vowels in all his speeches blurs the sense and sound until the voices of his actors seem to echo the baa-ing of so many sheep. One cannot doubt the good intentions expressed in the very choice of Mr. MacLeish's theme, which is the bank crash of 1929 [sic], yet I believe that his critics have overestimated his technical proficiency. The lines spoken by his banker hero . . . resemble closely the lines recited by Bernal Diaz . . . in Conquistador, and though the music is the same the images are less concrete. After the repetition of many open vowels, sounding through the suicide of McGafferty himself, the entire play seems to have no other purpose than the refrain of its final chorus,--which makes the assertion that man's fate is a drum.²

¹ Joseph Wood Krutch, The Modern Temper: A Study and a Confession (A Harvest Book; New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1929, 1956); vid. chapters V and VI.

² Horace Gregory, "Poets in the Theatre," Poetry: A Magazine of Verse XLVIII (July, 1936), 221-222.

The relation of structure, character, and language to the theme of Panic puzzled or irritated nearly every commentator.

Ruth Lechlitner, who reviewed every new MacLeish work of the late '20's and the '30's with considerable respect in The New York Herald Tribune, pointed out that "poetic symbolism overlays, to a large extent, what realistic speech and action the play has."¹ She thought the mob unconvincing as an actual mob, and she said its "leader, 'The Blind Man,' might as well be a figure of speech."² She thought McGafferty was "Overhumanized as a symbol of capitalism" and "probably no more representative of his class than the Blind Man was of his."³ Although she did not explicitly refer to Mr. MacLeish's technical problem in having the Blind Man function both as proletarian leader and raisonneur on the subject of a classical tragic theme, she did point to the basic discrepancy between the characterization of McGafferty and the theme:

MacLeish has made him a hero, it seems, not because he fights blindly to the bitter end, but because he acknowledge his defeat, admits that his end has come, and courageously gives in to it. If MacLeish's theme is that change must go on, that the crime of society is to fight change, rather than yield to it, well and good. But in that case McGafferty, if true to his author's philosophical conceptions, is at the same time false as a tragic figure in drama. Nor does one feel that the conflict between the two opposing groups in the play creates any positive state of dramatic tension. It doesn't matter any-

¹Ruth Lechlitner, "A Play of the Banking Crisis," The New York Herald Tribune Books, March 10, 1935, p. 6.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

how which side wins, so long as Time--controlled by Fate--is the real winner. Mr. MacLeish has doubtless fixed and made expressive a moment in the "flowing away of the world." It may be that his attitude toward the submerged in the flowing-away process is less ironic than he intended.¹

Miss Lechlitner said some favorable things about Mr. MacLeish's new trend toward social themes, and she admired his prosodic experimentation.

D. Sources and Interpretation

In general, the preceding reviews show the dimensions of audience frustration at seeing a rather smooth but unblended amalgam of disparate elements. The audience was led to expect a proletarian drama, and their expectations were partially fulfilled in Mr. MacLeish's use of a quasi-revolutionary situation in the continual appearance of the ordinary "masses." The situation of the play resembled what Odets had done in Waiting for Lefty: in that play the tensions of Odet's cab drivers brews while they argue their grievance in the hopes that their leader will show up to bring them victory; MacLeish has the masses and at times the bankers waiting for McGafferty, but like Lefty he has to let his colleagues down. While the "personal" element in Panic develops around McGafferty and in the direction of aristocratic classical tragedy, the common people keep worrying the audience in the tradition of proletarian drama.

¹Ibid.

The symmetry and quick pace of the alternating street and office scenes gives some idea of how action and theme are broken up and why the audience might have been in disagreement as to what the theme actually was. In lieu of numbered scenes in the text, the following schema indicates each change of scene by roman numerals; arabic numbers show the page on which action changes--either change of scene (inside the office to outside, and vice versa) or the entrance of new characters.

<u>Scene</u>	<u>Page</u>	<u>Action</u>
* I	3	Crowd in the street
II	8	Bankers in the office
* III	17	Crowd in the street
IV	20	Bankers in the office
	24	Radicals in the office
	27	Blind Man speaks in the office
* V	35	Crowd in the street
VI	41	McGafferty and Immelman in office (other bankers present briefly)
	53	Ione enters office
* VII	57	Crowd in the street
VIII	62	Ione and McGafferty in office
* IX	74	Crowd in street
X	77	Ione and McGafferty in office

<u>Scene</u>	<u>Page</u>	<u>Action</u>
	83	Griggs enters office
	91	Ione and McG. in office (exit Griggs)
* XI	98-102	Crowd in the street

Asterisks indicate the symmetrical arrangement of those scenes portraying the crowd in the street.

In many respects Panic resembles another social drama, Ernst Toller's Man and the Masses, which was translated by Mr. MacLeish's friend Louis Untermeyer¹ in the '20's and was regarded by Mr. MacLeish's generation as the classic proletarian drama. The structure of both plays is similar, and so is characterization. Characters in Toller's play are given the names "The Man," "The Woman," "Workmen," "Workwomen," "Bankers," and there are a few prison officials and sentinels. In Untermeyer's edition, the plates of scenes from the Theatre Guild production indicate that scenery and lighting for Toller's play were about what Mr. MacLeish was attempting when he asked that the "whole scene" of his play be "impersonal, bare, huge--on a scale to dwarf the shapes of men and women."² In Toller's second scene showing the bankers in the stock exchange, the clerk--who is also the symbolic "Man" of the

¹Ernst Toller, Man and the Masses: A Play of the Social Revolution in Seven Scenes, trans. Louis Untermeyer, The Theatre Guild Version, with six illustrations from photographs of the Theatre Guild production (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1924).

²Archibald MacLeish, Panic, p. 3.

first and of later scenes--is set off from the others and, visually at least, dominates the group. More important, the structure of Toller's play has the same symmetrical arrangement and corresponds in other details. Every other scene is a "dream picture" which goes on in the mind of "The Woman," who is protagonist:

- I Back room of a workmen's tavern
- II Dream Picture: bankers in a room of the stock exchange
- III A great hall where the proletarians hold a meeting
- IV Dream Picture: a court with a high wall, where the fate of the protagonist's bourgeois husband is decided
- V The same great hall as in III, where workers wait news of the insurrection going on in the streets
- VI Dream picture: boundless space; the heroine speaks to her jailors and to bankers
- VII A prison cell, where The Man and The Woman have their final interview before The Woman's execution

The odd scenes of Man and the Masses (I, III, . . . VII) are realistic and thoroughly proletarian, i.e., dominated by meetings and discussions of the Workmen; Toller's even scenes either feature bourgeois characters (the bankers--Scene II) or show the proletarians confronted by bourgeois power (Scenes IV and VI), and all these scenes are subjective "Dream Pictures." MacLeish's odd scenes (I, III, . . . XI) consistently feature proletarians in an objective, reportorial setting; i.e., "external" action as in a news reel. His even scenes

feature the bankers in their habitat and, while not given to anti-realistic "Dream Pictures," these scenes progressively increase the "inner" action of probing McGafferty's mental world, which ultimately becomes the chief interest of the play. In short, the pattern of distributing "bourgeois" and "proletarian" scenes is identical in both plays; MacLeish extends the pattern to four more scenes than Toller has and uses a simpler plan insofar as scene changes are always from street to office.

There are also resemblances in character conflict, each play pitting "Man" against the "Masses," a heroic individual against a revolutionary group. Toller's heroine, a converted bourgeoisie married to the "Man," who symbolizes both the State and bourgeois respectability, pleads with The Nameless One, who symbolizes Mass Man, to be more humane. She is caught between both sides in a class struggle. She is ultimately disowned by her adopted group and then executed by the forces of money and power. McGafferty is made to appear in the same situation, at one point taking the masses' part against the bankers and then haranguing against the masses. The heroic individual's struggle with leisure-class respectability and social irresponsibility is represented in both plays as a struggle between spouses (in McGafferty's situation, a common-law spouse); for Toller the antagonist is "The Man" and for MacLeish it is Ione. The combinations of similar character types, scene structure, situation, and conflict form an in-

teresting array of general resemblances between Man and the Masses and Panic. There are still other details which correspond.

Toller's "The Woman" and MacLeish's McGafferty are both expiators for the masses. Toller's Woman, though accused of being a counter-revolutionary by the masses (The Nameless One), teaches by her example the power of love to two prison women who are members of the mass. In identifying with them she constantly refers to the masses in Christological terms. In Panic the Blind Man, whose docile patience somewhat resembles Toller's heroine's, tells the bankers, "We are your Christ--your million Christs--who writhe."¹ The hint that McGafferty willingly expiates for them is given when the people in the street commiserate with McGafferty for bearing their suffering on his shoulders during the crisis:

A MAN
The great McGafferty suffering
Fate's envy in silence!--
A likely thing!

THE OLD WOMAN
 Silent or
Not silent--suffering!²

The crowd has grudgingly taken McGafferty to itself and dissociates him from the other, "guilty" bankers. Ellipsis periods after the third line in the following passage are in the text and do not indicate an omission through quotation.

¹Ibid., p. 30.

²Ibid., p. 40.

A MAN

Surely our Rod and our Staff and our
 Help in the world! And they'd keep us the
 Hunger and cold and the sleepless and
 Wet nights from our skin if we'd
 Give them the cash for their winnings and

.....
 be
 Silent with awe and amazed at the
 Cities they built us and praising them.¹

The crowd is driven to trust McGafferty because it fears itself, and in expressing the idea MacLeish even uses Toller's vocabulary when it appears that McGafferty might fall:

A MAN

The world's to the nameless now.

A WOMAN

The world's to the nameless man who'll
 Brag in the sun and withstand it and
 Stiffen our hearts that drift like
 Fog on a wave's lifting,²
 Following every current!

MacLeish's common people are purposely presented as individuals speaking their lines without identifying themselves with a revolutionary movement, and this shows the greatest difference in sympathy, or in the class interests, of MacLeish and Toller. But the message Toller gives to mass man--after delicately and consistently identifying his heroine with the interests of the revolutionary masses--is the same one MacLeish presents brusquely in McGafferty's references to the only contact he has had in the play with "mass man."

The radicals in the office are the only true example of

¹Ibid., pp. 75-76.

²Ibid., pp. 76-77.

revolutionary "masses" in the play. Their self-image is the same Marxian view of Toller's mass man. Toller's Nameless

One tells The Woman:

I am the Mass!
The Mass knows its future.
The Mass is destiny.

.....
Only the Mass must count!
Just think of it: a single bloody battle
And then, eternal peace.
No empty peace, a mask of mockery,
Hiding the face of war,
War of the strong against the weak,
War of exploiters, war of greed.
Think of it: the end of misery!

.....
It is the dawn of freedom for all people! . . .
You think I reckon lightly?
It is no longer a matter of choice.
War's a necessity for us.¹

MacLeish's Unemployed echo this argument:

Didn't you know it was this that was coming
Captains?

.....
Ever study the histories Empire Builders?
Ever read in the books how your world would
run?

.....
Runs in a groove with the crack of a gun at the
end of it!

Blood on the wall at the end of it!

Us at the end of it!

Our world at the end: a new world!

Didn't you know it was us would come after you
Captains?

Nothing in all your Hells can stop it now.

¹Toller, Man and the Masses, pp. 43 and 44-45.

Nothing can help you now Captains. It's our
 world!
 History's back of us! Time's bearing us!
 Life is a
 Full flood in our hearts and in yours hollow.¹

Perhaps the similarities in the two passages quoted above merely show that both authors have given their mass characters a standard Marxian interpretation of history in an abstract rhetoric which is common to both plays. It would be an even rarer coincidence if these two very different authors were to levy an identical critique against the Marxists. And they do.

The context of last passage quoted from Toller includes references to the feelings and conscience of individuals and to the need for the individual revolutionary to bow to the will of the masses. When the conflict between individual conscience and mass destiny comes to a climax in Toller's play, the heroine and her antagonist carry on the following dispute:

THE NAMELESS ONE

Mass counts and not the man. . . .

THE WOMAN

You have no love for man.

THE NAMELESS ONE

The principle above everything!
 I love posterity!

THE WOMAN

The individual above everything!
 You--you would sacrifice
 All living men²
 For a principle.

¹Archibald MacLeish, Panic, pp. 25-26.

²Toller, Man and the Masses, pp. 101-102.

Inveighing against the revolutionary Unemployed, MacLeish's McGafferty says:

Calling it love of humanity! Love of humanity!
 What's love of humanity? Hatred of manhood!
 Hatred of one man: love of men by hundreds!
 Love of what's least like a man: unliving;
Nameless: faceless: sexless: odorless: blank:
 Without breath: unreal: made of words: of
 numbers--
 Love as prudes love: love in books: on paper--
 Love! Not love but envy--but revenge--
 But fear: hatred of life: horror of manhood!
 Men who love humanity are men who
 Hate the man: who'd first destroy him: that kind!
 Their kind shrieking at us.¹

Conflict between the needs of individuals and of the masses is the well-integrated, basic theme of Man and the Masses; in Panic it is a fragment juxtaposed with other elements. In Toller's play the Marxian ideas of proletarian class interest and class conflict are portrayed as facts of life; in Panic they constitute a dogma which seems true only for those who believe it, while the burden of McGafferty's arguments and of other parts of the play is that another dogma--human freedom--ought to be more preferable for the general public, if not for McGafferty when he finally becomes a fatalist.

There are still other resemblances in the two plays. Each has only one developed character, Toller's *The Woman* and MacLeish's McGafferty, and each is chided for a reluctance to act. The Nameless One berates *The Woman* for her moral squeamishness over accepting leadership in a violent revolution, yet

¹Archibald MacLeish, Panic, p. 49. Italics mine.

she does accept it and takes the consequences. In Panic Griggs coaxes McGafferty to accept the chairmanship, then leaves in despair. It goes without saying that both protagonists have severe problems of identity and alienation. But only The Woman's are resolved.

Finally, there are similarities in the religious content of Man and the Masses and Panic. Toller's masses exonerate themselves of guilt and instead blame God:

THE HANDCUFFED ONE (crying out)
 Mass is necessity!
 Mass cannot be guilty!

THE KEEPER
 Man cannot be guilty!

THE HANDCUFFED ONE
 God is guilty!

DISTANT ECHOES
 Guilty . . .
 Guilty . . .
 Guilty . . .

THE KEEPER
 God is within you.

THE HANDCUFFED ONE
 Then I will triumph over God.

THE KEEPER
 Worm!
 Blasphemer!

THE HANDCUFFED ONE
 Did I dishonor
 God?
 Or did God
 Dishonor Man?
 O frightful
 Decrees of guilt,
 In which
 Man after man

Is horribly entangled,
 God--
 Bring God to justice!
 I accuse him!

The blasphemy of MacLeish's people is more surreptitious.

A Woman says:

Our Father who art Thou in Heaven
 Forgive us our daily bread!

and A Man replies, "Keep calm in the crisis!"² The refrain is taken up two pages later, a tentative approach to the same guilt problem forcefully stated by Toller. MacLeish's people begin with sarcasm and end with a feeling of conviction:

A WOMAN
 Father who art Thou in . . .

A MAN
 Thanks us for
 Keeping calm in the crisis!

AN OLD WOMAN
 Surely a curse lies on us!
 No common evil!
 No. . . . the luck leaves us!

AN OLD MAN
 The good man in his chair; the
 Child at its play will perish--by
 What hand ignorant--
 Either for what sin--
 Whether his own or another's or
 Everyman's--or for nothing:
 Whether by God's blow or
 God's blindness!

AN OLD MAN
 Knowing
 Never for what fault or

¹Toller, Man and the Masses, pp. 86-87.

²Archibald MacLeish, Panic, p. 18.

Failing of ours is altered the
 World's future suddenly--
 Spilling of what blood. . . .

A WOMAN

Where the eyes of death are
 Shown are shown against us
 Signals of God's enmity!

A WOMAN

We have beheld them--thousands--
 Dead man in blameless house.¹

The similarities of argument and language in Toller and MacLeish are, I think, a strong indication that Man and the Masses was a strong influence on Mr. MacLeish's writing of Panic, even to the point of Toller's play being a textual source.

While MacLeish's common people resemble Toller's in their accusations of an apparently personal God, McGafferty himself reverts to the idea of an impersonal god, already familiar from the earlier play Nobodaddy. Meditating on the unpredictable death of Shelton, McGafferty speaks of destiny as if it were the will of an impersonal god, of the Fates, or furies, and Mr. MacLeish's indebtedness to classical Greek drama is apparent:

He knew them also. He knew who they were.
 Give them time their hand will always show.
 They'll pile it on too thick until we know them:
 Heap it higher than a man could: crowd us:
 Cross us in purposes that no man knows:
 Follow us longer than a man would follow!--
 O we know the signs by now--the adversities
 Pure and causeless and crank as a child's
 murder:

¹Ibid., pp. 20-21.

The punishments not for evil: wrongs rewarded:
 The will not like our will but like a will:
 The law that's not our law but that compels us . . .

GRIGGS

For God's sake listen to me man!

MCGAFFERTY

I hear them too! He heard them! Room to room
 To that last shameful white-tiled empty room!--
 Time. You think there's ever time to trick them?
 They keep the time too!

The idea of god developed in Nobodaddy is now joined with the notion of Time as law and ruler of the physical universe, an idea implicit in several poems including Einstein, "Mother Goose's Garland," and "You, Andrew Marvell."

It should be apparent by now that the basic intellectual conflicts of the play are unresolved. An expression of individual freedom is shown to be possible for the financiers who are to rescue the system, yet the personal tragic theme dominating the play is an attempt at pure classic fatalism which is logically incompatible with individual freedom argued even by McGafferty and not really overtly contradicted by him. Mr. MacLeish and McGafferty believe in personal freedom, but they decide simply that time is up for McGafferty as the final curtain draws near. The suicide at the end is perhaps little more than a structural or literary device with some indeterminate social significance.

What Joseph Wood Krutch called the "revolutionary"

¹ Ibid., pp. 87-88.

elements of the play--the sometime use of McGafferty as a symbol of capitalism, the doctrinal exposition by Unemployed Marxians, the Blind Man and Ione used as both individuals and representatives of specific social classes, the social theme itself--are handled in the tradition of the morality play. The relationship of these to the more dominant features of classical tragedy is mainly one of juxtaposition. The theatre audience's confused response is partial witness to the fact that the play has no unified effect.

Since the play partakes of the ritual of tragedy, its qualifications for belonging to that exalted genre ought to be examined. Cleanth Brooks, writing shortly after the production of the play, observed:

If we are to raise the question of MacLeish's lack of dramatic quality, it may be well to test the statement against an explicit attempt at drama, . . . Panic. Here, as in nearly all his work, there is much to admire. The external items are handled well. The poet is successful in evoking the sense of the modern scene. . . . But there is no dramatic relation between the civilization that is going to pieces and the central character. . . . McGafferty is merely a special instance of the panic. He does not supply a focus for the forces which are supposed to dominate the play.

In the first place, McGafferty is too passive. We are constantly told by his employees and colleagues and the crowds on the street that he is an all-powerful financial force; and the poet does try to give us a conviction. McGafferty's gestures seem essentially empty, and, as he admits later, are bewildered. Most of all, he makes no decision which commits him to an issue involved in the tragic effect. He is rather the man who falls prey to a disease, an epidemic infection.

A consideration of the dramatic situation is revealing. McGafferty's position is almost precisely that of a man whose expensive car breaks down. He

raises the hood and does some tinkering with the carburetor. But he does not really understand the engine and he cannot repair it. There is first mere annoyance, then a dawning knowledge of the true state of affairs, then a sort of despair. The situation is basically comic, and merely to make the issues more serious is not enough to turn it into tragedy.

. . . MacLeish can summon up for his protagonist a kind of pathos; but any further attempt to secure more intensity would merely have resulted in sentimentality. This is why the reproof of McGafferty's hubris is not sufficient to make the play a tragedy and why McGafferty's death (because he does not wish to be forced to admit his ignorance of the financial machine) is finally the effect of a private and irrelevant pride, and therefore meaningless in the tragic sense.

. . . The irony accorded to McGafferty in the last scenes of the play. . . is romantic irony--the irony of the disillusioned strong man--not tragic irony. Romantic irony and fairly obvious external and satiric irony--see "Memorial Rain" and Frescoes--these are the kinds of irony which MacLeish is capable of.¹

This treatment of a prospective tragedy is no more harsh than many works by good modern dramatists have received. The play is manifestly not tragedy.

Brooks's argument may be more important than the final verdict, however, because of what he says about dramatic action. From a variety of perspectives, Brooks observes that the action is static, lacking in the movement and irony expected in the theatre. It is, in fact, a vehicle nobly fitted to carry pieces of doctrine and lyricism. Whether we see the vehicle as moving or standing still, as tragedy or something else, Brooks' point about MacLeish's dramatic action is seconded by

¹Cleanth Brooks, Modern Poetry and the Tradition (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1939), pp. 120-121.

John Howard Lawson, who observes that progression of the action must spring from the decisions of characters and that "lines spoken in a crowd depend" for their effectiveness "on the extent to which the individual is a part of the action."¹ Lawson believes that Panic fails on both counts. Recognizing that "MacLeish points the way to a new and freer use of dramatic poetry," Lawson nevertheless insists, "All that stands in the way is the barrier (which he himself has erected) between speech and action."²

The passivity of the characters, particularly protagonists, is of special importance in the study of nearly all Mr. MacLeish's plays; characters suffer and make judgments, but they rarely make decisions leading to significant action. Of the plays discussed so far, Nobodaddy shows the most promise of significant action: the myth provides Adam's and Eve's decision to disobey, but this action occurs in the first act, and little else "happens" afterward. Passivity has been noted already in Conquistador's expression of the futility of all action. This same mood in Panic may be a continuation of this firmly established Weltanschauung. One could speculate that by the mid-thirties Mr. MacLeish still found the problems of individual life and of the total American experience

¹John Howard Lawson, Theory and Techniques of Playwriting, with a New Introduction (A Dramabook; New York: Hill and Wang, 1936, 1949), p. 283; also see p. 282.

²Ibid., p. 293.

too bewildering to formulate into consistent dramatic experience. The use of various literary models merely complicated the original problems with disparate elements which would not mesh. Mr. MacLeish might have benefited greatly as a dramatist if he had continued experimenting with the situations and techniques he had worked with in Panic, but instead he shifted toward the simplified situations of documentary theatre. It seems more reasonable to view Panic as a journeyman play in a yet unfulfilled area of Mr. MacLeish's achievement than to suppose that he was incapable of handling significant action in his dramas because of temperament, lack of talent, or some other such limitation.

Passivity of the characters and the lack of significant action were particularly unfortunate in the social drama, Panic. If we presume that Mr. MacLeish had set out to write a social play, examination shows that Panic lacks the ingredient social plays normally have regardless of their respective literary shortcomings: significant action in the dramatization of an attempt to change society. After all, Odets' cab drivers finally decide to strike, and Toller's workmen attempt revolution. The only remotely comparable things in Panic are the automatic closing down of economic machinery, McGafferty's exhortations, and Grigg's feeble attempt to force McGafferty's comeback--actions which lead nowhere. When Griggs leaves the stage, he partakes of the sense of futility experienced by Bernal Diaz and McGafferty. Yet a notion of "social drama"

which includes plays commenting on society without dealing with social change hardly applies to Panic because Mr. MacLeish has deliberately used materials and conventions appropriate to plays which depict attempted social change. The cumulative effect of the play might be taken as the author's attempt to contrast a chaotic status quo in laissez faire capitalism with the Roosevelt Administration's bold intervention in the Banking Crisis of 1933, and to thus justify the increased Federal involvement. But if this was the author's intention, it is not incorporated into the play specifically enough to be taken seriously as a part of the thematic content.

At this point, I might suggest that the indecision of all the characters in Panic, together with the confusion of materials and themes, suggests that Mr. MacLeish had not found his identity as a poet. His own remarks on his writing of this period confirm the fact:

And yet something, Mark, something was certainly wrong in the activities of the thirties. Something was wrong in the so-called social consciousness of some poems of that period. I'd like nothing better than to try to explore that and to find out what it was that was wrong.

I feel this way about myself. I think some of my poems which moved into this field and were filled with political passion either berating the Marxists or berating their opposites, and so forth, were trespassing; not trespassing exactly, but they had gone over the fence. Something, something went wrong there.

¹The Dialogues of Archibald MacLeish and Mark Van Doren, ed. Warren V. Bush (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, 1964), p. 36.

It may not be presumptuous to suggest that the poet was foundering for want of an intellectual base--for him, preferably objective values--upon which to build his art. His anxiety in searching for values has already been shown in earlier work. The kaleidoscopic experimentation in techniques and ideas, his limitation and casting off of literary models, and the self-laceration and guilt which many commentators have interpreted in passages like Section 8 of the The Hamlet of A. MacLeish all find their way into Panic. The frustration which the character McGafferty feels is indicative of the author's own frustrations with him as a symbol of institutions and values one is taught to believe in and cannot, any more than he can believe in "their opposites." The author's indecisions and scepticism of the '20's had simply taken on a wider social dimension in Panic.

Hyatt Waggoner has noted Mr. MacLeish's frustrated quest for objective values and observes that twentieth century physics gave the poet his strongest suit in material and metaphor (hence the importance of Time as an agent in human destiny) as well as an unexplained scepticism resulting from the apparent lack of objectivity in human values. Mr. Waggoner thinks this scepticism is inexplicable because he says that nothing in modern physics "logically discourages belief in the objectivity of value."¹ The spiritual conflict

¹Hyatt Howe Waggoner, The Heel of Elohim: Science and Values in Modern Poetry (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1950), p. 153.

and the scepticism about objective values might rather derive from Mr. MacLeish's youthful study of science, religion, and philosophy which concentrated on such controversies as between the Darwinians and Genesis, or the scepticism may have been part of his youthful upbringing and then rationalized "scientifically" afterwards. His mature intellectual doubts seem themselves to have been derivative, resembling most the scepticisms about everything which Joseph Wood Krutch expressed in the late '20's. But Mr. Waggoner has a theory about Mr. MacLeish's performance in the thirties which seems feasible:

. . . Mr. MacLeish began with a sensibility which needed only to be supplemented by the new image which he desires. It is perhaps not too far-fetched to suggest that his devotion to social themes during the thirties and his comparative silence since, even perhaps what seems like the deterioration of his poetic powers--that these may all have something to do with his failure to find any ground for the new image more secure than the will to believe.¹

The ambivalence Mr. MacLeish shows toward McGafferty encourages this kind of interpretation of the play.

Ambivalence toward the "tragic hero" (Cowley thought him a hero-villain) is apparent throughout the play, as in these lines spoken by A Man:

Name known in foreign
Mountains: spoken in wars:
Spoken in all men's tongues--
Like the words for salt and for
hunger!²

¹Ibid., p. 154.

²Archibald MacLeish, Panic, p. 37.

One is tempted, and wonders whether Mr. MacLeish was tempted, to echo T. S. Eliot's epigraph: "Missah Kurtz--he dead. . . . A penny for the old guy."¹ My opinion is that Mr. MacLeish was really trying to create a worthy tragic hero in modern dress. But Mr. MacLeish had serious difficulties in handling this authoritarian hero. Like god in Nobodaddy and J. B., McGafferty had many traits of the poet's father, Andrew MacLeish, whose god-like demeanor is known to have inspired awe without admiration in the poet. McGafferty seems to be one link in the chain of character symbols in most of Mr. MacLeish's plays who are dramatizations of the poet's personal conflict, a quest for identity and belief, for a father image. These God-figures are most prominent in the three full-length plays which constitute Mr. MacLeish's major work in poetic theatre: Nobodaddy, Panic, and J. B.

The strong fears of failure which Ione brings to McGafferty's consciousness toward the end of Panic may represent the poet's fear of rejection, perhaps by the public, and perhaps by a mother-figure who the poet fancied had set a standard of achievement too high for him to reach. On the level of social approval, McGafferty's fear of punishment through social disapproval is very strong. McGafferty's generalized anxiety about fate could cover any syndrome of fears, most literally for McGafferty the banker, but also for MacLeish the poet.

¹T. S. Eliot, p. 56.

The long speeches he has with Ione, a stock mother figure, on love and professional achievement are as fitting an analogy to the action of the play as the explicit analogy Mr. MacLeish set down in the passage of his "Hamlet" already mentioned. Following the general outline of Shakespeare's play, MacLeish has Hamlet give a variation of the original speech following the dialogue with Ophelia while Polonius listens; The interpolated personal meanings are easily distinguishable from the original speech (Shakespeare's "O what a rogue and peasant slave. . . ."); Part 8 of The Hamlet of A. MacLeish begins:

Ay, sure, this is most brave:
That I . . .
the live son of a dead father
Doomed by my living breath itself to die

Must, like a whore, unpack my heart with words
Why must I speak of it? Why must I always
Stoop from this discent silence to this phrase
That makes a posture of my hurt? Why must I
Say I suffer? . . . or write out these words
For eyes to stare at that shall soon as mine
Or little after me go thick and lose
The light too, or for solemn fettered fools
To judge if I said neatly what I said!--
Make verses! . . . ease myself at the soiled stool
That's common to so swollen many! . . . shout Hamlet...
For hearing in the world's thick dirty ear! . . . sole.
Expose my scabs! . . . crowd forward among those
That beg for fame, that for so little praise
As pays a dog off will go stiff and tell
Their loss, lust, sorrow, anguish! . . . match
My grief with theirs! . . . compel the public prize
For deepest feeling and put on the bays! . . .
Oh shame, for shame to suffer it, to make
A skill of harm, a business of despair,
And like a barking ape betray us all
For itch of notice.

¹Archibald MacLeish, The Hamlet of A. MacLeish, Collected Poems, pp. 238-239.

My explanation of the personal factors inhibiting Mr. MacLeish's plays is rudimentary, perhaps implausible or even wrong, but some personal inhibition of the poet seems to be a major cause for the lack of coherence among elements of the plays treated so far. McGafferty's lack of confidence as a banker seems to parallel MacLeish's lack of confidence as a poet. The unharmonious fusion of elements in his dramatized character might be due to the poet's unconscious attempt to make him serve two functions: as all-powerful banker before Ione's appearance, he seems to be a classic father figure, but once Ione is onstage McGafferty becomes a guilty son expressing the author's fantasies as man and poet. McGafferty cannot carry both roles with dramatic vraisemblance. It also seems apparent that, whatever personal problems are expressed in Panic, Mr. MacLeish chose not to face them in the short plays of the later '30's and the '40's, which successively drift toward uninspired hackwork during the years of the poet's popular and political success.

In summary, Panic shows Mr. MacLeish's interest in "cosmic" problems. His philosophical reflections on Time are a cohesive--probably original amalgam of physics, social change, and classical tragic theory. Yet at the time Panic was written, Mr. MacLeish's cosmic interests seemed to be on the wane; they were subordinated to practical social problems in some parts of the play and would almost disappear in his next plays. The subjectivity of truth--perhaps a variation in the extreme of

the American schoolboy's doctrine of tolerance toward the beliefs of others--provides a defense against unacceptable or threatening beliefs. For instance, economic fatalism proves true for McGafferty only because he comes to believe in it. Marxism too is a mere dogma without effect upon or relevance to the development of American society. The Blind Man's exposure of this "truth" has a parallel in Mr. MacLeish's next play, The Fall of the City, in which the threat of totalitarian fascism is finally revealed in metaphor as a suit of armor without a human figure inside, and the people's acceptance of (i.e., belief in) the dictator is all that gives him power or, indeed, existence at all. Mr. MacLeish's political liberalism is almost beyond ideology, or without it, except that his belief in the institutions of liberal democracy (the ideology of the Founding Fathers) and the desire to believe in personal freedom may be called an ideology. This ideology of the middle way is embodied in arguments and images which are an attempt to defend modern American man, not only against such threats as Communism (and later, fascism), but against misinterpretations of American freedom like those made by the laissez faire capitalists. Finally, there is a strong desire for action, including poetic achievement, but as yet an intellectual despair over the efficacy of action.

CHAPTER VII

TWO ANTI-FASCIST RADIO PLAYS

By the end of 1935, Mr. MacLeish was saying, "To flourish, an art must touch the general mind of its time--not merely the most sensitive minds of its time."¹ He had stopped reading what literary critics had to say about his works, because, whether favorable or unfavorable, their judgments made him self-conscious.² He was ready to leave off "the production of little books to lie on little tables"³ and instead to reach out for a mass audience. The new medium of radio seemed to offer a ready market for verse plays. The exigencies of broadcasting capitalized on the strong point of his dramatic style--the sound of the spoken word--while eliminating the problems of visual action which he had not solved in his previous writing for the theatre. The Foreward to his first

¹Archibald MacLeish, "A Stage for Poetry," A Time to Speak, pp. 77-78.

²" . . . I long ago stopped reading criticism of my work. I found that it made me self-conscious when it was favorable and even more self-conscious when it wasn't and that I learned next to nothing from it. I think Faulkner and I came to the same conclusions at about the same time for pretty much the same reasons. . . ." (Letter of Mr. MacLeish to the author, June 26, 1963).

³Archibald MacLeish, "A Stage for Poetry," A Time to Speak, p. 77.

radio play, The Fall of the City: (1937), begins, "Any introduction is a confession of weakness," and states his preference for the new medium:

A radio play consists of words and word equivalents and nothing else. . . . There is only the spoken word--an implement which poets have always claimed to use with a special authority. There is only the word-excited imagination--a theatre in which poets have always claimed peculiar rights to play. Nothing exists except as the word creates it. The word dresses the stage. The word brings on the actors. The word supplies their look, their clothes, their gestures. The more packed and allusive the word, the more illuminating its rhythms, the more perfectly is the scene prepared, the more convincingly is the play enacted. On the stage, verse is often an obstacle because the artifice of the verse and the physical reality of the scene do not harmonize: it is for this reason that verse is easily accepted on the stage only where the scene is made remote in time and therefore artificial to begin with, or where the verse is blurred out and made to sound as much as possible like prose. But over the radio verse is not an obstacle. Over the radio verse has no visual presence to compete with. Only the ear is engaged and the ear is already half poet. It believes at once: creates and believes. It is the eye which is the realist. . . . With the eye closed and not staring at nothing verse has every power over the ear. The ear accepts, accepts and believes, accepts and creates. The ear is the poet's perfect audience, his only true audience. And it is radio and only radio which can give him public access to this perfect friend.¹

This passage of MacLeish's foreward to his first play in the new genre of radio writing has the quality of enthusiasm, even down to the lilt of the rhetoric, which Walt Whitman expressed in the preface to his first edition of poems. In 1937 vir-

¹Archibald MacLeish, "Foreward," The Fall of the City, pp. ix-x.

tually no American literary people were writing for radio, and poetry was thought impossible for mass radio audiences.

Sound effects and music were important adjuncts to the verse according to Mr. MacLeish's idea of radio drama. The mass audience, together with the time limitations of half-hour programs, demanded bold and legible themes. In an interview at the time of his second radio play, Air Raid (1938),

. . . Mr. MacLeish was asked if he didn't have to make compromises in writing poetic drama for broadcasting.

"Yes, but poetry to be understood must be simple and clear," he answered. "And that is the keynote of success in writing for the air."¹

Mr. MacLeish's belief that the radio announcer, as a character in a radio play, is "a great dramatic symbol"² furnished cause to use this conventional functionary of radio for much of the work of exposition, description of characters' "on-stage" action, and moral commentary which in theatre is ordinarily given to the people who carry out the action. In the two plays to be discussed in this chapter, the character named "Voice of the Announcer" is the most important single actor; he can range from flat-toned reporting to lyrical editorializing.

The language of the first two radio plays is more colloquial than any verse Mr. MacLeish had written so far.

¹Orrin E. Dunlap, Jr., "Exploring in Drama: MacLeish, Poetic Dramatist, Talks about the Task of Writing a Broadcast Play," New York Times, Sunday, October 30, 1938, sec. IX, p. 12.

²Ibid.

He adapted the experimental sprung rhythm he had used in Panic to situations calling for prosy radio announcers or terse speeches by some of the characters. Louise Bogan was among the academic critics who disliked the "slack discursiveness"¹ in many lines. The rhythm is accentual with a set number of stressed syllables per line, but no necessary number of unstressed syllables. The technique shows little development beyond that used in Panic.

In the first play, certain characters speak in a distinctive rhythmic line: messengers in dimeter, the Voice of the Dead Woman in trimeter, and other characters including the Announcer in pentameter. In writing his first radio play, Mr. MacLeish may have thought that a special rhythm for a character would help distinguish one character from another for a radio audience; this technique had been used to distinguish chorus from principal actors in Panic. But he dropped this technique in his second radio play. Of the two plays, The Fall of the City has a slightly more formal tone, and the characters have relatively long speeches; this pattern holds true for about the first half of Air Raid, but in the second half the excited crowd is given shorter, less formal speeches. The second half of Air Raid employs stychomythia more effectively than any of the earlier dramatic writing had.

Mr. MacLeish knew that the writing of radio verse drama

¹Louise Bogan, "Books: Verse," The New Yorker XV (December 16, 1939), 100.

was a calculated risk. Writing in this medium was time-consuming, and the finished product was impermanent and not very remunerative:

"It [Air Raid] took six months to write, several weeks to produce and long hours of rehearsal. . . .

"Until radio discovers some way to salvage the play from the insatiable hunger of the microphone and rescue it from the fast pace set by the clock, I don't see how radio can expect to get far in developing the so-called new art form it has been seeking. Unless it might be that the play in book form, after the broadcast, would sell to compensate the author, or in the form of recordings the drama of the air might be available to stage repeat performances through the phonograph."

Phonograph recordings of both The Fall of the City and Air Raid were made and are available in some public and school libraries. Louis Untermeyer has included The Fall of the City, at first the whole play and then parts of it, in his American poetry anthologies ever since the play was published.

Mr. MacLeish also feared that television might make radio plays obsolete. Interviewer Orrin Dunlap reported in 1938 that Mr. MacLeish already saw the need for readjusting his style to the newer medium:

But even so, Mr. MacLeish thoughtfully wonders if the book and the disk can make it all remuneratively worth while before the television comes along to change everything again. He sees the electric cameras creeping upon the radio stage and he believes they will throw drama right back into the theatre, as far as technique of writing and producing are concerned. For both ear and eye will be served. In radio only the ear must be entertained, but when the eye surveys the scene, then sound is not as vitally important.²

¹Dunlap, p. 12.

²Ibid.

Television's delay in reaching a large consumer market made the change to the new medium unnecessary for Mr. MacLeish until the post-War period; he did not begin writing for television until the '60's. Mr. MacLeish's radio plays of the late '30's are important if for no other reason than that they stimulated other serious writers to try their hand at this form of writing; commentators have been unanimous on this point from the time the plays were produced until the present day. Other writers could hear or read the new plays, and Mr. MacLeish spoke highly of the possibilities of radio verse to friends and critics.¹

Since The Fall of the City and Air Raid are specifically designed to be anti-Facist propaganda, a summary of Mr. MacLeish's political development in the last half of the 1930's is in order. Mr. MacLeish had sought to keep in contact and good favor with the progressive left, as witnessed by some of the sentiments expressed in Panic, by his allowing the third night benefit to be for New Theatre and New Masses, by his publishing articles in leftist magazines, by his once sharing the speakers' platform with Granville Hicks at a rally for New

¹Ruth Lechlitner, "Written to Be Heard, Not Seen," New York Herald Tribune Books, June 20, 1937, p. 4; Hermine Rich Isaacs, "The Fall of Another City," Theatre Arts Monthly XXIII (February, 1939), p. 149; Gilbert Seides, "Screen and Radio," Scribner's Magazine, CI (June, 1937), 61-62; Margaret Mayorga (ed.), The Best One Act Plays of 1939 (New York, Dodd, Mead and Co., 1940), p.v.; Ruth Lechlitner, "Anti-War and Anti-Fascism," The Carylton Miscellany, VI (Winter, 1965), 81.

Masses, and his participation in the Second American Writers' Congress.¹ At the same time, he was frequently under fire for not being extreme enough and for his frequent disagreement with propositions about which leftists generally agreed.² It may be safely said that he valued social cohesion above revolution, and of all the "progressives" of his generation he was among the most patriotic.

The one sure ground of agreement he had with Communist Party progressives (at least until the Hitler-Stalin pact) was anti-Fascism. According to Robert Van Gelder, Mr. MacLeish came to the realization at least by mid-1938

I don't know exactly what speech of Hitler's, . . . what action of persecution, brought me to that certainty. Suddenly it was there.³

Yet earlier statements show the dimensions of his ambiguity on the question of armed resistance: "There is only one attitude any right-thinking person can have toward militarism: absolute hostility."⁴ Colin Campbell interprets this state-

¹Campbell, pp. 122-123.

²A. B. Magill, "Mr. MacLeish Hesitates," New Masses, XXXI (May 30, 1939), 21-24; Dorothy Van Ghent, "The Poetry of Archibald MacLeish," Science and Society, II (Fall, 1938), 500-511.

³Robert Van Gelder, An Interview with Archibald MacLeish, p. 8; cited from Campbell, p. 134.

⁴Archibald MacLeish, "When America Goes to War: A Symposium," Modern Monthly, IX (June, 1935), 201; cited from Viola Sophia Wendt, "Archibald MacLeish: A Study of His Art and Ideas" (Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1946), p. 399.

ment as an expression of pacifism, but Mr. MacLeish could just as well have meant that armed "hostility" toward German (or any foreign) militarism is demanded.

In August 1935, Mr. MacLeish interpreted the struggle between Fascism and Freedom as a rather abstract battle of ideas, or more accurately, of emotions:

The appeal of fascism, since it has no intellectual content and no economic logic, is purely emotional. Against emotion only emotion, in the great masses of men, can fight. Against false and journalistic emotions of fascism the real and human emotions of art must content.¹

This passage shows Mr. MacLeish's willingness to engage in purely emotional persuasion for a good cause. In context, Mr. MacLeish seemed to be speaking of fascism as a choice Americans would make for America, and his prescriptions were for a workers' theatre which would combat fascism at home. This tendency to look upon the impending struggle as a quest for men's loyalties predominates during the mid-thirties. It is not until the end of the decade that he clearly advocates war.²

Hence, The Fall of the City (1937) symbolically depicts a dictator's victory over the emotions and loyalties of a once-

¹Archibald MacLeish, "Theatre Against War and Fascism," New Theatre, II (August, 1935), 3; reprinted as "A Question of Audience," A Time to Speak, p. 72.

²The Secret Diary of Harold Ickes (New York, 1954), III, 209; also Archibald MacLeish, "Post-War Writers and Pre-War Readers," New Republic, CII (June 10, 1940), 789-790.

free people; although the play exhorts citizens to resist, it is not altogether clear whether Mr. MacLeish means spiritual or physical resistance. Air Raid (1938), on the other hand, deals with similar material, but in an explicit and literal combat situation. The tendency in Mr. MacLeish's journalism, as in these two plays, was clearly toward open advocacy of war with Germany and Japan, although he may have been some time in realizing this trend in his own thinking. With his well-known article, "The Irresponsibles,"¹ which in effect exhorts American writers to get behind the New Deal's war mobilization, Mr. MacLeish drew fire from a number of liberal writers,² since most of them mistrusted the social effects of a major war. Mr. MacLeish, though recognizing the need for domestic social progress which would require peace, held to the ideal of a "future" democracy which would realize the degree of social justice not yet afforded in capitalist society. His political writing was committed to support democracy and free will, while opposing fascism.

A. The Fall of the City: An Allegory for Radio

The Fall of the City: A Verse Play for Radio was

¹Archibald MacLeish, "The Irresponsibles," Nation, CL (May 18, 1940), 618-623; reprinted in A Time to Speak, pp. 103-21.

²

Burton Rascoe, "The Tough-Muscle Boys of Literature," The American Mercury, LI (November, 1940), 369-474.

performed live at New York City's Armory¹ from 7:00 to 7:30 PM, Eastern Standard Time, April 11, 1937, over the CBS Network. Production was under Irving Reis, director of the Columbia Workshop, and the cast included Orson Wells as Voice of the Announcer and Burgess Meredith as Voice of the Orator. This play, like Air Raid, was produced before the publication of a printed text.

The half-hour play is continuous, without change in scene or apparent pauses in the action. No character is given a name, but instead is designated by class or function, as most characters in Panic were. The crowd or mob situations in both this play and Air Raid strongly resemble the crowd scenes of Panic. There is in all three plays the same mob confusion, a few unindividuated leaders or prestige figures, and the same use of individual voices in an attempted choral effect. The cast of The Fall of the City is composed of Director, Announcer, Dead Woman, First Messenger, Orator, Second Messenger, Priest, General, five Voices of Antiphonal Chorus, citizens, dancers, priests, soldiers, etc. Whereas the common people of Panic were depicted with warmth and respect, The Fall of the City has a certain tone of contempt for their intelligence and mob passions; Air Raid, however, restores some of the sympathy and pathos in an understanding portrayal of the people's

¹Gilbert Seldes, review of The Fall of the City, Scribner's Magazine, 101 (June, 1937), 62.

ignorance about the new phenomenon of aerial bombing.

The Fall of the City is said to have a historical setting--Montezuma's city, Tenochtitlan¹--and occurs in an ancient time. But the printed text has nothing in the program directions nor the specific allusions to place and time which would give this information; one finds it outside the text.² The use of swords and spears, as well as religious rites, suggests an ancient time, but the imagination is given much leeway for generalities. This play harkens back to earlier MacLeish works based on legend, but dependence on history is minimized to a few generalized details. It is enough to know that the situation is historical so we can learn from past history, as people are often asked to do. The images are slightly reminiscent of the Frazer legends in The Pot of Earth; the naive citizens act much like those walking in MacLeish's Garden of Eden (Nobodaddy) or watching the electric billboard in Times Square (Panic). But the effects now are wholly audial.

Moral purpose dominates the entire play. MacLeish tries to convert people to anti-Fascism, discourage a hitherto passive indifference to fascism's geographic remoteness, and to accomplish the effect through the immediate shock of a sound performance in living rooms all over America. Journalists

¹Donald Hall, "On Being a Poet in the Theatre," Horizon, II (January, 1960), 54.

²Colin Campbell, p. 182; also, Ruth Lechlitrer, "Written to be Heard, not Seen," The New York Herald Tribune Books, June 20, 1937, p. 4.

covering the performance and noting Orson Wells' participation casually mentioned the young actor's recent triumph in the radio production of H. G. Wells' The War of the Worlds,¹ which had unintentionally convinced people that an invasion of Martians was actually happening. Mr. MacLeish's task was to convince Americans of the reality of a fascist threat, and the general plot line of the "invasion" in The Fall of the City and Air Raid resembled the situation of H. G. Wells's prototype.

The Fall of the City utilizes the devices of the medieval debat (in modern dress, the Town Meeting), for speakers represent abstract intellectual positions which in themselves are clearly perceived as good or evil. The Orator represents supine moral indifference dressed in the language of modern liberalism and "passivism," the Priest is other-worldliness turning its back on tangible suffering, the General is the voice of prudence cautioning preparation and defense in the tone of a Boy Scout Manual, and the dictator is literally depersonalized into a symbol of fascism revealed as pure privation. Of all principal characters, only the Studio Manager and Announcer keep their stage realism, and theirs is functional in ways that pertain to their jobs.

The "orotund and professional"² Voice of the Studio Director announces the resurrection from death of a woman,

¹Orrin E. Dunlap, "Exploring in Drama," New York Times, October 30, 1938, Section IX, p. 12.

²Archibald MacLeish, The Fall of the City, p. 3.

which a large crowd expects to witness sharply at noon (the punctuality of radio reaches even to the supernatural). She has already risen thrice at this time on previous days, and the crowd expects her to finally say something today. From the crowd's motion and reports, the Announcer tells of her appearance, but he cannot see her himself. This qualified presentation of a supernatural phenomenon has antecedents in Nobodaddy where god's appearance is often referred to, often doubted, without being experienced by an eyewitness during the performance itself. Something of the same situation exists in the appearance of Helen of Troy in "Our Lady of Troy," when by turns Faust and other witnesses take a believing and an unbelieving attitude toward the validity of the apparition. In much more subtle fashion, The Fall of the City gives alternatives for those who believe in miracles and those who don't. The on-location announcer has a stationary platform near the cabinet ministers, an elite who apparently are cut off from view as the announcer is.

The voice of the Dead Woman is heard, first in self-conscious lines reminiscent of the dying woman in The Pot of Earth, and then she speaks the prophecy which she claims not to understand herself:

The city of masterless men
 Will take a master.
 There will be shouting then:
 Blood after!¹

¹Ibid., p. 7.

She disappears, and the narrator reminds the audience of the ancient significance of prophecies from the grave.

Small wonder they feel fear.
 Before the murders of the famous kings--
 Before imperial cities burned and fell--
 The dead were said to show themselves and speak.
 When dead men came disaster came. Presentiments
 That let the living on their beds sleep on
 Woke dead men out of death and gave them voices.
 All ancient men in every nation knew this.¹

Individual voices "over the crowd" are repeating the prophecy antiphonally when the first Messenger appears. In dimeter he announces that a conqueror is approaching. The Messenger claims a mandate to tell the people this news, but keeps its origin purposely vague:

I am to tell you. . . .
 It was laid on my shoulders
 By shall and by shan't
 That standing by day
 And staying by night
 Were not for my lot
 Till I came to the sight of you.²

This formula, which is repeated later by the second messenger, suggests that an abstract power or fate has commissioned the messenger; he apparently has not been sent by the conqueror (how could he, if the conqueror is--nothing?).

People crowd around the ministers, one of whom addresses them as The Orator (Burgess Meredith):

¹Ibid., pp. 8-9.

²Ibid., pp. 10-11.

What is the surest defender of liberty?
Is it not liberty?

A free people resists by freedom:
Not locks! Not blockhouses!

Those who win by the spear are the spear-
toters.

And what do they win? Spears! What else
is there?

If their hands let go they have nothing
to hold by.

They are not more free than a paralytic
propped against a tree is.

Nevertheless my friends there is a weapon!
Weakness conquers!

Against chainlessness who breaks?

Against wall-lessness who vaults?

Against forcelessness who forces?

There is a weapon my friends.
Scorn conquers!¹

The Announcer breaks in to improve the vraiseemblance of the
situation by describing the crowd's festive mood, and the
Orator continues:

There is a weapon.
Reason and truth are that weapon.

Let this conqueror come!
Show him no hindrance!
Suffer his flag and his drum!
Words . . . win!²

Carried away by the crowd's ovation, the Announcer proclaims
"a great speech" and describes the people taking out their
picnic lunches: "bread in their fists."³ Even the dullest
members of a radio audience would realize that the Orator's

¹Ibid., pp. 13-15.

²Ibid., p. 16.

³Ibid., pp. 16-17.

speech is utter nonsense; all but they might realize that Mr. MacLeish has set up a straw man. Yet the announcer's approval of the reduxio ad absurdum--and worse, his subsequent oscillation from one opposed opinion to another--constitute his greatest dramatic weakness. He seems only slightly less brainless than the mob. The subtle verbal ironies Mr. MacLeish injects into his speeches do not rescue him from implausibility. The equally implausible orator may be speaking allegorically about abstract Fascism rather than about a real military dictator, but since the allegory is finally clarified only at the end of the play, the allegory (if any) in the Orator's speech would be lost on a listening audience.

The Second Messenger appears reciting the "By shall and by shan't"¹ formula and adds new information about the conqueror:

Fame is his sword.
 He brings his own enemy!
 He baggages with him
 His closest antagonist--
 His private opposer.
 And he's knocking him down
 In every town square. . . .
 And the people are shouting
 Flowers him flinging
 Music him singing. . . .
 No man to conquer
 Yet as a conqueror
 Marches he forward. . . .
 Soon to descend on you!²

¹Ibid., pp. 18-20.

²Ibid.

The speech hints at the foe's spiritualized abstractness and at the subjectivity--familiar from Panic--in men's fatalistic, suicidal wish to be conquered.

The people begin questioning the minister's idea of "Freedom" and claim they have been sold out. The Announcer reports the new feeling sympathetically. The crowd gets out of control, but is assuaged by the Voices of the Priests coming from the pyramid. Their hypnotic litany, a variation of the Orator's speech, emphasizes an other-worldly attitude:

Let evil be overcome by the coming over
over of evil:
Your hearts shall be elsewhere.
Turn to your gods rememberers.¹

The Announcer is again impressed. The crowd begins a serpentine dance and then storms the pyramid under the leadership of a young girl.

The General gets the crowd's attention by haranguing the priests with some of the same arguments McGafferty used against the bankers in Panic:

THE VOICE OF THE GENERAL

You are foolish old men.

You ought to be flogged for your
foolishness.

Your grandfathers died to be free
And you--you juggle with freedom!

You thought you were safe in your
liberties!

You thought you could always quibble!

¹Ibid., p. 22.

Plain fools or were bred to it--
 Brood of the servile races
 Born with the hang-dog face. . . .¹

These lines recall McGafferty's argument on freedom in Panic which had utilized the images "hang" and "hog" to describe the timid bankers' reluctance to use freedom in the service of the common good. The General's next argument, however, turns slightly away from the worship of an authoritarian hero the crowd in Panic had often expressed. The General says:

There's nothing in this world worse--
 Empty belly or purse or the
 Pitiful hunger of children--
 Than doing the Strong Man's will!

The free will fight for their freedom.
 They're free men first. They feed
 Meager or fat but as free men,
 Everything else comes after--²

Mr. MacLeish's admiration for this authoritarian hero is apparent, for this general is like the last of God's messengers in his function of *raisonneur* explaining the spiritualized ideals for which the citizens ought to fight. The people's tragedy is that they do not listen to his advice.

Bridges and buildings on the outskirts are burning, and deserters pour into the city. They throw their bows, plumes, and spear-handles onto bonfires. The citizens editorialize on their own weakness in the thinnest verbal irony:

¹Ibid., pp. 26-27.

²Ibid., p. 27.

The city is doomed! . . .
 Let the conqueror have it. It's his!
 The age is his! It's his century!
 . . . demands a made-up mind.
 The conqueror's mind is decided on
 everything.

His doubt comes after the dead or never.

He knows what he wants for his want's
 what he knows.

He's one man: we are but thousands!

Who can defend us from one man?

Freedom's for fools:
 Force is the certainty!

Freedom has eaten our strength and
 corrupted our virtues!

Men must be ruled!

Fools must be mastered!

Rigor and fast
 Will restore us our dignity!

Chains will be liberty!¹

The "last defenders whirl from the streets like wild leaves
 on a wind: the square scatters them."² Down a broad, empty
 street with the sun at this back the awesome conqueror appears
 alone in armor. As people shield their eyes from the glare,
 he "mounts by the pyramid--stamps on the stairway--turns--
 His arm rises--his visor opening. . . ." ³ All have their
 eyes downward except the Announcer, who reports:

¹ Ibid., pp. 29-30.

² Ibid., p. 30.

³ Ibid., p. 32.

There's no one at all! . . .

No one! . . .

The helmet is hollow!

The metal is empty! The armor is empty. I tell you. . . .

They don't see! They lie on the paving. They lie in the
Burnt spears: the ashes of arrows. They lie there. . . .
They don't see or they won't see. They are silent. . . .

The people invent their oppressors: they wish to believe
in them

They wish to be free of their freedom: released from
their liberty:--

The long labor of liberty ended! They lie there!¹

The people shout with happiness: "The city of masterless men
has found a master! The city has fallen!" and the Announcer
repeats the statement of fact in a flat voice.²

The lines of development from Panic to The Fall of the City are clear. The same unenlightened, fearful mob on Times Square appears in a quasi-historical setting to illustrate the alternatives in a new contemporary social crisis. The common motivation of the two groups is the fear of death and of themselves in the free use of their human powers. Whereas a single character, McGafferty, assumed much of the crowd's burden of fear in Panic, the crowd in The Fall of the City takes on a much larger share of it than the Times Square Crowd had. The author appears to share this fear of death, if it be death through slavery, but he is also opposed to any course of action which robs man of freedom as the General defines it.

The rhetoric, heavily dependent on the prosody of Gerard Manley Hopkins, and antiphonal effects of the crowd

¹Ibid.

²Ibid., p. 33.

speeches are virtually the same in both plays. The Fall of the City propounds a theme almost identical to that of Panic: that man's feeling of helplessness, indeed even the physical manifestations of a social problem, are internal crises of the mind which can be solved by a change in the attitudes of individuals.

But there are notable changes in dramatic emphasis. The balance between elements of classical and morality drama shifts in favor of the morality play tradition. While there are such classical holdovers as the Cassandra-like prophetess's warning and the Messengers' vague appeal to commands of fate, an abstract struggle of moral forces is in complete charge of the action of the play. Symbolic elements, similar to the conventions of "mass drama" noted in Panic, now crowd out individuated characterization altogether. The effect is more unified, perhaps in the interest of simplicity and bold theme which Mr. MacLeish thought necessary for radio drama. Yet there are traces of the authoritarian hero McGafferty in the Conqueror, who significantly proves to be a mirage. The General, whose brief speech synthesizes McGafferty's character and early attitudes, shows the author's declining interest in a protagonist with a strong ego sympathetically portrayed.

The great structural weakness is the lack of significant conflict, an equally serious but also less apparent problem in Panic. In that play a clearly identifiable hero struggled with the bankers and the crowd and then gave up before the

climax of the play. In The Fall of the City, there is much excitement over the external situation, but there are no real antagonists until the General's brief show of strength just before the end of the play. The citizens have given up struggle at the beginning, and each act merely intensifies their predicament while reinforcing them in their original ignorance and passivity. The audience is given little cause to expect a turn in the action. There had been some degree of dramatic conflict in earlier plays; Mr. MacLeish's abandonment of this sine qua non of theatre marks the beginning of his trend toward the kind of documentary writing which would dominate his radio productions during the '40's.

The narrator functions as a reporter whose judgments of the action are as fluid and unsubstantial as the things he sees. Through most of the action, Mr. MacLeish allows him only slight liberty to editorialize, mainly through verbal ironies which are too subtle for a listening audience. Until the end when he openly gives the author's message, he simply absorbs and communicates the crowd's enthusiasms. He is, perhaps, in character as a network announcer inasmuch as he must "report" only what he knows would get past the eye of a vigilant station manager; yet in this role, considering the high proportion of lines he has, he is not characterized strongly enough to be interesting. He has the strongest lines of the play--those which are lyrically descriptive. His lack of commitment to the author's value judgments, which seem to

be the real business of the play, provides what dramatic tension there is exclusive of that tension in the situation which is cleared up by the surprise ending.

Allegory crops up throughout the play. Because it is mixed with realistic action and left unexplained until the end, a listening audience would probably miss it. That is, the audience could justifiably interpret the play as a frantic, literal call to arms, whereas Mr. MacLeish, if his concluding arguments are any index, apparently wanted no more than to inspire renewed belief in the heritage of democracy and personal freedom, belief which in itself would bring victory in the ideological (or emotional) struggle against the privation of these qualities--Fascism. The confusion of allegory with literal action in this most allegorical of Mr. MacLeish's plays, points up his unwillingness to leave the realistic tradition very far behind in his dramatic writing. Mr. MacLeish may have understood his confused handling of the allegory because the next play, Air Raid, has none.

The General is brought on as antagonist to the crowd, the Conqueror enters climactically, and the symbolism is finally explained all within the closing minutes of the play. It is possible that Mr. MacLeish was caught for time and had to make things happen before the end of the half-hour program. This play begins as slowly as the over-all pace of the earlier plays, which are all slow-moving, but its increase in momentum is continuous after the first half until the play actually

paces to its ending. The climax built on situation alone--the deliberate, mounting suspense resolved into a surprise ending--is a hallmark of melodrama. Other features of radio melodrama are the Announcer's over-enthusiastic descriptions and the reliance on sound effects including music. All these qualities persist, and some are intensified, in Air Raid.

As usual, the reactions of commentators were mixed. The most notable reactions came from the star of the show and the author himself during the backstage party at CBS, as reported by Ruth Lechlitner many years later:

Orson confided to me that he considered MacLeish "greater than Shakespeare." MacLeish himself--gentle, cordial, self-effacing--chatted with us about his conviction that poetry could be brought to a wide audience through the medium of radio, and urged some of us to try our hand at verse-plays for radio broadcasting.

In her review of the play for The New York Herald Tribune, Miss Lechlitner observed that the lines in the radio broadcast had seemed rushed; reading the printed text afterwards, she found that the narrator's lines, which are concretely descriptive, had stuck in her memory, but that the other characters' lines were generally abstract and unmemorable.² Yet there was general agreement that The Fall of the City was vastly superior to the poor quality of entertainment available

¹Ruth Lechlitner, "Anti-War and Anti-Fascism," The Carleton Miscellany, VI (Winter, 1965), 81.

²Ruth Lechlitner, "Written to be Heard, Not Seen," p. 4.

on radio at that time.¹

In a review published six years after the play,² Randal Jarrell called attention to its lack of dramatic conflict and significant action. Its dogged voluntarism he saw as

an extraordinary case of arrested development, a survival from an almost extinct past; there is something consciously neo-primitive about his eager adoption of the optimistic voluntarism of frontier days, when . . . plenty of people thought that you can if you think you can; that the world is what we make it; that there's no limit. This is as far as possible from any tragic view of life, from the point of view of any great dramatist--who is, necessarily, a specialist on limits; who knows that the world is, at a given moment, what we find it; who understands well enough to accept, with composure even, the inescapable conditions of existence.³

Jarrell thought the play "curiously partial and shallow and oratorical," representing "a positively political view of life"⁴ which is "the specious organization of a fallacy."⁵ The two levels of meaning in the play--the literal or Aztec level and the topical or allegorical level--both seemed arbitrarily and inaccurately portrayed. And the two levels of reality are never joined. At the literal level, there was little in the play which portrayed the true customs, feelings, and mentality of the non-industrialized culture of the Aztecs.

¹Gilbert Seldes, Review of The Fall of the City; also see other reviews mentioned in ftn. 1, page 259 of this chapter.

²Randall Jarrell, "The Fall of the City," Sewanee Review, LI (April, 1943), 267-280.

³Ibid., p. 276.

⁴Ibid., p. 277.

⁵Ibid., p. 278.

The allegory of modern fascism in the topical application of the story seemed equally absurd because Mr. MacLeish, in Jarrell's opinion, had ignored social and economic facts of modern fascism. The crowning absurdity for Jarrell was Mr. MacLeish's portrayal of the conqueror as a mere state of mind of the people (the empty armor), when it seemed obvious that in the contemporary world an oppressor and the socio-economic facts he exploits are quite concrete and real.

Jarrell concluded:

I believe that, on a fairly low level, it is an effective play. . . . But the point of view from which the play is written, the "message" of the play, seems to me far worse than the play itself. A critic, as critic, can say that the poet's analysis seems mistaken, his point of view unfortunate; but speaking as a private citizen, the critic may want to be a good deal blunter. A philosopher I know once lent a copy of Alice and Wonderland to an old lady; when she returned it he asked, "Well, what did you think of it?" She murmured: "What a lie!"¹

B. Air Raid: A Documentary Melodrama on War Technology

Air Raid is a simplified, realistic reworking of the familiar situation: attack and conquest, this time by air. Again, "belief" is a primary element of conflict--the problem being whether the citizens of a country have imagination enough to believe the enemy's capability for the new means of devastation by air attack. Again the mob proves unequal to the demands of their changing environment. The Announcer, by

¹Ibid., p. 280.

his on-the-scene presence and high proportion of lines given to him, holds the action together. An authority figure, this time a Sergeant, is introduced briefly in the last half of the play. The speeches, particularly in the climactic last half of the play, are more terse than those of The Fall of the City, and the text appears to be as much as one-third shorter than the play of the previous year.

Air Raid was first performed from 10:00 to 10:30 PM, October 27, 1938, at New York Station WABC and over CBS Network. William N. Robson directed the Columbia Workshop cast which included Frank Gallop, Agnes Moorhead, and Ed Latimer. The cast is listed in the familiar abstract way: Studio Announcer, Announcer, several women, men, boys, girls, Old Woman, Singing Woman, Sick Woman, and Sergeant. This play is a further approximation of the Wellsian "War-of-the-Worlds" situation because it literally portrays an attack from the air with a technological realism appropriate to the age of science. The dedication of the printed text is "For my Wife, my Mother, my Sister, and my Daughter who do not need--not yet--to fear the sky."¹ The play's historical precedent is most likely the Nazi bombings of unsuspecting villagers during the Spanish Civil War. This play and The Fall of the City were later regarded as prophetic warnings when Prague and Vienna fell to the Nazis and when air attacks became commonplace during World War II.

¹Archibald MacLeish, Air Raid: A Verse Play for Radio (New York: 1938), p. v.

The play opens with an announcement that it is ten seconds past two "precisely." Through word pictures the Studio Director takes the audience across European countries, noting the change in time and the approach of early morning; the effect is similar to the temporalspatial effects of MacLeish's poem, "You, Andrew Marvell,"¹ which depicts air flight. The Studio Director takes his radio audience "behind the border" of a small, unnamed village near some foothills in Europe, announcing finally: "you are there."² The description has some echoes of T. S. Eliot's rhythms from "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock":

You watch from kitchens for the bloody signs:
You watch for breaking war above the washing
on the lines.³

The Studio Director has sarcastically reminded the audience that "civilization" has gentled us/ . . . to take the dying and the wounds without the wars "⁴ in undeclared wars during times of formal peace.

The burden of the Announcer's early statements and those of the villagers at 7:00 in the morning is to show that these are ordinary people not unlike the members of the audience. Regional and cultural differences hardly exist in this pastoral

¹Archibald MacLeish, "You, Andrew Marvell, Collected Poems, pp. 60-61.

²Archibald MacLeish, Air Raid, p. 7; cf. T. S. Eliot, The Complete Poems and Plays 1909-1950, p. 3, ll. 1-2; p. 5, ll. 2-3; and passim.

³Ibid., p. 6.

⁴Ibid.

setting; e.g.,

THE ANNOUNCER

It was wind we heard in the valley cedars.
 Sounds rise to this roof--
 Hoof of stabled horses: leaves:
 Even the speaking of sleepers rises

Many sleep in the one house here:
 They work in the fields: sleep in the villages. . . .

 The women keep the town between.
 They keep it now: the tenement's full of them--
 A four-story building of women:
 They're filling the court with their quick
 talk:
 They call back and forth from the windows. . . .

It smells of a summer morning anywhere:
 It smells of seven o'clock in the morning in
 Any town they water dust in.
 Towns are all the same in summer.
 A man can remember the name of his own in
 Any city after the water carts.¹

The villagers discuss commonplaces such as births, marriages, crops, weather, and death, but they keep getting back to the theme of war rumors. These patches of discussion are resolved with assurance that (a) war is too silly to take seriously and (b) in times past the armies have always either by-passed the town or respected civilians' rights under temporary occupation.

Rumors of an air attack leave the citizens cold, for these are beyond their experience. Their arguments for passivity sound far more convincing than those of the Orator and Priest in The Fall of the City because the villagers are understandably and pathetically unaware of modern war technology.

¹Ibid., pp. 7-8 and 13.

whereas the leaders in The Fall of the City were guilty of crass ignorance in their support of ridiculous idealisms. The villagers of Air Raid are usually speaking of concrete things, and their concerns elicit audience recognition and sympathy. Moreover, the audience expects less knowledge from ordinary people than from elite leadership.

Certain MacLeish motifs are casually introduced. Psychological differences between men and women recall the arguments in The Happy Marriage and The Pot of Earth:

GIRLS' VOICES

When will she marry?

She won't marry:

He's always planning for something or other:

He's always fearing or hoping or something.

They never seem to know it's now--

Men don't: women sometimes do.

Life' more like itself for us than

Them. They're always meddling with it--

Always making life come true. . . . 1

.

THE GIRL'S VOICE

Tell me we're happy. No but say we are.

How can I know we are unless you tell me?

How can a woman know the world is good?

Which is the world and which is her and which is

Things she's known for sure that never
happened?

She can't tell. She can't and be a woman.

Can a cupful of well-water tell you the taste
of the well-water.²

Women's voices discuss death in terms typical of MacLeish's

¹Ibid., pp. 9-10; cf. Archibald MacLeish, "The Happy Marriage," Collected Poems, pp. 12, 13, and 14.

²Archibald MacLeish, Air Raid, p. 18; cf. "The Pot of Earth," Collected Poems, pp. 219-220 and 223.

works, notably The Hamlet of A. MacLeish and Panic:

WOMEN'S VOICES

Talking of wars as though to die were something!
 Death's the one thing every creature does
 And none does well I've seen--the one¹ thing
 Weak and foolish every creature does.

The next lines of this speech are also reminiscent of The Orator in The Fall of the City. The women say:

Only boys and men like boys believe in it.

It's sticking to this giddy world that's
 hard--
 Not turning limp and letting loose and
 tumbling.²

But in this passage the thought is improved through concreteness and is plausibly appropriate to the characters.

The use of antiphonal voices, which Mr. MacLeish experimented with throughout the decade, finally reaches dramatic effectiveness. Voices appear to be coming from various places in the tenement area. Each voice or group of voices carries its own bit of action forward in irregular alternating sequence, much like the counterpoint action in Elmer Rice's Street Scene. MacLeish antiphonal effects need summary.

The Old Woman assures the villagers against the ravages of war on the basis of her experience. Meanwhile, The Boy's Voice calls "Harry! Harry!" etc. at various times. Another Boy's

¹Archibald MacLeish, Air Raid, p. 11; cf. "The Hamlet of A. MacLeish," Collected Poems, pp. 236, 338, and 249.

²Archibald MacLeish, Air Raid, p. 11; cf. Panic, pp. 43, 86-91, and passim.

Voice asks his mother (The Sick Woman) questions about the war; although she attempts to assure him out of his scepticism, he shows that from his reading and conversations he has gained a better awareness of the effects of bombing than the older villagers have. In the background a Singing Woman is practicing "a high, pure scale" which resounds along with a tinny piano at various times in the play. Finally, two young lovers, who were probably the subject of the Girls' Voices' gossip, have a conversation, fragments of which recur:

A YOUNG MAN'S VOICE

Are you there? Are you still there?
I dreamed you had gone. Never go.

A GIRL'S VOICE (close: low)

Say we're happy. Tell me that we're
happy

THE YOUNG MAN'S VOICE

Stay as you are: do not move:
Do not ever move: stay there:
Stay with this sunlight on your
shoulders . . .

The total effect of all these groups is difficult to convey in summary. At first they punctuate and interrupt the thematic "argument" going on about the war, illustrating the everyday life of the village. And then when the bombing occurs at the end of the play, they occur as a link between the life of the village before and after the bombing, between life and death.

Through the sirens at the finale we hear:

¹Archibald MacLeish, Air Raid, p. 17; cf. ibid., p. 36.

THE BOY'S VOICE
Harry! Harry! Harry!

(The diminishing music
note again--level--long.)

THE VOICE OF THE YOUNG MAN
Stay as you are: do not move:
Do not ever move . . .

(The diminishing music note again.
Over it the voice of the Singing
Woman rising in a slow screaming
scale of the purest agony broken at
last on the unbearably highest note.
The diminishing drone of the planes
fades into actual silence.)¹

The vocalist's scale and the drone of the planes, here at the conclusion and elsewhere in the play, are the most prominent sound effects in Air Raid.

Lines which are disconnected insofar as they present separate parts of the action are drawn together at the end of the play to illustrate how the separate individuals--lovers, a vocalist, children, their mothers--all share a bond in suffering a common death. The brevity of the spoken lines and the other sounds conveys at once the people's common suffering because each person's function has been clarified earlier in the play through exposition. The emphatic, blasting note of the Singing Woman, together with the recurrent scales she sings during the play, could be a piece of personal symbolism which ties the play together from beginning to end; Mr. MacLeish's wife is the first mentioned of the four women to whom

¹Ibid., pp. 35-36.

the play is dedicated, in the hopes that they will "not need--not yet--to fear the sky," and Mrs. MacLeish was a professional singer. It is impossible to prove whether so obvious an allusion was intended. Whether or not the author made this personal reference, the whole play and in particular its conclusion inspires the fear of death which was also an important motif in Panic and The Fall of the City.

The narrator's description of the planes is a felicitous combination of flat reporting and restrained lyricism. As the planes bank for their bombing and strafing run, the Announcer says:

We hear them: we can't see them.

We hear the shearing metal:
We hear the tearing air.

All we see is sun.

Sun: the hawk's ambush.

Their flight is from the sun.

They might be low: they might be
Well down--three thousand.

They're changing formation

they're banking
The whole flight is banking
Front wheeling to flank
Flank anchored and climbing
Climbing back into line. . . .

The line swung like a lariat!

They turn like stones on a strong:
They swing like steel in a groove:

They move like tools not men:
 You'd say there were no men:
 You'd say there were no men:
 You'd say they had no will but the
 Will of motor on metal. . . .¹

The Announcer's lines are composed of shorter phrases and lines than those of the Announcer in The Fall of the City. The convention of having the attacker come from the direction of the sun is the same as in The Fall of the City, and it fits into the practice of aerial tactics as well. Emphasis on the lack of free will is lighter in Air Raid than in the two previous plays, but the impersonal quality of modern war is still mentioned above in connection with the will. The audience is constantly reminded of the impersonal willessness of the situation by the Announcer's frequent references to the huge distances between attackers and victims. The women's final strategem is to wave their skirts so that the flyers will avoid bombing persons they recognize as women, but the flyers either do not see or do not care and bomb anyway. The Announcer apparently has no more knowledge of the effects of aerial attack than the people do, because he does not seek cover; in this respect he resembles his predecessor in The Fall of the City, who was similarly unenlightened until the end of the play.

A man whom the Announcer identifies as a police sergeant enters when the air raid siren sounds and explains in a "pompous," "shouting" voice what it means: that people should

¹Ibid., pp. 31-34

take shelter in the cellars. He is on the scene for several minutes before he is heard from again. This time he gives reasons for the order--after the women have already ignored it and just before the bombs start falling. As raissonneur, the Sergeant insists that an enemy who kills women may be as impersonal and unknowledgeable as the fates, or he may have malice toward life itself.

THE VOICE OF THE SERGEANT

It may have been thought: this enemy kills
women

Meaning to kill them! . . .

I say it may be thought

This enemy is not the usual enemy!

That this one is no general in a greatcoat
Conquering countries for the pride and praise:

That this one conquers other things than
countries! . . .

It may be thought that this one conquers life!

That life that won't be conquered can be killed!

That women are most life-like! That he kills them!

It may be as I say. It may be thought he
Makes his wars on women. . . . It is possible.¹

Those doing the thinking are the people's leaders, who have advised taking shelter. Mr. MacLeish comes just short of accusing the enemy of malice toward life by his use of an indirect method of interpreting the enemy's intentions:

"It may have been thought. . . ." Syntax resembles the Messenger's impersonal use of "it" in The Fall of the City, but fascism is now using real bullets and bombs and so can hardly

¹Ibid., p. 27.

be passed off as pure privation or the people's objectified wish to be dominated. Nevertheless, there is enough language of the old fatalism in the passage to allow the same kind of interpretation given to The Fall of the City: that the enemy attack expresses the phenomenon or "will" of impersonal fate.

Unlike the General in The Fall of the City, the police sergeant is not the lone antagonist to public folly. However, he has been supported weakly and tentatively by the arguments of A Boy arguing with The Sick Woman on the basis of what he has read. Hence, the Sergeant's argument is somewhat better reinforced than is The General's. The Sergeant is the primary authority figure typical of MacLeish's plays, but he acknowledges his remoteness from the source of authority.

THE VOICE OF THE SERGEANT

I do not say the order was expedient.
 I say it was issued. I do not account
 for orders.
 It is not my duty to account for orders.
 Nevertheless it was issued by men of
 experience:
 Persons of sound sense.¹

The Sergeant is both an interpreter of fate and, within a chain of command, a voice of authority; that is he performs the two functions which in the previous play were given to the Messengers and the General.

The development in Mr. MacLeish's interpreters of "fate" or "orders" over the last three plays is interesting. There

¹Ibid., p. 26.

is less mythological and literary allusiveness in the Sergeant's lines than in the Blind Man's (Panic) or the Dead Woman's (The Fall of the City). The Messengers of the latter play were a literary device, and the General gave advice but made no pretense of supernatural inspiration. The Sergeant's message in Air Raid is as commonplace as a public service radio announcement by the Armed Forces, yet it resembles the old literary allusiveness just enough to show that Mr. MacLeish was holding off a little from documentary realism. The process of development, from mystical interpreters like The Blind Man and the Messengers to the Sergeant find elaboration on the theme, "Orders is orders," suggests a shift in Mr. MacLeish's perspective: first there was a focus on radical politics, then on the common man in the ordinary democratic sense (the Dead Woman and the messengers were plebians whose interpretations were distinct from those of their leaders,) and finally the civil authority is seen to be the proper interpreter of the voice of destiny.

The bombing and strafing occur in the last two pages of script, accounting for no more than two or three minutes of action. The Announcer's description of the bird-like attackers is impressive, but its lyrical beauties need not be quoted. The antiphonal voices at the end have already been discussed; the screaming scale sung by The Singing Woman at the very end

was, in Ruth Lechlitner's estimation, "something not soon to be forgotten."¹

The critics showed interest in both radio plays, but more in The Fall of the City, perhaps because it is more obviously a literary play. In a Theatre Arts Monthly review of Air Raid, Hermine Rich Isaacs said:

An estimation of both plays is of no value at this stage; and to criticize the product of an artist who is himself helping to create the standards by which his art will be measured in the future is quite impossible.²

As usual, critics discussed Mr. MacLeish's language and current interests in subject matter. Mrs. Isaacs noted that listening audiences

must find that if the content of the script is at all stimulating it will lead listeners off along independent thoughts away from the lines of the drama.³

This remark calls attention to the increased utilitarian function of Mr. MacLeish's drama. By the time Air Raid was written, he had pared away nearly all literary allusiveness. This play seems to me to be more effective than the two previous plays because it has modest but clearly envisioned purposes which it fully achieves. If one chooses to call all three plays melodramas, this most effective one proves an often held thesis

¹Ruth Lechlitner, "When Women Fear the Sky," New York Herald Tribune Books, April 23, 1939, Sec. IX, p. 9.

²Hermine Rich Isaacs, "The Fall of Another City," Theatre Arts Monthly, XXIII (February, 1939), 149.

³Ibid.

that radio is a most appropriate medium for that genre. Mr. MacLeish had found his medium.

The journey out of the ivory tower led Mr. MacLeish to experiment with certain conventions of mass drama--namely the antiphonal use of an amorphous speaking crowd. He carried the experiment over into the radio dramas and has not developed it further in any significant way since Air Raid. As we shall see in the next chapter, this play marks the end of an era in the development of his dramatic style.

By narrowing the problems he would choose to deal with in drama, Mr. MacLeish moved away from personal philosophical concerns, internal character struggle, and the kind of literary expressionism he had begun experimenting with in the first two plays of the '30's. It is intriguing but futile to imagine how he might have developed if events of the day had not turned his mind toward journalistic literalism and a new tendency to view literature as communication. His drift toward clearly recognizable public themes and the changes in writing style to serve them were already apparent in Panic and in the poetry collection, Public Speech (1936). These changes show his versatility. It is also possible that, concomitant with what he saw as the needs of his times and of the American audience for moral direction, he was running dry of new literary inspiration at least for the time being.

Mr. MacLeish was truly in a phase of transition at the close of the '30's. It would be fifteen years before he would

try any dramatic writing as cerebral or "literary" as Panic. In the meantime, he was by 1939 well within the orbit of the Roosevelt Administration's ideology and policy. He was ready for an offer to become one of the Party's leading propagandists

CHAPTER VIII

DRAMATIZING A PUBLIC PHILOSOPHY: THE WAR YEARS

Mr. MacLeish's first of several public appointments came on June 11, 1938, just a few months before the broadcast of his play The Fall of the City. A professed liberal and long-time admirer of the New Deal, Mr. MacLeish became officially associated with it when it was already declining as a liberal force in American politics. At least this is the inference one may derive from Dwight MacDonald's assessment of Roosevelt's last eight years:

The "New Deal" ended in 1937, when three great turning points occurred: (1) the defeat of the "Little Steel" strike when the CIO foolishly relied on Roosevelt's support--and didn't get it--against the terrorism of the steel companies, a defeat which crippled the union movement until the outbreak of war caused a labor shortage; (2) the severe depression which began that fall and lasted until the war refloated the American economy, a depression which came about when Roosevelt, yielded to right-wing pressure, drastically cut down Government spending earlier in the year; (3) Roosevelt's "Quarantine the Aggressor" speech a few weeks after the first stock market break, in which he announced a prewar, interventionist policy. After 1937, with the exception of the Wages & Hours Act the following year, no more major social legislation was enacted. Maneuvering the country into the war (which was, of course, essential for America's national interests under a Capitalist system), preparing for war and then fighting the war--these made up the content of Roosevelt's policies in the last eight years of his life. By the time he died, he had emerged as the Commander-in-Chief,

the implacable executioner of the Enemy peoples (his last State document, appropriately enough, dealt with the necessity for punishing and controlling Japan for generations), the originator of the appalling "unconditional surrender" policy, which he forced on the reluctant Churchill at Casablanca. . . . In his last years, he had even grown cynically weary of the pretense of humane and progressive aims, declaring the New Deal was dead, and the Atlantic Charter not to be taken seriously.

Yet when he died, he was mourned as a great humanitarian and the Father of the common people. The myth was still intact. By this, we may measure the deterioration of our policies in the last two generations.¹

Although many historical commentators would not use such disparaging language as MacDonald does, they would agree that there was a shift in emphasis away from the New Deal's early years of social progressivism in about 1937. I have found nothing in Mr. MacLeish's writings from this time through the war years which shows that he was aware of the change. If he was aware, his rhetoric tended to blur the dichotomy between the liberal and authoritarian elements in the New Deal while he served it.

Mr. MacLeish's usefulness to the Roosevelt Administration's military aims may have seemed obvious by virtue of his two radio plays which had been unsolicited contributions to national morale in the military build-up of the late '30's.

¹Dwight MacDonald, "The Death of F.D.R.," Memories of a Revolutionist: Essays in Political Criticism (New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1959), pp. 286-287; cf. Edmund Wilson, "Postscript of 1957," The American Earthquake: A Documentary of the Twenties and Thirties (Anchor Books; New York: Doubleday & Company, 1964), pp. 566-72; also, Louis M. Hacker and Benjamin B. Kendrick, The United States Since 1865 (Fourth Edition; New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1949), pp. 576-82.

Mr. MacLeish's devotion to the New Deal as he understood it was not only ideological, but personal. It is well known, for instance, that, during a twelve-year friendship with Felix Frankfurter, he had idolized that true liberal, whose Occasional Papers he edited in 1939.¹ His eulogies of Frankfurter are mainly personal, and the values he tended to symbolize in Frankfurter were easily transferable to the protective father symbol, F.D.R. The poet who had found his sustenance in absorbing and recreating the works of famous literary men was, after twenty years of continuous experimentation, constantly being regarded by critics as a "poet of promise," but he had never been whole-heartedly accepted by any major critic or literary school. During the late '30's and the '40's, he could find sustenance in the public philosophy of the Democratic Party. His new identity at times even allowed him to feel that he had a major part in shaping that philosophy.

The development of Mr. MacLeish's hero-worship can be traced over a number of years. In a review of Conquistador in 1932, Lincoln Kirsten had observed:

. . . MacLeish's religion is the hero's belief in the possibility of a hero. . . . To have written Conquistador is to have erected a monument to the

¹Felix Frankfurter, Law and Politics; Occasional Papers, 1913-1938, edited by Archibald MacLeish and E. F. Fritchard, Jr., with a foreward by Mr. MacLeish (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1939); also see "Portrait of a Living Man," A Time to Speak, pp. 165-175.

possibility of heroism. It is an act of faith in the belief of ¹poetry and human action, on a grand scale, again.

To compare works of the earlier period simply in terms of the poet's "morale," we can see the basis for Morton D. Zabel's claim that Mr. MacLeish's "gospels" were part of a "search for a faith and a father."² Despite the poet's attitude in Conquistador that all action is futile (a valid interpretation, as we have seen from Tate's analysis), the poem expressed an abiding desire to find a worthy exemplar of heroic action. The will to believe is the first and largest step toward belief.

Works after Conquistador show an intensification of this desire and of the scope of belief once an object for it should be found. Rejection of science in the person of Einstein indicates that the imagined person is as important as the values he is thought to represent. MacLeish's Hamlet shows a loss of satisfaction with the poet-hero as Byronic magician of the imagination, such as was expressed in the image of Faust of "Our Lady of Troy," a product of MacLeish's earliest literary idealism. Then in the '30's there is a shift in morale from the utter disillusionment with social machinery and technocracy in Panic to the belief in heroic action of the collective

¹Lincoln Kirsten, "Arms and Men," a review of Conquistador, Hound and Horn, V (1931-1932), 491 and 492; cited from Viola Wendt, p. 188.

²Morton Dauwen Zabel, "The Poet on Capital Hill (Part II)," Partisan Review, VIII (March-April, 1941), 144.

"tragic" situations of The Fall of the City and Air Raid. Finally, belief in a heroic nation under a heroic leader gives cause for optimism which the poet had not known since the lyrics of pleasant hillsides in Tower of Ivory. Zabel has said as much of Mr. MacLeish's politico-literary activities as they had developed by 1941:

Next to humanitarianism and nationalism, there is no faith so convenient, impressive and heartening as faith in a war.¹

R. P. Blackmur had noted in 1934 that the long "heroic" poems, The Hamlet of A. MacLeish and Conquistador, seemed "unintegrated, fragmentary, disjunctive, and, as wholes, failing of the purpose they manifest so well in detail."² He laid the cause of Mr. MacLeish's inability to judge when his writing was "adequate to the poem he has conceived and when it is adequate only to his private understanding."³ This opposition between "objective" and private meanings, between external and personalized reality, was, according to Blackmur, a result of:

the psychological and philosophical predicament of any sensitive young man, not committed to an authoritarian way of life, who yet pursues the theme of such a life. . . . In search of a personal salvation he finds something essentially not individual, not dis-

¹Ibid., p. 141.

²R. P. Blackmur, "Mr. MacLeish's Predicament," American Mercury, XXXI (April, 1934), 507.

³Ibid.

tinct, at all; he finds something, rather, of the lowest common denominator in which to immerse himself--in the pure rhetorical emotion of the "Hamlet" or in the oblivion of enthusiastic action of "Conquistador." Thus he finds refuge rather than salvation by securing attitudes without reference to contemporary life.

Mr. MacLeish seems to have consistently needed a refuge throughout his career, yet during the '30's--as many critics were noting signs of hope for his development as an artist--Mr. MacLeish's writing seemed to become more consistently rich in "reference to contemporary life."

Kenneth Burke adds clues to the mystery of MacLeish's development which, in a context of social analysis, are more considerate toward Mr. MacLeish than the devastating personal critiques by Blackmur and Zabel. In an article, "War, Response, and Contradiction," which was based on the MacLeish-Cowley debate,² appeared in Symposium during the '30's, and was then published as a chapter in The Philosophy of Literary Form, Burke ascribes the conflicts suffered by many authors to the contradictions inherent in Western industrial capitalism. He says that men of culture must verse themselves thoroughly in two contradictory "moralities":

The one prevailed largely in "glimpses," compensating by intensity for what it lacked in permanence, as earnest and uneasy young men, browsing about their local libraries in the indeterminate years before they had definitely settled down to "serious business," found opportunities and incentives to nibble at the

¹Ibid.

²New Republic, LXXVI (September 20, 1933), 159-161; Ibid., LXXVI (October 4, 1933), 214-216.

fringes of a humanistic, cultured way of life. They even tentatively encouraged in themselves such characteristics and interests and standards as would prepare them to be decent integers in a world so constructed. Here was the possibility of poetry, which they could find substantiated in the imagery of books, and at certain moments even dared think might attain its parallels in the architecture of the state.

However, the need of a counter-morality clearly made itself felt. For a morality is but a set of attitudes . . . which enable us the better to do the things we must do--and unless one happened to be supported by unearned increment from the capitalist structure, he found it imperative that he either cultivate the "capitalist virtues" or perish. As Veblen once neatly pointed out, opportunities to get ahead are likewise opportunities to fall behind--and though one may well ask himself whether the desire to triumph in the Scramble marks a very high cultural ideal, neither is it very "cultural" to find oneself edged further and further into the ditch.¹

As a thumbnail sketch of Mr. MacLeish's "esthetic" phase, which had lasted from 1912 into the '30's, and of his work with Fortune and then his later commitments to the power structure, this passage is adequate.

Burke goes on to contrast the artist's vocational experiences, in which "people got visions of noncompetitive . . . living," with those vocational ones, in which they had to "meet the conditions of the daily Scramble." He says the contradiction between the different experiences normally leads to "the artistic phenomenon generally and inappropriately designated a 'breach between art and life.'"² Mr. MacLeish's

¹Kenneth Burke, "War, Response, and Contradiction," The Philosophy of Literary Form (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1941), p. 247.

²Ibid., p. 248.

well-known ease in turning out copy for Henry Luce indicates his discipline in vocational morality, by which conditions of "economic combat necessarily silenced or stunted the noncommercial morality between the hours of nine and five."¹ MacLeish's works of the '30's, preoccupied as they were with such "serious" or vocational concerns as the betterment of society, allowed the responsible" or vocational habit of mind to grow upon him. According to Burke's schema, the "Faustian" split in MacLeish's artistic character had from the beginning been between "serious pursuits" and "dissipation."² We can see in the Yale poems (including "Our Lady of Troy") on through the "esthetic" phase that he had glorified the free and "lazy" use of imagination, yet his essays and public relations work of the late '30's and the '40's increasingly dwelt on themes of "responsibility" the artist must show toward the improvement of the social system generally, and then later, toward the pragmatic ends of the Administration with which he became identified. "Responsibility" began as an abstract social commitment and then became a personal loyalty to a leader whose social aims were felt to be clearer and more communicable than his own self-directed aims;

Mr. MacLeish's exhortations for greater "responsibility" on the part of artists began well before he was absorbed into

¹Ibid., pp. 248-249.

²The Dialogues of Mark Van Doren and Archibald MacLeish, p. 36.

the Roosevelt Administration, and they may have been the result of guilt over time wasted on "dissipation" in art which had not brought a sufficient return in social or personal artistic benefits. Accusations he made against "his own" generation of artists engaged in purposeless, negative, anti-social, or even "objective" portrayals of their society may in fact be a projection of guilt in having done these things himself. In his self-effacing manner, he has even admitted the charge.¹

Yet in the '30's he had lived with both the moralities described by Burke, since at that time "capitalism fed a capitalist morality and a morality beyond capitalism."² Burke explains the predicament in which MacLeish and others found themselves:

This dilemma has in particular exposed him to the purist attacks of all rationalist criticism (of either the neo-Humanist or the neo-Marxian kind) which would programmatically suppress one or another aspect of this duality by critical fiat. As regards certain superficial manifestations such demands can possibly be met: for instance, if a poet is sufficiently impressed by some new critical cannon, he might train himself to avoid the subject of Greek Isles and select the subject of workingmen instead. Or he can depict people "with or without will," depending upon which symbolic externalities the tastes of the season may deem more acceptable. But in the end, to a sharper eye, he will necessarily be found to symbolize the pattern of experience under which he was formed. At best, like the Lowlands painters, he will depict Calvary among windmills. Nor may it always be possible to say when the poet formed by capitalist contradictions is exemplify-

¹ Ibid.

² Burke, p. 249.

ing the acquiescent response and when the corrective one. When a wild animal grows heavier fur with the approach of winter, is it "resisting" the demands of the season or "acquiescing to" them?

The social system being what it is, Burke believes that "Essayistic exhortation" can be "consistent while the poetic is necessarily contradiction,"² for a poet is inclined toward paradoxical and tragic expression, but when he serves a Cause he must be the essayist or apologist making all things rational and consistent within its framework. By the '40's, Mr. MacLeish had become essayistic even in his poetry, and his consistency was concomitant with the rather singleminded goals of the Administration. His chosen role as liaison person between it and the community of artists and writers was particularly arduous at the beginning; he had to give up his private stock of contradictions as an artist and supply a rationale and coherence for the contradictions of the establishment he served. For this task he was the butt of artists' satire and disgust as he went about getting them to close ranks for the war effort. Long before most of his peers, he had committed himself to the Rooseveltian device of seeking peace by fighting for it. Once this principle was assumed, there was a new, unprecedented consistency in his life and writing.

I have dwelt upon Burke's essay because it probes deeply into the social causes of Mr. MacLeish's development. I have not even touched upon the thesis of Burke's essay, which must

¹Ibid., pp. 249-250.

²Ibid., p. 252.

be read entirely for the thesis to be understood. One application of the thesis, however, is that MacLeish had for a long time felt the need to see the First World War as a humane and ennobling pursuit. With such an attitude, he was not any more susceptible to war fever a second time than, say, Malcolm Cowley, who in the New Republic debate with Mr. MacLeish had wished to have the First World War portrayed in all its bestiality; MacLeish held off direct endorsement of war until 1940, probably (as Burke suggests) because he appreciated the bestial aspects of war. Within a year and a half, Mr. MacLeish had obtained wartime jobs in the Administration for many of his former opponents, including Malcolm Cowley.¹ It is noteworthy that Mr. MacLeish's major work of the War Years, the broadcast series entitled The American Story, is not an incitement to battle, as might have been expected from an author who was Director of the Office of War Information. This and the few other literary works Mr. MacLeish produced in the '40's seem rather to be his effort to rescue and restore some of the old vacational morality. Personal conflicts like those seen in other plays are reduced to a minimum as the poet manque, reconciling the vocational and vacational ways of life, turns toward an art which is socially acceptable for a man of his public station.

¹Colin Campbell, p. 199.

When Dr. Herbert Putnam, longtime Librarian of Congress, announced his resignation in June, 1938, the American Library Association appointed a committee to recommend candidates for the post to President Roosevelt. He disregarded their advice and appointed Archibald MacLeish, a choice which at first disappointed many vocal segments of the public. Congressmen who were asked to vote approval were unnecessarily suspicious of his "radical" past, or simply made the philistine assumption that no poet could be fit for public office. There was talk that Roosevelt was rewarding MacLeish for his early support of the New Deal and that Felix Frankfurter had recommended MacLeish simply out of friendship.¹ The most serious objections were that he (a) was not trained as a librarian, (b) had no administrative experience, and (c) was a communist sympathizer.²

In a short time MacLeish's performance dispelled all these fears. Whether his administrative training had come from experience as a lawyer, as a staff writer for Fortune, as Curator of the Nieman Collection, or from plain versatility, the fact is that he greatly improved the procedures and morale at the library of the Capitol. He set out to make it a resource for scholars, argued successfully before Congress for much larger appropriations, and simplified administrative

¹Wendt, pp. 445-446, citing Matthew Josephson, "Jurist-III," New Yorker, XVI (December 14, 1940), 34; see also "Panned Poet," Newsweek, XIII (June 13, 1939), 20.

²Ibid.

structure. He showed great imagination in setting up exhibits to illustrate little-known aspects of the American heritage, particularly in materials dealing with the early Republic and Latin America. His librarian's report at the end of five years service was the longest ever given by any Librarian of Congress.¹ Entitled "Reorganizing the Library of Congress," it clearly set the library in a new direction of development and won great praise from the press and from scholarly journals. Once again MacLeish had shown vigor and versatility in accomplishing a demanding task.

In the mounting struggle with fascism, MacLeish conceived the function of libraries to be a social force in promoting the truths of democracy. He was in effect applying the doctrine of ideological warfare which he had propounded in his radio play, The Fall of the City. Two essays published in 1939 and 1940 give his thoughts on the subject. "Libraries in the Contemporary Crises" suggests an antidote to the dual threat of communism and fascism:

We can either attempt to educate the people of this country--all the people of this country--to the value of the democratic tradition they have inherited, and so admit them to its enjoyment, or we can watch some of the people of this country destroy that tradition for all the rest.²

The nexus between education about ideals and the actual enjoy-

¹Newsweek, XVII (March 24, 1941), 52.

²Archibald MacLeish, "Libraries in the Contemporary Crisis," A Time to Speak, p. 126.

ment of opportunity is not explained, but Mr. MacLeish makes clear that, because there is not much time for schools to do the job and because librarians are more disinterested than those who control the mass media, then the educational task of democracy must rest mainly with librarians. Mr. MacLeish intensifies the feeling of crisis by citing statistics which show that an infinitesimal number of adults actually use public libraries. He thus recommends a crash program of public relations to get people to use the medium which will ultimately help them achieve their birthright. He displays the same pattern of concern he had voiced when entering the new medium of radio: the fear of not having an audience for a message which, by now, is unquestionably worthwhile.

"The Librarian and the Democratic Process,"¹ a piece ostensibly written for librarians eight months after the outbreak of World War II, lamented the uncertainty librarians have about their professional function. The answer to Nazism, which sacrifices human dignity to an economic and military efficiency greater than that of democracy, is for American librarians to use the marvelously efficient systems of libraries for supplying "materials . . . relevant to the decisions that people must make."² As in the late '30's, Mr. MacLeish sees the struggle against Nazism as a battle for people's minds,

¹ Archibald MacLeish, "The Librarian and the Democratic Process," ibid., pp. 144-151.

² Ibid., p. 150.

and the people ought to have a "legislative reference service" similar to that available to congressmen, if only "we" librarians "will devise means and establish ways to make these precedents available to those who need them."¹ A knowledge of history is seen as the key to correctly informing the public:

How are they to be provided, not only with the knowledge of the new facts creating the specific issue to be decided, but also with knowledge of the relevant parts of the historical record which constitutes the precedents for action?²

The Librarian's position was only the beginning of a series of tasks in public information which he performed for the Roosevelt Administration.

Mr. MacLeish's Library appointment had come just one month after the Nazi invasion of Poland. He is known to have begun contributing phrases and ideas for Roosevelt's speeches in early 1939. By the inaugural of 1940 he was a full-fledged ghost writer for the President, sharing responsibilities with Harry Hopkins and Samuel Roseman. Just before America's entry into the War, Mr. MacLeish was appointed director of the new Office of Facts and Figures (OFF), whose task it was to facilitate the "dissemination of factual information to the citizens of the country on the defense effort and the policies and activities of the government."³ This agency became the Office of

¹Ibid., pp. 151 and 149. ²Ibid., p. 149.

³"OFF for Accuracy," Newsweek, XVIII (November 3, 1941), 56.

War Information after war was declared. MacLeish held his position as director until he was replaced in early 1943.

Mr. MacLeish now had four fronts of communication with a mass audience: (a) his lyric poetry of "public speech," (b) radio drama, (c) the head librarianship of the Library of Congress, and (d) the directorship of the Office of War Information. Stock in MacLeish poetry had gone up after "America Was Promises," but his public functions allowed him to write almost no new poetry during the war years. Since these large agencies, the OWI and the Library of Congress with its subsidiaries across the land, could hardly be molded to his personal specifications as purveyors of American tradition to meet the particular needs of democracy's crisis, it was logical of Mr. MacLeish to turn again to radio dramatization as a means of expressing his wartime ideals.

A. "The States Talking"

The script of this brief radio play, which with sound devices and pauses seems to have lasted a half hour, is an adaptation of the poem, "Colloquy for the States," first published in October, 1939.¹ The dramatic adaptation was produced in 1941 by the group of actors and production staff employed during the war by CBS and known as The Free Company, led by Burgess Meredith, who usually had the role of narrator, per-

¹Archibald MacLeish, "Colloquy for the States," Atlantic Monthly, CLXIV (October, 1939), 484-487.

formed short works for radio by several authors, including Maxwell Anderson's "The Miracle of the Danube," which like Mr. MacLeish's play shows a dominant interest in maintaining popular morale.

"The States Talking"¹ has a three-page prose introduction spoken by Meredith and is interspersed with songs such as "The Arkansas Traveler" and "New River Train"; this American flavor is contrasted with occasional cuts of a German crowd reacting to a "Hitler-voice" which "rises to a ranting crescendo." Following Meredith's description of mainly American scenes and place names, similar to the opening of the play Air Raid, a poem of ten and a half pages follows. Each line or two is presumably given to a different speaker (the script in Mayorga's edition carries no actors' names besides Meredith's), but the only designation of character parts is "A Voice."

Voices are those of individual states reacting to the Nazi threat in deliberate tones. Each voice announces itself as a State:

A VOICE

There's talk says Illinois

A VOICE

Is there says Iowa.

¹Archibald MacLeish, "The States Talking," The Best One-Act Plays of 1941, ed. Margaret Mayorga (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1942), pp. 5-18.

A VOICE

There's talk₁ on the east wind says
Illinois.¹

The antiphonal discussion, broken occasionally by bars of American and some European song and two more intrusions of the Hitler-voice, argues that people (i.e., Germans) across the ocean have reason for not liking Americans. The reason is that Americans are a "mixed" race and therefore a threat to the Nazi racial doctrine. With continuous verbal irony, the States note the absurdity of the Nazi doctrine and recite the glories of America, particularly the fact that this country is the world's melting pot. Descriptions of American beauty counterpoint the recitation of the names of the national stock which makes up this country. Praise is also given to American towns, wheat, livestock, industry, scenery, and implicitly to American power and a unified national spirit.

The poem-play ends with a joke at the expense of European racists. Since the source of American strength is its mixture of nationalities, the weakness of Europeans is that they are "a purebred breed! says Texas." Faulty in fact and logic, the argument is made palatable through anecdotal cliché:

How could they help it?
Who would they marry? says Florida. Who could
they find?

¹Ibid., pp. 7-8.

A VOICE

The girls we left behind us says Missouri.

SOUND. (The laughter becomes a tremendous shout--recedes.)

A VOICE

That's them! The girls we left behind!
They married the girls we left behind!
says Wisconsin.

A VOICE

So that's it! So that's who! says
Connecticut.

A VOICE

So that's all! East of the sea! says
Ohio.

A VOICE

So that's all! says Missouri. All for that!
All for the pure-bred girls we left behind!¹

Laughter fades into the sound of the sea, and the next sounds are of wind in "bare trees and dry corn."² The voices conclude, "There's talk," and mention orchards and "Clash of corn in the wind says Illinois" as music punctuates the dialogue. Burgess Meredith then speaks a coda in prose to the effect that "Archibald MacLeish . . . makes us hear . . . the great strong laughing voice of America."³

The cataloging of place names in this play is reminiscent of Whitman's lyrics. The montage descriptions of nature and

¹Ibid., p. 17.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., p. 18.

of rather abstract feminine beauty are also Whitmanesque, but they resemble several of MacLeish's own earlier works even more (e.g., "Landscape as a Nude," "Cook County," and in particular the descriptive passages of Air Raid). Furthermore, the abstraction of character noted in Air Raid becomes even more pronounced as individual states express personified traits in one- or two-line speeches. This style is fragmentary and generalized to the point where its appeal must have depended heavily upon the audience's identification with its own State and its feeling of cohesion with other States during a national crisis involving an external threat. That the dramatic conventions are extremely artificial is evidenced by the fact that Mr. MacLeish excluded Meredith's opening and conclusion, together with all playscript character designations (i.e., "A VOICE"), and published this work as a lyric poem, "Colloquy for the States" in 1943.¹ The differences between this version and the play is that some of the chatty colloquialisms are absent from the poem. The textual variants in the poem also show a strengthening of the metrical effects of the irregularly counted five-stress line.

B. The Cultural Front

Part of Mr. MacLeish's task as Librarian and as Director of the Office of War Information was to act as a liaison per-

¹Archibald MacLeish, "Colloquy for the States," A Time to Act (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1943), pp. 1-6.

son between the wartime Administration and cultural leaders who, even after the outbreak of the War, were engaging in hostile criticism of the government. One of these efforts was a speech in Chicago warning of "harmful propaganda" by people who assume

that the government is one thing and the people another, that the President is one thing and the people who elected the President another, . . . with the implication that the government is something outside of the people.

When, by the end of the year 1942, the American people had closed ranks behind the war effort, Mr. MacLeish's main social goal of this period was fulfilled, and his own contribution had been a significant factor in its achievement. In early 1943 he was replaced as Director of the Office of War Information. Until his appointment as Assistant Secretary of State in December, 1944, he had no other government duties except his librarian's work. It was most likely during this period that MacLeish and members of his staff worked to put together the research, translation, and writing for the ten radio broadcasts entitled The American Story.

Even before the War Mr. MacLeish had shown concern about competition this country had with Germany in waging a propaganda battle for the friendship and loyalty of South Americans.

¹Archibald MacLeish quoted in "MacLeish Favors Free Criticism, but Not by Critics," Christian Century LIV (July 1, 1942), 829.

In a 1940 article, "The Art of the Good Neighbor,"¹ he had noted that the struggle had ceased to be merely for markets and had broadened into every area of culture. Gracing aside from South America's internal socio-economic problems, Mr. MacLeish isolated "the real issue":

But in a divided world in which the real issue of division is the cultural issue, cultural relations are not irrelevancies. They are everything. And in such a world a cultural defeat is a defeat on the one front on which defeat cannot be accepted.²

The task at that time had been to convince a sophisticated elite of South Americans knowledgeable in art, music, and literature that American expression in these areas was indeed worthwhile despite the tendency of "the Grace Line, the National City Bank, the Hearst comics, the Hollywood heartthrob, and an occasional best seller"³ to convince them otherwise; MacLeish also thought that the generally low opinion which European critics had of American culture influenced the attitudes of South America's cultural elite. But by 1944 Mr. MacLeish seemed less interested than before in persuading (particularly through one of his dramas)

the eminent critic of modern verse in Buenos Aires
pacing the long room over the earthen river--the
authority on modern music in the garden of enormous

¹Archibald MacLeish, "The Art of the Good Neighbor," Nation CL (February 10, 1940), 170-172; reprinted in A Time to Speak, pp. 199-205.

²"The Art of the Good Neighbor," Nation, loc. cit., p. 172.

³Ibid.

trees under the mountains of Santiago--the lady in the chair at Miraflores, the words dissolving in the dissolving light, the fame hanging there.¹

He was instead turning again to a mass audience composed mainly of North Americans who might not realize the cultural and historical ties which the Americans have in common. The American Story is a popularization of American history made vivid by the poet's brush, but even more by the librarian's paste and blue pencil.

Mr. MacLeish's emphasis on the "cultural front" of the war during the five years preceding this broadcast series is essential to an understanding of the work. His highly controversial essay, "The Irresponsibles," had elicited hostile replies from many quarters, including South America.² That attack upon European and American intellectuals had laid the rise of fascism at the doorstep of scholars and writers who, detached from contemporary affairs and over-specialized because of their respective commitments to objective truth, had lacked feeling and the sense of urgency necessary to point out fascism's threat to intellectual freedom. MacLeish saw "the essential nature" of fascism to be "the burning of books, the exiling of artists, the invention of mythologies."³ In short,

¹ Ibid., p. 171.

² Lloyd Mallan (ed. and trans.), "Mr. MacLeish, We Are Not Irresponsibles; Latin Americans Take up a Challenge" Points of View, no. 6 (Washington, D.C.: Division of Intellectual Cooperation, Pan American Union, 1943).

³ Archibald MacLeish, "The Irresponsibles," A Time to Speak p. 100.

Nazism was principally a cultural gangsterism waging war upon truth, which is the domain of "the man of letters." The Emersonian ideal implied in this phrase was epitomized in MacLeish's mind by Milton, Voltaire, and Las Casas, all of whom were scholars, artists, and social critics, and could thus represent a modern counterpart in the combined ideal traits--"Man Thinking" and the scholar as man of action--which Emerson holds up for imitation in his essay, "The American Scholar."¹ Not being so universally endowed as MacLeish's models, the modern intellectuals (with a few exceptions like Thomas Mann) had defaulted vis a vis the anti-liberal threat of fascism.

Had . . . the intellectuals of our time been whole and loyal--it would, I think, have been impossible for the revolution of the gangs to have succeeded where success has been most dangerous--in perversion of the judgments of the mind.²

In 1940 MacLeish had urged the intellectuals to abandon "the antiseptic air of objectivity"³ which at this time he saw as a socially non-functional trait of devotion to one's profession as artist or scholar. Eugene Jolas⁴ saw MacLeish's argu-

¹Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The American Scholar," Selected Prose and Poetry, ed. with an Introduction by Reginald L. Cook (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1962), p. 49 and passim.

²Archibald MacLeish, A Time to Speak, p. 114. Italics mine.

³Ibid., p. 121.

⁴Eugene Jolas, "Goodbye to Yesterday," Living Age, CCCLIX (October, 1940), 192.

ment as a digest of Julien Benda's thesis in Betrayal of the Intellectuals. Bernard de Voto claimed, in contradiction to MacLeish, that American writers had failed during the '30's because they had not recorded American life objectively. He argued further that in "The Irresponsibles" MacLeish had committed the literary fallacy, which assumes

that a culture may be understood and judged solely by means of its literature, that literature embodies truly and completely both the values and the content of a culture, . . . that literature is the measure of life, and finally that life is subordinate to literature.¹

Mr. MacLeish may well have stepped into the literary fallacy in the arguments of his attack on "Irresponsibles." Yet his call for "whole and loyal" men of letters to help solve the war crisis never flagged during the almost two years of controversy evoked by this essay. Furthermore, he seems to have isolated a model for himself in his thumbnail sketch of the man of letters who can write creative, socially relevant scholarship after the example of Milton, Voltaire, and Las Casas. A reading of The American Story makes one recall particularly the image of a Las Casas working out of the Library of Congress and emitting as much social indignation as current foreign policy of the "duration" would allow.

After "The Irresponsibles," MacLeish's notion of a

¹Bernard de Voto, The Literary Fallacy, p.43; cited from Viola Wendt, p. 502.

culture as a weapon of democracy can be seen to develop in various essays published in the collections A Time to Speak (1940) and A Time to Act (1943). During the summer of America's entry into the War, Mr. MacLeish gave two commencement addresses one at Union College on June 9, 1941, and one at the University of Pennsylvania on June 11, 1941, emphasizing in both the tactical importance of an increase of positive thinking about America's heritage. The Pennsylvania address, entitled "Prophets of Disaster," is a notable example of self-castigation for his having once been a representative of his nay-saying generation:

The generation to which I belong believes, as you who have read its books are aware, in a predetermined pattern of life. It is our conviction, explicitly stated in our histories, our political commentaries, and our studies in economics, implicitly stated in our novels and our poetry, that the pattern of life is determined by Economic Law or Historical Necessity or Psychological Compulsion and that we are, or by taking thought can make ourselves, privy to these Laws and these necessities. We not only believe in a predetermined pattern of life, which is to say, in Fate: we believe in it to a degree unknown in western civilization for centuries.¹

In plain prose, Mr. MacLeish is pointing out America's war-time antagonist--a fatalism encouraged by intellectuals--as he had isolated the antagonist against whom McGafferty struggled: a modern Fate more terrible than that of the Greeks. This line of thought is rather consistent in Mr. MacLeish's abiding world picture, and it would recur fifteen

¹Archibald MacLeish, "Prophets of Disaster," A Time to Act, p. 90.

years later even to the extent that two of the three capitalized abstractions who make up this fate are embodied in the comfortors of J. B.: Eliphaz and Bildad.

The Pennsylvania speech lays stress on the practical need for and applications of voluntarism, to which Mr. MacLeish would now like to commit himself entirely:

For the real issue is precisely the issue between those, on the one side, who believe that it is possible for men to imagine and by action to create the kind of world they wish for--the kind of world in which each man is truly free--and those, on the other side, who believe it is not possible for men to create for themselves the world they wish to live in but only possible to accept a world predestined, a world ordered and directed by those who know and will interpret the commands of fate. The real issue is between those who believe in themselves . . . and those who believe there is no room for men to act and no possibility that men will govern themselves and control their own lives and who therefore remit to the fates, to the universal laws, their responsibility for action.¹

Mr. MacLeish urges his listeners and readers to acquire "a central faith" for these times. But at least for the sake of argument, he will not dissociate himself from the fatal scepticism of his generation, for he concludes:

It is understandable that you should ask but unlikely that your asking will find answer. At least from us. The answers you require are the answers which will enable you to believe in your own lives and to respect your own hopes to accomplish your own purposes: the answers which will enable you to take the great ambiguous words--democracy--liberty--humanity--freedom--and speak them again as though you first had used them in the world; the answers which will enable you to act and to believe. Our generation has no such answers to supply. . . . It is not to² us but to yourselves that you must look for answers.

¹Ibid., pp. 98-99.

²Ibid., p. 100.

Mr. MacLeish has often used the rhetorical device of the unanswered question, and he seems sincere in using it above. The answers to the question, the meanings of words like "democracy" and "freedom" and a faith in them came for Mr. MacLeish as he built up his faith in the job he was doing for defense. In this respect he was no different from most citizens during wartime, which was not a time for posing and solving ultimate questions. Faith in his job meant having faith in books, as he told the American Booksellers Association on May 6, 1942:

Books were never more important to this country than they are today. The questions which must be decided, the issues which must be resolved, are, many of them, questions and issues which only books can properly present. The profoundly searching questions, for example, of the order and form of the post-war world are questions for which books and books alone provide an adequate forum.¹

His address to the American Library Association on June 26, 1942 ("The Country of the Mind Must Also Attack") argued against a proposed cut in the Library of Congress appropriations by emphasizing the "books" power to make and change history. The dominant image of this speech-essay, appropriate to its wartime content, was of an attack against ignorance as the best means of defending democracy. It was appropriate that his next play, in fact his longest work in any genre, would set about this task as a work of popularized history

¹Archibald MacLeish, "The Power of the Book," A Time to Act, p. 153.

offering "precedents" for democratic decision-making in the present, and allowing the artist to fulfil the needs and integrate the values of his vocational and vacational ways of life.

C. The American Story

The American Story is perhaps the culmination of a documentary style which had begun developing in MacLeish's first drama (Panic) showing a concern for contemporary affairs. No play before or since The American Story has relied so heavily on historical sources for its material and for dialogue and interpretations as well. His tendency to see a book as living fact, to "place undue emphasis on words simply as words,"¹ as one reviewer comments, is laid bare in the techniques of The American Story. An analysis of MacLeish's development made by Edwin Honig in 1940 correctly charted the way to this verifiable document of history and spliced-on, present-day interpretations. Speaking of Conquistador, Honig observed:

He has taken the history of the Mexican conquest not as imaginative idea but as story, as written document, and with the instrument of eclectic poetic sensibility has fashioned it into a romance, presumably inviting to the tastes of the modern reader. To do this he has to alter, transpose, and invent situations which would not cause the whole to fall out of immediate

¹Richard D. Altick, "Microphoned History," New York Times Book Review, January 28, 1945, p. 10.

familiarity as in following the actual history it would have to do.

The American Story's even greater dependence upon literal history illustrates a shift away from inventing situations, as MacLeish did in Conquistador, and instead leaves the way open to a greater inventiveness in the construction of gratuitous meanings as contemporary lessons to be learned from a historical document. Yet The American Story also shows great freedom in the alteration and transposition of sequences and in the juxtaposition of vastly separated incidents, all of which serve to reinforce these lessons.

Honig's further remarks can be applied to The American Story without reservation:

The deception is not in his having followed document of history at all, but in his having to supply it with an added document of his own. He wishes to rewrite history as a scientist but asks to be excused for fanciful intrusions because he is a poet. In this way he obscures the poet with the scientist. For the poet who views history through the imagination views it not as the subject of past experience in itself, but as the object for identifying a new experience whose inspiration is a present as real in predicament, yet whose proof and confirmation needs to be found in the past. MacLeish's sense of the past and present is unbalanced, for it is a sense of the past as a receptacle which will hold such emotions that in the present, without suitable heroes, speak through his sensuous imagery, and their movements exist in the tapestry-effect of the whole of their gifted rhetoric. It makes good "romance," and it obviously attracts the serious reader because of its characteristic² personal nostalgia which is so sympathetically modern.

¹Edwin Honig, "History, Document, and Archibald MacLeish," Sewanee Review, XLVIII (July-September, 1940), p. 387.

²Ibid.

In The American Story, Mr. MacLeish's old problem of inherent and imposed meanings, the conflict between publicly and privately understood meanings and emotions, is seen once again. Whereas other plays risked being incomprehensible in their composite meanings, this broadcast series is saved from that pitfall by its extremely literal dependence upon historical document, and also by the wartime public's willingness to accept the simplified and palatably comfortable moralizations. But this way of solving the dilemma of objective and subjective meanings could not prove satisfactory because of rather obvious sacrifices Mr. MacLeish had to make in his approach to dramatic technique. Technical weaknesses indicate that in The American Story dramatic style had reached a dead end.

Mr. MacLeish's introduction to The American Story follows the pattern of those introductions to his drama of the '30's in which he argued the artist's need to shape and change the mediums of stage and radio. Approaching the same problem of an intransigent medium, he again emphasizes the primacy of "the word" and goes a step further in expecting the medium to somehow transmit special meanings to the text through the process of radio productions:

Because radio is limited mechanically to sound, and particularly to the sound of speech, radio is capable of a concentration upon speech itself, the text itself, which can give words a life and a significance they rarely achieve outside the printed page--and which they achieve there only for the most gifted and fortunate readers. It is, or should be, possible for radio, there-

fore, to present a given text loyally and literally and simply, and yet in such a perspective and with such a focus of attention as to give breath and presentness and meaning to its words.¹

Misgivings about the direction in which radio drama was developing, such as MacLeish had expressed in his discussion of Air Raid² are now intensified. The introduction to The American Story continues:

The experimental work in the use of radio as a dramatic medium . . . in the thirties seems to have ended, and the concern with the development of radio not as a stage for the word, different in kind because different in character from the stage of the theatre, has apparently ended with it. The contemporary effort seems to be directed to the development of radio not as a stage at all but as an instrument. He refers respectfully to radio's uniquely melodramatic sound effects. . . . But the earlier hope for a new stage on which the spoken word, freed of all external paraphernalia, should create by its own power and eloquence the emotions of which it alone is capable, has not been realized. If anything, it is more remote today than it was ten years ago.³

MacLeish recognized the dichotomy between the "paraphernalia" of sounds in radio and his own predilection for the unadulterated words of a text. But his failure to resolve the conflict in his own play is recognized by Richard Altick, who observes in his New York Times review of The American Story:

But not all listeners can be expected to enjoy good writing when they hear it straight. . . . And so the writer calls to the assistance of his texts all the glib auxilliary devices which radio has adopted-- narrators and the sound of horses' hoofs and a choir

¹Archibald MacLeish, The American Story, pp. x-xi.

²Orrin E. Dunlap, "Exploring in Drama," New York Times, October 30, 1938, sec. IX, p. 12.

³Archibald MacLeish, The American Story, p. xi.

singing "Gloria in Excelsis." Thus he relies heavily on the very same "external paraphernalia" from which on the ideal radio stage of the future, the spoken word would be gloriously freed.

It seems characteristic of MacLeish that when writing drama in prose, as he does for the first time in The American Story and in three others of the '50's and '60's, the text becomes inadequate to his themes and feelings, and he is forced to dub in the most hackneyed devices of radio and TV as rather artificial support for his floundering dramatic effects. In his introduction, MacLeish begged off the dilemma of text versus sound effects by saying that, although the two are related, "the publication of basic historical texts need not necessarily depend upon the development of radio as a stage for the word."² He concludes his argument with a self-consciousness that approaches an admission of the dramatic artist's defeat. Pleading the educational usefulness for the "American narratives of authority and interest," he concedes: "Whatever the effectiveness of the broadcasts, the historical texts themselves are well worth hearing."³

It would take a return to the poetic drama, which has been his forte, to reestablish the stylistic achievements he had worked hard to achieve in the '20's and '30's. The broadcast plays of the '30's and '40's had earned him a wide

¹Richard D. Aitick, p. 10.

²Archibald MacLeish, The American Story, p. xi.

³Archibald MacLeish, The American Story, p. xii.

audience; he would have to risk losing some of it in the pursuit of a more esoteric poetic drama, and there was always the chance of developing his poetic drama in such a way as to win part of the audience back. Radio drama seems to have taught him something about the cords of public sentiment he might strike in order to get an adequate response.

There were not many reviews of The American Story, but those which appeared corroborate the points made in the preceding analysis. An anonymous review in Time reported this "frankly educational venture" with a lengthy quotation from Henri Bouquet which happened to fit wartime morale needs. But the reviewer noted "a certain eloquence . . . overloaded with conversation," and said that the script "made little use of advanced dramatic radio techniques" and was "dignified and resonant rather than compelling."¹

Richard Altick, in the New York Times review cited previously, said that MacLeish's large verbatim slices of historical texts are

not unknown to the writers of high school pageants,
 . . . The text, then, not the play, is the thing.²

Altick could not excuse the lack "of such commonplace devices as lively dialogue, suspense and climax," and he insisted that these elements are necessary "even" for mass audiences, particularly in radio presentation. Finally, in observing Mac-

¹"Voice of History," Time, XLIII (April 3, 1944), 60.

²Richard Altick, p. 10.

Leish's tendency to "overload his texts with emotional implications" and "undue emphasis on words as words," he concluded that the impermanence of everything broadcasted on radio made this medium "not too well suited as a medium of publication."¹ Mr. MacLeish had, of course, adjusted the historical texts, but, even if he had not, his grounds for defending the script--that the texts themselves are worth hearing--is a dubious thesis which is undercut by Altick's observation on the use of radio as a medium.

Norman Corwin, who himself had a strong interest and talent for writing documentary radio scripts, wrote the most favorable review of any. After distilling away Corwin's enthusiasm for what may potentially be written in the medium of documentary radio, one finds his opinion that The American Story is "a club sandwich full of good things."² His greatest praise is for the intention of the work:

that a poet who is also a craftsman can speak effectively for the commonness of ordinary solidarity, in a world notorious for divisions and dissent.³

After several years of rest, The American Story was reprinted in 1960.⁴

¹ Ibid.

² Norman Corwin, "Our History Comes to Us by Air," New York Herald Tribune Weekly Book Review, sec. VI, p. 2.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Archibald MacLeish, The American Story (New York: Duell, Sloan, and Pearce, 1960).

A notable change in the broadcast series, The American Story, which is the only "play" Mr. MacLeish wrote during the War years, is the absence of a strong antagonist. In Panic, Time and McGafferty's own fatalism are antagonists, Abel and god are the adversaries of Nobodaddy, and an invading enemy is the antagonist in The Fall of the City and Air Raid. Even "The States Talking" had a part written in for the voice of Hitler. Naturally there are a few "bad" people in some of the ten episodes of The American Story, but none is developed into a significant antagonist. This fact helps keep down dramatic conflict and also any contradictions in the presentation of theme.

The American Story portrays the colonization of North and South America as an inescapable heritage of carnage, exploitation, and heroism, an accomplished fact about which it seems fruitless to moralize except in ways which contribute to present-day morale. Mr. MacLeish broadens the range of territory he covered in Conquistador to include both continents and a time span from Columbus to Galan's uprising in 1781. The play has a good deal of sentimentality, but the feeling is public and quite different from the ultra-personal nostalgia of the epic poem. The broadcast play series attempts to inform an American audience about the continental experience it shares with South America, and the poet's intrusion of himself is usually for this end. The play's less personal tone comes from its being largely a compilation of other people's docu-

ments, from the audience's morale needs as Mr. MacLeish saw them during the wartime "duration," and not least from the fact that the hands of several library staff people were involved in culling the historical texts, which were often rendered verbatim.

The dramatizations emphasize wholesome aspects of the American past, and the treatment of American life and ideals is the most optimistic of any major work MacLeish had written to date. The theme and intention of The American Story, spoken of in the introduction to the printed text, is presented also at the beginning of the seventh broadcast in the words of a Narrator arguing for his audience's appreciation of the Americas' "common past":

There are men in America who do not believe in an American experience. . . . An American experience in which the men of the American nations could recognize their common American character has never existed, they tell us, and never can.

Those who talk in this way have forgotten the American past or have never known it. The American past, the past of all the American nations, contains more elements, and more characteristic elements, common to the continent as a whole, than any other continental past of which there is a knowledge or record.

There is no other continent of the world . . . in which so great a number of living men share in the memory of a past common to them all. There is no continental past from which such great and unforgettable events make up the common living memory of so many men.¹

This speech and dramatizations throughout the book find a

¹Archibald MacLeish, The American Story, p. 159.

common denominator of that experience "in Plymouth or in Brazil or in Virginia or Acadia" to be the colonists' profound and fearful awareness of "the surf on one side, and the wilderness on the other."¹ The motif of westward movement pervades the book; this staple of writing about American heritage had already been utilized in the MacLeish lyrics "The Lost Speakers" and "The Western Sky."² Essential to the poet's vision of westward movement in the New World was his idea of the Americas as an embodiment of the Western tradition of freedom. Westward movement and freedom, terms he had associated rather sceptically in his muckraking Land of the Free (1938), constitute the main elements of "the American Experience," which is a term he first used in a speech on October 12, 1940.³

The ten broadcast plays are mainly the verbatim exposition of historical documents interspersed with music and other sound devices. Speeches are quotations from a wide range of original sources in American history, particularly those published by the Hakluyt Society. The whole series was produced by the NBC University of the Air in February, March, and

¹ Ibid., p. 160.

² Archibald MacLeish, "The Lost Speakers," Collected Poems, pp. 176-177; "The Western Sky: Words for a Song," A Time to Act, pp. 197-198.

³ Amy Loveman, "A Poet in Government," Saturday Review of Literature, XXIV (November 1, 1941), 10.

April of 1944.¹ Mr. MacLeish dedicated the published version of the plays "to Muna Lee, A Poet of the Americas."² This member of his library staff is given credit in the introduction for being "a sound scholar, a mistress of tongues, and a profound believer in a cause" who assisted in the collection of historical materials and provided "continuing encouragement in their preparation."³ Mr. MacLeish also pays tribute to radio director Frank Papp and to actors "Arnold Moss and Alexander Skourby, who carried the heaviest burden."⁴ Since The American Story is a book length series of dramatizations, a scenario covering each of the ten parts can be of great help in understanding the work.

I. The Admiral. The musings, speeches, and actions of Columbus on his first voyage are based upon the Hakluyt Society Edition of The Journal of Columbus, published in 1893. The sound of the "Gloria in Excelsis" sung "as though beyond a heavy door"⁵ is followed by a narrator's explanation of background, and then Columbus speaks of seeing a light which betokens land. The sailors sight no land for several days, and an "English Voice" ad libs about "Hallucinations." Some dramatic effect is achieved by Spanish, Portuguese, and Dutch voices shouting "land" in their own languages. Dialogue in the last four-fifths of the play is divided about evenly between

¹Archibald MacLeish, The American Story, p. ix.

²Ibid., pp. v and xii.

³Ibid., p. xii.

⁴Ibid., p. xii.

⁵Ibid., p. 3.

The Admiral speaking his own lines from the log book and a Narrator commenting on events and summarizing action in order to move it forward. A full month of waiting to sight land after the first signs of its nearness provides moderate suspense. There is much talk of days of the month and comparisons of the weather with that of Spain. Finally, dropping anchor near an island, Columbus goes ashore, claims the land for Ferdinand and Isabella, and meets friendly natives. Columbus recognizes that they "could be more easily freed and converted to our holy faith by love than by force,"¹ and he builds up friendship by trading trinkets for produce. Yet for caution's sake, the boat crew pushes back beyond the surf and sails on. The Narrator and the Admiral between them make it clear that Columbus's interest in finding gold is subordinate to interest in fish, birds, flowers, colors, and particularly the conversion of newly discovered peoples to Christ. The broadcast ends with mild dramatic irony in the contrast between Columbus's idea of what he has found (an undiscovered part of Cathay) and what the twentieth century Narrator knows very well Columbus found.

II. The Names for the Rivers. This broadcast, quoting "severally" from eight historical sources, opens with a sea shanty of Henry VIII; other sea songs in various languages occur intermittently during the performance. Most of the

¹Ibid., pp. 15-16.

dialogue is about evenly split between First and Second Narrators, but other speakers include such historical characters as John Rut, members of the crew of John Frobisher, and a Spanish friar named Carvajal, who accompanied Captain Francisco de Orellana on a dangerous voyage down the Amazon River. The first half of the broadcast recounts Frobisher's voyage of 1576 along the coast of North America; as the crew struggles against ice and other hardships, crew members name the rivers. The second half of The Names for the Rivers, devoted to Carvajal's narrative of the Amazon Voyage, has slightly more dramatic tension in its description of the explorers' amateurish boatmaking, perilous drifting downstream, and encounters with hostile Indians. But by focusing the action upon Carvajal himself, MacLeish chooses to summarize a second, apparently uneventful voyage the historian took on the river, and the result is anti-climactic. The point of the broadcast is recited by the Second Narrator as a conclusion:

The continent was named in the five tongues and the shape of the land was drawn on secret charts; and the letters, the log-books, the relations were sent to the bishops and the kings and the pages were scattered over Europe, but the land has brought them together again notwithstanding. [Sir Walter Raleigh interjects his report that the rich land has not been sacked for gold.] . . . Such was the New World.¹

III. The American Name. This broadcast based entirely upon The Letters of Amerigo Vespucci and Other Documents

¹Ibid., pp. 39-40.

Illustrative of His Career (Hakluyt Society, 1864), is a witty argument between Vespucci's contemporaries--friends and enemies--and modern historians who challenge his claims that he is a gentleman and an authentic explorer and geographer of the New World. Stychomythia is used effectively throughout the argument, and the Narrator's parts are less dominant than in the foregoing broadcasts. The conclusion, which is the moral of the piece, has little relation to the action, however. A Second Narrator says:

The truth about Amerigo Vespucci, I suppose, is this--that the truth doesn't very much matter. If Amerigo was a liar, . . . the result would be the same. . . . For the word America, whatever it may have been by origin, is not now the name of Amerigo Vespucci. It is something very different. It is the name of the human expectation which men associate with a new world. The new world which men have in mind when they speak of America is a world new in its human possibilities--a world in which humanity is newly possible. It was not Amerigo or . . . even Columbus, who discovered that world. It was discovered by later travellers on other journeys. But there are millions of Americans, nevertheless,¹ who have seen it and who mean to live in it one day.

In these first three episodes, Mr. MacLeish seems to be vainly seeking a line of significant action capable of dramatic development. In the fourth through the sixth episodes, which deal with the colonial conquest of America, he comes closer to dramatic development. The story line deals mainly with Spanish conquest of Incas and Aztecs, material which MacLeish had treated before in Conquistador and The Fall of a City.

¹Ibid., pp. 66-67.

IV. The Discovered. This lyrically nostalgic reminiscence about the customs and civilizations of the Incas in Cuzco is rendered from The First Part of the Royal Commentaries of the Yncas by the mestizo Ynca Garcilasso de la Vega (Hakluyt Society Edition, 1869-1871). MacLeish's predilection for moon revery is integrated with Vega's description of Inca rites and superstitions. The Narrator explains the background of Vega, who was grand-nephew of the great Ynca Huaiyna Coapac and son of a Conquistador. An Inca love song is sung in the original and then translated, and this provides atmosphere for Vega's commentary on the city's ruins. Men sing a ritual song "Sun : Moon / Day : Night / Summer : Winter,"¹ which recalls E. E. Cummings' poem, "Anyone lived in a pretty how town."² Men's voices sing another Inca song, a prayer that they may know the unseen Creator. Vega and the Narrator marvel over the bygone wonders of the city, such as its water system and applications of astronomy in the functioning of the city. References are made to other parts of America, and after some nature imagery this wholly descriptive episode concludes with a meditation on the moon, which had been witness to Inca wonders centuries before Europeans had seen them.

¹Ibid., pp. 76, 77, and 78.

²E. E. Cummings, "Anyone Lived in a Pretty How Town," Modern Poetry, ed. by Maynard Mack, Leonard Dean, and William Frost (Second Edition; New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1961), pp. 328-29.

V. The American Gods. This account of the Spaniards' conquest of Mexico is taken from histories by Bernardo de Sahagun and Father Joseph de Acosta. Flute and drum sound throughout this narrative, which is a historically authentic account of the situation MacLeish had treated metaphorically in The Fall of the City. A voice speaking over the drum solemnly asks three times why Montezuma had allowed Cortez's small army to march unchallenged into the city of Tenochtitlan. Bernardo de Sahagun narrates the answer: The Aztecs had expected the gods to come at the time Cortez appeared, and they were religiously bound to honor the visitors. Sahagun fully describes the Aztec practice of human sacrifice, dwelling on the victim's willingness to participate, and this ritual fact is blended thematically with the acquiescence of the whole population in their destruction. De Acosta then describes the priests' futile efforts to charm and divert Cortez from his purpose to enter the city, and the episode ends with Montezuma pathetically aware that he must necessarily play host to his outnumbered enemies.

VI. The Many Dead. The slaughter of the Aztecs is told as part of a vignette which includes the Europeans' defeat of Algonquins, a confederation under Pontiac, and Incas. Sources are Francisco de Xeres' Reports of the Discovery of Peru, William Smith's . . . Boquet's Expedition against the Ohio Indians in 1764, and E. G. Squier's Historical and Mythological

Traditions of the Algonquins. The broadcast is a melange of episodes, and most speeches are brief and fragmentary. A "Clerk's voice" is one unifying element, and the convention of a "Bronze Voice" gives an ironically passionless quality to the narration of some bloodier parts of the story. Climactic portions are the stoning to death of Montezuma on the walls of the city, Colonel Henri Bouquet's description of inhospitable fighting conditions and of a long battle with Pontiac's men, the Inca Atahullpa's being dragged by Pizarro from his litter and away from his army of thousands and his later death by strangling with a bowstring. Incidents and expositions are presented impressionistically, often without regard to the chronology of an individual episode, in this dramatization of Senacan violence. The Bronze Voice asks for the "chronicles of the defeated in these wars,"¹ and the Clerk's Voice refers to records the Indians kept on knotted strings, drawings on stone, "scratches of despair on the rocks of the canons, the Aztec's hieroglyphics on maguey paper, and the Algonquins' "painted sticks." This nostalgic sympathy is taken up in a brief, concluding indictment of colonists' motives:

BRONZE VOICE:

Of the Conquerors
 In both continents
 Acquiring an immeasurable wealth of Gold
 (the voice fades out)

¹Archibald MacLeish, The American Story, p. 117.

SOUND: Music.¹

VII. Ripe Strawberries and Gooseberries and Sweet Single Roses. Derived from several historical sources, this plotless episode develops some interests touched upon in the first and second broadcasts: the extravagant richness of nature in the New World. The colonists' interest in gold and merchandise is balanced by their own accounts of natural beauty and luscious produce which

touched the stale and narrow world of Sixteenth-Century Europe like light at sunset when the rain ends and the clouds lift and the level vivid sunlight from the west sets all the window-glass on fire.²

Lyrics by Drayton, Marlowe, Donne, Marvel and others are quoted or sung. Sources are quoted by speakers who are mainly individual reporters characterized in the script according to function or profession, as in MacLeish's three dramas of the '30's. This colorful interlude describes alleged Spanish efforts to put accounts of fictitious prodigies into Sir Walter Raleigh's hands so as to deter him from finding riches. And in conclusion, the narrator tells us that these stories themselves are an important part of our heritage.

VIII. Between the Silence and the Surf. Recounting the early settlement of Virginia, Acadia, Plymouth, and Santiago (Chile), this episode focuses on common elements

¹Ibid., p. 136.

²Ibid., p. 144.

in the struggle to make these last two colonies viable. Emphasis is on the iron-willed courage of William Bradford in Plymouth and Pedro de Valdivia in Santiago. In rather long speeches by Bradford, Valdivia, and the Narrator, the two outstanding colonists are shown to have uncommon leadership qualities, a respect for farming, and farsightedness which gives their work permanence. Their histories are written

in the same language of the heart, . . . with a common accent, of a common understanding and a common hope.¹

MacLeish singles out their work as the first permanent settlements in the New World.

IX. Nat Bacon's Bones. A Narrator begins with the paradoxical argument that tyrants are architects of freedom because they compel people to love freedom by the fact of its absence. "Inscriptions" are read in the formal tones of a court crier indicting Governors Antonio de Sousa of Brazil, Sir Edmund Andros of New England, Don Antonio de Areche of Peru, and Sir William Berkeley, of tyrannical crimes. The story of Nathaniel Bacon's rebellion against Governor Berkeley is then told from T[homas] M[atthew]'s Beginning, Progress and Conclusion of Bacon's Rebellion (1705). Much is made of the facts having been obscured until the publication of

¹Ibid., pp. 176-177.

this text in 1940. MacLeish's poem "Nat Bacon's Bones"¹ is sung through, and lines of it are sung at various times during the action. The Narrator and Matthews vindicate Bacon as a popular leader in the just cause of levying troops against the Indians against the wishes of a self-interested Governor. Bacon is hailed as "the first great hero of freedom in the western world."² As he and his private militia pressure a corrupt House of Burgesses in June, 1676 to extend suffrage to non-property owners, his cause is shown to foreshadow the American Revolution. Bacon's death from sickness and the Governors' later reprisals against his followers are anticlimactic, yet as historical record the piece is the most interesting of the book.

X. Socorro, When Your Sons Forget. Very similar in content and structure to the preceding episode, this account of a popular Colombian uprising in 1781 begins with a South American counterpart of a Fourth of July oration, in which the speaker insists that people of the revolutionary era desired political independence from Europe. Monroe, Washington, Franklin, and Jefferson are portrayed in speeches which quote their letters to the effect that rights and privileges, not independence, was the colonists' goal in the

¹Archibald MacLeish, Collected Poems, pp. 105-106.

²Archibald MacLeish, The American Story, p. 189.

early years of revolution. Governor Richard Penn makes the same claim before the English House of Lords. With guitar accompaniment, a woman recites MacLeish's poem "Galan,"¹ a line of which serves as title for this final episode of The American Story. With some verbal irony in the use of an In-former's testimony, it is made clear that starvation and unjust taxation prompt a spontaneous rebellion of 20,000 people which forcibly enlists local rulers and later finds its true leader in a common laborer named Jose Antonio Galan. Defeating a naval invasion by the Spanish Viceroy, Galan's army receives official redress of grievances and amnesty to all participants. But when the rebels return home, the officials attempt to tighten their rule again, and Galan is seized after inciting a more radical rebellion at Socorro. He is tried, sentenced, and hanged, drawn and quartered, various parts of his body being displayed at Socorro, San Gil, and Charala. At the very least, this interesting story is a necessary gloss for an understanding of the poem Galan:

Socorro, when your sons forget,
 San Gil, when you forget this man,
 When you forget him, Charala,
 The stones--the stones--will shout Galan.²

Concluding quotations of Penn and Washington to the effect that

¹Archibald MacLeish, Collected Poems, pp. 106-107.

²Ibid., p. 107.

American rebellion is "in defense of . . . liberties" rather than for self-rule emphasizes MacLeish's interpretation of the story in the light of a political liberalism not at variance with his wartime ideal of Pan-American cohesion. Historical sources are the writings of the Founding Fathers and, for the Galan incident, Manuel Brinceno's Los Comuneros (Bogota, 1880).

Mr. MacLeish also acknowledges that he is

indebted--not for quoted material, but as all readers must be, for background and atmosphere--to Dr. German Archinegas' fine work of reconstruction and interpretation, also entitled Los Comuneros (Bogota, 1938).

CHAPTER IX

TWO VERSE DRAMAS OF THE EARLY 'FIFTIES

Mr. MacLeish's work in government was his main preoccupation until 1947. In 1944 he had been appointed Assistant Secretary of State in charge of cultural affairs. His time was spent in London and Washington until the end of the War. He was then put on the Advisory Committee on Postwar Foreign Policy. He was also a member of the Executive Board of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization from 1946 until mid-1947. At this time he decided to leave public life entirely, and the result was that he began a gradual rehabilitation as a poet interested in the kinds of subject matter and technical experimentation that had interested him before the War.

A new collection of poems, Actfive and Other Poems (1948) showed a concern for responsibility similar to what he had expressed in the essay "Nevertheless One Debt" (1931), as the inscription page of the new collection suggests:

" . . . with no one to whom the duty could be owed and still to owe the duty--no one here or elsewhere; even the noble image of ourselves in which we trusted broken and destroyed".¹

¹Archibald MacLeish, Actfive and Other Poems (New York: Random House, 1948), p. 7.

Along with this sense of duty goes a feeling of scepticism and alienation which he had claimed to be the hallmark of his generation; this sentiment had not been articulated since the Pennsylvania address, "Prophets of Disaster," in June 1941.¹ The long title poem, Actfive, is full of the passionate Weltschmerz which had characterized MacLeish's work during the '20's and '30's. This long meditation, whose format is a casual imitation of The Hamlet of A. MacLeish, utters discontents which were presumably stored up for a decade. Its theme is that man's searching for a hero, a belief system, and a worthy image of himself has so far proved futile. The first part, entitled "The State All Blood," sets a scene which is reflected in the imagery throughout the poem: physical devastation caused by war and a spiritual nihilism of lack of serious ideology. Mankind and the universe together share the guilt for this situation. Of the candidates for the role of "Hero," the revolutionary is indicted for an abstract, meaningless love of humanity much in the way he was disposed of in Panic.² Rulers, designated without distinction as "The King Once, the King's son," are those

¹Archibald MacLeish, "Prophets of Disaster," A Time to Act, pp. 85-102.

²Archibald MacLeish, Actfive, p. 18; cf. Panic, p. 49.

In whose rule were all things real,
 In whose must the pain the death the dearth had
 justice--

· · · · ·
 Gave wrong its right!¹ · · · · ·

The second part of Actfive, "The Masque of Mummers," introduces further distrust for the State in an image which is to become central to MacLeish's next verse play, The Trojan Horse:

The State!
 Oh the State! Invisible mystery
 Visible only to the poor in
 Spirit which performs
 The miracle of every into all:
 Mortal resurrection from the worms,
 Fallible redemption from the fall,
 Arc to ride the violent flood

· · · · ·
 In the womb where fear can wait,
 In the warm where fright can hide,
 In the belly of the State. . . .²

The third part, "The Shape of Flesh and Bone," contains a eulogy of Franklin Roosevelt as the "responsible man" whose character and labors would be unjustly maligned.³ Personal admiration of this hero image stands out in contrast to more generalized expressions of revolution. "The city of man" is "consumed to ashes. . . ," and the "republic a marble rubble on its hill."⁴ The final exhortation is to "Cry out Despair and fall and fail," but at the same time to "know the night be-

¹Archibald MacLeish, Actfive, p. 12.

²Ibid., p. 21.

³Ibid., p. 28.

⁴Ibid., p. 32.

low and dare / Endure and love."¹

This poem, which Robert Fitzgerald said was "not a good poem, but better than before,"² is a compendium of pre-war attitudes; it also contains in germ many of the themes which would preoccupy Mr. MacLeish in the coming decade. His old interest in Time as a force in history is now converted into the Yeatsian imagery of the revolving gyre:

Take the form within the circle,
 Take the circle in the form,
 Take the stillness at the center. . . .

 With its turning and returning
 Like the figures on an urn.³

MacLeish's interest in Yeats will also be seen in the diction of his forthcoming verse plays.

Mr. MacLeish's retirement from politics was gradual and never final. He managed to hold his own as an occasional essayist on current problems. His concern for establishing a durable peace is expressed in a six-page essay contributed to Clara Urquhart's Last Chance, a book-length dialogue "by 26 Leaders of Thought of 14 Nations" published in 1948.⁴

¹Ibid., p. 33.

²Robert Fitzgerald, "Oracles and Things," New Republic, CXIX (November 22, 1948), 23.

³Archibald MacLeish, Actfive, pp. 25-26.

⁴Clara Urquhart, (ed.), Last Chance: 11 Questions on Issues Determining Our Destiny: Answered by 26 Leaders of Thought of 14 Nations (Boston: Beacon Press, 1948), pp. 33-9.

Mr. MacLeish denies the existence of "two worlds" in the early stages of the Cold War and states that the "real question" is the necessity of maintaining a world which is in fact one because of its interdependent economy and commitment to industrialism. Like the old dichotomy between freedom and fascism, Mr. MacLeish recognizes East-West conflict on a purely ideational level: "The two principal ideas that are competing for the paternity of that society are the ideas of authority and responsibility."¹ Russia represents totalitarian authority, and America represents a somewhat hampered spirit of individual freedom and responsibility. The problem of securing freedom and responsibility is important in those plays which will deal with political themes. In this essay Mr. MacLeish asserts that "there is no humanity that is not individual,"² a sentiment expressed in Panic and elsewhere. His future choice of media for the presentation of his drama scripts is hinted at in this statement, mixed as it is with cynicism and hope:

One may detest the civilization that the industrial revolution has imposed on the peoples of the earth; but it does not follow that, because one detests the modern city, and mechanized art, and the slogans of advertising, and the obscenities of the yellow press, and the corrupting inanities of most radio programs that these instruments are themselves evil or incapable of enriching use. On the contrary, the occasional use of these and other instru-

¹Ibid., p. 37.

²Ibid., p. 38.

ments for the benefit of humanity . . . is proof enough that we have it in our power . . . to create for more men a better life than history has ever seen.

It is somewhat ironical that Mr. MacLeish's next two plays, written for radio performance, did not gain the acceptance by radio networks which had been accorded The Fall of the City, Air Raid, and The American Story. To the writer's knowledge, Mr. MacLeish's two verse dramas for radio, This Music Crept By Me Upon the Waters and The Trojan Horse, have never been performed on network radio in this country. However, Mr. MacLeish specified that these plays could be presented on radio or in stage reading. He seems to have understood the decline in the radio market for verse drama as early as 1948.

Mr. MacLeish's third and final collection of essays on public topics was published in 1951 under the title, Freedom Is the Right to Choose: An Inquiry into the Battle for the American Future. Some of the thirteen pieces, dating back to 1943, argue the primacy of ideological victory over totalitarianism through persuasion and example, once an American military victory is assured.² At the time of their publication in 1951, these essays seemed to the reviewer Gerald Johnson to sound "archaic," while the more recent articles seemed to "depict all the right attitudes."³ Yet many atti-

¹Ibid., p. 39.

²Gerald Johnson, "Free Land, Free Citizen," New York Herald Tribune Books, December 16, 1951, p. 6.

³Ibid.

tudes in the later essays were but extensions of earlier thinking. For instance, Mr. MacLeish continued to see education of the public as the solution of democracy's problems.¹ He denied gloomy prospects of "inevitable war" between Russia and the United States because the contest is mainly an ideational one between (U.S.) "responsibility" and (Russian) "authority."² The differences in thinking between East and West will, he believes, give way to the needs of the underdeveloped world which require creative solutions that must be, by definition, nonmilitary.³

Mr. MacLeish's insistence upon a positive American creed is as strong at the beginning of the '50's as it had been during the War and in the peroration of Actfive; essays such as "The Sense of American Purpose" and "An Act of Faith" express confidence that peoples of the world will move toward the Western Bloc as it moves to meet their aspirations for a better life.⁴ His exhortations for a positive faith, similar to those of the war period, are offered as a psychological defense which will uphold morale of Americans struggling for progress in an era of Cold War crisis. The touchstone of his position is now individual responsibility in a completely

¹Archibald MacLeish, "The Revulsion of Decency," Freedom is the Right to Choose: An Inquiry into the Battle for the American Future (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1951), p. 111.

²Ibid., pp. 136-137.

³Ibid., pp. 166-7.

⁴Ibid., pp. 115-23 and 161-70.

free intellectual climate which will enable Americans to formulate their positive creed.¹ Mr. MacLeish's post-War social picture, which is described above, is the belief system of a private citizen who no longer has a position in the government; it seems to be formulated at leisure and stated in less urgent tones than had characterized the wartime pronouncements. But as the McCarthy era settles over the land, the anxious tones creep back into Mr. MacLeish's style. He seems particularly disturbed that "authority," a trait he has learned to associate with foreign dictatorships, should replace what he sees as the American legacy of "responsibility." When he writes The Trojan Horse, a play ostensibly designed to combat this process, the urgency of his prose declarations has its counterpart in his poetic writing, as was the case with his plays written immediately before and during the War.

Mr. MacLeish's essayistic preoccupation with McCarthyism, the cause célèbre of the early '50's, was in different ways a benefit and a liability to him during his post-War renaissance as an artist and thinker. He benefited in his intellectual life from opposition to McCarthyism insofar as he was required to assert his identity as a free-thinking individual who, like other intellectuals, should be allowed complete freedom of expression by government and its agencies;

¹Ibid., pp. 108-10 and 173-82.

thus, every declamation for free speech and thought tended to reinforce his emancipation from bureaucratic or "public" restrictions he had known during the War. The liability of this essayistic interest was that he tended to restrict his political thinking to the free speech issue, bypassing specific socio-economic issues which had attracted him immediately before the War. This tendency, however, need be thought a liability only if one assumes that Mr. MacLeish still had a contribution to make as an opinion leader in practical affairs. His public contribution during the War is easier to acknowledge than his value to the cause he championed in the '50's. T. V. Smith, reviewing Freedom Is the Right to Choose, in the Journal of Ethics,¹ thought the whole volume so impaired by cliché and oversimplification as to be useless; he advised Mr. MacLeish to cultivate his forte, poetry. A low-pressure debate with Mr. MacLeish in the pages of The American Scholar prompted David Riesman respectfully to suggest that Mr. MacLeish's anxiety about "our silence as a people" in the face of McCarthyism was not an accurate description of fact and that expressions of fearful anxiety by intellectuals con-

¹T. V. Smith, Review of Freedom Is the Right to Choose, Ethics, LXII (April, 1952), 225.

tribute to the opposition by making it seem stronger than it is.¹

As late as mid-1955, in an attack on Walter Lippmann's The Public Philosophy, Mr. MacLeish argued within the context of the McCarthy era that the Republic should rededicate itself to its original "conception of boundless freedom of the individual human spirit."² Mr. MacLeish's essay says many things about the individual's capacity for development toward this ideal. But the reflections on personal life and imaginative conceptions, if carried over consistently from the imaginative life of the artist to the realm of politics, would have put Mr. MacLeish's political thinking somewhere near that of Henry Miller's. Mr. Lippmann's rejoinder is well taken:

The realm where liberty is "boundless" is in the realm of essence, in what Mr. MacLeish in his peroration so aptly calls "the inward country." But in the outward country, in the public country of the diverse inhabitants of our plural society, freedom cannot be boundless. It can be only as great as possible.³

It is apparent that by 1955, Mr. MacLeish could not talk

¹David Riesman, "Some Observations on Intellectual Freedom," Selected Essays from Individualism Reconsidered (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, 1955), pp. 108-10; originally published in The American Scholar, XXIII (Winter, 1953-1954), 9-25.

²Archibald MacLeish, "The Alternative," Yale Review, XLIV (June, 1955), p. 491.

³Walter Lippmann, "A Rejoinder," ibid., p. 499.

politics except from the perspective of an artist stepping out momentarily from "the inward country." He was indeed returning to esthetic preoccupations he had left behind in the '20's. His next volume of essays, Poetry as Experience,¹ hardly touches politics, and such essays as he would write which have political implications (e.g., "Poetry and Journalism"²) would be built around such notions as the need for imagination like the poet's in facing the duties of citizenship. There is evidence in his two verse plays of the early '50's that he is searching for the best of both worlds, artistic expression and public responsibility.

One other work is of utmost importance to Mr. MacLeish's morale and reputation in the '50's--the publication of his Collected Poems in 1952. Reviews by Hayden Carruth, Babette Deutsch, Richard Eberhart, Randall Jarrell, Howard Nemerov, Richard Wilbur, and others were on the whole more favorable than any dealing with Mr. MacLeish's work since 1929.³ The

¹Archibald MacLeish, Poetry and Experience (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1961).

²Archibald MacLeish, Poetry and Journalism (The Gideon D. Seymour Memorial Lecture Series; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1958); reprinted as "The Poet and the Press," The Atlantic, CCIII (March, 1959), pp. 40-46.

³Hayden Carruth, "MacLeish's Poetry," Nation, CLXXVI (January 31, 1953), 103; Richard Eberhart, "The Pattern of MacLeish's Poetry," New York Times Book Review, November 23, 1952, pp. 5 and 48; Randal Jarrell, "Recent Poetry," Yale Review, XLIV (Summer, 1955), 598-608; Howard Nemerov, "MacLeish and Viereck," Partisan Review, XX (January-February, 1953), 115-122; and Richard Wilbur, Review of Collected Poems, 1917-1952, New England Quarterly, XXVI (March, 1953), 117-21.

general spirit of these reviewers, recognizing the lacerations Mr. MacLeish had received from critics in times past, is perhaps represented in Hayden Carruth's statement: "For all those amputations, perhaps there wasn't anything wrong with him in the first place."¹ Carruth thought the new play, The Trojan Horse, which was included in this volume, "the best work of the kind"² that MacLeish had done, despite the fact that he and most other reviewers who considered Mr. MacLeish's political works thought them inferior to his purely lyrical ones. Of The Trojan Horse Howard Nemerov said:

Its language is more spare and active than much that precedes it; as poetry it reads not very well, perhaps, but one has learned that such language may be extremely well suited to declamation, and that given a competent performance it is likely to surprise by a vigor and tension not always easily seen on the printed page.³

In some of the newest additions to the MacLeish canon, one can see what Nemerov called the process of "strategic withdrawal" from a revolutionary tone in politically directed verse. The Trojan Horse is Mr. MacLeish's last substantial utterance in verse on a political theme. Its appearance as the last piece in the Collected Poems gives it a prominence among its author's works. It is the first sign of Mr. MacLeish's renaissance in verse drama.

¹Carruth, p. 103.

²Ibid.

³Nemerov, p. 118.

A. The Trojan Horse (1952), A Response to McCarthyism

Mr. MacLeish's premonitions about attacks on free speech in the name of anti-Communism began at least as early as 1947, when he says he wrote the lyric "Brave New World" as a means of exposing this fallacy.¹ His shock over the suicide of journalist Larry Duggan prior to an investigation by an un-American Activities Committee is expressed in "The Black Day":

God help that country where informers thrive!

God help that country! But for you--for you--
Pure hearts, sweet spirit, humble, loyal,² true,
Pretend, pretend, we know not what we do.

Mr. MacLeish has expressed dissatisfaction with the direct outpouring of feeling in the diction of this poem,³ and for his play he gained a measure of detachment by choosing an ancient myth and using it allegorically in the tradition of morality drama. It is a technique used in nearly all of his verse dramas.

As in other works, such as Conquistador, (1933), and such poems in his recent collection such as "Calypso's Island" and

¹Archibald MacLeish, "Brave New World," Actfive, pp. 61-63; see Mr. MacLeish's interpretation in "The Poet and America," Carolina Quarterly, IX (Winter, 1957), 11.

²Archibald MacLeish, "The Black Day," Collected Poems, 1917-1952 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1952), p. 160; author's interpretation in The Dialogues of Archibald MacLeish and Mark Van Doren, ed. Warren V. Bush (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1964), p. 36-38.

³Ibid.

"The Rock in the Sea,"¹ Mr. MacLeish turns to The Odyssey for a basic metaphor. But his proclivity for the journey metaphor of The Odyssey gives way to the story of the Trojan horse as told in Book IV of The Odyssey; he also relies on the more developed version in Book II of The Aeneid.² As an epigraph for the play, Mr. MacLeish cites lines 231-389 of The Odyssey, which tell of Helen approaching the horse and calling the names of the Greeks to see whether they will answer. Mr. MacLeish reconstructs the story so that the noise of the Greeks inside makes their presence clearly known to Helen and some others outside.

The play's contemporary political implications are spelled out in Paul Brooks's "Publisher's Note" to the first edition:

. . . American readers may be interested in the parallel between the Trojans' acceptance of the wooden horse and certain attitudes which prevail in America today.

The men who dragged the wooden horse within the gates of Troy were moved by fear. Tired of the ten years' struggle, having lost faith in themselves, they craved the security and authority that would serve for thought. Before them stood the great horse, symbol of their city, ten times natural size. It was so big and blatant that it must be a true god. Even when a spear rang against its hollow sides, and

¹Archibald MacLeish, Collected Poems, 1917-1952, pp. 233-332, 146-7, and 154.

²The Aeneid of Virgil, a Verse Translation by Rolfe Humphries (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), pp. 37-40; The Odyssey of Homer, tr. Robert Fitzgerald (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1963), p. 61.

the well-known voice of the enemy was heard from within, they did not believe their ears. The horse would save the city; and those who questioned were traitors. They dragged it through the walls.

Mr. MacLeish has used the ancient legend to warn us that in adopting as our own the tactics of the enemy, in branding as traitors those who try to reason with us, we haul within our gates the agent of our own destruction. Americans as well as Trojans can mistake a monster for a god. Those who do so forget that their country was once something to be constantly re-created and loved, and that patriotism does not mean acceptance or conformity. Some are satisfied with the easy answer that men who talk against the horse talk against America. They act, in short, not through reason but through fear.

Out of fear
Bring that enormous image in
To make official patriots of us,
Sweating our public love by law,
And all of us will fear each other.

If this play helps us to recognize a wooden horse when we see one, it will have served an important purpose.¹

This statement, which points out the play's transparent political theme, was left out of the version of the play which appeared in Collected Poems, 1917-1952.

As in every play since Panic (1935), characterization is abstract. Most lines are divided between a First and Second Voice, three Councillors, a Girl, and a Blind Man. Of these characters, only the Councillors have a rank above that of the ordinary citizen. There are also three members of the nobility who derive from the Homeric legend, and they speak

¹Paul Brooks, "Publisher's Note," The Trojan Horse: A Play by Archibald MacLeish (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1952), pp. v-vi .

relatively few lines. Laocoon, Helen, and Cassandra are the legendary characters. Helen is by far the most important, and her role is altered considerably from traditional modes of presentation.

Since the dialogue of the citizens dominates the play, and because they do little else but comment on the action of the noble characters whose contribution to dialogue is relatively small, the action of the play is essentially static. The common people's relation to the principals (i.e., the Councillors and the three characters with proper names) is similar to the relation of the crowd in Panic with McGafferty, Ione, and the Bankers of that play. The Trojan Horse even shows signs of the formula Mr. MacLeish established in Panic for alternating action between principals and members of the crowd. For while the action of The Trojan Horse does not shift from a room scene to an outside scene, as in Panic, the dialogue of the crowd around the horse builds up tension until the crucial entrances of such principals as Laocoon, the Councillors, Helen, and Cassandra respectively. The Blind Man, like the one in Panic, functions as part of the crowd. As in the earlier play, The Trojan Horse contains a good deal of public discussion on the role of free choice vs. Fate.

Other features of The Trojan Horse recall techniques of Mr. MacLeish's earliest plays, Nobodaddy and "Our Lady of Troy." For instance, Laocoon's death, which occurs miracu-

lously in The Aeneid, occurs by natural means in MacLeish's play, just as god's communications with Abel in Nobodaddy and Helen's appearance in "Our Lady of Troy" are portrayed according to the conventions of realism. The Blind Man's scepticism and feeling of alienation resemble Cain's in Nobodaddy, while Helen in The Trojan Horse is symbolized very much according to the pattern established in "Our Lady of Troy." Helen's role in the Homeric legends pertaining to the Trojan horse is a mere footnote, but Mr. MacLeish has built the climax of the play around her, in much the same way as he adjusted the Faust legend so that Helen would be featured in the climax (cf. Ione's strong part in the climax of Panic before McGafferty's death).

Sound effects approximate those used in earlier radio plays. The play is "intended for reading without scenery or for radio."¹ The sound of surf and of gulls mewing, which are the dominant non-spoken sounds in the first half of the play, have also been important in many scenes of The American Story. Crowd noises, ranging from shouts to rumbling low whispers, have been a staple in all the previous radio dramas. These sounds are all but abandoned in the latter half of the play, and toward the end a drum sound of growing intensity signifies approaching fate. This use of the drums is similar to their symbolic role in "The American Gods" (Part V of The

¹Ibid., p. 1.

American Story) and recalls the last line of Panic: "Man's fate is a drum!"¹ A trumpet is also used to herald Cassandra's delphic quatrain at the end of the play.

The Trojan Horse opens with the character named "First voice" addressing an "Old Poet" with an epic incantation phrased as a question: "Tell me why that town is fallen."² A "Second voice" answers against a background of surf noises and mewling gulls:

She Helen knew and would not know. They brought
The horse in by the₃broken wall.
The town went down.

The First voice complains he cannot hear above the surf, and after one brief incoherent line the Second voice fades out in a rising surf sound to conclude this brief prologue. A Child, Woman, Young woman, and Man observe the presence of the horse, while the two women argue over standing room in the crowd. The Blind man, introduced in the stage directions as "the second voice of the prologue,"⁴ asks brief questions about the gathering crowd and about the horse which people are calling a god. The Blind man says nothing for about a hundred lines while members of the crowd discuss themselves, the horse, and the war.

A Man introduces the topical theme by arguing that the

¹Archibald MacLeish, Panic, 102.

²Archibald MacLeish, The Trojan Horse, p. 1.

³Ibid., p. 2.

⁴Ibid., p. 3.

city "needs / . . . one overmastering monument"¹ to cleanse its guilt in defending a pair of wrongdoers. He naively and ironically states the opposition's case, which the poet has given contemporary political implications:

Curious thing to be killed for:
The right to choose and be happy!²

Then he chooses authoritarian arguments to bolster his own view:

Peace! Order! Certainty!
Things in their proper places!
Respect for authority! Truth!
A war like that can be won,--
The god will fight in such battles:
Not in our kind. Happiness!³

The significance and application of the last word are purposely vague.

Citizens argue that the Greeks will be back, others say they are gone for good, and others agree that only a god who is a monument of authority can defend them. Since the horse is spoken of as the symbol of Troy, the city of horsetamers, its significance to the contemporary political theme is that, just as nothing could be more characteristically Trojan than the horse, so for America nothing could be thought more American than a symbol of "Americanism."

The chief defenders of authoritarian "Americanism" are three misguided Councillors, the villains of the play. An immediate clue that they are villains or at least wrong-

¹Ibid., p. 6.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

headed is the fatalistic opening of the first Councillor's speech:

No one believes the ten years war is ended.
 Those Greeks have a terrible certainty. They think
 The eternal future of the world is spun
 In one thread and the thread is theirs. They think
 The fall of Troy has been foredoomed and uttered.¹

The contemporary application of the speech is to the historical necessity of the Marxist powers who believe history furthers their cause. The irony of the Councillors' position is that it leads them into the Greeks' trap: the horse manufactured by Greeks is the symbolic equivalent of the authoritarian way of life which Mr. MacLeish has classified in the essays treated earlier in this chapter as a peculiarly Communist trait.

The Councillors are clearly meant to be character symbols for those who investigate un-American activities. They order the horse to be brought into the city. Laocoon, their first victim and a prominent member of the community, enters and immediately questions the validity of the Councillors' symbol. He argues for private patriotism rather than a public show of it:

I thought Troy's horse was carved upon a coin,
 An image on a ring, that each man fingered
 Privately and as his heart was moved.
 No Trojan would have made Troy's horse a monument.

 Troy was not worshipped: Troy was loved. And now
 You stand here by this monumental image. . . .
 Shaped like Troy's horse and say the god is in it--

¹Ibid., p. 10.

Heaven's authority and man's in one!
 You think its stature is the proof of God:
 The greater the more sacred. Is it?¹

The Councillors continue arguing for a monument, and when Laocoon suggests that they all push the horse into the sea the Councillors accuse him of treason and blasphemy. They try futilely to make him disclaim his views. When Laocoon throws his spear at the horse to prove his claim, people hear "a man's sudden muffled cry . . . suddenly stilled"² from within. People cautiously admit hearing the sound, and then abruptly the Blind man asks where Laocoon has gone. He is told that Laocoon is climbing the sea path toward the city.

After the sounds of gulls and the sea, indicating a passage of time, bystanders near the horse report that Cassandra is singing:

Whose hand is that upon the bridle?
 Whose voice cries out, Destroy! Destroy!
 Who rides the horse that has no rider?³

The Blind man asks about shouting he hears afar off, and a Girl reports that a man is saying Laocoon has been killed by sea serpents. The Blind man expresses disbelief in serpents killing Laocoon at this particular time; he asks who has followed Laocoon, and a few random details reported second-hand by members of the crowd furnish circumstantial evidence that Laocoon's enemies have punished him with death.

¹Ibid., pp. 12-13.

²Ibid., p. 15.

³Ibid., p. 16.

The Councillors are the first to explain that divine will has caused Laocoon's death, and they threaten similar fates to any who question the horse. They are clearly implicated, and to supplement their threats against rebels, they suggest that the god voice answered when Laocoon's spear struck the horse. Henceforth, no member of the crowd except the Blind man expresses a definite opinion of having heard a human voice. None but he questions the Councillors' airtight theory about the divine origin of the horse. Remarks from the crowd become more unreasonable, in this respect resembling the crowds in Panic, The Fall of the City, and Air Raid whose mob behavior is itself an index of mistaken opinions. The Councillors order citizens to bring the horse into the city, and the excited mob describes its entry through the symbolically broken wall: Troy has smashed its bulwark of freedom. The Blind man repeats Laocoon's argument and a Councillor threatens him with Laocoon's fate.

Helen's name comes up casually in the crowd's discussion, and about seventy lines later she appears.¹ Her scene is the climax of the play. To decide once and for all whether a man or a god made the sound within the horse, the Blind man asks the Councillors to allow Helen to put their theories to the test. Until he begins his argument for Helen's participation

¹Cf. The 81 lines of discussion between the time Matthiolus asks for Helen and her appearance in "Our Lady of Troy," Tower of Ivory, pp. 13-19.

Second Councillor:

What can Helen know of Troy
Or Troy's great holy image?

Blind man:

Some,
Deceived no doubt by their own senses,
Think Troy's image may conceal
Troy's enemies.

First Councillor:

And how can she,
Beautiful though she is, persuade them?

Blind man:

Because she is! Women hear heart-beats
Even behind the holiest appearances.
Treason betrays itself with women,
And most with those most beautiful. No
woman
Ever was beautiful as Helen is:
Ten years the Greeks have fought to take her.
If Helen whispered they would answer her.
Even if she barely touched
The shell that hid them they would answer;¹
If there are hidden Greeks they'll answer.

The crowd seconds Helen's merits as an ideal of beauty. A few make crude references to her love affair, but most agree that "Beauty is a kind of deafness"² and that the inward music of her soul prevents her from hearing base things.

Helen's speech to the crowd and Councillors shows some resemblance to Faust's and Helen's speeches in "Our Lady of Troy." For instance, she contrasts Menelaus's quest at the beginning of the war ten years ago--

Yes, I should be taken.

Taken! Not as then though,

¹Ibid., pp. 26-7.

²Ibid., p. 29.

Feeling the sail fill and the silver peak
Swing through the channels of the stars¹

--with Menelaus's present attitude. And at this point, after three and a half pages of script which pertains to herself, she finally brings attention back to the topical theme:

Why should Menelaus answer me?
He comes to put the past away:
To cancel out this town, this hope, this
Troy that in contempt of fate
Chose one man's happiness to fight for--
And one woman's--and made fate contemptible
And all who serve their fate. . . .²

This passage relates Menelaus to contemporary Marxists who wish to "cancel out" American democracy. Helen's personal defiance of tradition and fate in her love life is equated with the primacy of the individual which is central to MacLeish's concept of American democracy. This metaphorical relation spans great reaches of imaginative distance and is probably an original application of the Homeric materials. It could elude large segments of an audience.

The decisive elements of the climax, easily perceptible to any audience member, is Helen's reluctant approach toward the horse, her touching the horse and gently calling the names of the Greeks, and her fearful reaction when she hears a muffled answer inside. She stands a moment--

¹Ibid., p. 30; cf. Faust's closing speech:

"Peak-high in those grey mountains of my mind

All knowledge shines--a radiance of stars."

(Archibald MacLeish, "Our Lady of Troy," Tower of Ivory, p. 21.)

²Archibald MacLeish, The Trojan Horse, pp. 30-31.

A hare,
 Frozen in her form, that feels
 The grey hawk circle, would be still
 As she is!¹

--and then she runs away. She is not particularly afraid of the Greeks, but as the Blind man interprets:

Oh, she knows.
 She has no people anymore.
 If she should tell the truth these Trojans
 Mad in their terror would destroy her.
 If she is silent, then those others--
 Those that have hunted her so long--²
 Will take her in the night. She runs.

Thus even this person who is portrayed as the ideal of Trojan free society has been intimidated by the totalitarian tactics of the Councillors. Cassandra provides the denouement by reciting a word picture of how Troy will look when it is burned. She repeats her lines about the horse which have already been quoted, and then adds: "No other hand shall burn Troy!"³ The implication is that Troy has wilfully destroyed itself.

The climactic last scene portraying Helen's discovery that the Greeks are inside the horse deserves analysis beyond the scope of the topical public theme of McCarthyism. Beyond a clear manifestation that the three councillors have betrayed the State by having a symbol of state absolutism hauled into the city is the poet's attempt to set forth a positive and universal statement about the relation of truth and beauty and

¹Ibid., p. 35.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., p. 37.

the role of poetry and the poet in the communication of knowledge. Efforts to integrate these notions with the topical theme of the play are apparent in the text, though they seem at times to be made in an indirect, diffuse manner as if they are to be assumed and hinted at rather than explicitly demonstrated.

From the opening lines when the old, blind poet is invoked to give a true account of the events which is at the same time relevant to contemporary affairs, the Blind man is a person of special cognitive powers and the principal *raisonneur* in the play. In the style of MacLeish's hortatory essays, the blind poet constantly asks the appropriate questions which lead to the truth. He is a dramatized counterpart of the artist model which MacLeish extolled and emulated during the War: poet, historian, librarian, and prophet, in whose power it lies to tell the public what the score really is as far as national destiny is concerned. But when the Blind man urges Helen's participation in the quest for truth, the imagery and argument strive toward a quasi-metaphysical and esthetic level of meaning.

That Helen's scene is the most drastically reshaped portion of the Homeric myth used in this play suggests some purpose beyond the topical theme. The reshaping of plot and the mode of rhetorical lyricism in this scene bring in arbitrary changes of emphasis which exceed Mr. MacLeish's ordinary

practice in his mature works. In the Homeric source,¹ Odysseus tells of the men's reaction inside the horse, but Helen does not admit having heard anything. It is doubtful that anyone has made an audible sound when Helen walks around the horse. Immediately preceding Menelaus's story,² Helen tells of an earlier time when Odysseus had come into the city by himself on a spying mission. Helen says she had helped him and had told him of her wish to go home again. She says Odysseus told her of the Greeks' plans, but it is uncertain whether he told her of the hollow horse with men inside. This fusion and readjustment of materials resembles MacLeish's early technique in handling disparate elements--e.g., the use of Marlowe and Burton in "Our Lady of Troy." In The Trojan Horse Mr. MacLeish presents Helen in her traditional role as the inspiration of Trojan and Greek heroism, but he also appropriates a new role for her as agent of the blind poet's inspired strategem. In a word, she is the muse he needs in order to find truth. This role is akin to the relationship of Helen to Faust at the end of "Our Lady of Troy."

The forced effect which comes from Helen's identification of herself as an exemplar of voluntarism and political freedom results from a weak allegorical pose that does not stand up to the emphatic lyricism describing Helen as an intuitive

¹The Aeneid of Virgil, p. 61, ll. 264-98.

²Ibid., pp. 60-1, ll. 235-63; cf. T. E. Shaw translation quoted in Archibald MacLeish, The Trojan Horse, p. 1.

The italicized imagery, each in its own context, forms a sensational contrast between past and present.

Helen's encounter with Menelaus, as she anticipates it in The Trojan Horse, is described as a "returning ghost" meeting "Unknowing the returning ghost."¹ This image, which has no basis in the Homeric sources, is a precise reminiscence of Faust's encounter with the reincarnated Helen:

Lo, this ghost
That makes a mock of them! This thing of air,
Smoke wrought, and smoke-enduring! Such as she,
Appearances and shadows, are all things
That flesh may not acknowledge.²

Helen is also characterized in both plays as the ideal of woman, love, and beauty which men seek no matter what particular woman they have in love. Finally, images of a "driven leaf" and "a fallen leaf of dusk" which "shakes upon the grass" in Helen's closing speech of "Our Lady of Troy" is converted into the image of Helen "running through the trees"³ as she is described at the end of the later play. This image is a personal interpolation into the myth; the ground before Troy's walls is traditionally represented as a plain without much of anything growing upon it. The image describing Helen's departure strongly resembles the dancer in MacLeish's early

¹ Archibald MacLeish, The Trojan Horse, p. 34.

² Archibald MacLeish, "Our Lady of Troy," Tower of Ivory, p. 18.

³ Ibid., pp. 20 and 21; Archibald MacLeish, The Trojan Horse, p. 35.

story, "The Virtues of Vice":

She had come dancing down between the white tables, carried on the mad tide of the music like a whirling leaf in an autumn breeze.¹

In the short story the beautiful lady teaches a value system, just as Helen does in both plays.

For a space of ten pages at the end of The Trojan Horse, attention is focused on Helen in one of three ways:

- a) her sad history and predicament are told as exposition,
- b) she gradually works up to her function as the agent through whom the Greeks could be exposed, and
- c) her worth as a free moral agent and as an ideal symbol of love and beauty is painstakingly established.

Only the second of these functions brings dramatic tension into the story. The other two functions are interesting to anyone who is familiar with the original myth and admires Mr. MacLeish's ingenuity in reshaping it, or to a person who has no particular interest in the myth as such but enjoys rhetorical lyricism. A reading of the last scene demonstrates that functions (a) and (c) lack integration with the major conflict of the story and its allegorical theme. The ending of this play is marred by a cardinal error in dramatic writing: the most significant (or at least emphatic) character exposition of the play is delayed until the climax. Character exposition

¹Archibald MacLeish, "The Virtues of Vice," Yale Literary Magazine, LXXVIII (May, 1913), pp. 356-7.

about Helen reduces interest in the story as it has developed so far. New material--very likely a new allegory--is introduced.

The introduction of new material and new thematic emphasis at the climax of The Trojan Horse follows a similar pattern in "Our Lady of Troy." The same technique, which constitutes an unfortunate structural flaw, is used in the two other plays written during Mr. MacLeish's post-War renaissance in verse drama: This Music Crept by Me Upon the Waters and J. B. These plays also contain elements which are at odds with the main developments of theme and characterization. A large part of the difficulty is Mr. MacLeish's tendency in these works to be derivative not only from other authors, but from earlier works or old attitudes of his own which have little to do with the materials at hand.

The ending of The Trojan Horse founders about in search of a new allegory. Helen--symbol of romantic love, beauty, and political freedom--is the inspiration of the blind poet and acts as his agent. As an expression of an art ideology, she derives part of her symbolic value from the poet's early dedication to pure art during his esthetic phase which ended in the early '30's. Yet art and beauty, symbolically represented in the blind poet and his muse, are also presented in the last scene as touchstones to truth in matters of importance to democracy. Democracy itself is an ideal quality of in-

ternal spiritual significance which the poet must embody in a symbol, and Helen is again chosen as the vehicle for this ideal.

Mr. MacLeish's logic on this point is easy enough to trace in his prose works written during the '50's. "The Alternative"¹ presents the artist's "inward country" of the imagination as the true seedbed for political freedom. A somewhat later article, "The Poet and the Press,"² makes substantially the same relationship by arguing the thesis that it takes a poet's imagination and feeling to understand the full human implication of current events. The tragedy of Helen as symbol of poetry and truth in The Trojan Horse is Mr. MacLeish's personal tragedy during his pre-War and post-War career in practical affairs; she is not heeded in her prophetic role. Her fears and her flight away from the Trojan public are an expression of this frustration over the incompatibility of these "poetic" and "practical" roles. Mr. MacLeish once again expresses the conflict between "vacational" and "vocational" activity which has caused him anxiety throughout his career.

A sense of insecurity about the future is the strongest and final impression conveyed in the play. The uncertainty is

¹Archibald MacLeish, "The Alternative," Yale Review, XLIV (June, 1955), 491.

²Archibald MacLeish, "The Poet and the Press," Atlantic, CCIII (March, 1959), 40-46; reprinted with revisions from Poetry and Journalism.

to a great extent like that of the young artist expressing himself through the Faust mask in "Our Lady of Troy": he is doubtful about his relationship as a poet to truth and beauty on the one hand, and to his audience on the other. The last lines which the blind poet speaks regarding Helen substantiate this interpretation:

Oh, she knows.
 She has no people anymore.
 If she should tell the truth these Trojans
 Mad in their terror would destroy her.
 If she is silent, then those others--
 Those that have hunted her so long--¹
 Will take her in the night. She runs.

In his function as prophet, the artist fears the public; in his function as artist he fears the critics. The closing statement is also a final comment on the political theme of the play. Art, symbolized by Helen, needs freedom if it is to flourish; as freedom is threatened with extinction, so is art, and truth along with it. In light of the importance Helen has as a symbol in Mr. MacLeish's art ideology, her flight may express the poet's fears that his muse has fled. The anxieties which Helen and the blind poet feel also express the artist's frustrated search for autonomy--a desire for a freedom which consists of a flight from the uncongenial political climate of McCarthyism and perhaps from socio-political concerns generally. The poet is ready for a new embarkation toward the "inward country of the mind."

¹Archibald MacLeish, The Trojan Horse, p. 35.

Mr. MacLeish's recent collected essays on current affairs, Freedom Is the Right to Choose, had not been taken very seriously by reviewers. There may have been some anxiety about a play on a current subject not being taken seriously either. Reviewers of the Collected Poems would point out Mr. MacLeish's superior talent for non-political subjects. After The Trojan Horse and the less than merciful treatment he would receive in his political debates with Walter Lippmann and David Riesman, Mr. MacLeish would wait another seven years before allowing the social muse to dominate one of his plays.

Since The Trojan Horse is Mr. MacLeish's first verse drama after a lapse of fourteen years (The States Talking may be excluded because it is a poem adapted for radio reading), it is not surprising that Mr. MacLeish's verse technique shows some development in the new play. The basic rhythm is a four stress line without a regularly established foot. It is no longer an emulation of Hopkins' sprung rhythm such as Mr. MacLeish had experimented with in Air Raid and The Fall of the City. The new style has fewer slack syllables than most lines of these plays, hardly any obtrusive alliterations, and far fewer accumulations of either stressed or slack syllables. The new line resembles the tighter (i.e., trochaic and iambic) four-stress lines of some of the crowd speeches in the verse plays of the '30's, or the four-stress lines of Eliot and Yeats. Iambic rhythm, where it occurs, is usually broken at least once in a line. But there are other interesting effects

when the rhythm occasionally settles into regular iambic feet.

The first two lines of this passage are in broken iambic rhythm and of unequal length, and those that follow show an alternation between regular iambic pentameter and tetrameter:

Or is it your ear, Menelaus,
 Words of mine are dumb to? For they say
 Those who have loved and have forgotten
 Cannot encounter. The returning ghost,
 Cry though it may against the door
 Or in the chamber even, meets ¹
 Unknowing the returning ghost.

The first line of this passage is anapestic trimeter, the second and fourth lines are iambic pentameter, and the remaining four lines are iambic tetrameter. Rhythm is more evenly syllabic than Mr. MacLeish preferred in the '30's. This mixture of lines combines the four-stress standard Mr. MacLeish set in his dramatic verse of the '30's with the blank verse style of "Our Lady of Troy" and Nobodaddy. Even the diction of this passage and some others in The Trojan Horse harkens back to those imitations of Renaissance verse in his first two plays.

The loosest rhythms of the play are in the speeches of the Three Councillors. Their irregular iambic pentameter is almost ragged enough to resemble prose, like that of Eliot's rationalizing knights in Murder in the Cathedral, whose characters resemble those of MacLeish's Councillors. The Third Councillor says:

¹Ibid., p. 54.

I say what he says: that the Greeks have fled.
 I do not say the Greeks are gone. No sensible
 Ripe experienced man would make that judgment.
 These Greeks will still return and still return
 And still again return until the prophecy,
 Scored, they think, upon the skull of time,
 Has been accomplished and this town, its towers
 Tumbled upon our heap of bones, becomes
 Our sepulchre, not our city.¹

Loose rhythm is achieved, not so much by departures from a syllabic norm, but by the use of frequent minor stresses and the expansion of an iambic pentameter norm to alexandrines. The second and fifth lines are alexandrines, and the third and sixth lines are acephalous iambic pentameter which helps balance the iambic hexameter lines. The last line of the passage juxtaposes accents of the third and fourth feet.

The first line of the passage echoes the speech of Eliot's First Knight, who says, "I should like first to recur to a point that was very well put by our leaders. . . ." ²
 In fact the whole passage quoted above is an argument for reasonable judgment which echoes the diction and sense of the First, Second, and Third Knights' speeches in Murder in the Cathedral. Emphasis on the same "Greeks" parallels the First Knight's repetition of "English" in his argument for fair play. The speeches in both plays emphasize local patriotism; MacLeish's Councillors imply the kind of disinterestedness which Eliot's Knights explicitly claim for themselves.

¹Ibid., p. 11.

²T. S. Eliot, Murder in the Cathedral, Collected Poems and Plays, 1909-1950, p. 216. See also p. 215.

Finally, the thrice repeated "return" of the Greeks in MacLeish's lines resembles the opening of Eliot's Ash Wednesday, while the images of the skull and bones recall the beginning of part two of that poem, which sets out three white leopards, a skull, and bones for contemplation; MacLeish's tower faintly suggests Eliot's staircase imagery later in that poem.¹ The method of imitation seems to be a distillation or summary of early influences. Rather than imitating Eliot consciously or directly, Mr. MacLeish may be recapturing images from his own works of an early Eliot phase.

The direction of Mr. MacLeish's thematic and prosodic development is revealed further in Songs for Eve,² a collection of lyrics which appeared as a book in 1954. Divided into two parts, this volume contains a series of twenty-eight poems, which gives the book its title, and twenty-one additional poems. The short, runic poems of the first section--often framed as dialogues, question-and-answer ballads, or riddles--strongly resemble Yeats's style in treating themes of old age and mortality in those later series of lyrics entitled "A Man Young and Old," "Words for Music Perhaps," and "A Woman Young and Old."³ The MacLeishian awestruck candor is the most

¹T.S. Eliot, Ash Wednesday, ibid., pp. 60,61, and passim.

²Archibald MacLeish, Songs for Eve (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1954); six poems not in the title sequence were published in Atlantic Monthly, CXCIV (July, 1945), 42-43.

³W.B. Yeats, The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats (Definitive Edition, With the Author's Final Revisions; New York: The MacMillan Co., 1957), pp. 218-23 and 251-272.

personal note in Songs for Eve. Many of these very short lyrics function as statements and replies in a kind of dramatic series. The last ten poems in the series are, however, somewhat longer than the others, and they function as single poems, each with a dialogue within itself (e.g., "Eve Quiets Her Children," "The Serpent's Cradle Song," "Eve Explains to the Thrush Who Repeats Everything," and "What the Wind Said to the Water: What the Water Replied").

The poems of this series are a hybrid of lyrical and dramatic writing: individual poems, or parts of single poems, are like speeches of different people in a play who address each other. Except for the greater regularity of stress, the rhythm and length of lines in these poems strongly resemble Mr. MacLeish's practice in all three verse plays of the '50's. The characteristic line in Songs for Eve is three or four stresses, tightly constructed in simple diction with heavy accents. The most noteworthy thematic elements are the consciously reworked materials from the early play Nobodaddy and the emphasis on abstract Time as a dynamic force in man's life. Mr. MacLeish thus returns to a motif which preoccupied him in such works of the '20's and '30's as Einstein and Panic and--among many short lyrics--"Le Secret humaine," "Immortal Helix," and "You, Andrew Marvel."¹

Songs for Eve was reviewed favorably by John Ciardi,

¹Archibald MacLeish, Collected Poems, pp. 26, 29, 60-1, and 251-8.

who saw in it a "return of MacLeish's lyric voice,"¹ and by Richard Eberhart, who was enchanted by the simplicity of language and the biblical material without the superstructure of Freudian or other intellectual graftings.² Neither reviewer noted qualities derivative of Mr. MacLeish's earlier work.

The second half of the volume contains twenty-one poems which are more discursive than the poems of the Eve cycle and do not use short lines so often. An exception is "Why the Face of the Clock is Not Truly a Circle," which combines MacLeish's familiar treatment of Time with Yeatsian melancholy over the aging process in the concluding stanza:

Time does not go:
Time keeps its place.
But oh the brown hair
And oh the bright face!
Where? By What journey.³

MacLeish's abstract imagery in the first part of this four-stanza poem resembles Yeats's discussion of an abstract subject which takes a sudden, "irrelevant" rhetorical turn at the end. Yeats's "Politics" concludes:

But O that I were young again
And held her in my arms!⁴

¹John Ciardi, "Recent Poetry," Nation, CLXXX (February 22, 1955), 77.

²Richard Eberhart, "The More I Have Traveled," New York Times Book Review, October 10, 1954, p. 14.

³Archibald MacLeish, Songs for Eve, p. 43.

⁴W. B. Yeats, "Politics," Collected Poems, p. 337.

A similar pattern of contrasts occurs in MacLeish's lyric, "The Theory of Poetry," which is a dilution of his "Ars poetica" and "Whay Any Lover Learns." The new poem argues the superiority of heart over mind and punningly ends:

"Take heart then, poet!"¹

Another of these twenty-one poems which shows a return to older usages and themes is "Dr. Sigmund Freud Discovers the Sea Shell,"² which has imagery and an anti-intellectual argument very much like what the poet had written in Einstein. Quoting Erich Neumann, MacLeish's epigraph to "Infiltration of the Universe" (dedicated to William Empson) spells out the theme of Nobodaddy: "The ascent toward consciousness is the 'unnatural' thing in nature."³ In this poem, images of inanimate nature "prove" the theme as they did in Nobodaddy. Some of these images occur in the next play, This Music Crept By Me Upon the Waters. Regular rhythm in lines of irregularly alternating length--three to five stresses per line--illustrate a development already pointed out in The Trojan Horse.⁴ The theme of awakened consciousness is the raison d'etre of Mr. MacLeish's next play, but a modern realistic setting obscures

¹ Archibald MacLeish, Songs for Eve, p. 37; cf. Collected Poems, pp. 50-1 and 158.

² Ibid., p. 38; cf. Archibald MacLeish, Einstein, Collected Poems, pp. 251-8, esp. p. 253.

³ Archibald MacLeish, Songs for Eve, p. 40.

⁴ See pp. 381ff.

the play's relationship to Mr. MacLeish's treatment of the theme in Nobodaddy.

B. This Music Crept By Me Upon the Waters

In April, 1953, less than a year after the publication of The Trojan Horse, Mr. MacLeish's verse play, This Music Crept By Me Upon the Waters appeared in the literary magazine, Botteghe Oscure.¹ Produced as a radio play by Geoffrey Bridson, it was performed several times beginning in June on the Third Program of the British Broadcasting Company.² In late September, Mr. MacLeish wrote in an introduction to the single volume edition, which was the first of the Poet's Theatre Series, that the play was about to be presented under the direction of Mary Howe by the Poets' Theatre at Harvard University.³ Thus, Mr. MacLeish's play was realizing the standard he had set for The Trojan Horse--a verse drama which would adapt equally well to radio and the stage.

Mr. MacLeish's rapprochement with the conditions of his media is evident in his introduction to the single volume edition. He refers to his confidence, expressed nearly twenty

¹Archibald MacLeish, "This Music Crept By Me Upon the Waters," Botteghe Oscure, XI (April, 1953), 172-225.

²Steven Marcus, "The Power of Audience," Commentary XVIII (August, 1954), p. 172; Archibald MacLeish, This Music Crept By Me Upon the Waters (The Poets' Theatre Series, No. 1; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1953), pp. [iii-iv].

³Ibid., p. [iv].

years before in the introduction to The Fall of the City, that poetry would appeal to "the imaginative ear" and would regain its long lost public through radio verse drama. But he now drastically amends the earlier declaration:

I still believe in the promise but no longer in the fulfillment, at least in this country. And not only because television has, in the interim, returned the eye to its modern primacy, subordinating the unseen to the seen, but for a different reason. The theatre of which I wrote has been remodelled for more realistic purposes and there is very little hope or none at all that it will be restored to what it was, or might have been. Commercial time does not turn backwards. A few independent stations may set up tents from year to year, but Americans who wish to continue to believe that radio as a whole can be something more than a "communications industry" must look to the British Broadcasting Corporation to keep their hearts up.¹

Mr. McLeish's dwindled confidence in "commercial" radio as a medium for art prompts him to depend less on the "paraphernalia" of sound effects which he had deprecated even while using them extensively in The American Story.² The introduction to the new play harkens back to the poet's ideal of verse drama for radio as he had expressed it in the '30's.³

As if he has taken his cue from Enobarbus's colorful speech in Shakespeare's *Anthony and Cleopatra*, a line of which

¹ Ibid., p. [iii].

² Archibald MacLeish, The American Story, p. xi.

³ "On the stage, verse is often an obstacle because the artifice of the verse and the physical reality of the scene do not harmonize. . . . Over the radio verse has no visual presence to compete with. Only the ear is engaged and the ear is already half poet." (Archibald MacLeish, "Foreward," The Fall of the City, p. x.)

furnishes the title of his play, Mr. MacLeish attempts to create the setting as well as a mood of awe through the richly descriptive speeches of his characters. Besides the sound effects, which are limited to occasional surf sounds and the knocking of wood, there are few other elements of "spectacle." These are conveyed through brief and infrequent stage directions and deal mainly with lighting effects such as the increase of moonlight on the water, the swerving of headlights up the driveway, and a character walking through a door or arch. The visual elements are brief enough to be described by a radio announcer, indicated by a character's movement on a stage without scenery, or left out altogether. The script indicates that Mr. MacLeish wrote with minimal dependence upon the techniques furnished by radio or stage media. The spoken text seems to have been the true realization of the play for Mr. MacLeish, and the cooperation of directors at the BBC and Harvard's P_uets' Theatre were additions after the fact. To a greater extent than in any previous play, he places the whole burden of his dramatization upon the dialogue of his actors.

Mr. MacLeish expresses the artistic problem for this--and presumably any verse drama--in rhetorical questions about Eliot's commercially successfully play, The Cocktail Party, which bound itself to the "status quo ante" of "the stage in the four-walled room" and perhaps "paid too high" a "prosodic price" in its creation of surreptitiously versified familiar

language. Eliot's experiment is contrasted with Yeats's "move in the opposite direction" of the "chamber play." Mr. MacLeish does not say which method is "the right one for us,"¹ but his discussion of the media which have actually carried his own play suggests that he is trying to gain a popular audience in England through the BBC and a small band of American appreciators through the Poets' Theatre. Mr. MacLeish's anxiety over the dilemma of artistic quality vs. popular demand looms once more--

It is by no means a prospect to despair of, even for those who held high hopes of the stage radio might have created. Small identifiable audiences may create in time a more enduring public for poetry than the large anonymous audiences radio could have reached. And if other publishers will do what the Harvard University Press is doing in the series of verse plays here inaugurated, that public need not necessarily be small.²

--and the dilemma seems resolved temporarily in elite group acceptance of "poetic drama" on home soil.

This Music Crept by Me Upon the Waters portrays monotony of the lives of several upper middle class Americans vacationing in the Antilles who are challenged to an awakening of consciousness by a vision of moonlit ocean splendor. The vision of beauty is associated at the end of the play with the love of man and woman. This relationship and the timeless stasis of man's intuition of beauty are stated, and the play

¹Archibald MacLeish, This Music Crept By Me Upon the Waters, p. [iii].

²Ibid., p. [iv].

ends with all the characters settling back to broiled chicken and monotony before character relationships have been very fully developed. Owing to the lack of development in plot or character, it is reasonable to treat the play more as a "statement" than as an action. Statement of the theme is developed chiefly through metaphors, many of which are strongly derivative of Mr. MacLeish's other works. The following summary of the play will explicate action, theme development, and derivations.

The thirty-eight page text, which would take less than an hour to read or perform, is continuous and without any designation of act or scene. However, a division of five scenes can be adopted based upon the entrance or exit of characters. These divisions also correspond roughly to the development and shifting of theme. The entire play takes place in a garden above the sea in the Antilles, at the cottage of Chuck Stone and his wife, Elizabeth. An American couple in their late thirties, they are waiting with an Englishman, Oliver Oren, and Alice Liam--both in their late forties--for other dinner guests to arrive. The guests are long overdue, and the waiting couples are said to have consumed many words and drinks.

Alice opens with a question about who is expected, but Elizabeth is absentmindedly looking toward the sea. Chuck complains that he doesn't know what she listens to on the island--"not me at least."¹ Elizabeth denies a suggestion that

¹Ibid., p. 2.

she doesn't like the island, and by playing the antagonist to the others' discussion of commonplace subjects, she shows herself to be least happy with her environment and the most receptive to some sort of higher inspiration. Oliver and Alice seem the most detached and urbane of all the characters of the play. Oliver notes that the Negroes on the island don't need watches, while Oliver observes that the entire American community can sometimes be as much as fifty minutes off the right time. Elizabeth retorts:

Not the least like natives, Oliver.
They have no time to lose. They live
Now. Not late, not soon, but now.
They can't lose now. They live there.¹

Oliver's reply--"Only the / Trees have found that fabulous country"--is a reminder that life in the manner Alice describes which consist of complete lack of consciousness, which is precisely the point of the argument, Like Abel in Nobodaddy, Elizabeth argues for life without consciousness:

Every paradise is laid in it.
Here and now must meet each other
Like two impossible rivers joining
Just where Jerusalem begins . . .
No matter which Jerusalem.²

OLIVER

The unattainable, unvisited now
That's never here when we are.

ELIZABETH
(violently)

No!

¹Ibid., p. 3.

²Ibid.

Now and here together in one gulp
To burn the heart out with its happiness!¹

By responding to Chuck's reprimand and then admitting that she has never been in that land, Elizabeth gives further evidence of her unhappiness.² Elizabeth's character conflict so far is a neat reversal of Eve's in Nobodaddy: whereas Eve lamented the departure from paradise, Elizabeth lives in what to the eyes is paradise but says she cannot partake of it.

The other three people divert themselves by discussing lunch and Chuck's landscaping. Elizabeth calls attention to the brightening moon and urges that they enjoy the present instead of looking ahead two years when Chuck's garden is expected to mature. Oliver, perhaps jokingly, has asked the others not to divert him from his misery. Apparently alluding to Henry James, he says:

Who was it said his whole life seemed
A preparation for what never happened? . . .
Like your dinner, dear Elizabeth: ³
A preparation for who never comes.

Through a few images, Alice and Elizabeth introduce the idea that the passage of time is an illusion.

ALICE

How smooth the wind is. Like a river.

¹ Ibid., pp. 3-4; cf. Cain's vision of "another land" in Nobodaddy, p. 50.

² Archibald MacLeish, This Music Crept By Me Upon the Waters, p. 5.

³ Ibid., cf. Henry James, "The Beast in the Jungle," Selected Short Stories, ed. with an Introduction by Quentin Anderson, Revised (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1957), pp. 260-1.

ELIZABETH

The always flowing of the wind. . . .

CHUCK

They never fail, the Trades.

ALICE

It feels

The air against my face--as though
The air were still and the earth turning.

ELIZABETH

I know. You feel the turning earth here.¹

This passage is a variation on the theme of MacLeish's lyric, "You, Andrew Marvell," in which an airborne spectator observes "the always coming on / The always rising of the night."²

A shift in the conversation to the subject of the natives' nakedness reveals the speakers' self-consciousness in spite of their attempts at sophistication. Like Adam's family after the expulsion from Eden, they must bear the burden of human consciousness. Material for this conversation includes mention of Columbus naming the island paradise "La Desirada," Elizabeth's abortive beginning of a poem by Apollinaire, and allusions to Arawaks, Caribs, and Rousseau's "noble savage." The conversationalists dwell on Columbus's amazement over the beauty of the island and the naked innocence of the natives. This part of the dialogue recreates the part of Columbus's logbook which MacLeish had used toward the end of "The Admiral," the first installment of The American

¹ Ibid., pp. 5-6.

² Archibald MacLeish, "You, Andrew Marvell," Collected Poems p. 60.

Story.

Alice suggests that the Indians Columbus saw were "the angels at the gate"¹ of paradise. Elizabeth introduces the old MacLeishian theme of the New World as the fulfillment of human aspirations, but she lacks the grounds for optimism argued in The American Story:

ELIZABETH

(excitedly)

I think he saw it all. And knew
This was no island in the sea.
This was another kind of island--
A shoal in time where happiness was possible:
More perhaps than possible--inevitable.

OLIVER

Inevitable? Happiness?

ELIZABETH

Yes. Inevitable. . . .
For those who found his island.

OLIVER

Found it!
Thousands of wanderers must have found it . . .
.
And were they happy?
Are they? All of them? Those Negroes
Swinking half-naked in the cane?
Americans stark naked on the beaches?²

The argument is a brief for several problems treated in earlier works. In Land of the Free and The American Story Mr. MacLeish has asked whether happiness (or freedom) was a place or a state of mind. Elizabeth's answer shifts into the old ambiguities. Is the island paradise which all seek a state of

¹Archibald MacLeish, This Music, p. 7.

²Ibid., p. 8.

mind in the present time, or is it a re-creation of Columbus's ideal which defies time and social conditions? The latter is the ideal Mr. MacLeish has advocated in The American Story. This problem of interpretation is unresolved because the ideal paradise is described in a variety of ways, many of which have nothing to do with Columbus as a historical, ideal, or symbolic personality.

The notion of happiness being inevitable is a variation of the fatalism which has been the cause of much discomfort in Panic and other works even as recent as The Trojan Horse. For MacLeish characters to speak of inevitability is usually an automatic sign that they are in error. In answer to Elizabeth's false start, Oliver is the raisonneur describing the central character conflict of the play:

Perhaps some bronze brown African woman
 Lying like summer in the sun,
 Languid with her mute desire,
 Might turn her head and be there--might!
 But who else? Your American neighbors?
 If one American should see this Paradise,
 Even from far off in his grog,
 The way you think the Admiral saw it,
 His mind would fail him! Don't deceive yourself.
 We're all sleep-walkers here, Elizabeth.
 You are. I am. Chuck there. Alice.
 If we should find ourselves awake
 Where "now" was truly now, and "here"
 Just here, and nothing left to hide us,
 We'd huddle shivering in our souls
 Like those who waken in cathedrals, naked.
 Oh, we'd sweat I tell you. We'd be miserable.¹

The contrast between primeval unconsciousness before beauty

¹Ibid., pp. 8-9.

in paradise and the anxious self-awareness of modern man before the gates of paradixe is a modernized version of the Cain-Abel conflict in Nobodaddy. The effects of awakened consciousness described in this speech are precisely those dramatized in the earlier play, and references to nakedness strengthen the thematic relationship between the two plays.

The rest of This Music Crept By Me Upon the Waters attempts to illuminate the struggle for happiness and awareness in the lives of two characters. As Elizabeth ominously answers Oliver with the words, "One or two would change their lives,"¹ the group starts discussing Peter Bolt. Elizabeth says, "It's never now or here with Peter" because it must be "somewhere else and afterward . . . when the work is finished, / The fame won."² Chuck answers defensively that all the American men live the same way, and Oliver suggests that Peter is not so impetuous (i.e., aggressive or competitive) as the others. He is a well-known young lawyer who never spends much time in his vacation house on the island. Elizabeth says she used to know him, but the "haven't really talked for years."³ She adds that Peter's wife Ann is perfect except for her lack of feeling. Aided by Ann, Elizabeth argues that Peter's anxiety for his wife's comfort is no proof of his love.

On the subject of everyone's right to happiness, Chuck

¹Ibid., p. 9.

²Ibid., p. 12.

³Ibid., p. 10.

claims that "simple, decent people" have it, while Oliver argues that happiness can be known by

Saints of a far more rigorous discipline
 Than any the meek church acknowledges.
 Mexican Indians. Chinese poets.
 No ordinary saint can sit
 In sunlight at a door, like those
 Old Negro women of Elizabeth's.

As the group continues to discuss happiness in the timeless present, Elizabeth remarks on the beauty of the moon for a second time. Just then Chuck notices that the Trade Wind has stopped--a phenomenon that almost never happens at that season. In the stillness, Alice describes the scene in language recalling MacLeish's "Ars poetica":

The palm leaves fill
 And fall as though not air but moonlight
 Gathered them and let them go.
 You know, it could be Paradise, it could be--
 This moment anyway.²

Like their antecedent, these lines seem to have some general application to the process of poetic creation. Elizabeth answers:

It is!
 If only we ourselves awoke
 And trusted it, it could be. Even for
 Us! If we could take it. . . . Dared to. . . .

¹Ibid., p. 13.

²Ibid., p. 15; cf. "Ars poetica":
 "Leaving, as the moon releases
 Twig by twig the night-entangled trees,

 A poem should be motionless in time
 As the moon climbs." (Archibald MacLeish, Collected Poems,
 pp. 50-51.)

CHUCK

Take what?

ELIZABETH

Our lives! Our lives! Our lives!
 (Elizabeth crosses to the cliff's edge, stands
 there looking out to sea.)¹

The echos in these lines of "esthetic" and "social" poems, together with Elizabeth's rush to the cliff, suggest some kind of implied conflict and private meaning having to do with the opposition of art and politics, art and life, or vocational and vacational experience. That the beauty of paradise has begun causing the viewers' minds to fail them, as Oliver has predicted, is suggested by Oliver's remark, "Alice is giddy from her fast."²

Chuck remarks that it is already eight o'clock, and Oliver compares the guests' non-appearance to Raleigh's vanished settlement at Jamestown, or to a deserted ship at full sail. Elizabeth shifts this meditation to thoughts of themselves facing annihilation:

What makes you think we're safe inside,
 We others? That blazing moon could burn
 The whole stockade of certainty and leave us
 Ignorant in the wilderness, no matter

¹Archibald MacLeish, This Music, p. 16. Cf. "America Was Promises: "America is promises to
 Take!

.
 To take them

Brutally

With love but

Take them." (Archibald MacLeish, Collected

How we'd built it out of words from home.
Where would we hide our hunger then?¹

The passage is a diluted variation of MacLeish's lyric, "The End of the World," in which the top of the circus tent blows off and the people inside look with "white faces, dazed eyes" through "starless dark" at "nothing, nothing, nothing--nothing at all."² Chuck irritably tells Elizabeth he hates "those games" of "always asking / Where . . . When? . . ."³

The guests are now arriving, and Chuck wagers that they feel no pain.

The foregoing scene comprises nearly half the text of the play. The second scene shows the same characters interacting with two more slightly intoxicated couples in such a way that all of them reject the vision of beauty, happiness, and self-realization through a vision of beauty--except for Elizabeth, who becomes more alienated from the group. Harry Keogh and his wife Sally are simple people from Milwaukee. At the introductions, Harry reminds the others that he is a Colonel and, in the vein of MacLeish's "Memorial Rain" and "Lines for an Interment" remarks: "When the wars are ended /

¹Ibid., p. 17.

²Archibald MacLeish, Collected Poems, p. 33.

³Archibald MacLeish, This Music; P. 17; cf. "Stupid, hating the words, the meanings, hating The Think now, Think, the Oh but Think!" (Archibald MacLeish, "Eleven," Collected Poems, p. 36.)

Who remembers the poor soldiers?"¹ Harry seems a little more drunk than the others. He expresses vehement disgust at the others' moonstruck rapsodies. His wife reverts to language and sentiments of the flapper era--

They're crazy, everybody's crazy,
 Craziest night I ever saw,
 Like Paris, who was it that was, saying
 Let's go crazy, dear, in Paris?²

--and Harry appropriately reminds her of the anachronism:

"Quiet! You're a big girl now: / You're forty-seven."³

Sally recounts how she had gazed at the moon and repeated "I'm beautiful" while imagining she was naked by the water. Her husband, playing the authoritarian censor, snaps, "Shut up." But Elizabeth encourages Sally to hold on to her lost fantasy.

The other couple is J. B. Halsey and his wife Helen. Helen remarks that her husband, characterized as an inattentive businessman, had looked at the moon in a way that he never looked at her:

HELEN

Who sees the whole of his desire. Oh, like a man, . . .

HALSEY

You don't know what you're saying, Helen.

HELEN

A man who saw his whole desire,
 Near as the world was in that moon,
 Might get it.⁴

¹Archibald MacLeish, This Music, p. 21; cf. Archibald MacLeish, Collected Poems, pp. 46-7 and 96.

²Archibald MacLeish, This Music, p. 23.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid., p. 22.

The "poetic" connotations of Helen's statement above are remarkably like those of the muse Helen in "Our Lady of Troy" and The Trojan Horse. However, this motif receives only slight development in This Music Crept By Me Upon the Waters. Elizabeth closes the second scene with a commentary on the pathetic group and thus advances the theme of the play a little further:

We face our lives
 Like young girls in a gallery of mirrors.
 Some glittering, unexpected moment
 Shows us our images and we shriek
 With childish, hysterical laughter, caught
 Naked in the simplicity of ourselves. . . .
 You needn't stare at me. You know it--all of you.

 Yes, and see
 Things they never meant to see
 And tell themselves they've never seen them!
 We shouldn't live here, any of us.
 We're out of place in so much light!
 The green volcano in those hills
 Could drown us in a flood of fire
 And we'd go under giggling.¹

The others straggle into the house for their neglected meal, while Elizabeth, the hostess, walks "awkwardly and rather self-consciously. . . to the cliff's edge over the sea and stands leaning against a palm trunk."² The headlights of Peter Bolt's car can be seen down on the driveway.

In the doorway of the house, Helen talks confidentially to Chuck. She parries his respectably suggestive remarks by confessing with great urgency her sense of spiritual isolation:

¹Ibid., pp. 24-25.

²Ibid., p. 25.

Please! I mean it Chuck. I heard
 Something that frightened me beside the water.
 There wasn't any sound at all--
 No sound at all and yet I heard
 Ravishing laughter on the sea
 Like negresses: in love they say
 they shriek with laughter. . . . it was horrible!
 I stood there staring at the moon and heard
 Ravishing laughter on the water. . . .¹
 I don't know what I am, I don't know. . . .¹

The crisis of identity is personal with Helen, who becomes virtually a nonentity for the rest of the play, and her remarks can also apply to the other confused and dull people at this party. If Helen has an offhand symbolic identity as the poet's muse, then she is also confessing a crisis of artistic identity. Her speech above alludes to the title of the play and for that reason would seem important. On the most literal level, she is the spokesman of frustration, lack of identity, and inability to interpret meaning in life. Her last lines of the play, spoken after the resolution of a momentary crisis, is a final echo of the last line in "The End of the World" as she chants: "Nothing has happened. . . . / Nothing. Nothing at all."² Whether these allusive statements apply to the poet's feeling about his craft or about the outcome of this particular play is a question which defies a clear and definite answer.

Scenes three through five comprise the last third of the play. The audience's expectations about the personal fate of Peter Bolt have been heightened by what other character's have

¹Ibid., pp. 26-27.

²Ibid., p. 38.

said about him in the first two acts. As they approach the house, Peter tells his wife Ann that she should go in because he needs time to think. She fears he has suddenly changed, and he says he wishes he had. It is as if he wished to rise from the dead so he could "Live here. Live in this island."¹

Ann insists he couldn't bear it:

Oh, my dear, how well I know you.
You need to earn your life to live in it
Even though the earning cost you
All your lifetime and yourself.²

Peter insists with effort that he wishes to live

This, this moment now, this moon now. . . .
This man here on an island watching.
The way you understand in dreams
That waken in a giddiness of certainty.³

Peter diagnoses his mistake of not living in the present:

All my life I've lived tomorrow
Waiting for my life to come:
Promises to come true tomorrow,
Journeys to begin tomorrow,
Mornings in the sun tomorrow,
Books read, words written,
All tomorrow. Cities visited.
Even this fever of the sleepless heart
Slept away tomorrow. . . . all of it.

To this speech echoing Macbeth's similar condemnation of his ambition, Ann interpolates, "Truth to be told at last . . . tomorrow,"⁵ and Peter continues:

¹Ibid., p. 27.

²Ibid., pp. 27-28.

³Ibid., p. 28.

⁴Ibid., pp. 28-29.

⁵Ibid., p. 29.

We cling so to the skirts of suffering
 Like children to their mothers--hold
 The hand that hurts our hand for fear
 We'll lose ourselves unless it hurts us!--
 Making a virtue of our cowardice:
 Pretending that a sense of sin and shame
 Is holier than the happiness we fumble.¹

The first five lines of this passage echo MacLeish's lyric, "Ancestral," and the last three furnish a wry commentary on the situation of the child in the lyric "Some Aspects of Immortality," who is "too ignorant, think I, for fears."²

Communication breaks down completely, and Ann agrees to go into the house if Peter will come when he can. He promises he will.

In scene four, Peter is surprised to meet Elizabeth, who has overheard the previous conversation. The two now have a frank and sympathetic discussion of their experiences viewing the moon. Elizabeth said she felt as though she had started out of sleep. Peter agrees that he felt the same way, that for the first time--

I stood and I was there! As though
 I'd turned a corner suddenly and come--
 I don't know where but come there. Oh,
 As though I'd ended and begun.³

Peter is obviously still caught up in the conflict over living in the present or in some other time. Ann says she had thought of him, and Peter says of his moon viewing experience,

¹Ibid., cf. Archibald MacLeish, "Ancestral," Collected Poems, pp. 43-44.

²Archibald MacLeish, "Some Aspects of Immortality," ibid., p. 45.

³Archibald MacLeish, This Music, p. 31.

Only when I thought of you--
 Only then did that inexplicable happiness
 Take form and meaning and grow capable. . . .¹

Elizabeth wonders whether they have been silent too long to know happiness. She reiterates that happiness is always in the present. Peter wonders why it takes so long to know this truth.

Elizabeth says "The world is." Peter says he never knew that until tonight. They agree that they are answerable to nothing but "the loveliness of our lives."² Now Peter says they are

Removed by some enchantment not of change
 To this . . . this instant. . . . this forever . . .
 Never to go back.³

Paradox is evident in the fact that an enchantment has taken place without a change, yet they will never go back. Are they to begin a new love together and run off? They promise each other never to go back, and they seal the promise with a kind of oath:

ELIZABETH

I promise you. . . . If we should turn
 Even our hearts to look behind us. . . .

PETER

Even our hearts would turn to salt.
 Come!⁴

Where shall they go?

PETER

No matter where.
 Anywhere but through that door. . . .⁵

¹Ibid.

Ibid., p. 32.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid., p. 33.

⁵Ibid.

They go out through the archway as the wind rises again.

At the house Chuck calls out that "Soup's on." The house door bangs in the wind.

The fifth scene ties together the action of the lyrical melodrama by means of a fortuitous happening. Nobody in the house can find Peter's wife Ann. Everyone, including Peter and Elizabeth, knows she is missing. Someone mentions the cliff, and suicide is feared. Only Keogh, the uncouth realist, thinks that the fears are groundless. Peter and Elizabeth forget their commitment not to return and help in the search. Finally, someone discovers her in the house cooking potatoes. All go in to supper.

This play--with its vacation setting, its middleaged couples capable of a variety of responses in an essentially static situation, and the striking versification of every kind of language from rapsody to stubborn chiché--works toward the single effect of captivating the audience while it contemplates a theme which is best epitomized in W. H. Davies' refrain:

What is this life if, full of care,¹
We have no time to stand and stare.

Mr. MacLeish's deliberate abandonment of sophistication has a charm which deserves the praise Steven Marcus has given it.²

¹W.H. Davies, "Leisure," The Pocket of Modern Verse, ed. Oscar Williams (New York: Pocket Books, Inc., 1954), p. 217.

²Steven Marcus, "The Power of the Audience," Commentary, XVIII (August, 1954), 172-75.

Yet the play poses problems insofar as, at some points, the author promises deep interpretations of life in a character relationship which never develops beyond outline. Marcus's comments on the ending of the play--on Peter Bolt's abandonment of his esthetics and on his newly found love for the sake of his wife and the potatoes--points to the essential difficulty in the structure of the play:

The irony with which Mr. MacLeish intends to end his play is entirely unconvincing; "life's little ironies" is the refuge of just the attitudes that he has been criticizing. It is as if Mr. MacLeish had suddenly become embarrassed by the straightforwardness of his sermon, and had contrived this ending as an assurance that he was not so unsophisticated after all. It is an act of piety to his audience, and it seems to me to betray misgivings about that audience, for the slight charm of the play lies exactly in its temporary suspension of all that we know as sophisticated and ironic. When the poet surrenders his work to an assumption that his audience is bored by his simplicities, and seems constrained to reassure them that he is as aware of life's realities as they, he has, I think, renounced the admirable function of reminding them of what they have forgotten for the tedious one of telling them what they already know.¹

From a structural standpoint, the first two "scenes" (i.e., pp. 1-27) articulate virtually everything Mr. MacLeish has to say on his unsophisticated lyrical theme. At the same time, these scenes function dramatically to anticipate Peter Bolt's forthcoming decisive contribution to the lyrical theme.

But in dominating the last three "scenes" (pp. 27-38), Peter merely reiterates responses of earlier speeches by others, adding an indecisive swagger in his protestations that the

¹Ibid., pp. 174-75.

momentary insights can somehow be made into a way of life. The poet has worked the play to the point where action or further statement is required of his protagonist, but Peter Bolt's barely outlined development consists of ambiguous promises and a decision which depends more on the lyrical spell cast in the first two scenes than upon the motivation of the two lovers. The audience can rightfully carp on the question of whether Peter fell in love with the moon or with Elizabeth. The dramatic purpose of the play is split between an attempt to make a meaningful statement about the quality of life generally or about people in love. Mr. MacLeish has set impossible conditions for himself in trying to develop this second interest in the last third of the play.

Peter's final decision--to throw his lot in with the homier consolations of married life--is an interesting contrast to his more exotic desires; these include the poet's professional duty to fashion an esthetic interpretation of truth and beauty which he continually asserts and then all but despairs of achieving. The exaltation of the commonplace thus introduces a third incongruity which brings the play down to "reality" with a thud, as if protagonist and audience must be reminded that they have dreamed everything. Marcus's concern about Mr. MacLeish's condescension to his audience may have some foundation. Yet there is another explanation for this tactic.

In his later years, Mr. MacLeish has had a preoccupation with the sacred commonplaces of married life, and he seems intent upon interjecting this strongly felt respect into various contexts in ways which would seem gratuitous to many readers. Witness, for instance, the last speech in the acting version of J. B., an afterthought which has attracted much notice and wonder. The opinion is well known from his defenses of that ending and from other statements he has made.¹ It is evidently important enough to Mr. MacLeish as a man and an artist to have found sufficient reason to weave this belief into the emphatic conclusions of two consecutive plays which are widely different in theme, characterization, and nearly everything else. Mr. MacLeish's difficulty in managing disparate elements in the conclusion of This Music Crept By Me Upon the Waters is a clue to the problem of structure throughout the play.

It is fairly obvious that the word, the lyrical phrase or image, is preeminently important in Mr. MacLeish's dramatic writing. This particular play is set in a location which Mr. MacLeish knows with greatest familiarity--the island where he spends a good part of every year. Description of this setting could be accomplished with relative ease. Yet from my close analysis of the diction it is also apparent that

¹Archibald MacLeish, J. B. (New York: Samuel French, Inc., 1959), p. 10 ; Jean White, "Will to Live is Key to MacLeish's 'J.B.,'" Library Journal, LXXXIV (January, 1, 1959), p. 37; The Dialogues of Archibald MacLeish and Mark Van Doren, pp. 182-83.

Mr. MacLeish has drawn heavily from imagery and arguments of his other works" "Ars poetica," "You, Andrew Marvell," "The End of the World," "The American Story, and Songs for Eve, as well as a few works by other authors such as T. S. Eliot. He seems, in fact, to allow one derivative speech to grow out of another. This is a most random way of organizing a play, and the ordinary result to be expected might be chaos. It must be said, however, that even as Mr. MacLeish in his later works has tended to derive more from his own works than from those of others, he has shown great ingenuity in forming a context and sequence out of reused elements. The greatest problem comes when one goes over the whole texture and realizes how far afield the poet can travel in rendering the intellectual experiences, and diction, of a lifetime over the length of a single play. Note, for instance that Elizabeth's and Peter's "vacational" sentiments--"Happiness is real. . . . The world is"¹ are hardly more than a paraphrase of Mr. MacLeish's editorial from his student days:

There is always the choice between assured success in a paternal office and the hazardous pilgrimage whither the heart leads. And the cup that dulls the longing of the heart is the cup called Happiness. . . . The earth is real; all men may touch the earth and see the fruits of it. And the rest,--the rest is mist of dreams and vague. . . . But what then "if the Real lives only in the Vague?"²

¹Archibald MacLeish, This Music, p. 32.

²Archibald MacLeish, "The the Patient Few," Yale Literary Magazine, LXXIX (April, 1914), 285-6. Italics mine.

The diction and the logic of this youthful statment are realized in the play of the elderly man. The structural task of this play is to fit together the images, arguments, and sentiments of a lifetime into a coherent whole. It is no wonder that the structure breaks down when a resolution is attempted in the last scenes. It might be added that in this play Mr. MacLeish is hard at work picking up the scraps of his most strongly felt artistic experiences in order to re-establish his expertise and confidence in his poetic ability. The play is a pot pourri or workshop in which the dross would burned away before a new play could be written with far less dependence than this one has on derivative elements from his own works.

CHAPTER X

J. B.: POPULAR TRIUMPH OF THE FIFTIES

Mr. MacLeish's best known play, J. B., is a modernized adaption of the biblical story of Job which fulfills Mr. MacLeish's ideals as a dramatist. It is freely adapted myth in verse and is at the same time popular theatre. Mr. MacLeish has said that the play took him five years to write.¹ Its success, first at the Yale University Theatre and then on Broadway is a tribute to the poet's diligence and good fortune.

The prologue of the play was first published September 1, 1956, in The Saturday Review.² The text of the play was published by Houghton Mifflin in early 1958. The School of Drama at Yale University gave the play its premiere on April 22, 1958. F. Curtis Canfield was director and Donald Oenslager did the setting, which was a translucent blue tent requiring only a change of lighting to transform it into a stary sky. The students who acted the main parts were Ray Sader as Zuss, Bernard Engel as Nickles, Margaret Andrews as Sarah, and James

¹Donald Hall, "Archibald MacLeish: On Being a Poet in the Theatre," Horizon, II (January, 1960), 50.

²Archibald MacLeish, "'J.B.': the Prologue to the Play," Saturday Review, XXXIX (September 1, 1956), 7-10.

Sheperd as J. B. The play ran for five nights and a matinee and received significant notice in the press.

Brooks Atkinson, writing two reviews in the New York Times called the play a "tumultuous epic" which "ranks with the finest work in American drama";¹ he thought that the student acting was inadequate for the play's dynamic script and predicted that a professional company would do it justice. Two writers analysed the play in Saturday Review. John Ciardi reviewed the book, concentrating mainly on versification:

MacLeish's great technical achievement is in his forging of a true poetic stage line for our times. . . . We now have a great American poetic drama.²

He predicted that Broadway would eventually come around to presenting J. B. A later review by Henry Hewes of the Yale production disparaged the play as a "stillborn classic."³ The Atkinson and Ciardi reviews may be described as "rave" notices which got the popularity of J. B. on its way.

Producer Alfred De Liagre, Jr. asked for the rights to the play after the Yale production. With Elia Kazan as

¹ Brooks Atkinson, "Poet's Epic of Mankind Staged at Yale," The New York Times, April 24, 1958, p. 37, and "From Job to J.B.," Ibid., May 4, 1958, sec II, p. 1.

² John Ciardi, "The Birth of a Classic," Saturday Review, XLI (March 8, 1958), 11, 12 and 48, quoted from Ralph E. Hone (ed.), The Voice Out of the Whirlwind: The Book of Job (San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Company, Inc., 1960), pp. 278 and 280.

³ Henry Hewes, "Yes Is for a Very Rich Man," Saturday Review, XLI (May 10, 1958), 22.

director and a cast which included Raymond Massey as Zuss, Christopher Plummer as Nickles, Pat Hingle as J. B., and Nan Martin as Sarah, rehearsals began for a New York production in late 1958. Kazan and MacLeish worked closely to adapt the script for professional production. Mr. MacLeish says:

The first thing that Kazan did was to forget my stage directions. He wanted the stage directions to be the expression of his modeling of the entire action on the stage,¹ and not descriptive adjuncts to the printed text.

There were a number of line changes and transpositions which the two men worked out, and Mr. MacLeish has insisted that he was satisfied with them.² Prior to its New York opening, the play was performed in Washington and, according to Mr. MacLeish, "had a very tough time."³ Kazan and MacLeish agreed that the poet should clarify the ending by writing additional lines; as a result, J. B. is given a speech of thirteen lines which concludes the acting version of the play.

The play opened at the ANTA Theatre on December 11, 1959. A newspaper strike in New York prevented advance publicity and the publication of reviews which would normally follow a Broadway opening. However, both CBS and NBC networks gave

¹Donald Hall, p. 50.

²Ibid., p. 52; also interview of Mr. MacLeish by the writer, October 18, 1961. Archibald MacLeish, *The Staging of a Play: The Notebooks and Letters behind Elia Kazan's Staging of Archibald MacLeish's 'J.B.'*, Esquire, LI (May 1959), 144-58.

³Donald Hall, p. 51.

generous amounts of television and radio time for the author, director, and actors to appear on programs during the days preceding the opening night.¹ Time, Newsweek, and Life² gave the play strong notice with pictures and stories within a week of Christmas. They hailed the play's success, achieved without benefit of newspaper coverage, as a box office miracle. One commentator writing in Modern Drama³ observed that the play had more than enough early coverage from other sources, including the above magazines, to offset the absence of newspaper reviews in New York City. Brooks Atkinson's third rave review, written for but not published in the New York Times during the strike, was read December 12 over nationwide television on the Dave Garroway Show. Mr. MacLeish, who appeared on the program, has described his reactions to the review while he stood before the cameras:

This was the first inkling I had that Mr. Atkinson had called "J.B." "one of the memorable works of the century." Well, after you've worked five years on a play and your whole heart's in it. . . . well, it's a funny thing to say but right then I thought I'd break down and cry in front of the cameras. . . . I'm amused by the irony of the situation. Here I've written a play about Job and his multiple disasters, and the play opens with disaster. I refer to the strike.⁴

¹Ben Siegel, "Miracle on Broadway: and the Box-Office Magic of the Bible," Modern Drama, II (May, 1959), 45.

²Anon., Review of J. B., Time, LXX (December 22, 1958), 53-54; "Job's Ordeal in a Great Play," Life, XLV (December 22, 1958), 171 and 173-74; "First Nighters Cheered," Newsweek, LII (December 22, 1958), 45-46.

³Siegel, p. 45.

⁴Anon., "First Nighters Cheered," Newsweek, pp. 45-46.

Two hundred people waited for tickets outside the box office on the second day of performance. The play ran for eight months at the ANTA and went on tour in various cities throughout the country.

Presentations of the play in Europe began even before the New York production had opened. Canfield's Yale group performed the play in the American Theatre at the Brussels Universal and International exposition in the fall of 1958. By February 1960, the play had been translated for many performances in Scandanavia, Germany, Austria, Italy, Belgium, Israel, and Mexico.¹ Translations were taken from the original script rather than from Kazan's version. In May of 1959, Mr. MacLeish won the Pulitzer Prize in Drama for his play.

A. Sources and Analogues

The Book of Job furnishes the main impetus and source for Mr. MacLeish's play. The biblical work has tremendous stature in Western tradition as a profound investigation into the causes and effects of human suffering--a theme which has preoccupied Mr. MacLeish in Nobodaddy, The Hamlet of Archibald MacLeish, Panic, and other works. The very style of The Book of Job invites dramatic imitation; its dialogue between Job

¹Robert Downing, "J.B.'s Journeys," Theatre Arts, XLIV (February, 1960), 29-32.

the three comfortors, and Elihu are in a kind of dramatic format. One teacher of the ancient church, Theodore of Mopsuestia (d. 428), has gone so far as to call the Book of Job a Hebrew author's imitation of Greek tragedy.¹ In our own time, Horace M. Kallen has used internal evidence in the biblical work to restructure it as a tragedy in the Euripedian manner. Kallen's work² demonstrates the dramatic potentialities of The Book of Job, exclusive of its Prologue and Epilogue. Although this work first appeared in 1918, it need not be considered a direct source for J. B.--any more than the central part of The Book of Job is--because, as Kallen rightly points out, "MacLeish's J. B. draws almost entirely upon the Prologue, presenting Job's losses and sufferings in modern symbols and the modern manner."³ The bulk of argument in The Book of Job is the dialogue between Job and the comfortors Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. MacLeish ignores their biblical characterization and instead makes them in one brief scene the symbols of modern religion, Marxist historical dialectic, and psychoanalysis. The decisive speeches of Elihu as true messenger of God in the biblical version of the story have no counterpart in MacLeish's play.

In an early review of J. B., Charles Poore said the

¹George Foote Moore, Introduction to the First Edition, Horace M. Kallen, The Book of Job as a Greek Tragedy, with an Essay (Drawnbook; New York: Hill and Wang, 1959), p. xxii.

²Ibid.

³Kallen, "Preface, 1959," p. xi.

play reminded him vaguely of the Job situation in Philip Barry's play of the '30's, Here Come the Clowns.¹ The modern dress phantasy has second-rate vaudevillians act out a Job situations in a highly expressionistic style. Although it is far from being a redaction of the book of Job, it does present a solution similar to the one in the conclusion of The Book of Job: man must accept suffering without being able to fathom its meaning. In a recent book on modern American drama, Louis Broussard says that Barry's Here Come the Clowns definitely sets a precedent for MacLeish's play to the extent that J. B. presents a characterization which seems "only vaguely contemporary."² Broussard claims that MacLeish is not a playwright but that

he comes to drama to reassess values which at one time found analysis in his verse. And he has not written a play even here. What he has done is to arrange his poetical ideas in a play form. He has at the same time controverted the ideas of the school of despair championed by O'Neill and assumed as their legacy by Williams and Miller. Eliot steps out of his role as poet to challenge the attitude³ of the playwrights. And to follow him, MacLeish.

Broussard points out that the "doubt and confusion" of MacLeish's poems in the early twenties "gave way" in such poems as The

¹Charles G. Poore, "Books of the Times," New York Times, March 8, 1958, p. 15; Philip Barry, Here Come the Clowns: A Play in Three Acts (New York: Coward-McCann, Inc., 1939).

²Louis Broussard, American Drama: Contemporary Allegory from Eugene O'Neill to Tennessee Williams (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1962), p. 124.

³Ibid., pp. 126-27.

Hamlet of A. MacLeish, "Einstein," and "Actfive" to "an acceptance of the cyclical as justification for the chaotic in human life."¹ In J. B. MacLeish would repeat the exhortation he had given at the end of Actfive: "to take heart: to cross over--to persist and to cross over and survive."² In attempting to "rationalize his search for an explanation of life's truths as a repetition of a pattern long since in existence,"³ MacLeish's Hamlet and "Einstein" even anticipate similar trends in the writing of Eliot and Wilder.

The chief resemblances between Barry's Here Come the Clowns and MacLeish's J. B. are that both plays are acted out by self-conscious, second-rate actors, both extol free will, and both accept the cyclical as justification for human suffering. A final speech by Dan Clancy, the suffering hero of Barry's play, summarizes these arguments which are similar to J. B.'s final speeches. Clancy says:

Oh, I see now its no will of God things are as they are--no, nor Devil's will neither! It's the will of all them like himself, the world over--men bad by their own choice--and the woods full of 'em. . . . Answer? You give me it!--the proud will of Man is my answer. The free will of Man, turned the wrong way. By the Grace of God, free to think and choose for himself, was he?--Free to make his own world, eh? The fine job he's made of it! . . . But know we will know we will!--For it's a fine instrument, the free

¹Ibid., p. 122.

²Ibid., pp. 122-23, cited from Archibald MacLeish, Actfive and Other Poems, p. 35.

³Broussard, p. 122.

will of man is, and can as easy be turned to Good as to Bad.--Ah, it's the grand thing, is man's will! Whatever it's sunk to, it can rise again. It can rise again. It can rise over anything, anything!¹

Barry's efforts to find a basis for human dignity, to assign man a place in a moral universe, occur in yet another play whose arguments strongly resemble MacLeish's. In Hotel Universe, the character named Stephen anticipates MacLeish's acceptance of life as a series of experiences which test endurance:

STEPHEN. There are many men who would go to the ends of the earth for God. . . . and cannot get through their own garden. . . . But there are strong souls who never leave their gardens. Their strength is not in the doing, but in the wish to do. There is no strength anywhere, but in the wish. Once realized, it has spent itself, and must be born again.

TOM. But I don't know what I'm here at all for.

STEPHEN. To suffer and to rejoice. To gain, to lose. To love, and to be rejected. To be young and middle-aged and old. To know life as it happens, and then to say, "This is it."²

MacLeish has enunciated sentiments like these in many prose and poetic works, yet Broussard's case for making Barry's plays a precedent for MacLeish's J. B. removes some of the air of novelty which surrounded the reception of Mr. MacLeish's play. It is also true, as Broussard suggests, that in J. B., Mr. MacLeish is repeating and in some cases is reassessing ideas he had treated in earlier works.

Descriptions of God in J. B. resemble those of Nobodaddy.

¹Barry, Here Come the Clowns, pp. 186-87.

²Barry, Hotel Universe, quoted from Broussard, pp. 63-64.

The actor Mr. Zuss becomes the character God by wearing "a huge white, blank, beautiful, expressionless mask with eyes lidded like the eyes of the mask in Michelangelo's Night."¹ In J. B., God is characterized as blind, mindless, never laughing, and somehow resentful of man's self-consciousness:

The one thing God can't stomach is a man,
That scratcher at the cracked creation!
That eyeball squinting through₂ into His Eye,
Blind with the sight of Sight.

These attributes are carry-overs from the characterization of God in Nobodaddy,³ and a contradiction which seems to exist in having a part written for a God who has these attributes is obviated because the play rests on the supposition that actors only pretend to represent God and Satan. The part assigned to Satan resembles the awakened self-consciousness which has strong thematic significance in Nobodaddy, but in J. B. the suffering which comes to man made aware is relegated to a brief speech by Nickles when he dons the open-eyed mask of Satan:

I know what Hell is now--to see.
Consciousness of consciousness. . . .⁴

During the prologue and at other points during the play,

¹ Archibald MacLeish, J. B.: A Play in Verse (Sentry Edition; Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1961), p. 16.

² Ibid., p. 10; cf. "God never laughs," ibid., p. 8; and "God is far below in Mindlessness," ibid., p. 119.

³ Archibald MacLeish, Nobodaddy, pp. 48 and 52.

⁴ Archibald MacLeish, J. B., p. 22.

Nickles as Satan protests God's ordering of the universe in the same manner and with some of the same arguments as Cain has in Nobodaddy. For instance, Nickles says:

What has any man to laugh at!
The panting crow by the dry tree
Drags dusty wings. God's mercy brings
The rains--but not to such as he.¹

In Nobodaddy, Cain's challenge is voiced in similar language: "He is the god of dust; well, let him rule it" and "Only god can kill the things / That trust him."² Even closer to Nickles' lines is Cain's attribution of suffering to God as its source:

The drouth is his
But I can pity the poor beasts that die;
He cannot.³

It is noteworthy that the lines of Nickles which have been quoted above were omitted in the Kazan version of the play, yet they show the continuity of Mr. MacLeish's thinking and imagery over a long period of time.

The calamities of J. B. have their model in The Book of Job, of course, but they are also a development of the misfortunes catalogued in "Actfive." Amid the ruins caused by war, social upheaval, and the loss of belief systems, the speaker in "Actfive" describes the passive suffering which

¹Ibid., p. 23.

²Archibald MacLeish, Nobodaddy, pp. 51 and 60.

³Ibid., p. 52.

characterizes MacLeish's abiding image of modern man and also of his Job:

Abandoned by the guardians and gods,
 The great companion of the metaphor
 Dead of the wars and worlds (O murdered dream!),
 The city of man consumed to ashes, ashes,
 The republic a marble rubble on its hill,
 The laws rules rites prayers philters all exhausted,
 Elders and the supernatural aids withdrawn--
 Abandoned by them all, by all forsaken,
 The naked human perishable heart--
 Naked as sea-worm in the shattered shell--
 No further savior standing to come forth,
 Nor magic champion with miraculous blade,
 Nor help in fight nor succor in the field
 (Thou art my Shield! Thou art my Rock!)
 No help, no hand, no succor but itself--
 The human perishable heart. . . .

The picture of spiritual devastation in this concluding passage of the poem prefigures the situation and arguments at the end of J. B. Parenthetical reference of God as "Shield" and "Rock" is ironic coming as it does just before the declaration that man must depend solely upon his own "human perishable heart." The humanist paradoxically finds strength in weakness and emotion, regarding older idealisms nostalgically as beautiful but nonfunctional ornament. The deity in J. B. is ultimately relegated to the same nugatory role as man achieves his independent destiny. "Actfive," like J. B., Nobodaddy, and Panic, searches for man's place in the universe, and the cyclical historical outlook in the poem of the '40's would be seconded by the Zuss's remark in J. B.: "Oh, there's always

¹Archibald MacLeish, Actfive, pp. 31-32.

/ Someone playing Job."¹ In J. B., Bildad's speech about nations and classes perishing² is an echo of the catalogued sufferings recited in "Actfive." It is also reminiscent of the young Marxists' speeches in Panic.

J. B.'s Three Comfortors are a far cry from the Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar of The Book of Job. Whereas these characters function in the bible story as custodians of the traditional view that God personally sends suffering as a punishment for evildoing, the Comfortors in J. B. are spokesmen of more modern traditions. Zophar does echo the biblical comfortor when he says, "Happy the man whom God correcteth!"³ but his proper role in the play is to urge the value of feeling guilt as the cure religion offers for the correction of man's spiritual ills. He is in a word the negative embodiment of all religious institutions. The other two comfortors are spokesmen for other modern creeds which Mr. MacLeish has attacked from time to time, particularly in his essay of the '40's, "Prophets of Disaster":

The generation to which I belong believes . . . in a predetermined pattern of life. It is our conviction, explicitly stated in our histories, our political commentaries, and our studies in economics, implicitly stated in our novels and our poetry, that the pattern of life is determined by Economic Law or Historical Necessity or Psychological Compulsion and that we are, or by taking thought can make ourselves, privy to these Laws and these Necessities. . . . It is probable therefore that it is not because they have been touched by

¹Archibald MacLeish, J. B., p. 12.

²Ibid., p. 120.

³Ibid., p. 124.

a god's breath or because they have beheld visions at night but for a simpler reason that these prophets prophesy: . . . they belong to a generation which . . . believes . . . in Fate and because, therefore, prophecy is natural to them.¹

Eliphaz and Bildad are prophets of blind fate in J. B. who argue, respectively, the positions of psychoanalysis and Marxist historical necessity: that "God" is the unconscious mind or is historical necessity.

When the actors Zuss and Nickles play the roles of God and Satan, their use of masks is a convention new to MacLeish's drama, yet the voice out of the whirlwind, which is God speaking, has its precedent in the last chapters of The Book of Job and also in MacLeish's Nobodaddy. God and Satan also have speaking parts in that play. In using alternating scenes to present two lines of action--Zuss and Nickles in one line and J. B. with family and others in a second--MacLeish is harkening back to the convention of alternating action between McGafferty and the street crowd in Panic. The pattern can be seen in the appearance of the supernatural characters during the Prologue, Scene Two, the end of Scene Three, the beginning and end of Scene Five, Scene Seven, briefly during Scene Eight, at the end of Scene Nine, and finally in Scene Ten. J. B. has a total of eleven scenes and a prologue. Use of these commentators, however, is freer than MacLeish's use of the crowd in Panic because

¹Archibald MacLeish, A Time to Act, pp. 90-91; cf. J. B., pp. 119ff.

Zuss and Nickles can comment on the others' action even while others are speaking. As in every play since Panic, there are unnamed minor characters, but there are also several who are given names.

J. B. has many echoes of the poet's lyrics. One representative instance, as Thurston Davis has pointed out, is the use of the circus tent setting which recalls the lyric published in 1926, "The End of the World."¹ Mr. MacLeish has said that until he came upon the idea of using this set, the structure of the play presented a great problem.² A representative instance of a MacLeish poem finding an echo in the play is Sarah's speech--

Water under bridges opens
Closing and the companion stars
Still float there afterwards. I
Thought the door
Opened into closing water.³

--which is reminiscent of these lines of "'Dover Beach'--A note to that Poem":

The wave withdrawing
Withers with seaward rustle of flimsy water.
.....
The roil after it settling, too smooth,
smothered. . .
.....

¹Thurston Davis, "Arid Repudiation of Religion," Life, XLVI (May 18, 1959), p. 138.

²The Dialogues of Archibald MacLeish and Mark Van Doren, p. 137.

³Archibald MacLeish, J. B., p. 152.

Let them go over us all I say with the
thunder of
What's to be next in the world. It's we will
be under it!¹

J. B.'s echoes of imagery and rhythms from earlier works are less interesting than the verse structure itself, which in J. B. is an amalgam of older style and new experimentation.

B. Prosody

The best commentary of the verse of J. B. is John Ciardi's rave review, "Birth of a Classic,"² which exalts the play chiefly on the grounds that it is superb poetry for the stage. Ciardi laid down four criteria for modern dramatic verse which he says are fulfilled in the poetry of J. B. These are (1) that a line of verse drama must have range, (2) must be "recognizably a line of poetry," (3) must be truly a line of poetry, and (4) must have a pace that works in the theatre. These points are illustrated from Ciardi's examples and from some others which will be cited.

By "range" Ciardi means the range of thought and emotion with which characters can speak with equal assurance: "passion, sublimity, chitchat, and every way-station of the emotions." Ciardi gives as an example the "resonance" and "agony of Job's cry: "God is unthinkable if we are innocent'" and the "thrilled depravity of Jolly

¹Archibald MacLeish, Collected Poems, p. 121.

²John Ciardi, "Birth of a Classic" Saturday Review.

Adams' remark when she begs off looking at Job's sores, "'Every sore I seen I remember.'"¹ In addition to what Ciardi sees as a range of emotion, there is prosodic range in MacLeish's employment of a line of four stresses which, as in earlier plays, is the dominant pattern throughout the play. The following passage shows the frequent device of beginning a speech with an isolated rhythmic foot which continues a line from a former speech; it also shows the frequent use of feminine endings and a tendency to slacken the rhythm from tight iambs to anapests.

To know they see: to know they've seen it.
 Lions and dolphins have such eyes.
 They know the way the wild geese know--
 Those pin-point travelers who go home
 To Labrador they never meant to,
 Unwinding the will of the world like string.
 What would they make of a man, those eyelids?²

The underlined consonants in the last two, anapestic lines show alliterative patterns which Mr. MacLeish had used with

XLI (March 8, 1958), pp. 11-12 and 48; cited from Ralph E. Hone (ed.) The Voice Out of the Whirlwind: The Book of Job (San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Company, Inc., 1960), pp. 276-81.

¹Ibid.

²Archibald MacLeish, J. B., pp. 16-17.

greater frequency and less success in Panic than he does in this play. Prosodic range in J. B. includes the mixing of pentameter and tetrameter lines:

She's éver had of loveliness, of wonder,

 Ábsurd déspair! Ridículous ágony!
 What has any man to laugh at!¹

There are two iambic pentameter lines, the second with some metrical variation which serves as a transition into tetrameter lines beginning with the last line quoted above. The breaking of the line with a caesura prepares the listener for shorter lines. Half-lines of anapestic pentameter--

Mary: Cránbèrry Day.

Ruth: Succotásh Day.

David: When we all can have white

Johathan: And gíblèts to bíte.

Ruth: And two kinds of píe.

Johathan: And Squásh in your éye.²

are rhymed in the children's Thanksgiving repartee. In a more serious passage dactyls are introduced into iambic pentameter and tetrameter lines:

J. B.: hardly daring
 If I am innocent. . . ?

¹Ibid., p. 23.

²Ibid., p. 28.

Bildad: snort of jerring laughter

Innócent! Innocént!

Nations shall perish in their innocence.
 Classes shall perish in their innocence.
 Young men in slaughtered cities
 Offering their silly throats. . .
 Against the tanks in innocence shall perish.¹

The twice repeated "Innocent!" fills out a pentemeter line, but with dactylic rhythm.

Ciardi's second requirement for verse drama, that the line be recognizably a line of poetry, is clearly illustrated by the passage above, where in Ciardi's words a "constant play of variations and compensations"² takes place. The first line, in which "innocent" is repeated thrice, sounds like a pentameter line despite the fact that two people speak parts of it in different rhythms. This line also illustrates metrical "compensation," for the last syllable of "innocent" is a suppressed minor stress and adds two syllables to the line which balance, or compensate for, the short second- and third-last lines of the passage. Ciardi also makes the point that MacLeish's lines are irreducible (as proverbial statements are), memorable, and nervous (as both he and MacLeish have claimed modern American speech to be).

¹Ibid., p. 120.

²Hone, p. 277.

Pace is the rate at which the writing (here, the saying) reveals itself to the reader. Some young poets, for example, have tried to use Dylan Thomas's tight lyric line for the stage, and the results have been disastrous. When the speaking voice offers a tightly knotted phrase or metaphor, one naturally fastens onto it. He stops to examine it, caught by its complexities. But the speaking voice goes on. By the time the listener solves or gives up his puzzle, the voice may have covered fifteen or twenty unheard lines, and, by that time who has any notion of what is being said?

Ciardi maintains that *J. B.* offers rich poetic diction at a pace which enhances understanding. There is a large amount of commonplace talk, and images are spaced well enough so as not to jar against one another or distract the reader from what is going on. In this respect, *J. B.* is a considerable improvement over all of the earlier verse dramas, with the possible exception of *This Music Crept By Me Upon the Waters*, which also avoids over-sophisticated imagery.

In an analysis *J. B.*'s verse, Richard Eberhart concurs with John Ciardi's observations on "pace"; Eberhart says that MacLeish

desires and secures a quick, one-to-one relationship between the action and the audience. The lines can be understood immediately, the actions are swift and clean, the whole work is tense and taut. MacLeish's pass on for assent is bought at the price of integumental connotations. . . . There is throughout a boxing cleverness, a sparring of ideas and reactions as MacLeish retells the old story of Job in his own words and with his own lively theatrical evocations.²

¹ Hone, p. 278.

² Richard Eberhart, "Outer and Inner Verse Drama," Virginia Quarterly Review, XXXIV (Autumn, 1958), 621-

Eberhart coins the term "outer verse drama" to designate the high level of communication in J. B.'s verse and its corresponding lack of the evocative power which a poetic line of tightly packed images has. It seems that MacLeish's work in popular radio theatre has trained him to catch and hold audience attention even when writing in verse.

C. Analysis of J. B.

The text to be used for an analysis of the play is the Sentry Edition of 1961, which is a reprint of the hard cover edition published by Houghton Mifflin in 1958. The chief reason for preferring this text to the Broadway script is that it is the author's own without the producer's alterations. The fact that the original version was reissued as late as 1961 suggests that the author stands by it as a definitive text. It is also the version upon which all foreign productions are based. The Kazan version is, of course, also important because it is the text of the Broadway production and has been circulated widely by Samuel French, Inc. to amateur and professional groups producing the play in the United States. The variations in the two texts will be discussed at the conclusion of this analysis.

The scene of the entire play is the corner of an enormous circus tent late at night after the crowd and performers have gone. There is a rough stage across the corner of the set and a wooden platform of six or seven feet. A

wooden ladder leans against it. There is one door-shaped opening in the canvas and a large slanted pole which makes the peak of the corner. The garments strewn about are given a religious significance in the stage directions:

Clothes that have the look of vestments of many churches and times have been left about at one side and the other of the stage and the light at the beginning--such light as there is--is provided by bulbs and dangling from hanks of wire.¹

Thus it is suggested that the "show" of the world's religions is over or in abeyance, and "such light as there is" in the world is scant indeed.

The Prologue opens as Mr. Zuss and Nickles, each a "broken down actor fallen on evil days,"² enters from the shadows and stop before the side-show stage. Stage directions call for the language of rhetorical theatre in their speeches. By way of exposition, Zuss lets Nickles know that this scene is where the "play" of life is to be enacted with real live characters. Zuss claims a special kind of detachment for himself and his companion, in contrast to the people who must act out human suffering:

At least we're actors. They're not actors.
Never acted anything.

Nickles answers:

They only own the show.³ That's right.

¹Archibald MacLeish, J. B., p. 2.

²Ibid., p. 3.

³Ibid., p. 5.

Nickles compares the light bulbs to stars; the drifts of their speech, which is at first commonplace, is to emphasize the cosmic scope of the play to be enacted. Nickles argues that they should secure masks for God and Satan, whom they will play. Nickles paraphrases The Book of Job:

But this is God in Job you're playing:
 God the Maker: God Himself!
 Remember what He says?--the hawk
 Flies by His wisdom! And the goats--
 Remember the goats? He challenges Job
 with them:
 Dost thou know the time of the wild goats?
 What human face knows time like that time?
 You need a face of fur to know it.
 Human faces know too much too little.¹

The last pair of lines, ironic and enigmatic, suggest divine unconsciousness which is familiar from Nobodaddy. As himself and as God, Mr. Zuss is the "straight man" of this two man team of comic actors.

Nickles insists that the actor playing God wear a mask lest he be caught laughing at the ridiculous spectacle He has caused. Both actors acknowledge that God is incapable of laughter, Zuss claims that Job is impertinent to ask God for justice, and Nickles places a great stress on the fact that man alone of all creatures suffers because he has self-consciousness. Nickles speaks bitterly about the lack of justice in the world, and he assumes that with this attitude he is qualified to play Job. Zuss expresses disgust at Nickles' pose as a modern hero:

¹ Ibid., pp. 7-8; cf. The Book of Job, 39:26 and 39:1.

Our Odysseus
 Sailing sidewalks toward the turd
 Of truth and touching it at last in triumph!
 The honest, disillusioned man!
 You sicken me.¹

Zuss surprises Nickles by informing him that he is assigned the role of Satan, but Nickles is pleased. After a pause, Nickles sings:

I heard upon his dry dung heap
 That man cry out who cannot sleep:
 "If God is God He is not good,
 If God is good He is not God;
 Take the even, take the odd,
 I would not sleep here if I could
 Except for the little green leaves
 in the wood
 And the wind on the water."²

The third and fourth lines quoted above are the play's thematic statement about divine justice being incompatible with man's notion of justice and his sensitivity. The compensation for living at all seems to be man's appreciation of natural beauty outside the scope of the "justice" which God has assigned to be man's fate.

It is assumed throughout the play that God is responsible for both good and evil. Nickles, even as Satan, is a kind of human *raisonneur* who reminds Zuss and the audience of this fact. When Nickles looks for his mask and Zuss tells him to find it for himself, Nickles insists

¹Archibald MacLeish, J. B., p. 11.

²Ibid., pp. 14-15.

that the mask is in heaven and that Zuss should get it because heaven is his department. Zuss gets the mask, an act which suggests that God as creator of everything is responsible for the origin of evil.

Nickles and Zuss, still speaking as private persons, argue the merits of God's unconscious knowledge and His justice, Zuss defending God and Nickles attacking him. Nickles says Job finally knows better than to expect justice after he has searched for it; Zuss claims that Job finally knows justice, which looks like the godmask. Nickles argues that God is blind, and the stage directions which call for a godmask with closed eyelids substantiate the claim. Zuss and Nickles put their masks on and automatically speak their assigned lines from the Bible. When laughter comes apparently from behind Nickles' Satan mask, Zuss tears off his own mask and reprimands Nickles' irreverence. Nickles solemnly claims that he did not laugh, that the vision of suffering he had seen through the open-eyed mask he was wearing would stifle all laughter. This is the first strong hint that something ambiguously supernatural is going on, as when God spoke through Abel's mouth in Nobodaddy. The world seen through the Satan mask is nothing more or less than the vision of human consciousness. Nickles describes what his eyes see:

They see the world. They do. They see it.
 From going to and fro in the earth,
 From walking up and down, they see it.
 I know what Hell is now--to see. 1
 Consciousness of consciousness. . . .

Thus, at this point in the play, Nickles as Satan sets himself up as a humanistic apologist for suffering mankind. Zuss remarks that Nickles plays the part of Satan whether he is in or out of the role, and then he suggests, "Maybe Satan's playing you."² Zuss calls for the lights to go off, and when the line "Whence comest thou?" is spoken, neither actor admits having said it. Casting tall shadows against the canvas sky, both actors hear God's lines from the Bible spoken.

Hast thou considered my servant Job
That there is none like him on the earth
A perfect and an upright man, one
That feareth God and escheweth evil?³

The prologue has ended, and Scene One now opens showing Job and his family at Thanksgiving dinner.

The light now shines to the right on a deal table with seven chairs around it. The scene presents the prosperous businessman J. B., his wife Sarah, and their five children at Thanksgiving dinner. A mild argument ensues between J. B. and Sarah over the children's lack of seriousness while saying grace before the meal. Sarah is characterized at once as a rather conservative person who attempts rigorous discipline with the children, feels mild

¹Ibid., p. 22.

²Ibid., 23.

³Ibid., p. 24.

frustration because J. B. seems to take her for granted, and asserts her pious opinions for the children's benefit. She is in most respects meant to represent a typical American mother. J. B., on the other hand, is more casual about other people's and his own obligations. For instance, he says the children's appreciation for food is shown simply by their eager enjoyment of it. Whereas Sarah argues that they owe God for his blessings, J. B. is content to regard blessings as a gratuitous gift from God. He uses nature imagery to substantiate the mysterious bounty of natural gifts.

J. B. then states his belief in God and His gifts:

Never since I learned to tell
 My shadow from my shirt, not once,
 Not for watch-tick, have I doubted
 God was on my side, was good to me.
 Even young and poor I knew it.
 People called it luck: it wasn't.
 I never though so from the first
 Fine silver dollar to the last
 Controlling interest in some company
 I couldn't get--and got. It isn't
 luck.¹

He tells an anecdote about his competitor and friend, Sullivan, who asks for the secret of J. B.'s success. Comparing his own good fortune to a road which goes God-knows-where, J. B. argues:

It isn't luck when God is good to you.
 It's something more. It's like those dizzy
 Daft old lads who dowse for water.
 They feel the alder twig twist down

¹Ibid., p. 35.

And know they've got it and they have:
 They've got it. Blast the ledge and water
 Gushes at you. And they knew.
 It wasn't luck. They knew. They felt the
 Gush go shuddering through their shoulders,
 huge
 As some mysterious certainty of opulence.
 They couldn't hold it. I can't hold it.
 I've always known that God was with me.
 I've tried to show I knew it--not
 Only in words.

J. B.'s trust in providence establishes him as an upright man. His wife tries to convince him that he has earned his good fortune by his virtuous character, but J. B. insists that God's gift are gratuitous.

As the scene draws to a close, Sarah recites a tune for the children's benefit:

I love Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday.
 Where have Monday, Tuesday, gone?
 Under the grass tree,
 Under the green tree,
 One by one.
 Caught as we are in Heaven's quandry,
 Is it they or we are gone
 Under the grass tree,
 Under the green tree?

I love Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday.
 One by one.²

The meaning and application of these lines seem uncertain. They express Sarah's love of life and wistful thoughts about time passing. They are also an echo of MacLeish's early four-line poem, "Mother Goose's Garland":

¹Ibid., pp. 37-38.

²Ibid., pp. 42-3.

Zuss expresses admiration for Job, who can love wife and children even though he knows he will someday lose them. Nickles answers that the losses and his suffering make him the "victim of the spinning joke."¹ Zuss says that man's reward is that God teaches him in this life what God is--

Enormous pattern of the steep of stars,
Minute perfection of the frozen crystal
Inimitable architecture of the slow, . . .²
Cold, silent, ignorant sea-small. . . .

This inadequate argument receives an adequate reply from Nickles:

Infinite must! Wait till your pigeon
Pecks at the world the way the rest do--
Eager beak to naked bum!³

Nickles' profanity gives Zuss the opportunity to avoid the question by simply asserting that Nickles should have his tongue torn out and that he had better put on his mask so that the action can continue.

But Nickles renews the argument by asking a philosophical question: Why must men suffer? The stage directions make Zuss look like a fool. Halfway in the act of putting on his mask, he lowers it and stares into it as if the answer might be written inside. Then he answers "too loud": "To praise." And Nickles answers "softly": "He praises now. Like a canary."⁴ Zuss has no other reply except to urge again that Nickles put on his mask. Nickles then answers

¹Ibid., p. 47.

²Ibid., pp. 47-48.

³Ibid., p. 48.

⁴Ibid.

his own question: man learns to suffer, to give up the idea that cuddling arms enclose him, so that he will be prepared to accept the worms as nurses after death. He prophesies that J. B. will wish he had never lived. Zuss says he will not, and Nickles prophesies that J. B. will be most miserable but will speak "Man's last word . . . worthy of him!"¹ These remarks seem misplaced. In the biblical story, Job does wish he had never been born, and J. B. comes close to such a statement later, but Zuss--who plays God--is unaware of these things. Nickles' remarks that man makes a last frail gesture which is worthy of him seems a stark contrast to the disparaging comments which have preceded this one. The argument continues awhile in this vein, and Zuss retorts again by urging Nickles to put his mask back on.

With their masks on, Zuss and Nickles speak lines from the prologue of The Book of Job which their real life arguments have just paraphrased. God considers Job a just man, and Satan says Job will curse God to his face once the blessings are taken away. God turns over all that Job has into Satan's power, but cautions Satan not to touch Job's body. The biblical language jars against the casual and sometimes vulgar language used earlier in the scene. A greater discrepancy occurs by the fact that Nickles has argued, and Zuss has not denied, that God is responsible for

¹Ibid., p. 49.

the evils that befall man. The biblical quotations, however, clearly make Satan responsible for the evils which Job must endure. MacLeish's revision of the Job situation, together with the card-stacking in favor of Nickles' arguments, creates Nickles as a kind of secondary protagonist, Zuss of course being the antagonist. A note at the end of Scene Two says:

The play is conceived and written without breaks, but if recesses in the action are desired one might well be made at this point.¹

The play is about one-third over, and this point is a logical division. The next scenes portray the decline of J. B.'s fortunes.

Some time has elapsed when Scene Three opens, showing the family's living room. Sarah, who is putting flowers on the table against the window, notices two soldiers coming toward the house. They are drunk, but get past the butler because they claim to be friends of the son, David. Sty-chomythia dominates the speeches of this scene. The soldiers, listed in the scripts as "Messengers," appear to have opposite personalities; the first is loud, very casual and uncouth in his language; the second, when he finally speaks, has a classic formality of diction similar to the messenger's lines in The Fall of the City. The soldiers soon reveal that they have come to meet the parents of their dead buddy David, but

¹Ibid., p. 52.

the parents have had no news from the army or anyone else that he has died. The dramatic shock is overwhelming, though a little overdone; for instance, the soldiers apologize that they did not have the right size lumber for David's casket, implying that they had to cut him down to size. The war has already ended, and this detail recalls the circumstances of Kenneth MacLeish's death just a few days before the Armistice of World War I.

The Second Messenger's language contrasts sharply with that used by all the others, and examples of it are worth noting:

How, by night, by chance, darkling. . .
By the dark of chance. . .

How, the war done, the guns silent. . .

. . . My tongue loosened by drink . . .

. my thought
Darkened as by the wind the water. . .

The day is lost where it fell. . . .¹

The shy, tentative phrasing and rhetorical use of participles recall MacLeish's poem, "Memorial Rain":

The wind coiled glistening, darted, fled,
Dragging its heavy body: at Waereghem
The wind coiled in the grass above his head:
Waiting--listening. . . .²

The line which rings most of classical rhetoric of The Fall of the City is the Second Messenger's line, "I only am

¹Ibid., pp. 58 and 60.

²Archibald MacLeish, Collected Poems, p. 47.

escaped alone to tell thee . . . "1 Sarah ends the scene by saying that David is dead and God has taken him.

Scene Four portrays the announcement of two more deaths in J. B.'s family by an auto accident. The same two messengers break the news, but this time they play the role of newspapermen trying to get photographs and a story just as J. B. and Sarah hear the news. The scene opens with the newsmen trying to convince a pretty girl to attract the parents' attention while the newsmen wait, one to break the news and the other to get the photo. The Second Messenger's argument about why someone must always be available to witness catastrophe and inform the bereaved has the same participial phrasing and classical style as in the previous scene:

There's always. . .

Someone chosen by the chance of seeing,
 By the accident of sight,
 By stumbling on the moment of it,
 Unprepared, unwarned, unready,
 Thinking of nothing, of his drink, his bed,
 His belly, and it happens, and he sees it. . .

Caught in that inextricable net
 Of having witnessed, having seen. . .

It was I

I only. I alone. The moment
 Closed us together in its gaping grin
 Of horrible incredulity. I saw their
 Eyes see mine! We saw each other.²

¹Archibald MacLeish, J. B., p. 60.

²Ibid., pp. 66-67.

The girl and the messengers carry out their plan, and naturally Sarah is grief stricken while J. B.'s reaction is to try to beat up the reporters. The messengers and the girl leave the scene.

The lights fade, and Sarah acts like a sleepwalker. She argues with J. B. that it was not the children in the car, but God, who was responsible. She asks why God has done this and also asks what J. B. or Sarah have ever done to bring down this action of God's hand. J. B. counters that it does no good to think these things once they have happened. He says:

Shall we . . .
 Take the good and not the evil?
 We have to take the chances, Sarah:
 Evil with good.
then, in a desperate candor
Is no good!¹ It doesn't mean there

Zuss and Nickles urge each of the antagonists on in the argument:

Nickles: in his cracked whisper

Doesn't it? Doesn't it?

Mr. Zuss: silencing Nickles with his hand, his whisper
hardly heard

Go on! Go on! That path will lead you.

Sarah: bitterly

When you were lucky it was God!

J. B. Sticks and stones and steel are chances.
 There's no will in stone and steel. . .

His voice breaks

It happens to us. . .

He drops on his knees beside her.

Sarah:

No! . . . Don't touch me!²

¹Ibid., p. 71.

²Ibid., pp. 71-72.

Scene Five begins with commentary by Zuss and Nickles and then portrays the messengers, again in the roles of newsmen, breaking news to J. B. and Sarah that their younger daughter Rebecca has been killed by a sex maniac. At the beginning of the scene Nickles summarizes J. B.'s reactions:

Even a perfect and an upright man
Lears if you keep turning long enough.
First he thought it wasn't happening--
Couldn't be happening--not to him--
Not with you in the stratosphere tooting the
Blue trombone for the moon to dance.
Then he thought it chanced by chance!
a dry hiccup of laughter
Childish hypothesis of course
But still hypothesis--a start--
A pair of tongs to take the toad by--
Recognition that it is a toad:
Not quite comfort but still comfortable,
Eases the hook in the gills a little:
He'll learn.¹

Zuss asks, "Learn what?" And Nickles replies, "Your--purpose for him!" Again Zuss can only answer with a threatening, authoritarian reply: "Keep your tongue in your teeth, will you?"² From the beginning of the scene Zuss has been holding a padded drum-stick, and Nickles now alludes to it:

Nickles: He doesn't have to act. He suffers.
It's an old role--played like a mouth-organ.
All he needs is help to see.

Mr. Zuss: See what?

Nickles: That bloody drum-stick striking;
See Who lets it strike the drum!³

¹Ibid., pp. 73-74.

²Ibid., p. 74.

³Ibid., p. 75.

The police then produce a red parasol that Rebecca carried, and they let the family know that she definitely is dead.

When J. B. touches the parasol, he said, "The Lord giveth. . . the Lord taketh away!" Zuss urges an aside: "Go on! / Go on! Finish it! Finish it!"¹ But J. B. does not round out the quotation with the words, "Blessed be the name of the Lord." Zuss and Nickles have a little discussion, Zuss calling the light bulbs stars and Nickles claiming that Zuss is out of his mind.

Scene Six depicts the aftermath of an air raid in which J. B.'s bank and factory have been completely demolished. Their daughter Ruth has just been killed in the raid. Sarah is in a state of paralytic despair. J. B. is holding on to his faith by a thread:

Sarah!
Even desperate we can't despair--
Let go each other's fingers--sink
Numb in that dumb silence--drown there
Sole in our cold selves . . .

We cannot!

God is there too, in the desperation.
I do not know why God should strike
But God is what is stricken also:
Life is what despairs in death
And, desperate, is life still . . .

Sarah!
Do not let my hand go, Sarah!

Say it after me:

¹Ibid., p. 83.

The Lord,
Giveth . . . Say it.

Sarah breaks down in anger and asserts that God kills. J. B. concludes the scene by saying, after a silence, "Blessed be the name of the Lord."²

Scene Seven portrays Zuss and Nickles arguing about J. B.'s adherence to his faith in God. Zuss has regained confidence, since J. B. has blessed God despite all the calamities. Nickles asserts that J. B. must be a ham in his continuance of unwavering piety; he does not believe J. B. can understand the implications of human suffering. Zuss assures him that J. B. does. Zuss predicts J. B.'s faithfulness to the end. Nickles says God merely forces J. B. to give "proof of pain":

No! God overreaches at the end--
Pursues too far--follows too fearfully.
He seals him in his sack of skin
And scalds his skin to crust to squeeze
The answer out, but Job evades Him.

Zuss alludes to Dante's line, "His will is our peace," but Nickles continues:

Will was never peace, no matter
Whose Will, whose peace.
Will is rule: surrender is surrender.
You make your peace: you don't give in to
it.
Job will make his own cold peace
When God pursues him in the web too far . . .³

This interpretation foreshadows the actual outcome of the

¹Ibid., p. 89.

²Ibid., p. 90.

³Ibid., p. 94.

play, at which time J. B. will make his own kind of detente independent of God's plan or wishes. Thus, Nickles seems to be a *raisonneur* in the part of the play, as he was earlier. Nickles' speech then turns to the idea of suicide as an alternative, and thus the listener can be misled into rejecting the correct interpretation of the play which is quoted above.

The two actors put on their masks and express astonishment when a loud voice chants their biblical lines, this phenomenon furnishes them with proof that the events are divinely controlled. There is irony in the Godmask's claim that Satan moves to destroy Job "without cause," inasmuch as God's having allowed Satan to plague Job is itself regarded as a cause. God now gives Satan permission to bring disease to Job's body.

Scene Eight begins with a speech by Nickles in which he claims:

Now you've fumbled it again:
 Tumbled a whole city down
 To blister one man's skin with agony.

 Look at your works! Those shivering women
 Sheltering under any crumbling
 Heap to keep the sky out! Weeping.¹

Nickles himself is a humane sympathizer quite different from the Satanmask role he must play when he recites scriptural lines, and of course different from the character traditionally

¹Ibid., pp. 99-100.

attributed to Satan.

Several women huddle together commiserating with each other and commenting upon J. B.'s state, which is still sensational material for town gossip despite the fact that all have endured some kind of saturation bombing or nuclear attack. The speeches recall the crowd speeches of Panic, The Fall of the City, and Air Raid, but one difference is that the women have very interesting individual names: Mrs. Adams, Jolly Adams, Mrs. Lesure, Mrs. Botticelli, and Mrs. Murphy. Their dialogue alternates with J. B. and Sarah's. The group of women consists of common people whose earthiness descends to the vulgar. They make a good deal of the fact that J. B.'s disease has affected the marriage relationship.

J. B. prays that God will let him die, and Sarah sarcastically says that God would not even help him to do that. She says God is their enemy, and J. B. asks her not to talk that way. J. B. makes some lyrical remarks about the value of sleep and asks Sarah to try to sleep. Sarah is haunted by the memory of her children's death and uses strong language to attack J. B.'s loyalty to God:

If God is just our slaughtered children
Stank with sin, were rotten with it!

Does God demand deception of us?—
Purchase His innocence by ours?
Must we be guilty for Him?—bear
The burden of the world's malevolence
For Him who made the world?¹

¹Ibid., p. 109.

J. B. says that his own guilt must be the reason for the calamities, and that God is just.

Sarah makes this position of J. B.'s an issue between them.

Sarah: I will not stay here if you lie--
 Connive in your destruction, cringe to it:
 Not if you betray my children. . .
 I will not stay to listen. . .
 They are
 Dead and they were innocent: I will not
 Let you sacrifice their deaths
 To make injustice Justice and God Good!

 If you buy quiet with their innocence--
 Theirs or yours. . .

softly

I will not love you.

J. B.: I have no choice but to be guilty.

Sarah: We have the choice to live or die,
 All of us. . .

Curse God and die. . .

J. B.: God is God or we are nothing--

We have no choice but to be guilty¹
 God is unthinkable if we are innocent.

Sarah walks out on her husband. The group of women, who have heard the conversation, disregard the theological basis of the conflict and offer a different motive for Sarah's leaving: J. B.'s diseased skin was worse than she could stand. Nickles makes the final speech of the scene; he decries guilt as a "putrid poultice of the soul"² and says bitterly that it is time for the three comfortors to come and

¹Ibid., pp. 110-111.

²Ibid., p. 112.

justify God's ways to J. B.

In Scene Nine, the canvas walls have dissolved into endless space. The platform is moved almost off stage. J. B. kneels on a table in center stage and says he wishes he had never been born. The Three Comfortors come shuffling onstage: Zophar, a fat, red-faced man in clerical collar; Eliphaz, a lean doctor in a dirty intern's jacket; and Bildad, a thick man wearing a ragged wind-breaker. The Comfortors look frowsy and sinister, and the women in the group describe them as they come on so that the audience will have the proper attitude toward them:

Mrs. Murphy:

See that leather-backed old bucket?--
Kind of character you hear from
Sundays in a public park
Pounding the hell out of everything . . . you
know.

Mrs. Botticelli:

I know. Wall Street. Bakers. Bankers.

Mrs. Lesure:

All the answers in a book.

Mrs. Botticelli:

Russkys got them all--the answers.

.

Mrs. Lesure:

Who's the collar?

Mrs. Murphy:

Some spoiled priest.

Mrs. Botticelli:

They can smell it further even.

Mrs. Lesure:

Not as far as dead-beat doctors:
They're the nosies.

Zophar: Why should God reply to you
From the blue depths of His Eternity?

Eliphaz: Blind depths of His Unconsciousness?

Bildad: Blank depths of His Necessity?

Zophar: God is far above Mystery.

Eliphaz: God is far below in Mindlessness.

Bildad: God is far within in History--
Why should God have time for you?¹

J. B. says that all the hopes of his life are gone. When he asks why these things should happen if he is innocent, Bildad the communist gives a class interpretation of history and asserts that individual innocence is meaningless and irrelevant. J. B. then says:

Guilt matters. Guilt must always matter.
Unless guilt matters the whole world is
meaningless. God too is nothing.²

But Bildad answers that guilt is a sociological accident, indicating that J. B. belongs to the wrong social class and has outdated attitudes.

Eliphaz, the psychiatrist, assures J. B. that guilt is a disease and an illusion, while Zophar the clergyman insists that guilt is reality. Zophar interprets J. B.'s plight in terms somewhat similar to the Comfortors' argument in The Book of Job: "Happy the man whom God correcteth!"³ J. B. urgently asks Zophar to show him his sin, but Zophar

¹Ibid., p. 119.

²Ibid., p. 121.

³Ibid., p. 124.

The burden of God's speech is to ask what his authority or achievements are that he should question God's plan. The quotations are taken in a random sequence from Chapters 38-40 of The Book of Job, as follows: 38:2, 4, 12, 17, 19, 22, 24, and 31; 39:19, 25, and 27; and 40:2, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 14. The Comfortors and the group of women become frightened at the sound of the wind, and they all exit. Job's speech, which concludes this climactic scene, is a quotation of The Book of Job, 40:4 and 42:2-6:

Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee?
I will lay mine hand upon my mouth.

.
I know that thou canst do everything.
And that no thought can be withholden from thee.
Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge?
Therefore have I uttered that I understood not:
Things too wonderful for me, which I knew not.

.
I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear. . .
But now. . .

mine eye seeth thee!

I abhor myself. . .and repent. . .¹Wherefore

Scene Ten is a long conversation between Zuss and Nickles which is somewhat anti-climactic. Nickles gives Zuss a left-handed compliment for his acting and continues to nay-say God's treatment of J. B.:

Being magnificent and being right
Don't go together in this universe.
It's being wrong--a desperate stubbornness
Fighting the inextinguishable stars--
Excites imagination.²

¹Ibid., pp. 131-32.

²Ibid., p. 135.

Nickles says that J. B. misconceived his part because he gave in to God. Zuss says J. B.'s action was not supercilious humility. Nickles cannot understand why J. B. should concede to God's display of power when he has already been crushed by it. Zuss acknowledges that by his silence J. B. forgave God for the world and for everything God had done to him. Both actors feel that there has been something more than repentance in J. B.'s final act of humbling himself.

Zuss informs Nickles that the show is not over. J. B. is to be given everything back, including his wife and more children. Nickles is stunned by the news and cannot believe that J. B. would want to live now that he has suffered and learned what man's fate is. Nickles says, jeering:

Wife back! Balls! He wouldn't touch her.
 He wouldn't take her with a glove!
 After all that filth and blood and
 Fury to begin again! . . .
 This fetid earth! That frightened Heaven
 Terrified to trust the soul
 It made with Its own hands, but testing it,
 Tasting it, by trial, by torture,
 Over and over till the last, least town
 On all this reeling, reeking earth
 Stinks with spiritual agony
 That stains the stones with excrement and shows
 In shadow on each greasy curtain!
 After life like his to take
 The seed up of the sad creation
 Planting the hopeful world again--
 He can't. . . he won't! . . . he wouldn't
 touch her!¹

Zuss assures Nickles that mankind is capable of bearing the

¹Ibid., p. 143.

Sarah: I loved you.
I couldn't help you any more
You wanted justice and there was none--
Only love.

J. B. He does not love. He
Is.

Sarah: But we do. That's the wonder.¹

Early in the play, it has been established by Nickles that God does not have consciousness and that human beings are superior insofar as they do. Lack of consciousness precludes feeling, and Sarah's remark that God does not love follows out consistently the concept of an impersonal God as has been presented throughout the play. Man's dignity, based upon self-consciousness and love, is now being asserted at the conclusion of the play; this achievement of self-consciousness resembles the quest for self-consciousness in Nobodaddy and in the long poems of that early period, The Happy Marriage and The Pot of Earth. J. B. gives up his quest for an understanding of the universe, except as the universe or life can be known through love.

Sarah admits that her leaving J. B. was no escape from her trials. She assures him that love will recreate their belief in life:

Then blow on the coal of the heart, my
darling.

The coal of the heart. . . .
It's all the light now.

¹Ibid., pp. 151-52.

Blow on the coal of the heart.
 The candles in churches are out.
 The lights have gone out in the sky.
 Blow on the coal of the heart
 And we'll see by and by. . .
 We'll see where we are.
 The wit won't burn and the wet soul smoulders.
 Blow on the coal of the heart and we'll know. . .
 We'll know. . .

The light in the door increases to plain white daylight and the curtain falls.

D. Revision for the Broadway Production

The most significant revisions occur in the final scene of the play. To many there seemed to be something missing in J. B.'s recognition of God's power and his simple acceptance of life once he realizes it will be restored to him. Signi Falk says of the original version:

In the scene following. . . "repentance," Zuss uncomfortably asks Nickles how J. B. voiced his repentance, and whether he did it for God or for himself. A scene very important in the development of the experience of Job is thus presented second-hand. At the end of this scene, in very few lines and very briefly, J. B. rejects Nickles' suggestions of self-annihilation. . . . In this original version there is no scene in which J. B. is made to reveal what he has learned from experience, a scene very much needed in the play and one necessary for the interpretation which MacLeish gives to the Job legend. This so-called "recognition scene" was developed during the rehearsals and was substituted for the original and weaker one.²

In the Kazan version, the material which was originally Scene Ten is shortened, and in the final scene both Zuss and Nickles

¹ Ibid., p. 153.

² Signi Falk, Archibald MacLeish, (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1965), p. 146.

talk to J. B. When J. B. has rejected Nickles' exhortation to suicide, Zuss throws off his robe and comes down the ladder triumphantly:

Mr. Zuss:

Job! You've answered him!

J. B.: Let me alone. I am alone.

I'll sweat it out alone.

Mr. Zuss:

You've found

The answer at the end. You've answered him!

We take what God has sent--the Godsend.

There is no resolution of the mystery
Of unintelligible suffering but the dumb

Bowed head that makes injustice just

By yielding to the Will that willed it--

Yielding to the Will that willed

A world where there can be injustice.

The end is the acceptance of the end.

We take what God has willed.

J. B. (Crosses to Mr. Zuss. Savagely.)

I will not

Duck my head again to thunder--

That bullwhip crackling at my ears!--although

He kill me with it. I must know.

(Crosses R. to Sarah. Nickles crosses down
platform and down steps. To Nickles.)

Life is a filthy farce, you say,

And nothing but a bloody stage

Can bring the curtain down and men

Must have ironic hearts and perish

Laughing. . . .

(Mr. Zuss crosses D. L.)

Well, I will not laugh!

(He swings on Mr. Zuss.)

And neither will I weep among

The obedient who lie down to die

In meek relinquishment protesting

Nothing, questioning nothing, asking

Nothing but to rise again and

bow!

Neither the bowing nor the blood

Will make an end for me now!

Neither the

Yes in ignorance. . .

the No in spite. . . .

Neither of them!¹

¹Archibald MacLeish, J.B.: A Play in Verse (New York: Samuel French, Inc., 1958), pp. 106-07.

Thus in a few lines, Zuss is able to convey his position directly to J. B., casting off his identity as God and losing much of the dramatic irony his role obtained for him. J. B.'s defiance of the theistic position is a new element introduced at this point in the play. J. B.'s rejection of both Zuss and Nickles reduces their earlier long arguments to naught. J. B. says he must know the meaning of suffering; this assertion supplies a basis for his rejection of Zuss's arguments. Yet when Sarah soon claims that there is no answer to suffering, J. B. is content to give up looking.

When Zuss and Nickles leave and J. B. is talking to Sarah he is given additional lines which follow Sarah's words, "Blow on the coal of the heart / And . . . We'll know":

J. B. (Slowly, with difficulty, the hard words said at last.)

We can never know.
He answered me like the stillness of a star
That silences us asking.

No Sarah, no:

(Kneels beside her.)

We are and that is all our answer.
We are and what we are can suffer.
But. . .

what suffers loves.

And love
Will live its suffering again,
Endure the loss of everything again
And yet again and yet again
In doubt, in dread, in ignorance, unanswered,
Over and over, with the dark before,
The dark behind it. . .and still live. . .
still love.¹

The director, and apparently Mr. MacLeish also, felt that

¹Ibid., p. 110.

the last lines of the original version did not clarify the thematic conflict of the play. The final lines of the revised version, quoted above, give the action a sense of finality, but J. B.'s admission that suffering cannot be understood is a dramatically unexplained contradiction of J. B.'s closing argument with Mr. Zuss, in which J. B. insists that he must know the reason for his suffering. It appears that in both versions of the play, the closing theme--love's compensation for the ills of life--has not been integrated with the philosophical question hammered at by Zuss and Nickles continually throughout the play: why must man suffer?

Other significant changes in the Kazan version include the division of the play into two acts. Two-thirds of action comprises the first act, which continues up to the time when the group of women and the comfortors appear. This seems to be a most logical division, since the complications which develop from J. B.'s loss of his family are allowed to play upon the audience's imagination during the intermission, and the raffish scenes involving the women and Comfortors give the final act a great deal of vitality. At the beginning of both acts, the Kazan version introduces a group of stagehands who busy themselves about preparing the scene and props. These innovations seem to be misspent theatricalism because the speeches of Zuss and Nickles are

long enough in themselves and they make it clear enough that the audience is supposed to be seeing a play enacted. Individual lines and short speeches are cut or rearranged, but none of these is worth discussing. Some of the cuts, however, do away with private meanings and allusions to earlier MacLeish works and these have been discussed in the section of this chapter dealing with sources.

One final significant change in Elia Kazan's decision to represent Nickles as a young man rather than an old one. Mr. MacLeish has given Mr. Kazan's reason for the change. Mr. Kazan is reported to have said:

Nickles is a young man. He talks like a young man. That's the way young beatniks talk. Life to him is disgusting, a miserable, horrible thing. He hates life. That's kid talk, not an old man's.

And Mr. MacLeish answered: "'My eyes are opened."¹ Mr. MacLeish thinks that it is worthwhile to preserve the antiquity of evil by letting Nickles remain an old man, and he is happy that European versions portray Nickles as an old man. Yet he is not at odds with Elia Kazan's change and admits that Nickles' lines spoken by Christopher Plummer as a young man "began taking on edge."² It is not surprising that Nickles' lines were discovered to sound like the arguments of a young man because they contain much of the spirit and

¹Personal interview, October 18, 1962.

²Donald Hall, "Archibald MacLeish: On Being a Poet in the Theatre," Horizon, p. 53.

some of the arguments Cain had evinced in Mr. MacLeish's play Nobodaddy, published in 1926. In Nickles, the poet was rehearsing his youthful sentiments.

E. Conclusions

In his portrayal of Man suffering, Mr. MacLeish has attempted to write J. B. as the kind of tragedy he wrote in Panic.¹ The heroes of both plays are passive and they are unable to affect the machinery which metes out their destiny. Cleanth Brooks' figure of the broken carburetor, which the suffering amateur mechanic tampers with, complains about, and then leaves in despair, can be applied to J. B.² The protagonist persists in wanting to know first causes for his suffering, but he abruptly abandons the search and looks for consolation elsewhere.

In the arguments of Zuss and the Three Comfortors, Mr. MacLeish uses obviously bankrupt language to portray the irrelevance of these characters' arguments. His own precedents for this technique go back to Faust in Our Lady of Troy, to the peace-minded people of The Fall of the City and Air Raid, and the Three Councillors of The Trojan Horse. The difficulty with this technique as it is used for Zuss in J. B. is that God is made to give a very poor show. If

¹See pp. 216ff. of this text.

²See pp. 243-4 of this text.

the playwright wishes this effect, he may have his reasons for it. But Zuss's lines juxtaposed with God's as quoted from The Book of Job produce a queer mixture of the ridiculous and the sublime; the overall or intended effect is not clear at all. This difficulty leads to the problem Mr. MacLeish has continually encountered in trying fuse legend and contemporary argument. He has hardly handled the problem adequately in J. B. As Allan Tate remarked of Conquistadors,¹ the total effect in J. B. is a sentimental view of experience: when J. B. abandons his search for justice, he catches hold of a comfortable, home-style set of virtues and consolations which offer him a subjective sense of well-being without in any way coming to terms with the cosmic problems which have dominated the play right down to the last few lines. The audience does not even have the consolation of seeing a conflict left unresolved: the protagonist merely tries to call attention away from it. The incongruity of the ending with the rest of the play recalls the quick change of focus at the end in the two recent verse plays, The Trojan Horse and This Music Crept By Me Upon the Waters, which were discussed in the last chapter.

The playwright's less than satisfactory fusion of legend with contemporary argument suggests that he is writing out conflicts which function on a different level from that

¹See p. 200 of this text.

of the stated theme--man's need to find reasons for his suffering. Zuss is presented as an antagonistic character whose orthodox religious view is held in contempt. In an interview on J. B., Mr. MacLeish is reported to have said:

For Zuss, the lesson is that "the answer to the terrific problem is not fear of God but love of life." "I remember my father, a Scot," added MacLeish, "was always talking about the fear of God."¹

This desire to live is the same urge which prompts Bernal Diaz to hold on to life through his reminiscences in Conquistadors, a struggle which leads to a sentimental view of experience. Furthermore, the association of Zuss with the playwright's father recalls a psychological basis for Mr. MacLeish's antagonism toward traditional morality which has been discussed earlier in this study. The end of the play particularly shows the Oedipal triangle in its basic structure: J. B. challenges God by claiming he must know the reasons for his suffering, but then he is allayed by the soothings of a mother figure, Sarah, who convinces him that he need not oppose God through a continuance of his search. The possibility of Zuss being a father figure goes a long way in explaining the dramatic fact that Zuss is the antagonist of the play.

In a comment on Panic² quoted earlier in this study,

¹Jean White, "Will to Live is Key in MacLeish's 'J. B.,'" Library Journal, LXXXIV (January 1, 1959), 37.

²John Howard Lawson, Theory and Technique of Playwriting, p. 293.

John Howard Lawson noted the barrier which Mr. MacLeish had constructed between the speech and action of that play. There is a similar barrier in J. B. Zuss and Nickles carry on virtually all of the commentary on the action, and Nickles expresses exasperation several times that J. B. cannot or will not act. The audience has the right to this kind of exasperation. For J. B. shows little development as a character. The audience is given the impression through most of the play that Zuss, Nickles and J. B. are involved in the same action. Only at the end does it come clear that the philosophical and theological arguments of Zuss and Nickles are irrelevant to J. B.'s solution to his conflict. The audience is thus at the last minute informed that Zuss's and Nickles' commentary (speech) and J. B.'s conflict (action) have little or nothing to do with each other. Part of this incongruity is produced by Mr. MacLeish's allowing Nickles to appear as a *raisonneur* throughout most of the play; only at the end does Nickles have his platform pulled out from under him. The disparity in development between Nickles and J. B. is so great that during the earlier part of the play Nickles appears almost as the protagonist. The disparity between speech and action is also brought about by the discrepancy between the language and meaning of the biblical quotations and, on the other hand, the ordinary conversations of the characters.

CHAPTER XI

CONCLUSION

A. Recent Dramatizations

Since 1959 Mr. MacLeish has devoted most of his writing efforts to drama.¹ Three plays have been published in the '60's: The Secret of Freedom, Our Lives, Our Fortunes and Our Sacred Honor, and The American Bell. Since these short plays for mass media are all essayistic endeavors to promote patriotic feelings, and since they show little development in the playwright's technique, they will be discussed only in brief summary.

The Secret of Freedom was originally commissioned and presented as a television play on February 28, 1960 by NBC. In a setting of a typical small American town, Jill finally convinces her husband Joe of the importance of a local school bond issue. Joe is shown canvassing other typical townspeople who express various opinions on education and democracy. One teen-age boy in particular has cynically given up the ideals of democracy. The bond issue fails, but Joe and Jill determine

¹Anon. "MacLeish Says Drama Will be Main Interest," St. Louis Post Dispatch, May 10, 1959, p. 4.

to keep working for freedom by becoming involved on the right side of local political issues. Toward the end of this half-hour program, a character named Doc, who is played by Thomas Mitchell, makes some long speeches in a conversation with Joe. Doc concludes:

Belief is always headed toward the future, Joe. You go home and tell Jill you believe in the future of this town, of this Republic. That's all the knowing she'll need. . . .And tell her the future of America's in your hands. Because it is.¹

In his "notes on Production," Mr. MacLeish calls the play a "drama of ideas" and pays homage to the "documentary reminders"² of impressionistic TV camera work.

Our Lives, Our Fortunes and Our Sacred Honor was commissioned by the editors of Think, a magazine published by IBM Corporation, for the occasion of the Fourth of July, 1961. The play has never been produced on television. It is dramatized research which brings out the meaning of the Declaration of Independence and something of the characters of the signers, particularly Thomas Jefferson. A narrator figures prominently in setting the scene and telling the story. To the accompaniment of pictured contemporary world events (revolutions, harness racing, etc.), the narrator argues with members of an American crowd about the importance and meaning of the Fourth of July. Next, the narrator

¹Archibald MacLeish, "The Secret of Freedom," Three Short Plays (New York: Dramatists Play Service, 1961), p. 32.

²Ibid., p. 7.

interviews Isaac, a slave who helped build Monticello and left testimony about Jefferson's style of life. The narrator then interviews Jefferson's friend, Joseph Cabell, who speaks about the circumstances of Jefferson's death, which occurred auspiciously on the Fourth of July. The signing of the Declaration of Independence is portrayed in documentary, the narrator explaining events and the camera focusing on contemporary paintings of the event. The text of the Declaration is examined by camera and narrator. Then the narrator moderates a debate on popular democracy between Jefferson and John Adams taken from their correspondence. John Adams's death is described, and the documentary ends with Jefferson's words:

And for the support of this Declaration . . .
we mutually pledge to each other our lives,
our fortunes, and our sacred honor.¹

The American Bell² is another historical documentary on the American Revolution and is done in collaboration with the Princeton historian, Julian Boyd. It was first presented and published in 1962. It is neither a stage drama nor a television drama, but a "Lumadrama" consisting of on-the-scene portrayal by sound and light of events that took place in Independence Hall. Instead of live actors, magnetic tapes of

¹ Archibald MacLeish, "Our Lives, Our Fortunes and Our Sacred Honor," Think, XXVII (July-August, 1961), 23.

² Archibald MacLeish, "The American Bell," Let Freedom Ring (New York: American Heritage Publishing Co., Inc., 1962), pp. 49-61.

actors' voices are used, and spectacular lighting effects inside and outside of the Hall accompany the drama of voices. The narrator, played by Frederick March, has a major role in this program which is presented periodically to outdoor audiences of as many as a thousand people. The idea of Lumadrama was adopted by Mr. MacLeish from the Son et Lumiere spectacles in France and elsewhere which portray historical events on the scene where they took place. Other Lumadramas are scheduled for various historical sites in the United States. Mr. MacLeish's was done in cooperation with Lumadrama, Inc. and the National Park Service under the sponsorship of the Old Philadelphia Development Corporation and the City of Philadelphia.

The American Bell begins with the narrator alluding to contemporary America and then persuading the audience to make an imaginative leap back to the time when Washington was appointed General of the Continental Army and other participants in the Revolution were making their contributions to the movement for independence. Franklin, Jefferson, and Paine are imagined to be standing outdoors. Present-day voices break in and then the action settles back to historical documentary. Voices out of the past dramatize the purchase, casting, and inscribing of the Liberty Bell. Citizens discuss the powerful resonance of the bell and the inconvenience of some who feel it is rung too often. Jefferson, Adams, Paine, and others then go through the arguments for declaring

independence from Britain. A resolution is made, discussed, and passed. The voice of Thomas Jefferson is then heard reading a large part of the Declaration of Independence, and the Liberty Bell is rung in celebration of the event.

The three plays just summarized continue the line of development in Mr. MacLeish's writing which he began in The American Story: utilitarian playwriting, some of it historical documentary, which attempts to create or renew patriotic feelings. These three plays are all short minor works, and critics and reviewers have taken no notice of them. They bring the number of Mr. MacLeish's published drama to a total of thirteen. Recently Mr. MacLeish has written one more drama, The Labors of Herakles, which was given a performance at the University of Michigan in November, 1965. It has not yet been published and so is not being considered in this study.

B. Summary

Through the variety of development and forms in Mr. MacLeish's dramas, one can apply the classification of vocational works to those which meet the "serious" business of living in the practical world by attaching some kind of ideological and essayistic purpose to the writing. These plays are Panic, The Fall of the City, Air Raid, The States Talking, The American Story, The Trojan Horse, The Secret

of Freedom, Our Lives, Our Fortunes and Our Sacred Honor, and The American Bell. Some of these works are in prose and others are in poetry. Characteristics of these plays are stereotyped characterization, heavy reliance in some of these works on historical (or in The Trojan Horse, legendary) texts, enthusiastic and direct moralizing, and a great deal of technical experimentation--some of which is derived from other literary works.

Mr. MacLeish's other plays--Our Lady of Troy, Nobodaddy, This Music Crept By Me Upon the Waters, and J. B.-- may be described as vacational works dealing with esthetic and philosophical concerns. It is significant that they are all written in verse, for Mr. MacLeish's art ideology seems to demand the sophistication of verse drama for his works dealing with subjects of deep concern to the philosopher-artist. In these plays the poet takes great pains to raise the level of action above the commonplace and to obscure or avoid dogmatic moralizing. Yet "real life" does intrude at the very end of This Music Crept By Me Upon the Waters and J. B. Panic and The Trojan Horse, both verse dramas, are a hybrid of vocational and vacational writing, for along with their utilitarian ends they introduce philosophical considerations of fate and esthetic judgments on the role of the artist; at the ends of these plays, private meanings obscure utilitarian purpose.

Mr. MacLeish's enthusiasm for social concerns, occurring after his sojourn in Europe, seem to derive in part from his mother's influence. His lack of dogmatism also reflects his mother's deemphasis of religious dogma in the family's religion. His tendency to make God an antagonist-- as in Nobodaddy and J. B.--suggests a reaction to his father's stern Calvinism, or a reaction to his father generally. The females in his plays are often mediators--Helen in Our Lady of Troy and The Trojan Horse, Eve in Nobodaddy, and Sarah at the end of J. B. All these women are also treated as feminine ideals and to the extent that they are stereotyped characters. Ione in Panic is not idealized, but acts as an unsuccessful mediator between McGafferty and Fate.

The playwright's technical achievements are greatest in the areas of prosody and diction. From his reliance on blank verse in Our Lady of Troy and Nobodaddy he has developed a flexible four-stress line in The Trojan Horse, This Music Crept By Me Upon the Waters, and J. B. In every verse play since Panic, the prosody and diction have been faithful to what Mr. MacLeish sees as the "nervous" idiom of American speech. What John Ciardi has seen as the balance and compensations of Mr. MacLeish's prosody is perhaps Mr. MacLeish's most striking contribution to modern poetic diction in the theatre. There is, however, a barrier between speech and action which John Howard Lawson has noted in Panic and is characteristic of the other plays. This discrepancy seems

to occur mainly from Mr. MacLeish's efforts to infuse actions with meaning or a multiplicity of meanings. The dense texture which Mr. MacLeish has been accustomed to use in his poetry, after the school of T. S. Eliot, carries over into his dramas. Yet it must be noted that the texture becomes thinner, diction more informal, and private meanings less obstructive in the later plays.

Mr. MacLeish's stagecraft has gone through many phases of development. Our Lady of Troy and Nobodaddy are closet dramas in iambic pentameter which are lyrical dialogues without very much significant action. Panic continues Mr. MacLeish's reliance on dialogue as a substitute for action, but the use of crowd scenes enlivens the action somewhat. The Fall of the City, Air Raid, and The American Story show development in the use of crowd scenes, and more importantly they indicate Mr. MacLeish's partial mastery of radio techniques. The Trojan Horse and This Music Crept By Me Upon the Waters are both radio plays, although the latter can also be presented on the stage. They show Mr. MacLeish's full development in adapting poetic drama to radio. J. B., the only major drama Mr. MacLeish has produced, is also his only venture into expressionism. In this play he is able to discipline his private meanings and put them across the footlights to the satisfaction of large segments of the theatre-going public. Our Lives, Our Fortunes and Our Sacred Honor

and The American Bell are popular dramatizations of historical texts which simply show Mr. MacLeish's versatility in refining the techniques he learned in writing The American Story. The Secret of Freedom, with its defeated protagonists formulating their strong wish in achieving the American Dream, exhibits a trait which exists in virtually all except the most propagandistic plays--the major characters' passivity in the face of events. The plays are also significant for the derivative qualities which have been pointed out in this study--Mr. MacLeish's reliance on inspiration from other writers and then, more recently, his dependence upon earlier works of his own.

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APPROVAL SHEET

The dissertation submitted by Edward Arthur Morin, Jr. has been read and approved by five members of the Department of English.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the dissertation is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The dissertation is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Date

Signature of Adviser