The Word and Beyond

The Word

Four Literary

Dick Higgins

Richard Morris

Donald Phelps

Harry Smith

and Beyond

Cosmologists

1982
The Smith
New York City

Designer: Dick Higgins
Cover Art: Paula Goodman
Editorial Coordinator: Anne Conover Heller
Typography: Open Studio, Ltd.
Printer: R.R. Donnelley

ISBN 0-912292-71-7 (cloth edition)

This book is copyright © 1982 by The Smith. All rights reserved. No portion of this book may be reproduced in any form whatever without permission in writing from the publisher, except for brief passages quoted for inclusion in a review written for a newspaper or a magazine or a radio or television broadcast.

Manufactured in the United States of America.

the word & beyond

Dick Higgins
The Naïve and Its Function in Meaning 3
Postface 7
Postscript to Postface 97
An Exemplativist Manifesto 102

Richard Morris
Romantics and Antiromantics 115
Science, Literature and Magic 123
"Star Wars" as a Zoroastrian Myth 136
Academic Ghettoes 141
Leaping Around in the Three Brains 146
The Moon Shot: Poetry, Technology and Normal Mailer 150
A Literary Counterfeiter 156
Yesterday's Burdens 158
"Stirless He Lay" 160
On John Brockman 163

Bad Ass Comix 169
Books that Fucked up My Head 173
Who Are the Greatest Poets? An Informal Survey 176
The Academic Reviewer 181
The Small Press 184
A Dadaist Manifesto 189

Donald Phelps
Destiny as Melodrama 195
Edith Wharton and the Invisible 205
Four Walls 217
"H" 228
The Holy Family 251
Doing Time 261
The Rabbit Man: The Art of Harrison Cady 269
Quotes and Inferences 276
The Body of Our Death 281
Many Forms, No Form: William S. Poster 295
The Simple Ecology of the Soul 301
Some Notes on a Misplaced Art Form 306
Shut Up, He Explained 313

Harry Smith
Smith's Cosmology 333
A Letter to My Son 338
Accidental Education Vs. the Wordshop 341
The Psychonauts 344
Defictionalizing James T. Farrell 350
Can Poets Conquer the World? 360
Breakthrough Fictioneers 363
The Non-Rationalist 366
Publishing and the Destruction of Values 369
The Naïve Manifesto 397

Some of the essays published in this book first appeared in the following periodicals: For Now *3, 4, and 11;* Mulch *(October, 1971 and Spring 1972);* Nada Review; NewsArt; Prose *7; and* The Smith *1, 15, 17, 18, 21 and 22.*

The Word and Beyond

Dick Higgins

The Naïve and Its Function in Meaning

My neighbor kneels when he tends his cows. I have photographed him doing so. If I show my photograph to most observers, they will think he is worshipping them. But not so: to the great frustration of his wife, who must wash his dirty work pants, it is a habit he picked up long ago—and he's reached an age when he is unlikely to change. Alas, if I tell my friends the truth, the photo becomes far less interesting. It loses its emotional impact.

So it is with the critics—they argue the meaning in art of this or that but never ask themselves, why should an art mean anything? Can art mean anything? Or the negative—which in this case is an antinomy: can art mean nothing?

This leads to the usual ambiguity of attitude: If I like a work, it is meaningful. If I do not, it is meaningless. (Or vice versa.) Yet, if I dislike it—isn't that also a form of meaning? Thus the critic fails to distinguish

between the meaningful character of a work—a potential object-language—and the metalanguage of his own attribution. Put differently, the meaning he sees in a work, whether intellectual or emotional, lies in his own head: the work itself may or may not have any meaning.

But nobody ever loved a poem because of its meaning, because what it said was right. An essay, perhaps (especially if one agreed with it). But a poem—its impact comes from its ability to provoke meaning, not from any intrinsic meaning it may have. To understand a work is, therefore, to misunderstand it—to receive the provocation which it offers, and to attribute that provocation (a response) to something inherent in the work.

The poem is—and the same holds true of music, I think—a test, therefore, and a provocation. The most naive listener says: I do not understand it. What he does not understand, in fact, are the ways in which he might react to it.

The next-to-most-naive listener is the ideal one—he is most deeply provoked, but does not have the coolness of connoisseurship to inhibit his natural responses.

The less naive listener, the connoisseur—he is jaded in his response, because he only allows his response to a token level, enough to determine for him the character of the work. After that his cognitive opinion is allowed to take over. The work is transformed into his opinion of it, by a sort of mental and emotional clinamen.

The least naive listener, the absolute expert—the professional—even his response must be subsumed and schematized according to his image of himself as critic and professional, according to the system of roles and functions he has built up (usually for teaching or for journalistic purposes). He is dead to the work—it is merely a name, a conventionalized sign.

Wittgenstein (in the *Blue Book*, for instance) is among those who have pointed out how we think in signs—and so we do. But the response is far from being automatic as the response of a typesetter to the correct number of holes in its controlling tape. The semiosis of morphemes and transforms in the literary arts is in a constant dialectic with the life and communications of the listener (or reader, or viewer—heard poetry is merely my paradigm: I am speaking of all the arts).

But far from a cumulative sophistication being built up by an enor-

mous quantitative exposure to an art, exhaustion sets in. The professional cannot afford to admit his exhaustion: so he or she carries on in some purely analytical way, according to a cognitive scheme he or she has devised. Were the listener to act less cognitively, he would be free to become refreshed by adding to his experience some work which was unfamiliar—or which was incapable of being or becoming familiar (or as nearly so as possible). Work of this last sort is rare: yet it was to attack the progressive ossification via connoisseurship that, for instance, testing structures and chance operations were applied to poetry—by Jackson Mac Low and myself among others. The dancerly dance is always deadly, but the dance of life is not—there must always be something, in a work, which is incapable of being known and about which the listener remains naive for the work to provoke a strong positive or negative response. The non-response, the safe one, involves less of our selves: but it is at our very great peril that we hide there—that way lies depersonalization and professional hebephrenia. The cognitive approach, therefore, with its characteristic self-imaging and "professional cool," is a dead end.

Art is possibly, then, an experience—but it is modified by its recognition as art, and this act of recognition (which replaces the concept of the creative act in older systems) is precisely where the artist (who would otherwise develop all the negative characteristics of the cognitive professional—and the worst artists usually do) places his own emphasis. If what he or she did became too familiar, a cognitive effect would take place. Thus, to avoid it, the artist must always work with something about which he or she is naive. Thus the poet cannot repeat himself, the composer cannot keep on grinding it out in the style that made him or her famous—even if he wanted to—without simultaneously committing an act of destruction of his or her most vital self. Finally, the artist can only accept his or her own identity in a similar state of motion—in an ongoing process of movement into the unknown: for if he or she did not stress this, his or her own cognitive image would take over and the joy in work would die.

The strangeness of the familiar—about that there are never any experts. Yet it is there that the most powerful aesthetic provocations and simulations lie. Too strange?—the work would be decorative. Too familiar?—the process would become cognitive. To work with the concrete, then, including the specific and precise abstraction which is really part of the concrete, requires that the artist remain naive about

these—far from the artist teaching, in his work, the way an expert teaches a subject, the artist shares those things which strike him in his naivete. The subject of the work teaches the artist, and he merely shares the experience.

Since such a system requires that the artist continually explore, it also follows that the artist, working in *terra incognita* on his map, must always deal with what is to him or her an avant garde. A prisoner's first sonnet is an experiment, but his twentieth is not. He must, therefore, to maintain his involvement, move to other forms—as all artists must. And the listener—for the listener, the first experience of the work is apt to be the most profound; any further experience of it, to match the initial experience, must have some equal revelation of some area in which the listener was previously naive (e.g., a conductor's unorthodox but successful reading of a symphony). Provocation, to succeed, requires naivete.

Barton, Vermont
11 August, 1976

Postface

for the greatest of no-sayers, whose work I understate
through accident rather than intention, for Wolf Vostell

I—Preamble

When it was slow in the printing shop where I was working, like the others, I was reading a book. My boss came up and said, "I'm sorry, but business is pretty slow. Friday I'm going to have to let you go." I understood, useless though such understanding was. And what was the book I was reading? Horatio Alger's *Ragged Dick*.

From now on, the act of reading Alger is going to strike me as being very ironic.

My point is that art is inexorably bound up in the situation where it

is produced and where it is experienced. You can emphasize this, or you can emphasize where it is produced or experienced: you can even equate them, and emphasize the equation. The relationship exists in any case, and, either as artist or as audience, we are in a situation analogous to a swimmer who may fight the surf, dive through it and struggle against it till he gets out beyond where the surf is noticeable: or else this swimmer can roll with the waves.

This situation seems relevant to what is happening in the arts today, and to my own work in particular. And so I am writing an essay for these five reasons: 1. I want to suggest critical criteria that are more pertinent to current art work than those that are in general use. 2. I want to describe the flow of things and where I am in it. 3. I want to suggest differences and similarities in work which is usually not only suppressed or minimized by the large media but lumped together, partially to separate out what I do and what I want to do from what others are doing. 4. I want to locate much of the social implications of what is being done in the arts within the larger social flow. And 5. By clarifying all this, I want to help break down the Going Thing in the various arts and help cause, as it is said, a hundred flowers to blossom and a thousand schools of thought to contend.

It amazes me how little variety there is in the best work that is being done today. There is remarkably little difference between the work of William Carlos Williams and Leroi Jones, although the former poet must have been nearly a half century older than Jones. Similarly, although most of the prominent younger poets are trying to develop their own "sound," which is their word for "poetic diction" (and an improvement on it, I think), everybody's sound turns out to be the same. Ron Loewinson, Paul Blackburn, with eleven years difference in age, from the Philippines and Vermont respectively: surely one could expect a little more variety. Part of the reason for this is our implicit acceptance of types.

The image that one has of what we are and what we are doing almost stereotypes our activities. These days dancers and poets don't seem to get enough variety into what they do because they know too well what dancers do and what poets do. There is an implicit love of professionalism that is, I feel, extremely dangerous. Perhaps it is an attachment formed by the fact that most artists, particularly those who write for performance, get lots of honors and almost no cash for their efforts. But that is just conjecture.

These images are very strong with us—we expect a lawyer to be as we think a lawyer ought to be. But what a shame for the lawyer to think that and to conform to an image of lawyers in general. We type suburban housewifes, militant Negroes, ambitious Jews, AFofL craftsmen, and so on, and in many cases these characterizations are negative. Then it is particularly sad for a person to conform to such an image. It is also very frustrating when he tries not to conform to it. An interesting case in point of this last is that of Carmine De Sapio. He was an Italian district leader in New York politics whose responsibility was primarily the sensitive one of giving promotions on the basis of seniority. Because of an eye disease in his youth, he must wear dark glasses—he may damage his eyes severely by not wearing them. Now, all of us know from our native-born, red-blooded American cradles that most Italians belong to the mafia and are incorrigible of course. Conclusion: this harmless old De Sapio must be a very sinister man. It happened that the head of the corruption-riddled administration of New York, Mayor Wagner, belonged to the same party as De Sapio, and, perhaps in need of more financial support, coveted De Sapio's position. At the same time, the people of New York were beginning to complain about the corruption in the city under Mayor Wagner's administration. A reform movement began to develop. And, knowing our willingness to type people, Mayor Wagner waged one of the dirtiest campaigns in our history; by sheer innuendo and sly publicity he played up to our prejudices. They say that De Sapio kept a whole staff of lawyers on guard, waiting for Mayor Wagner to make a specific accusation, so that De Sapio could accuse Mayor Wagner of libel. But Mayor Wagner, while I think he is personally honest, is very shrewd, ruthless, and unprincipled, not to say demagogic. And so because of our prejudice, De Sapio is out. And Mayor Wagner now heads the reform movement to clean up his own mess. And fortunes are still made in tearing down good buildings and putting up bad ones. The only difference is that you used to pay the cop five dollars a month to park where it was forbidden, and now it costs fifteen. Where is the extra ten going?

This story has a lot to do with why there isn't very much variety in the arts today. I don't think that this characteristic is confined to America at all. Two well-known characters might be taken as the prototypes of our artists: Faust and Schweik. Faust, who makes a gnostic religion or way of life or even mystery out of art, is the older style. He is

beautifully described in Thomas Mann's *Doctor Faustus*, which is said to be based on the life of Alban Berg. Mahler, Schoenberg, Stockhausen, Paik—I think of these people as Faustian.

The other type of image is even more poetic than old Faust. Schweik is a character in a great novel by that name by Hasek. Schweik is a soldier. The world explodes, but he endures. His country crumbles, but he sells dogs. He is forced into the army. He is buffeted and thrown around here and there. But he is too naive and too fine a person to pay any attention to all that. He is, perhaps, above it. At the end of the novel he wanders off into no man's land, in pursuit of a beautiful butterfly. He may have been captured or shot: we do not know.

Right now this is the more popular kind of image. Most artists are behaving as if they had set up this image for themselves. I think some consciously have. And to me, the terrible thing is that anyone behaves as if he had set any image for himself.

Schweik is poetic. But to live up to one's image is sheer Madison Avenue. And Madison Avenue is sick, don't you think? Madison Avenue may plant the trees on Park Avenue every Christmas, but Madison Avenue is available to the highest bidder.

And so living up to the image of Schweik is being for sale at the noblest phrase.

But that is to get ahead of the story.

These two images have produced a dual Going Thing. To do the right thing in the Faustian mode, you must be terribly noble, in the sense that you must not be influenced directly by your public or by anything save what you think is true. You must work seriously, preferably at night, you must regard yourself as the greatest man since Adam, and you must reveal yourself, preferably in the nude, in every thing you do. Violence, scandal, action, assumedly as the expression of good will taking a revolutionary-for-the-sake-of-revolutionary form (which is these days the commonest kind of anarchism), these are all implicitly in the Faustian mode.

It is hard for me to describe the Faustian mode sympathetically. I really do have respect for it, but I do not like it. In my country it has been responsible for my people's highest artistic achievements: Whitman, Pollack, Lindsay, and abstract expressionism.

On the other hand, as the social situation has deteriorated in this country over the past few years, many of us have more and more come to insist on values that belong to the Schweikian mode. We like quite

ordinary, workaday, nonproductive things and activities. In context, they take on great something-or-other. While Rome burns, I work with butter and eggs for a while, George Brecht calls for:

• at least one egg

and Alison Knowles makes an egg salad; and La Monte Young plays B-F sharp on a fiddle hour after hour. This is our kind of insistence, towards which many of us, especially the young ones, seem to gravitate. It has one main thing in common with the Faustian mode: it suggests great nobility.

It is true that these modes are not mutually exclusive. Some of the beat poets have taken up George Brecht—but, I suspect, to his surprise. But his work is so magnificently lucid that it appeals to a great variety of people.

I do not understand this great emphasis on motivation that is implied by a stress on nobility. The nobility of one's motives is no guarantee of a good thing being done. Surely it is somehow a degradation of nobility to attach any particular value to it. A good thing is done for its own sake, because one has good will or because one has bad will or because one has no will at all but just wants to do something. I think that nobility is not a value but a state of being. If it might be, for the moment, equated with saintliness, we can can quote Gertrude Stein:

> A saint a real saint never does anything, a martyr does something but a really good saint does nothing, and so I wanted to have Four Saints who did nothing and I wrote the *Four Saints in Three Acts* and they did nothing and that was everything.[1]

Or again:

> I always remember during the war being so interested in one thing in seeing the American soldiers standing, standing and doing nothing standing for a long time not even talking but just standing and being watched by the whole French population and their feeling the feeling of the whole population that the American soldier standing there and doing nothing impressed them as the American soldier as no soldier could impress them by doing anything.[2]

Perhaps a state of being, whether attained or acquired, is a set of coordinates that give your position here with respect to there. Perhaps a state of being, such as nobility, is simply where you are, which is itself relative. You can be north or south, noble or ignoble, active or inactive, but if you hurt someone, he is hurt and your being does not matter a hell of a lot to him. There is therefore no particular value in nobility.

Perhaps this is why the Japanese Zensters used to insist that there was no value in the enlightenment which is the whole direction of Zen training. Again, there is the story I read somewhere that after the last world war Samuel Beckett was walking around Paris and was stabbed by an Algerian. He was a robust man, Beckett, and he managed to get the knife out of himself and into the Algerian. They were taken to the hospital together, in a state of shock. After weeks of lying in adjacent beds, Beckett was strong enough to ask the man, "Why did you do this thing?" The man answered, "I do not know, Monsieur."

And so I do not see any value in nobility in the arts. Satie's "La Divane de l'Empire," which is a hack dance written for a cabaret, is just as interesting as the *Nocturnes,* written for the most selfless of motives. Hans Wahlgren's dance band arrangements suggest more noble values than his countryman Bo Nillson's very noble utterances. And on the same grounds.

So down with motivation, I say. Leave motivational research to Madison Avenue. The only way to get anywhere with motivation in art might be to deemphasize everything else. And that is in a time-honoured tradition of the hollow modern—find a convention, knock everything else out, and look how original you are.

So what I am going to do is let my discussion of common points in the two modes be, and talk about: 1. values in what is happening, 2. what other people are doing, 3. what I am doing, and 4. points of movement and confluence.

II—from the theatrical to the theater

A theater is a place made for things to happen in. If nothing really happens, then the theater is not being used for the purpose for which it is intended.

In a regular drama, a pretense takes place. What is being done is not really being done. It is being pretended. It is very charming, very smart to emphasize the pretense. Alternately, by now, it is practically a cliché to draw attention to the pretense at all. In any number of works somebody comes down from the stage and harangues you.

Ah, but that's the easy way out. Much less facile to question the necessity for a stage, for a distinction between the performers and the audience, even to question the necessity for a performance, as such, at

all. This is nearly as fascinating a literary-philosophical pastime as the pretense. But it is equally a sham. Well, maybe that's too hard a word. It is, at any rate, unsatisfying save to him who does it. The artist sees his reflection in the mirror, and since his reflection and he are both doing what pleases him, says, "Oh, what an intelligent, interesting person." Any number of plays turn the stage in on itself, giving us the reflection of a reflection of a reflection of a reflection. To then measure the exact physical properties of this reflection by such an aesthetic means as removing separations between audience and performer is to make form one's subject matter. And that is best done in school. It is the worst kind of academicism. It is Pirandello or Gelber. It is what I mean when I say formalism.

The theater, as an institution, is dead. It has been for a long time. They have forgotten to bury it. But then they have forgotten to bury a lot of things. Not all the rhetoric of Albee, the bombast of Williams, or the formalism of The Living Theater is going to bring the old institutional theater alive. Albee, The Living Theater, this kind of thing—it seems to exist in several arts—has the beauty—or is it fascination?—of molds growing on a dead thing, consuming the remains of the body that threw it up to light. The theater of the Becks—The Living Theater—is the apotheosis of narcissism. Of their recent productions, the biggest success was the one about self-pity and junk—*The Connection.* Others were Pirandello's *Tonight We Improvise,* Mac Low's *The Marrying Maiden,* Brecht's *In The Jungle of Cities,* Gelber's *The Apple,* and W.C. Williams' *Many Loves. The Connection, Tonight We Improvise,* and *Many Loves* are all essentially plays within plays, in which the audience is required to be conscious of being itself and to concentrate on that from time to time. But the Living Theater is New York's avant-garde theater: It represented us at the Theater of All Nations. That in itself should speak for itself. The theater as such cannot use much of that. When we are looking for a theater in which things happen, it is all right to use any means to get something to happen, I suppose, even an oversized text. But to reduce the theater to a forum for the display of one's ego is going off somewhere altogether different. It will be observed that the leading lady (unless she is the director) is always Mrs. Beck (Judith Malina). Do you suppose there is any connection between the vehicles they choose in their "search for a style"—to quote Julian Beck—and the presence of a part for Mrs. Beck, who is distinctly a specialist? The question is for you to answer for yourself. My own

conclusions are libelous. However, in the Becks' defense it should be said that the snowshoe tracks to the future or to the theater are sure to show the peculiarities of the wearers. If one assumes that, a troop of performers is bound to reflect the personalities of the troop's most powerful members. Nevertheless, almost all the old members of the troop are gone now. Now, why should that be, when some of them became very proficient? Is this the best, even in traditional theater, that we can put together? I can show something about the Becks too when we take up Pirandello.

Look at Pirandello. He's a hero to a good many people because he seems so staunch and experimental and honest, and because he seems to reflect their own despair. Lots of people take naturally to any weeping laugh, or any Void, or any facile pun on reality. Actually the root of all this in Pirandello isn't hard to find. He started out as a hack novelist who ground out umpteen novels in just a couple of years. The plots of these novels start out to be very interesting, but soon they get involved in puns on what-you-think as opposed to what-is. And that is all he had to say; it's right there in those hack novels. But as time went by he just had to do more. So he wrote those novels over again, over and over again, this time for the stage. But because he was concentrating on this situation in only one form, the only context he ever put it in is an upper-middle-class one that gets more and more monotonous as you plow through those plays. He wasn't a very courageous man—if you don't believe me, read the last interviews he gave, in the late 1930s. There's one in *The Atlantic,* for example. There you see that this man, living in Mussolini's Italy, was perfectly game to go along with Mussolini's military policies, and even with his local suppression of civil rights in Pirandello's native Sicily—of which Pirandello was perfectly well aware. There isn't an ounce of nerve or zip in this cowardly interview. And this is the trouble with Pirandello. Except for scenes with "lower-class color," like the bar scene in *Tonight We Improvise,* all his plays are about, for, and by the most backward part of the Italian middle class. There is a sort of sick mysticism involved in the mixup of one reality with another, where we see that on the one hand Pirandello knows that it's not very important which one is the real one or even whether both are, but, on the other hand, it's the only thing he knows how to write about, so he goes on and on. *Henry IV,* for example, depends for its impact on the question of who is mad, Henry or the people around him. If you read Pirandello's comments on that play,

you'll find he thought of it as an attack on middle-class smugness. But it's a pretty feeble attack. And if you like the actor who plays Henry, all the peregrinations of his life have no impact on you at all since they are so drawn-out, and you are lost to the play, except that you sympathize with the actor playing Henry and so a realistic element is introduced that Pirandello never even meant should be there. If you, as a member of the audience, know anything about disorders that could cause the kind of delusions Henry has, then the shock impact of his madness is removed and the text seems a morbid prying into a medical case. Yet Pirandello buffs like to cite this as one of his greatest (though lesser-known) plays. Or how about *Right You Are If You Think You are.* To me there is one inexplicably funny moment in that play: The butler carries in a papier maché chicken to the assembled company, and says, "The fowl, sir." I don't know why that is so funny to me. Perhaps it has to do with the contrast between that and the dialogue that has been going on. The people seem to be playing a sort of twenty questions, trying to figure out who they are and what their relationships are to each other. Many interpretations are possible, and Pirandello assumes 1., that we adamantly refuse to accept that these people both be right about who is who and who has done what to whom and 2., that we are endlessly fascinated by this sort of problem. No wonder Pirandello isn't awfully popular any more. It is very difficult to broaden one's experience or understanding with all these questions about who is whose wife or daughter. My theory is that the play qualifies as intellectual matter, and it's avant-garde because it is offbeat, facile, and existential.

And so to *Tonight We Improvise,* which I think most people probably think of as Pirandello's most ambitious, "radical," if you will, play. Even its fraud is very stilted and contrived. Technically it's a lot less experimental than *Helzapoppin* (is that how you spell it?), a musical of the same period in the U.S.A. The Living Theater production of *Tonight We Improvise* received rave reviews, though qualified by, for example, the following kind of remark (by Brooks Atkinson): "*Tonight We Improvise* ...is the sort of script that ought to be experimented with, although it will probably interest only people who are fascinated with the anatomy of the theatrical process. ...It takes a lot of work and skill for a company of actors to conduct the experiment. But Mr. Beck and his associates have done the work well. Although the play is valueless...., the inquiry is interesting." The Living Theater very kindly gave me a ticket to their production. Partway through the first act, at a time

when most of the action is in the audience, Judith Malina came down the aisle, took one look at me, and said, "You're in my seat!" I decided if this was improvisation, I'd best get in the spirit of the thing and do something. If she'd pretend this was her seat, I'd pretend I was a gentleman and give her my seat. So I stood up and offered it to her. She just kept on yelling, "He's taken my seat!" But she would not accept that seat. She just wanted to yell, maybe, or she didn't want to sit down. What do you think? Here's another: During intermission the actors joined the audience in the lobby. Coffee was served. A friend of mine spilled his coffee on one of the actresses' dresses. She just moved away without complaint and talked on. A performer was seated in the audience to heckle the performance. But you couldn't talk to him. He was too much a performer for that. And each night he did it the same way. He had a beard at the time, which once I pulled in the intermission. He pouted at me and walked away. Now, either the production or the play was inconsistent. I think it was the latter. For my part, I improvised: I left both times I attended before the end.

But if Pirandello is a pretentious charlatan, in his case it should be noted that he is deliberately that, which does give him some charm. He makes his own charlatanry his subject matter. It is not his charlatanry, ultimately, which I scold him for. It is the moral and imaginative weakness that renders his theater irrelevant, even intellectually and morally and emotionally useless. His refusal to say anything more than he did is not inspiring, like so many refusals. It just seems kind of pale and very professional. Genet does better.

Genet—there's an interesting figure. His negativism seems like a conscious, clear-cut rejection of his emotional and moral environment, and it even takes on a certain degree of heroism that makes him inspiring. He is a puritan on the other team from Bunyan. *The Blacks* is a courageous play. The sad thing about Genet is his not finding a more satisfactory environment for his work. One is too conscious of being in a theater, of the thing being theatrical. Can a situation be too theatrical for the theater? I think so, if its context and thus its environment remove it from the most useful environment it might have been placed in. One might do *The Blacks* in the street during a civil rights march. But Genet would most likely find that vulgar and too unambiguous. If the older artists of this century have a hobbyhorse—like Uncle Toby says all men do—it is the love of ambiguity, so much a rapture that it becomes a sort of eccentric disease of the soul. One is here and one is

there at the same time, one is this and one is that. And this condition is never accepted, it is dwelt on. Perhaps this is true of such Europeans as Joyce, Helms, Pirandello, and Genet more than of the Americans: They, more than we, seem to feel disinherited. But I wouldn't swear to it. It is all a speculation, and why not? I wonder if Genet doesn't get this ambiguity more from Pirandello than from anyone else. He seems to prefer not to relate to the immediate present except in a literary way. When his work is read, it seems like history. The atmosphere of intellectual, contrived ambiguity seems to be the whole game. One expects that of Anouilh, Ionesco, De-Gaullicus, and Giraudoux. But for Genet one hopes the best. I love *Notre Dame des Fleures* even more than the other novels. They are meant to be read. But the dramas are too theatrical to be read. Someday there may be a medium on the order of three-dimensional television, which is read, imagined, and realized all at once. *The Blacks* belongs in this medium, not in the theater. It is very embarrassing to see middle-class Negros attacking the same people they ape, to the detriment of their own people. And if the play were performed by really poor people, it would not be Genet any more. *The Blacks* is a contradiction of its own intentions and messages. I think Genet has done that deliberately, but I think he should not have done it. I think Genet wanted to throw a good, healthy load into the faces of his sick countrymen, but he got so amused by his load—hypnotized by it, you might say—that his load acquired all the sickness of his country.

Then, too, the act of protesting almost implies that one is protesting to a hostile audience. But we are not hostile. In my country at my time, we are enormously impressed and therefore largely led by our black people. We identify with them. It affects an enormous number of us. The Negros sit in at City Hall. Some of us join them. Almost all of us support them. In the past this would have marked us as being from a peculiarly liberal background. It would have seemed rather bohemian. But in this summer of 1963 a new generation has appeared that refuses to be as sick as our fathers, even as our older brothers. Older generations used to complain about their fathers, and "revolt against them." Our older brothers have collaborated with our fathers to make a world in which there is no room for the young. Our older brothers listen to rarefied jazz that has lost any trace of social relevance. They made their gestures by swallowing "sacred poisons" that enlightened them about the air. And they kept their lousy, hip, beat mouths shut while unemployment skyrocketed among the newly graduated, and auto-

mation, poorly handled, took away the possibility of our contributing, on an ordinary level, to society. The Leroi Joneses—are they the Joneses we should try to keep up with?—concentrated on Cuba, while their younger brothers rode in the fronts of Alabama buses. The Allen Ginsbergs told how they wanted to be God while the unions shut my generation out, as surely and as cruelly and as completely as any employer ever did. To concentrate on A-bombs and peace movements is certainly worthwhile, but not so much to the point as recognizing the economic basis of our conflict with the East, and then working for peace through economic means.

What I am saying is that any sacrifices that are made are going to be made by my generaton. And for what should we be sacrificed? We refuse. And therefore we hate our older brothers. And I mean hate. Go sit in a candy store in Greenpoint for a few weeks, and talk with one of those teenagers who says he wants to be a movie star when he grows up, or who makes poor Paul Goodman cry because he says he doesn't want to be anything. Get through his veneer of so-what. One day you will suddenly come on an expression of hate so deep and so violent that you will be amazed at the human capability of nourishing it. Nobody asked to be born doomed. The civil rights struggle comes from this. And the explosion of the young, which may well surpass all historical precedents—and which will destroy or at any rate be directed against not a people, such as the Jews, a class, such as the bourgeoisie, or a race, but against, purely and simply, older people. It will be very difficult to head this off. We are not nonparticipants, like the beats were: We are arming to take to the barricades.

And therefore Genet seems passé, like an old antivivisectionist, grown fat in the service of his cause.

Same with most of the crusading nihilists—the Tennessee Williams-William Inge-Edward Albee kind of writers—how could their ilk possibly have anything to do with us in our situation?

Soon, I guess, Albee will write some poems for *Kulcher* and Diane di Prima's plays will be printed by the Grove Press.

What do you use a Williams play for? Are they pertinent social criticisms, as in Sartre? Or does he merely harp on grim things for their decorative effect? Take *This Property is Condemned.* In a way, it is one of the greatest one-act plays. The two characters are both extraordinarily lively depictions. Their interests vary. And the piece seems to lament that this girl is, like her house, condemned. But it is uncharac-

teristic Williams. Its best points assume a common point of view. Take also *Orpheus Descending,* which is a reworking of an earlier play, and therefore has stronger ideas than Williams' later things. (I have a theory about that, and I'll get back to it in a little while.) The ideas are incredibly effective. And that is that. Williams simply revels in the nymphomania of the girl. And a weird, half-mad Negro wanders around giving a weird Indian whoop. So you are shocked. So he does a lot of the right things. It is very theatrical theater. Still, it is the easy way out. Now, comparing both plays, in each he raises questions. In each he shows a sick society. But in each he depends on that same society for the play's impact. And in each he seems to tacitly approve of it. You can write of sick situations, like Ibsen does, without being sick. But that does not often happen.

Finally, Williams, like Genet, develops his brilliant theatricality out of shock values, by exaggerating what is common to his society. But these values change. If Kinsey were to concentrate on, for example, sexual attitudes in my generation, I think he'd be in for a surprise. The inarticulate people, who seem not to have been extensively covered, have a way of life that is extremely more promiscuous than that of ten years ago. Kinsey should take a walk up the fire escape of the building where I was working until this last week any lunch hour. This is something that has developed in the last few years, according to the older workers.

My theory is that the personality changes with the environment, in such a way that if the personality ever becomes fixed, as the environment that produced it fades away, we are left with a hollow shell with the manners and none of the living matter of the original personality. I think that any artist, such as Tennessee Williams, who makes up his mind without taking into account the shifting environment stales. And so it is not a good idea for an artist to depend on his own flair or knowledge to carry a work off. He should always take into account all changes in sociology, environment, even in his own physique.

So, Tennessee Williams, you've had it. You committed yourself to shock people, and, as time goes by, you have to be more and more bizarre until, in *Suddenly Last Summer*, you come to cannibalism. If you are depicting cannibalism, do you think it is a depiction of our society? I may say, in all good faith, that I've never been a cannibal. And if you are trying to shock us to our senses, then don't you think it's a pretty sick appeal?

Albee is considered avant-garde. But he is more facile, even, than Williams. From *The Zoo Story* one comes to think that he is interested in a new psychological theater. But his idea of what psychology is is the same old thing. How can anyone in good faith cover the same old psychology with effective sauce and serve it, piping hot, on a silver platter? Answer: I do not think Albee is acting in good faith.

But there's no doubt that Albee seems most interested in displaying psychological effects. His characters are so spectacular. They seem to have nothing to do with daily living. In *The Zoo Story,* what would happen to Jerry if he went to work in the printing plant where I was?

But Albee has one very interesting aspect. In a way he is the end of naturalistic theater. You could not go further than he has, emphasizing abnormal psychology and heaving fluff with violence. It is the end of a line of evolution, one in which great attention was given to details and very little to what was actually going on. Wedekind, O'Neill, Williams, Albee—it is easy to see what dramas historians can prepare their doctoral dissertations on for the next few years.

There is a sort of dramatist who simply makes gentle twists within the context of the given theater. The writers of this style whom we know best are Pinter, Ionesco, and the early Adamov (since much improved). Pinter writes for the "Bditish tdadition," Ionesco for the ruggedly individualistic (why are all rugged individualists the same meek, conservative individual?) Gaullist clerk, usually named Berenger, who forms a united front with the intelligentsia and dukes who constitute Ionesco's natural audience, and the Adamov of cruelty-and-I'm-through-with-your-wife,-I'll-pass-her-on-to-Joe,-but-don't-you-dare-insult-the-whore-I-love. To be a writer of this style, you should assume that everybody comes from the same bland background and then shock them by isolating extraordinary factors in life and isolating them in such a way that only these factors are important. In Strindberg's *A Spook Play,* there's an old mummy who lives in a cupboard and who screams out from time to time. Shocking? Yes, in an easy, Breton-surrealism way. The others (Pinter, Ionesco, and early Adamov) take this as Standard Operating Procedure, and, mechanically, they go on proceeding, always with great hoop-la about how modern this is. Such work, I assert but don't bother to demonstrate, really appeals to the worst in us, and so we like it in a decorative way. But it is safe. It poses no threat to anybody. Safety in the arts is not necessarily pejorative, of course. But in this case, it seems an escape

from anything one might be called on to do. We can always daydream how sad we are in our cupboards and, in this way, be too absorbed to worry about screams for help from the next cupboard.

Really, the trouble with the institution of Theater today is that is just isn't itself, and it can't be. The theater is just not being a place where things happen, because nothing happens there.

It is all literature.

If you read Horatio Alger, who hated the theater as a waste of attention, you find that in his time the bootblacks and the millionaires used to rub shoulders at Tony Pastors and other places on the Bowery. At that time the Theater was not so self-conscious and it did not concentrate on theatrical effects. It simply catered to everybody's imagination and sensibility, i.e., to two healthy faculties, rather than to their sense of the bizarre. In one of the *Ragged Dick* series there is a description of a play with dragons, done without illusion, which delighted the newspaper boy-narrator because he had never thought about being in the same room as a dragon. For all Alger's distrust of the theater, in *Jed the Poorhouse Boy* an alcoholic actor helps Jed escape from his poorhouse and puts him on the road to being a useful member of society. This all takes place in little villages in upstate New York. Do you think that the part that the Theater played at that time was purely the low-grade, crass entertainment that one gets from the Ed Sullivan show? I don't. I think that in the Theater one enjoyed a vicarious glory and dreaming to which there is simply no contemporary parallel. One had a sort of glimpse of anarchic freedom and of ideals that were bound up in specific activities. I would like to see this situation exist again.

People are people, a man is a man. I haven't much to say about Brecht's theater or similar theater which deals with these problems, because I have never seen a Brecht play properly performed; though I have read a good many of them, I have never seen a good translation of any except for the Charles Laughton *Galileo*, which is, as a piece, too much of a tour de force for my taste. I would like to see what would happen if somebody did *Die Mutter* in New York as it is prescribed in the Henschelverlag books. I doubt our institution of Theater, where our highest tradition is that you cannot whistle in the dressing rooms, would recover from the impact.

When these ideas are handled in a more Aristotelian context, the facelessness of the most vivid characters seems overwhelming. It is

years since I've seen or read *Waiting for Lefty,* and I remember how unreal the summer stock actor made the lead, though I also remember this lead—is his name Mac?—matching coins while his world came apart. A realistic situation in which an unreal person is involved.

For this reason I make a distinction between a persona and a character in my own work. Who you are, your social position, the name of your second cousin and the color of your hair—that is the persona. What you like, what you do, your personality, how you behave—that is character. I like to give the performer a minimum persona and ask him to develop a maximum character, which may and usually does coincide with his own. The same approach we find in Shakespeare—what sort of guys are Lorenzo and Graziano in *The Merchant of Venice?* Not to mention interpretations of Hamlet, of course.

But in recent drama, from Ibsen to Ionesco, from Albee to Odets, this liberty of the performer is denied. To take it is to violate the spirit of the play. When characters are thought of as fixed and unchanging, the absurd is reached, inasmuch as the realistic is being denied. If to love the unrealistic is sick, then only the sick, from their society, go see plays by O'Neill and Albee.

From this the Theater has died: it has become too theatrical. The Going Thing mentality has affected it. The only way to revive the Theater is to dump the professionals, all those who profit by the Theater's exclusiveness and who thrive in this Going Thing situation.

When you do the right thing, when you avoid danger, you are acting as a machine and denying your manhood.

The new theater is any art in any medium that happens, and in its narrower sense, it is a synthesis of ideas already obvious in other art media. But there is not a single thing that we can learn from the Albees and Ionescos of this world, from their work or from their experience. The old theater must die with them before the new can be born. So let's bury them.

There are, however, ideas that were offered to the theater but never accepted by the theater on a large scale. These were put forward by Artaud and by Marinetti. A couple of Artaud disciples have become very prominent—Decroux and Barrault. But Decroux is a fine mime technician with a taste for the Czarist aesthetic of dance, and, though he has taught many skillful mimes, he never has done anything to hold our attention. And Barrault is a powerhouse with Decroux's taste and no mind whatsoever. Together they seem to comprise a French Living

Theater. Perhaps they'll do some plays by Ashbery, Koch and O'Hara.

Artaud's ideas are so ingrained in what I say that I have a hard time separating them. His manifestoes constitute my main core of theater technique. His aesthetic (the love of the lurid and bombastic and pure melodrama) seems excessively Faustian to me (the real school of Artaud is Paik), but his images haunt me. There is his idea, for example, that the theater can be like a plague and, by burning itself out, purge you. You will never forget that idea.

Marinetti, on the other hand, first conceived of the dramatist as one who provoked events rather than produced them. At one point he did theatricals by filling tents with evil-smelling rags and chasing the audience through them at night, screaming. Finally, he developed a notion that, in the theater, you could emphasize speed and compress an intense situation or experience into a couple of moments. One thing I greatly admire about Marinetti is that he could develop three such different (but not mutually exclusive) ideas.

But that is one of the things about Marinetti: he develops ideas simultaneously that have nothing to do with each other. There is absolutely no connection between Marinetti's theater and his acceptance of fascism, except that he always kept trying to be as modern and as Italian as possible. His point of view is unbelievably simple, in fact. Those two aims explain everything he ever did.

His fast plays are compressed into a couple of lines at the most. This was not a new technique. Carlo Beni wrote the tragedy of *Rosmunda* in five lines, back around the middle of the nineteenth century, for the same reasons as Marinetti. Verlaine wrote a couple of tiny plays. But Marinetti extended the idea of compression to include plays about nothing, i.e., everything, with any possible form of experience thrown in.

Any Lester Trimble who gets the idea that this kind of theater has any connection with dada is all balled up. Marinetti's plays in this form, like my own and Ray Johnson's, are poetic, experimental processes and activities. They are not existential analyses of the Ball and Huelsenbeck sort, nor are they Tzara gestures. The name that Marinetti gave this kind of theater sounds very odd in English: "Synthetic Plays." But since there really is no need to duplicate terms, no matter how awkward, so that everybody can have a term that suits his own work, I suggest that little compressions of experience into processes and activities be stuck with the name of "synthetic plays."

Actually, the spirit of dada is lots further from what I, Hansen, Joe Jones and the others of my generation are doing than the general spirit of futurism is, whatever exceptions there are to this. To be delighted by ambiguities and absurdities, as such, is more for our older brothers and sisters than for us. The John Ashberys, like the Tristan Tzaras, seem to be out on strike, once and for all, in this world, but it is not a strike with picket lines. It is no more than absence and refusal, now and forever.

Personally, I think that you have to have a joy in something happening to have theater. But that is a matter of taste. Taste: it is something that fits with Marinetti like salt on hamburger. For me, the thing about Marinetti isn't that he's a great dramatist; because he risks so much he always loses. It's that he's such a ringleader. He really suggests some great ways to do things. When the rest of the theater goes into the mist and has nothing to do with what is going on, even in the theater, there are these words of his manifesto, written half a century ago, in Camille Gordon's fluent translation:

Manifesto:

"After the synthetic theater and the theater of surprise we are going to have the antipsychological abstract theater of pure elements and the tactile theater.

"In the synthetic theater we don't concern ourselves about dramatic principles. We have always new juxtapositions of humor and earnestness, of real and unreal people, time and space relationships, simultaneities, dramas of objects and presences, scenic dissonances, picture-stage enclosures, show windows of ideas and gestures.

"If, today, a new Italian theater exists with mixtures of the comic, the serious and the grotesque, fictitious persons in concrete surroundings, simultaneities and time-space relationships—then our synthetic theater is to be thanked.

"The theater of surprise aims to arouse amazement through all means, situations, ideas, contrasts, which will now but have never yet appeared on the stage, with juxtaposed effects that will shake our human sensitivity.

"For us surprise is a fundamental element of art. Any work of art is autonomous. It resembles only itself and appears as a wonder. Bot-

ticelli's 'La Primavera' had, at the time of its appearance, like many other masterpieces (quite apart from its complex values of composition, rhythm, volume, and colors), the value of surprising originality. Our knowledge of the picture and its copies and imitations has destroyed this value of surprise. The cult of the great work of art (gawked at, imitated, reproduced), is fatal for fresh zeal, and, besides, it is lazy and absurd.

"Raphael chose for his frescoes a particular wall of the Vatican which, a few years previously, had been painted by Sodoma. He had the marvelous work of this painter obliterated and painted the wall anew to flatter his creative pride, for he was convinced that the main worth of a work of art lay in its new and surprising appearance.

"Surprise is an essential element in contemporary art—so much so that work which once was surprising after all these years has become completely genial—and it is now hard to surprise.

"In the theater of surprise the direction to which the author hastens his strength of invention must be to:

1. Drive the sensibility of the audience with fortuitous surprises into chaos.
2. Suggest a sequence of other notions—as a stone, which is thrown into the water, sends out wider and wider circles.
3. Summon the public to unheard of words and gesticulations, so that each surprise arouses new surprises in the loge, in the balcony, late in the evening, the next day, on and on.

"I will stop a moment to attack the theater of psychology in its three basic forms:

1. The antique, scientific-documentary psychological theater.
2. The parasitic semi-futuristic, fragmentary, feminine, ambiguous psychological connection (e.g., Proust).
3. The Italian, modern psychologism with its powerful, directed, heavy-handed, moralistic, professional, pedantic analysis of basics, haunted by the age-old weaknesses of the Hamlets ('to be or not to be'), living and dreaming about this, the philosophical dialogue without any plastic synthesis and movement, dressed up as futurism.

"These three psychologisms are all similarly analytical, boring without transparency, without poesy, monotonous, vexatious, depressing and anti-Italian—that is, opposed to the beautiful, poetic, spiritual, explosive, improvisation-loving, fiery, colorful character of our people.

"Therefore we have made two new kinds of theater and performed on tour in eighteen Italian cities:

1. The abstract a-logical synthesis of pure elements, which offers the public the force of life in motion without psychology (the abstract synthesis is an irrational, surprising combination of typical experiences).
2. The tactile, muscular, athletic, mechanical synthesis without psychology."[3]

III—Poetry and things that happen

I looked out the printing plant window. White feathers floated by through the air. I do not know why.

It struck me that this was a very poetic thing. I do not know why.

It struck me that to see this thing happen was its poetry. To write about it was not to hold the poetry of the moment. I do not know about that either.

Surely, if one is working in a medium that allows things to take place, there is room for a sort of work where the driest of words bring about many marvelous moments. I hope the world has room for this kind of work.

And so a poetic element can be discovered in a lot of work where it was not intended, and thereby we can explain marvelous things that we have seen, and we can also notice the deadness of a lot of situations.

One of the most wonderful moments I recall was in a concert of American vocal music in May, 1960. The piece was Charles Wuorinen's "On the Raft." One singer was very large, the other was rather small, but both were pretty girls. They hugged the edge of the piano when they sang, both of them half smiling, both exactly together. It was a marvelously absurd sight, and they sang very well. Somehow I think the composer was a ringleader in the situation.

Then there is the opposite kind of development. When David Tudor performs Busotti—and many others—he puts on gloves and/or arms himself with toys and mallets and goes playing all over the piano. As a result, the situation becomes rather faceless. It was a piano but now it is just being used as a reverberating object. Formerly one thought one might hear all kinds of interesting things. But the situational aspect is half the fun now. And yet always this confounded piano, which seems to become a symbolic object in many of these Tudor performances, just as the Tudor manner—ultracool, ultracalm, ultraprofessional—becomes a symbolic manner. The piano is the grand instru-

ment of the last century. Tudor's manner is the extreme exaggeration of a professional manner. And both seem rather out of the spirit of these situational compositions. They detract from the poetic situation. If only Tudor would let loose with a good loud "Ooomph," or stop a moment and wipe his forehead. I summed this up in a piece I wrote this summer called "Interjection for David Tudor." It goes like this: "Laugh when you do something funny," and it is to be inserted into any piece if anything strikes David Tudor as being funny while he is playing.

But back to my point: I like pianos to be pianos, and when they are something else to be something else. And these are things that do seem to happen in performances.

There is a kind of Persian poetry where sense, form and even language are ignored. The shape of the words, some of them nonexistent, is the only consideration.

But these days our poets do not seem even to consider these things. It strikes me that Diane di Prima, Jonathan Williams, Edward Dorn, and Gary Snyder are all furiously at work on the same poem.

How is it possible that as many people as those in, for example, Donald M. Allen's *The New American Poetry* could all have such similar intentions? The only two poets of the generation of the anthology who seem to have any interest in doing anything besides the Going Thing are Jackson Mac Low and Tuli Kupferberg, neither of whom is in the anthology.

This is the Going Thing style: you first look for your own, individual sound (i.e., poetic diction). The sound comes before all else. Even so, a few kinds of sound are acceptable only. There is the declamatory style used by Ginsberg in his best-known pieces, whose closest precedent is Christopher Smart in the eighteenth century. It has many many exclamations and pile-ups of nouns. Diane di Prima and Michael McClure use this style extensively, though their typography differs and makes their things look a lot more different than they really are. The second sound is the hermetic free verse with lots of proper nouns. The master of this style is Charles Olson, whose lines really move. But, since his influence began to appear in the early nineteen fifties at Black Mountain College and in the *Black Mountain Review,* he has come to recapitulate himself into mannerisms. And the Kochs and O'Haras and McClures who use Olson's manner have come to a sound that can only be described as privacy in the Manner of Poesy. I am not, please remember, speaking of subject matter just yet, merely of the superfi-

cial sound of this kind of verse. Finally, the third Going Thing style is the well-formed line of conversation, picked up mostly from William Carlos Williams' *Desert Music* and from some 1920s pieces of his. This sound is phrased according to the Going Thing sort of jazz. The result is elegiac and (Creeley's "Air: Cat Bird Singing,"[4] or Oppenheimer's "The Rain"[5]) occasionally very powerful. The end of "The Rain" shows what I mean:

There are Africans
believe the sun
female. This
is not my way.

The sound of those lines give them strength much more than the meaning or the image. There are probably not many of us for whom African totemism is a particularly important subject. But the sound of this kind of verse makes everything seem quite significant.

Having his style, the Going Thing poet feeds into it some of the following material: survivors of atomic wars, early history, a natural analogy, fellatio, or Cuba-and-junk (which are not usually separated, though I think this is more a phenomenon than an intention). Now these matters are, of course, national preoccupations, and ones about which there is a great deal of hypocrisy. But how about labor reform, urban renewal, liquor, civil rights, industrial techniques, food, quietness and plants? Is it that these more complex matters require great specificity? Or is it, perhaps, that Going Thing poets prefer phony revolutions, ones that, it can safely be assumed, will never take place?

Finally, having brought up these matters, the Going Thing poet merely takes an exaggeratedly liberal view of each of them, throws in a little nostalgia, and calls it quits. The poem is then sent to his best friend's magazine, read by other friends, and referred to in a poem six years later.

It is not permitted to assume a really radical point of view on anything, although this is not confessed. It would seem humorless. Very characteristic is the title of a Joel Oppenheimer book, *The Love Bit*, which suggests a good deal of alienation from one's own feelings.

Radicalism is more than an intensification of liberal tendencies. More than anything else, it is a conviction that something must be done. This is a foreign vein to our Going Thing poets. They scream and they holler, but they never sum up. They express great excitement at a safe distance, but it is only the facade of concern. Like my scholar in

Nicoplis 1396 they are fighting the Turk by praising the Lord and being good Christians.

This is work that very often is topical and is filled with political references; but its radicalism is phony: it has a few concrete suggestions, many regrets. And so I think that the voice of the radical kind of Going Thing poetry, of the McClures and the Di Primas and the Lamantias, is the voice of the disowned czarist, mourning his lost homeland and acting up in the meantime in front of a mirror.

This is why the Going Thing poets seem so absurd in comparison with a Neruda or a B. Brecht. When Oppenheimer writes an Un Del Di,[6] on the other hand, which is prose intoned in the manner of poetry, he uses the style consistently for what it is best suited: a sensuous, lyrical love story.

Twenty years ago there was a strong school of Eliot. But many, even in the generation that belonged to that school, had nothing to do with it and, without dashing off into the misty past (like Bly is doing today, out of dissatisfaction with the Going Thing present, I suppose), these people began what is today the Going Thing style.

But the Going Thing has no Eliot, no masters save, perhaps, Olson, and, with a nod from half a century ago, William Carlos Williams. And neither of these men is papal. And so the only master the Going Thing has is the opinion of other members. This has become the source of a problem. The opinion of one's fellows ought not be so important. Le Roi Jones ought not to be teaching himself, Di Prima and McClure to classes of students at the New School for Social Research. In poetry classes, even historical ones, the trick should be to open minds, not to close them.

And so it goes on. This poetry, which might have become extremely popular and have helped to reshape a mass culture, is crumbling while its practitioners concentrate more and more on doing the right thing. Where there is no danger, there is no life. Nothing ventured, nothing gained.

That is what I think about the Going Thing.

Much more interesting, I think, is the work of Jackson Mac Low. For ten years he's been working with raw language. He uses coins, nails driven through magazines, all kinds of methods of randomizing words. These are then put where he wants them, into a stanza, or onto an index card, or into one part of a concert hall while other words are thrown into the time dimension in another part of the concert hall.

The result is a pile-up of units (or a breakdown of them) which acquire meaning according to what is already moving through the mind. In order that the possibility of meaning may continue to exist, Mac Low seldom goes below the word unit, into morphemes, syllables, phonemes, and tonemes. In order that the musical aspect continue to be prominent, Mac Low only occasionally randomizes units larger than a word or ideas as such (as, for example, I do in the angel's speech at the end of *Adam and Eve* or in "The Youngest Soldier's Story"), with the result that, if poetry is music applied to language, then this is as pure a poetry as possible. The movement of the consciousness through this flow of words and their connotations constitutes a poetic experience in its own right.

When work like this is sustained for any amount of time, one fights it and becomes bored, or one surrenders to the movement and enjoys it. It is difficult to imagine this sort of thing becoming very popular; but who knows? The principle that leads to enjoyment happens rather than gets worked for. In a way, listening to this kind of poetry is for the lazy and the leisurely, because there is no idea to grasp, except, occasionally, a structural one. The ideas just come in and go out freely. This in itself is perhaps a moral point. Because Mac Low does it, can one assume he does what he thinks is right, so that there is a value judgement bound up in this exemplified behavior?

I suspect so. Once I thought that the motivations involved in Mac Low's work had simply to do with accepting what is done, and that there was no more reason in the work than the basic one—why did the chicken cross the road? Or why, for that matter, did Bodhidharma come over the mountains from India? That if one was to face the work, it would be faced plain and simple, and that was all there was to it.

But the work is so consistent, and the stream of words is, however placed in space on the page or in the room, however mingled with silence until the silence is absorbed into the poem, or however filtered by meter, rhyme, and so on, this way of the words of behaving is the way people should behave in a room or community or world together; I cannot but think that there is a very strong moral current.

Actually, Mac Low himself sometimes behaves like the words in his poems. I mean that within the corpus of his work there is an incredible variety, as if he had decided, now I'll be here, now there.

That seems like a very natural way of behaving; now you do this, and now that.

The variety of Mac Low's work is one of taste and aesthetic. For example, I think I remember a film scenario where Mac Low suggests pointing a camera at a tree and starting the camera and shooting roll after roll of film all day long. If that isn't by Mac Low, it might have been, because he sometimes does things like that. Except for the one aspect, that fighting the movie you would become bored and surrendering, you would be fascinated, except for this the film is way away from the poems; it has constant change and variations in lighting and coloring, by dust on the screen, by grain in the film, and so on. As for what would happen when a bird flew across the screen—crisis!

Finally, one technique that I first know of in Mac Low is that of composition by intention. When you work like this, you say what you intend and you leave the specific realization up to the performer. It is a nice way to work because it both allows for no mistaking what you are trying to do, and it also allows the performer to do what you want in the way that is most in accordance with what he can do. This sounds like indeterminacy, but really it comes out quite differently, since indeterminacy is a method of structuring materials while intention simply points in a direction and says, "Go!" Mac Low first told me about this structure by intention back in the winter of 1960, although I have yet to see any pure intention pieces of his. A good example of what comes from this way of working is my "Celestials for Bengt af Klintberg."

Really, there's just nothing going on in written poetry: it never seems to come to a head until it is performed. This is true to a large extent with Mac Low, and in Europe it is true of Dufrêne and Gysin and Filliou, of Emmett Williams and of Bengt af Klintberg. There is simply no comparison between any two of these people. If only there were more activity as a whole, though. There is no serious avant-garde literary magazine in this country at the moment and so the orientation of the best poets, like those above, seems to be toward the best rostrums they have, which are the stage and the podium. It is questionable whether the current evolution of poetry toward the performance in time and space would take place with such decisiveness if there were more effective means of giving what one has done to the world.

Perhaps it would be a good idea to describe some of the work of these European poets, since it is not well known here, and since literature today is international at its best, although as provincial as

ever at its worst. Bengt af Klintberg is a young Swede who does happenings, in the technical sense of the word, as poems, ignoring any statement that he might make or seem to make and concerned almost exclusively with the poetic images that appear in situations that he provokes. He is the opposite of the man who listens to what he is saying.

I will talk more about af Klintberg later on.

Dufrêne is the ultimate among punsters. His work is an outgrowth of letterism. His largest work, *TPL (Le Tombeau de Pierre Larousse),* consists mostly of musical forms taken from exaggerated accents in proper nouns which may or may not mean anything. His other large work, *D'Inutiles Notules,* is almost entirely a mass of puns occasionally provoked by and very seldom relevant to the photographs which it accompanies. These photographs depict the man of a thousand faces, Daniel Spoerri, wearing a collection of eyeglasses which he built, acquired, and amassed. Apart from these and an old film scenario, Dufrêne's work seems to be a collection of patterns of howls and screams and squeaks that have almost all vanished into thin air. Only the two large works are available in print, so far as I know.

There is no comparison between reading Brion Gysin's cut-up poems and hearing them. He has made concert tapes of "I Am that I Am" which show what he does best, and there's no comparing it with the things in *The Exterminator* or *Minutes to Go.*

Filliou is another very versatile man. He had an art gallery in his cap for a while. I wonder that he never put a theater there. He did poems by wrapping things up and by chaining blocks of wood together with hooks; on each block he wrote a word, and he hung the chain on the wall. Another time he began to think that maybe we spend too much of our lives measuring and evaluating things, and so he reduced that to absurdity in his own joyful way by measuring things with objects. He found that Emmett Williams is sixty-five and a quarter matchboxes high: this is demonstrated by observing sixty-five and a quarter match boxes neatly glued to a board. Another discovery is that the German magazine, *Der Spiegel,* is exactly one French hammer high. He himself is six and a half featherdusters high. There is a bridge over the Singel canal in Amsterdam that is thirty-four billion inflationary marks long: Emmett Williams told Robert Filliou this, and Robert was delighted. But I do not know whether this has become a poem yet or not. Robert Filliou is very young; he is only five trips to London old. And so on.

Another poem-thing he did in London: there was an exhibition in London in which Filliou, Køpcke, Williams, Spoerri, Ben, Metzger, and Page were included. Filliou built a bowling alley, labeled the balls "When you see Filliou," or "When you see Køpcke," etc., and then labeled the pins, "Think of Spoerri," or "Think of Ben." It was a very nice game because there were no winners and every time you bowled down a pin you were offered an idea. And yet, Filliou's work runs the gamut from from very eccentric melodrama (e.g.,"Père Lachaise No 1, un poeme de 53 kilos")[7] to an excellent long political (?) drama (I've never seen it, but Emmett Williams says it's tremendous) and to the object and activity poem-things I've described.

Williams is an expatriate American whose work, like Filliou's, runs an extraordinary gamut from surrealistic novels to geometric progressions of letters (which sometimes are printed with rubber stamps and amount to being graphic books), mathematical permutations and displacements of words and letters through the alphabet, and recently performance pieces. The most striking thing to me about Williams' things are their lovability. They appeal to the best in us and we love them for it. For example, Williams has an opera for forty-eight Marias, each of whom is given a Latin name or title. A master of ceremonies calls out the Maria's name by hailing her, "Ave Maria Dolorosa," and the Maria summoned up enters and, with great politeness, greets all the other Marias present. The piece ends when all the Marias are on the stage and everyone has shaken everybody else's hand. The social aspect of his piece is perfectly enchanting, with all this greeting and arriving and all these people seeing each other. If Williams' pieces suffer some from their extraordinary limitation to the most elegant conceivable kind of activities, still his being able to attain such elegance is quite amazing, and it accounts for a good part of his artistic personality.

If only we had something of the variety going on here that is happening in Europe. Is it that our soil is only capable of nourishing one kind of plant at a time? Shouldn't we allow ourselves not only a crowd of maverick weeds but a whole forestful of different kinds of trees, shrubs, flowers and strange growths? Are the reasons we have such slight variety economic? Or does it have to do with our literary jingoism, with the unwillingness to accept all kinds of eclectic materials without absorbing them?

Surely it's just because our literary scene is dull and stupid, more

than at any time since the eighteen-eighties and nineties, that literary possibilities are ignored in all the other arts, that our real theater is done by painters and musicians rather than by our Columbia M.A. Going Thing poets.

IV—Moving and happening

So much has been going on, in the past few months, among the people I have been discussing, that all this activity seems more automatic than well considered or even necessary. It seems a sort of Brownian movement that happens in order to conceal the vacuousness behind the quantity of activity. It is difficult to be both busy and depressed or discouraged.

Or perhaps it is simply that last winter was so very cold. People just sat around and thought awhile. Then, one day, it was spring, and one could get around a little more, so one did.

Performers had been squeezed up, and now they sprang, like so many watch movements. There were the Yam Festival, the dance concerts at the Judson Memorial Church, Yvonne Rainer's great dance recital, various Philip Comer activities, the Pocket Follies, the goings-on at Hansen's Third Rail Gallery by Hansen, Vostell and others. It was the only year I have experienced that had no summer. The performances at the Gramercy Arts Theater, the Pocket Theater, and Judson Hall kept on taking place. This fall there will be a lot of events. I go to many things that I doubt I will like, looking for little things, like the clarinet player a couple of weeks ago who was playing an eminently undistinguished piece but could not stop grinning while he played.

A lot of this activity is happenings and event pieces, and so I may as well turn scholar a few moments so that what I say can be safely forgotten but a little clarity remain.

If you take a collage and add more and more diverse things to it, you have something on the order of Rauschenberg's combines, which are paintings-with-objects and, for me, violations of the spirit of working with objects; but since he is a very good painter, he comes out with very good paintings. As this collage develops, you add more things to it, until it surrounds you. You penetrate it, you are within it. That is an "environment." For a while, five or six years ago, Allan Kaprow and Robert Whitman made environments. The movement of the environ-

ment is fascinating, both as you move through it and as it changes. To speed up these changes you may decide to motorize the environment and/or to introduce live performers (can you call them that?) into it. Then you have what is called a "happening.' Nowadays anything that happens deliberately is called a "happening," but this is more thanks to the stupidity of the ladies at *Time* Magazine than to anything else. When I say "happening," I am talking about a series of events designed to take place in an environment. Other things I call event pieces or performance pieces or just situations, according to what seems the best phrase for the particular piece.

Of course, I have given these things in what seemed to be a sensible order, but it does not follow that they always happen in that order. For example, Ay-o (Takao Iijima) of Japan has done environments, but no happenings. Same with Addi Køpcke in Denmark. Bengt of Klintberg has done happenings but no environments.

It is said that just after World War I a friend of Bragaglia who had been expelled from the futurist movement put up a tent outside Lucca, hung rags and strange tactile objects there, invited his audience to come at night, and then chased them through the tent labyrinth on a motorcycle. I have been unable to find out more than that, but if this is what happened, then this was the first happening. Of course, late futurism is contemporary with dada, but it is supremely different from it. Futurism of that period often attempted to stimulate a concrete aesthetic mentality. Dada, even in its French phase, is still an outgrowth of expressionistic tendencies, and thus expresses its mentality less in a work of art than in a gesture. There is no denying that dada, perhaps because of its inclusiveness and its sense of change, is the more interesting of the two movements.

Somebody once suggested to me that the perfect dada objects are Ilse Koche's lampshades, made of the tatooed skin of concentration camp inmates.

After all, there is much confusion as to what the dadaists did. This is really inevitable in a movement in which the spirit and the gesture are more important than the physical productions.

In Paris a sort of vaudeville was usually mounted, similar to the Pocket Follies sort of show that our dancers produce. With extraordinary international ballyhoo, very elegant presentations took place. Several people spoke simultaneously or threw things at noises. The response of the public had more to do with the spirit than the work.

Eventually the taste for vaudeville disappeared into the modern ballet. It has come down to us through the dancers, and gives us the standard taste that we find among dancers and International Style composers for the refined, the slapstick, the vaudeville, Duchampiana, and so on.

If only Paris had died a little more, and a touch of the Berlin dada had survived. The Berlin dada, for all its fussiness, conventions and bombast, nevertheless seems less to deny its own existence.

In a sense our environment is the world and the most ambitious happenings are our lives. Works of art can be in the world or can fight it, they can allow the world to come through them or they can transcend their karmas. The conventional taste for Duchamp does not seem to take this into consideration. It is another instance of the myth and hearsay and typing taking over from the work. One thinks of the chevalier Duchamp, who painted a chevalier's moustache on the Mona Lisa, who denied his own "Roue de Bicyclette" (was it too common for his taste?) by putting it behind glass in a large piece, whose phial of Paris air will surely not be thrown out even when it cracks and there is only plain old Philadelphia air left, and so on. It is easy to ignore the death-absorbed Duchamp of the melted teeth, the cover of the *First Papers of Surrealism*, and the "Unhappy Readymade," who intended that his largest work would destroy itself, and whose pyramid, in "A regarder d'un oeill" at the New York Museum of Modern Art, is cracked. In fact the work of Duchamp has an interest a good deal broader than the Duchamp of the smile. But it is this conventional view that seems to have come down as our idea of the Paris dadaists, rather than Tzara, idle in the cafes, hating America as the "homeland of work," [8] playing with communism and writing poems for workers in limited editions costing fifty dollars a copy, which is, of course, more what dada was like. Duchamp is a highlight, and did a good part of his "dada" output wth Picabia before dada came to Paris. Still, to return to the Duchamp of the most elegant pieces, it seems more lively to include one's environment in the work than to try to shut it out hermetically by denying one's own taste in favor of an impersonal one. Best to leave tracings in the sand for future people to come across, if they care to, and decipher, until the waves have obliterated them.

I am advocating a revolution of taste: let us accept what we find, accept ourselves as we really are, including what we might be. More than anything else we should be concerned about bringing new elements of a taste for realism into our magazines and concerts. I miss

being able to say, This one makes his living as a television repair man, this one is just nutty about dancing on his knees, this one doesn't like blond people, this one is afraid of the dark, and this one likes it when very fat musicians play on little tiny instruments very softly. There is so much mistrust of the eccentric, the exceptional, all the crazy little things that go on, in and out of performances. There's a line somewhere in Fitzgerald: "He wants me to be on an ivory pedestal, but all I want to be is Mickey Mouse." Am I clear?

And so this is the environment in which the happenings have come about. In the winter of 1959 Kaprow published the first text for a happening, *The Demiurge,* in a student magazine at Rutgers University in New Jersey. It contains everything that he has used in his happenings since, though it is too comprehensive, too expensive to mount. A copy fell into my hands, and I liked it very much. I met him, and tried to help him put together his first New York happening, *18 Happenings in 6 Parts,* to be done at the Reuben Gallery in the fall. In connection with this we went on television, for the publicity, with a collage of a section of his *18 Happenings* and two of my *27 Episodes for the Aquarian Theater.* This is the only happening I have ever done, although there is a text in *100 Plays* that I wrote at that time. Thus I helped out in happenings from the beginning in New York, and I did do the one; but I do not think of myself as closely involved with them. My one happening was a small thing, a reworking from an older play performed not alone but simultaneously with Kaprow's work. I didn't trust the *thinginess* of the Happenings artists, apart from Kaprow. Their authors seemed hung up on being artists.

Most happenings, whether by Karpow or Oldenburg or Dine or Whitman or Hansen, have taken place in lofts or stores in industrial parts of the city. Because of the environment structure, the happening is very improbable in a confined area such as the proscenium stage. The audience has to be in the midst of the action, and this, for the most part, precludes the possibility of any seating arrangement being good for more than one happening, in spite of the general usefulness of the theater—where you have an audience that can see the show, where all kinds of lights can be used, and where there is a proscenium to which all kinds of things can be attached. Granted that a stage has its confines, it is a painterly prejudice that keeps the happening away from the conventional theater, with the result that in many cases the audience is crowded away from the performance almost entirely, and only the

scholars, artists and critics are able to obtain access to the performance, with which they are not very deeply involved. As a result, Kaprow and the others have made an art form that is chiefly accessible to scholars, artists and critics and therefore is pertinent only to them. Of course one might equally well attach a value to the portability of the work (taking portability as the opposite of an environment) and become fascinated by the difference between a performance here and one there. But if one likes this concept of building an environment for your piece, it is simply a limitation imposed by accepting the medium and I doubt whether there is any solution to this.

Another painterly hangover that became particularly striking for a while was the interest in the temporary and the impermanent. This was almost implicit in the abstract style—slap dash, let your work grow while it can and it's too intense a situation to worry much about materials. Kaprow made mountains of sculptures and environments out of newspaper. When one was through looking at them, they were thrown away. Oldenburg made some of the most wonderful objects I have ever seen out of newspaper and corrugated cardboard and chicken wire. They were not thrown away: most of them simply took nature's course. It was implicit that unless one wanted to perform a happening in an environment and then abandon the room, the environment would have to be destroyed. And so these materials were particularly suitable for this kind of work. Why build environments of fine carpentry and glass when chicken wire, rags, polyethylene, newspapers, scraps of anything, in fact, would do as well? However, in Kaprow's case, there is a complication. His work requires his presence, at least most of the time, and, at performance, all the time. This is so because when he isn't there, his work doesn't look like it does when he works on it, a sort of violently out-of-kilter Levittown slum. This means he is limited by his own technique, by the weight-load of the floor (no motors and machinery in this art gallery please), by the mechanics of sure-I'd-like-to-use-that-but-I-haven't-time-to-find-it-cheap-and-I-can't-afford-it-expensive, by the whim of the lighting man who doesn't understand how Kaprow wants his light set (or unset) and quits. As a result, his work very often has an improvised look that occasionally makes it seem extremely narrow in intent, as opposed to Robert Whitman, whose environments are made at his own pace and usually serve to extend the scope of the experience of his piece enormously, though he has nothing like Kaprow's imagina-

tion. The result of all this is that Kaprow's work fails and is in plenty of danger of failing any time: therefore it is alive. You come, you have a sense of excitement in that what you see may well be quite deadly or it may be wonderful.

18 Happenings and *Spring Happening* are—or were (since they're over now and will never happen again)—marvelous pieces. The pieces Kaprow did at the Maidman Theater (in the furnace room there), at the Greenwich Hotel (on a patio forty feet high), and at the Paris Bon Marché, none of which I saw, sound like great Kaprow epics—for he is a maker of epics, more than anything else. On the other hand, he did a piece on a beach at Long Island and another one at George Segal's farm in New Jersey, the first with mermaids and torches at night, with yelling psychiatrists drinking beer and a girl in polyethylene dragging herself to the sea, and the other with a forest of people moving in howling masses at a haystack, on top of which La Monte Young plays jazz, and automobiles knocking down haystacks. (So far so good.) But then Siegfried Kaprow roars up the haystack, heroically "slays" the evil musician, drinks all the water from the beer bottles on a tree, saws the tree down, collapses, and dies. Somebody should hide Kaprow's copy of *The Golden Bough.* Still, who but he would take the risk of trying such a piece? Nor is there any particular change in his work. Fragments of *The Demiurge* might have been used at Segal's farm. From what I have heard, the very first happenings Kaprow did, in New Jersey in the spring of 1958 and the spring of 1959, were no different in spirit. Is this a limitation? Or is it how things are? Or is it how he likes them to be?

Dine and Whitman aren't in the air just now. Whitman is a virtuoso who has marvelous moments—in his happening, *Flower,* women walked around wearing multi-skirts in the primary colors that could be pulled up as blouses or dropped as skirts, blossoming and blossoming. Again, shreds of cloth were hung from the ceiling and tied in bunches. When each tie was cut the shreds spread apart, and we were in the woods. Still, most of the time we were watching a movie of his girl waking up in the morning. And Whitman allows himself to be seduced by the materials he works with. In *The American Moon* there was a rag fight very similar to that in *Flower.* He has a bizarre affinity for rags. There's no question that his environments profit from this: he always maneuvers marvelous surroundings into existence. But what happens is sometimes surreal, and sometimes too private, and only

rarely do those wonderful moments take place. James Dine's *The Smiling Workman* is a legend by now; it was a rare thing, this humming man writing, "I love my work. Help me," with paint, then drinking the paint, dumping it over his head, and leaping through his painting. I was listening to my tape recording of it a couple of days ago; it is terrifically exciting, as a regular vaudeville play and as an epitaph for abstract expressionism. But it was not a happening. It was an independent play that used a prop, just as his other famous happening, *The Car Crash,* was a play that had nothing to do with the environment except to take place in it—ah yes, the costumes and make-up were the same silvery white as the environment. Dine's own makeup was metallic, and he looked like a car. He and the other performers raced around, stammering, while a lovely, chalk-white girl stood on a stool in a matching white gown that stretched to the floor. Suddenly the performance became more inarticulate and there was nothing the performers could do, and they crashed. These were not goings-on in an environment; they were a fine, personal melodrama. It was structurally not much different from Pinter or Kopit. So really, though Dine did those two marvelous things, he never did a happening any more than I did, and these two performance pieces are no more central to his work than the fine performance pieces by Rauschenberg, Piccaso, Køpcke, Rousseau, etc. Shortly afterwards he gave up this line of thinking altogether and went on to revive *Die Neue Sachlichkeit,* though a handle was borrowed from Pierre Restany for the occasion, *The New Realism,* which was much more suitable as a term to describe what Hains, Spoerri, Klein, Christo, Deschamps, and the rest had in common with each other.

Actually, I am trying to steer clear of talking about visual artists, since to bring them up would involve other kinds of thinking and being and doing than those I am going through. So I will not talk about the marvelous work of Spoerri (except briefly, later), Hains, Køpcke, Vostell, or even the non-performance pieces of Brecht, Oldenburg and Hansen, no matter how much any of these people are in the air.

Oldenburg has a remarkable concentration in his pieces—he directs the attention so that a particular kind of mood appears. In *Snapshots from the City* he suggested streets and a crazy kind of cardboard dance that looked pretty painful. It was very dirty, it was illuminated by flashes of light so that you caught only phases of the activity. Something very simple was going on, this shifting and chang-

ing and flashing of lights. It was very basic and realistic, but there's really no more you can say about it. That is true of most of the Oldenburg happenings. He only uses one or two kinds of things at a time—for example, in *Injun,* he used the traditional images of *Tobacco Road* and an Indian. First, while two girls slept on a pile of rags, a man came by and, a little suggestively, put stickers on their thighs. Then Oldenburg appeared in a loin-cloth, "killed" the man, "scalped" first one girl, chased the other up the wall, then "scalped" her and went away. All this went on a long time, however, and it was absolutely unclear if there was any sort of narrative line. I only figured that part out much later. As a result, the piece behaved like a dance environment. Another happening, in the same series, had a typical Oldenburg enigma: a lovely girl, high over the place where the audience was jammed, sorted fish onto a window made of heavy polyethylene, so that we saw her through the fish. In the meantime, a little girl in a party dress walked among some display tree branches. It was a fine moment, just fine. The relationship it had, experimentally, was as if you drove down a street and saw all this happen, and then recalled it; it would then be happening simultaneously and it would seem to go together since you had seen it all together. But I really do not know Oldenburg's intentions. Sometimes, when I see pictures of his famous giant hamburger, I think of it as a fat man's dream (I have never seen that hamburger). And that seems natural. And again, when most artists decide to "do" a store, I think they would paint a picture of it. Oldenburg, very characteristically, rented a store, filled it with plaster imitations of things (sometimes wildly out of scale or distorted) and, for a while, sold these things as the objects in a store, thereby recreating the situation of the store and concentrating on that situation (by not selling real hams, just plaster hams). I still have a bright blue and yellow candy bar (in plaster) that I bought for a nickel. But what he means to do, and what I see him doing are probably quite different. His only large statement that I have seen, in the catalogue for a show two years ago, "Environments, Situations, Spaces," gives as a clue a list of common, urban objects which he says he's for the art of. But why he does one thing rather than another remains an enigma. Perhaps it is not important. Perhaps he just wants the innocent eye to see and to notice and to do. But this I know: I haven't any idea what he's up to and I'm all for it, whatever it is.

V—Towards musical activity

It's always seemed to me that music is more a matter of activity than anything else. What is done is done. When the sound is gone, the string ceases to vibrate, the bell stops its resonating, and the activity is over. Unlike a poem or a painting, music has no life without constant activity taking place.

Of course one could debate whether paintings have their identity when they are not being looked at. But musical activity takes place in time, and it seems to me that anything that breaks up time by happening in it, absorbing it, is musical.

It is when we come to analyze what is going on in time, and when we find that what is happening is not just going on for its own sake but is being used to indicate a static entity, in its essence, that other kinds of thinking become more prominent and seem more suitable. When a static, verbal point becomes particularly prominent, in the sense that the idea is more prominent than the fact that something is happening, then a literary element has entered. When this is combined with purposeful activities and impersonations and recreations of what is going on it is drama. Or if there is an all-inclusive stress on breaking up time with the consciousness of one's body (which may or may not be a movement between points), that one considers dance.

It would seem then that a piece, a notation, a score, all these things belong to a situation in which the maker of the thing provokes some sort of activity. Suppose there is more than one maker?

Can a work provoke itself?

Do we need a provoker?

These are essentially logical questions and I do not propose to answer them, since the answer does not affect music but only the metaphysics of the mind. It might also be noted, however, that all kinds of questions of this sort might be used as provocation notations (like, for example, some of my *Danger Musics*), in which one answers the question or follows the principle, anyway, and by doing something that seems relevant to this, the performance takes place.

So when I say that any emphasis on things simply happening is theatrical, this concept that I have just described should be added to it. Then the semantic identity of what is going on is seen in its perspective as a qualification.

I propose that in approaching any work of art one consider these

things and form any conclusions about a work according to its essential appropriateness (or relevance).

One might profitably spend one's days considering the essence of any goings-on, in or out of art or one's life. (Is there a consistent distinction?)

What is being done in music today is perhaps more complex and has more potential interest than in any other of the arts, in spite of the extraordinarily tight control that the International Style composers have over musical institutions.

As you look at a book, the letters form words. You back up and the letters dissolve into a blotch, and, continuing to recede, they form paragraphs and finally merely discolorations on the page. It is only to be expected that to a flea on one leg of a "v" the difference between that leg of the "v" and the other is significant.

But to the eye the only significance is that both legs exist. The eye notes that a "v" is formed within a word. Of course, if one looks from too great a distance, the word seems vague, and so one must choose a proper distance. This is precisely the situation in which one must examine the International Style in order to see the geography and clear the air.

In effect, it is all one style, whether it is the Official Swedish (Hambraeus-Nilsson-Welin) or German (Stockhausen-Kagel-Kolnchen) or American (Feldman-Carter-Babbitt) or English (Cardew-Von Biel) or Italian or what-have-you. No matter how diverse the notations look, the performance always comes out the same: dry, contrasting volumes, timbres, and effects with a mathematically alternating pulse of as many kinds as possible. Among these people I have mentioned the number of roads they take to get to the same place is perfectly incredible. Hambraeus's, Stockhausen's, Feldman's and Babbitt's ways of getting where they go, i.e., their notations and methods of provoking musical activity, vary enormously. But why does Feldman use a graph-paper score to write something that sounds like Stockhausen (albeit softer)? And why the great shadowboxing between Babbitt's computers and Feldman's brand of indeterminacy? Isn't it like the competition between two beer companies, the same, finally, from Boulez and Stockhausen to Feldman and Pousseur and Nilsson? The number of IMPORTANT avant-garde festivals in Adenauer's Germany is greater than in socially-conscious Italy, in France than in social-democratic Sweden. There is no question that the concerns of the

International Stylists are considered the most harmless and therefore the most worthy of patronage by those who have the most to fear from any real artistic ferment. When the International Stylists evoke Webern, it is the many shadows invoking the body in the name of the light that produces them.

This reduction of the situation to the personal level is, I think, in the same manner as the excessive concern with form and technique as ends in themselves, a defense mechanism established by the International Stylist to ward off uncomfortable attacks on the real content of his work. It is for this reason that, in such a serious composers' organ as *Die Reihe*, which is the main rostrum for the International Stylist, the attacks are never on the essence of the work, always on the mathematics or the methodology. In all the copious quotes in *Die Reihe*, in all the precise analyses of Stockhausen and Pousseur (et al, et al, et al), nobody ever questions the situational or philosophical basis of anything. All attacks, or critiques, or praises, are always on the basis of the means used to reach an ignored end.

Or, alternately, one becomes very excited about irrelevant matters, and indulges in useless ranting that avoids any real issues, but which appeals to the exponents of military monopolism who support this kind of International Stylism, as in this quote from *It is:*

"Recently I heard news from Europe that Boulez is adopting the chance techniques of John Cage and perhaps myself [Feldman]. Like Mathieu, he is going to show us Katzenjammer kids how an ambitious Frenchman can really do it. It was easy for Napoleon to reach Moscow. And it will be curious to observe Boulez straggling home to Darmstadt." [10]

This is a good display of jingoism of the cheapest kind, as if all Europe did not know that Cage was American but accepted him mostly as Cage. The assumption is that all Europeans are oriented toward Darmstadt and all Americans toward Cage and Feldman, that deviations are not only condemned but doomed to failure. It is a monopolistic division of the world into zones of fashion design, mostly out of wishful thinking, and partly out of a desire to form a united front against anyone who might hit on the real question: how do you stop worrying so much about the techniques of producing events and start concerning yourself a little more about what is going on in them?

It ought to be clear to anybody that any of the things that happen when such a piece as "Projection 4" (by Feldman) is performed might

with equal judiciousness and economy have been achieved using conventional notation. The two reasons that I can see for going to such a generalized notation as is used in this piece are, 1. that such a notation requires very little effort, knowledge or exertion to compose, which means that practically from whole cloth the possibility of a marvelous experience arises, and this is therefore a better reason than 2. that the use of this sort of notation, because of general placements of sound, over a number of performances, tends to emphasize the general composition as frequency in time. This last I find not so interesting because one cannot listen to all these performances over time simultaneously; each time one is hearing something that is the same variation-replete sort of thing that has ben going on since 1909. Plus ça change, plus ça même chose. The fact that Feldman's pieces are played softly is no less a mannerism that Boulez's skyward gestures. The ideal or spiritual values that Feldman seems to be intending to suggest in his music are, 1. not musical values and therefore difficult to attribute to (or involve in) music, and 2. not so simple as to be achieved merely by scoring all pieces mp or pp, like his enemy Boulez to whom he is so similar, by pointing all the movements upwards.

Essentially the problem with pieces such as "Projection 4" is that the analogy between quietness and a state of grace has been mistaken for an equation. The a priori, idealistic approach has led to a new situation where the main spiritual value required is restraint on the part of the audience to keep from being annoyed by the piece. Naturally there will be many people also to whom quiet sounds are the only beautiful ones, and to them the music will be soothing, a sort of good liquor to go with one's after-dinner benevolence. But if one likes all sounds and goings-on that don't actually hurt, if one considers the possibility that any sound can be lovely, then the piece is conventionalized and standardized, no more or less marvelous than any other International Style piece.

With Stockhausen's kind of International Style a slightly different situation often prevails, in which the mathematical relationship (it is usually a static form of mathematics, never a procedure, progression, array or operation) is the determining factor in the piece. However two things can be noted: 1. The mathematical exemplification may be important to the composer, but it is by no means apprehensive to the listener, who is conscious only of the constantly changing, desiccated

sound, the groupings of which are slightly less clear than in Feldman's work, and therefore suggest a more complex version of the same thing, which is, in fact, the case. Mathematics is used to obtain material, no more, no less. The logic of the behavior of frogs may be subject to basic principles of psychology but it is not subject to theories about mass hysteria. The mathematics that is used is of too complex an order to be perceived in a clear, mathematical way. The result is that the piece as it appears may be justified in mathematics, but one does not see mathematics justified in it; the sound is usually identical to that in such a randomized piece as Cage's *Music of Changes*, except that the Cage piece occasionally appears to crystallize for a moment while Stockhausen merely gets going a little faster or slower, higher or lower for a while, giving the effect of a constant irrational stream decorated by change.

2. One begins to wonder if the search for mathematical relationships does not blind one to the possibilities of musical development. That is to say, if the time that is spent investigating mathematics were instead devoted to developing new procedures for provoking musical events, conceivably mathematical ones, the overall situation might develop into something quite rewarding. Of course there is always the question of whether one is as responsible for what one does not do as for what one does; after all, not-doing is merely another aspect of doing. But even so, I think that part of the unimaginativeness of the music of Stockhausen (and Kagel and the rest) is primarily due to their assumption that the musical event is thoroughly explored and completely subject to the usual methods of mathematical investigation. The question of whether the mathematical knowledge of the composer is drawn on to disguise an inferior acoustical imagination I will not raise; I am assuming that technique is not more nor less than the ability to realize one's intentions, and that one knows enough to intend anything that seems suitable at the moment.

In any case, the problem is that the mathematical approach is not giving a noticeably dissimilar result from the graphic one, and that, taken in aggregate, Feldman and Babbitt, Byrd and Nilsson, Pousseur and Cardew, Stockhausen and Berio all sound the same, all arrive, by any number of different routes, at the same place. Is this desirable?

There are very few independents, very few who just follow their own course, such as Earle Brown (who, as Cage one remarked, fills in a time unit the way a painter fills a canvas, with the result that everything in

his work is a clear, aural presence and no more) or Christian Wolff (who makes listening very hard and therefore rewarding, usually by separating his sounds with incredibly long silences, whose music seems to be all about listening and not at all about composing) or Philip Corner (who works, usually through graphics, with relative momentums and weights, sculpting his sounds, so that an extraordinary variety of things becomes possible at any time; one day I would like to detail his work more fully).

The International Stylists, however, dominate our avant-garde concerts and musical life to the exclusion of everybody else; it has been like that for some years now, and perhaps it should continue, since the result has been to encourage all tendencies that emphasize activities rather than just sound, and has led to the present situation. The only difference between what prevails now and what went on before is that now their dominance is more accepted, while then, though their days of being open were over and the style was formed, the generation of composers of the 1920s still seemed dominant.

At that time Al Hansen, George Brecht and I met in John Cage's composition class at the New School for Social Research. The year was 1958. Kaprow had studied with him the previous year. For us, it was an odd coming together of many very different people from many ways.

Hansen was—and is—a most striking individual. I think of him as a soldier for whom the wars will never end until every man is articulate. He sometimes is the soldier on leave and sometimes the soldier fighting. But the only reason I can find evidence of in his work is his love of articulateness. This gives him a great deal in common with all non-artists. But it is the real core of his work, as I see it. In fact he got into the army at the tag end of World War II, saw duty overseas, came home and had a good many adventures, in the course of which he began his drift into art and acquired his lovely little daughter Bibbe for whom *Bibbe's Tao* and *Car Bibbe* are named. He reentered the armed forces, this time the Air Force, and became an exhibition paratrooper. When Hansen becomes nostalgic, it is parachute jumping that he talks about. When he came out he went to Pratt Institute, married, and began to be not merely an artist but a very serious artist. When I first knew him he was living in a loathsome middle-class housing project, one of those Palaces of Poverty in Queens, making a living as a commercial artist and trying hard to enjoy it. Of course it could not last, considering the personalities of the people involved. One day at Pratt

somebody played him a Cage composition. Its anarchy appealed. "It was just a mess, a racket. It made no sense. I loved it," and, totally undeterred by the fact that to this day he cannot read a note of music, he seriously took up musical composition with Cage.

Brecht, at that time, still described himself as, "you might say, a painter," though most of his work was already marvelous objects, usually with moving parts, things for adults to play with. He made a living as a scientist in the suburbs in New Jersey, in Metuchen, and his life and his aesthetic seemed connected with that. For hours in class he would talk with Cage about the need for spiritual virtuosity and abdication from technical virtuosity, both of which were very attractive to Cage.

I was a skeptic from New England, fat and nervous. I had fled the north in order to see what goes on down on earth. I wanted to make a career in musical theater, which was to be based on calypso. For the moment I was working for a public relations firm, which I felt was a little immoral. I could write my quadruple fugues with any textures or affections desired. I wanted to synthesize within myself all the techniques I could master to make an art form along the lines of Brecht-Eisler or Brecht-Weill, but based, as I have mentioned, on more indigenous materials, from calypso to rock-and-roll. My own ideas bored even me, so I became restless. I had, a few years before, experimented with hoisting many many hunks of iron and metal up in the trees on either side of a valley in Vermont and raising one hell of a ruckus at five o'clock one afternoon. Once I had put on a crazy set of goings-on in a barn, amid a mess of hung cloth and animals (it would be called a happening today). But these were essentially entertainments and I felt no great urgency about them. However, I had begun my habit of taking notes and developing them into pieces, compressing them back into notes, expanding these, and so on. My whole output consists of workings of a mass that is constantly on the back of my stove. I had discovered the old Gallimard edition of Artaud—not the translation (which is excellent but not Artaud)—and had, as a result, begun a play about people with horrible diseases wearing diving costumes, and some surrealistic farces that consisted of collaged fragments. Some of this stuff wound up in *Stacked Deck, The Ladder to the Moon* and *27 Episodes for the Aquarian Theater*.[11] I came to take Cage's course because I couldn't think what else to do. What I got from it was a sense of general activity and a taste for my own direction, to which previ-

ously my own skepticism had been very unkind. I agreed with much of Cage's aesthetic, but not with his taste. When he and Brecht took off for spirit and nobilities yet uncharted, I made wisecracks that there was no difference between spiritual virtuosity and any other kind of virtuosity.

But Cage used to talk about a lot of things going on at once and having nothing to do with each other. He called it the autonomous behavior of simultaneous events; I called it independence.

In fact, the beauty of studying with Cage was that he brought out what you already knew and helped you to become conscious of the essence of what you were doing, whether or not it was noble (and, thus, acceptable to him). Though my own inclinations were always rather antithetical to Cage's, I was able, through him, to become conscious of my love of autonomy, variety, some sorts of inconsistency, rationalism, etc.

In the same way Brecht picked up from Cage an understanding of his love of complete anonymity, simplicity and non-involvement with what he does. And Hansen got his anarchy enforced and accepted his own love of letting people be just as they are. Is Hansen the ultimate in philanthropists?

To us, Cage's ideas about indeterminacy and all that seemed very democratic and just fine, because we had each other and all of us seemed to think a little the same way. We even took indeterminacy further than Cage without his ever having told us about it. About the second meeting of class Cage, who had previously written down all aspects of performances he could think of, passed out pencils and paper and asked us to write pieces, since none of us had done our homework and brought pieces to class. The pieces we wrote were done with words. Perhaps they were about the first notationless nonimprovisatory music. They were all different and all left something unsaid except mine; I was not indeterminate. I lined up adjectives opposite Cage's list of aspects of performances, which made him tell me that nothing had any inherent qualities other than physical ones and that therefore psychology was an illusion; this led to my 17th-century-cum-Artaud book of characters, *Stacked Deck*.

Cage had to go on tour, so he turned over his class for two meetings to Feldman, who said taste was everything, and Maxfield, who had just completed his first electronic pieces. Maxfield was then very lively—he was interested in really using all aspects of the electronic media. Later

he went metaphysical, and became obsessed by the idea of notationless music per se; but first he just did what he made, mixed his cut pieces of tape in a salad bowl, spliced them together, and did any superimposing that seemed necessary. I thought it was a very natural way to do things, and so I invited Maxfield to do *Stacked Deck* with me. It was to be the first electronic opera, and I think it was, though I wouldn't swear to it. Maxfield liked to be an electronic composer because there was no separation between the composer and the performance. The original score was the most gorgeous electronic music I have ever heard. In later scores he allowed theoretical notions to win out—besides, he was suspicious of the beautiful aspects of the early score—so he mixed them all up together and got a piece with too much unity and universality and compromise to it. He wound up with a justification rather than a manifestation. But nobody else has ever done such interesting electronic music. Only Maxfield has succeeded in doing electronic music in which one is conscious of the latter word rather than the former. In such more recent music as *Night Music* and *Italian Folk Music* he just suggests sounds with sounds, and he rapes the very basis of the Feldman-Stockhausen International Style.

In that fall of '58 not much seemed to be going on. In the theater one hoped that the Living Theater would open (it opened many months late). I had so much hoped for the operation that I painted the ladies' room myself to help speed things up. Hansen did some obscene geometrical items and a portrait in which he worked weeks painting each hair but never did paint in the face. Brecht stayed in New Jersey. But we were all up to doing things. I wrote six hours a day and began most of the things in *100 Plays*. Also there was my unpublished novel, *Orpheus Shorts,* and a series of graphic notations for theater and music (or either) called *Graphis,* each a separate work, which by now number nearly 120. I also filled up two notebooks with ideas and notions which have since turned out to be lectures, *Graphisses*, poems, constellations, concertos, and the like. Hansen, late that fall, cut out a bunch of holes in pieces of card stock, wrote numbers on them in vertical and horizontal lines, and did his first really Hansenish piece by handing the performers these cards and just telling them to use them as notations for events. A week or so later he did *Alice Denham in 48 Seconds*, which was the result of an interesting accident: he found three or four sets of numbers on the street all of which happened to add up to 48. He wrote them on a piece of paper in a

square. In his hand he had a magazine. It had a pretty nude in it, a red-head by the name of Alice Denham. It also had a very fine short story in it by her. This piece has been done a good many times now, forty or fifty. Once I answered the phone; it was Alice Denham. She'd read this piece was being performed and wanted to know what was going on, had Hansen used her name or was it a coincidence? Poor girl. But she finally did catch up with Hansen, they got along fine, and I've never met her but I understand she comes to his things from time to time. The whole affair, the titling of this piece, is itself a Hansen composition.

Hansen wrote the numbers on the wall, and he wrote an arbitrary set of numbers on the diagonal. He gave everybody toys to use as instruments—guns, battleships, whirlers, helicopters, etc. It was one of the good things, this first *Alice Denham.*

But that winter Hansen began a way of life that he has since held to, and it seems very appropriate to his work.

Every winter when the rich go to Florida, Hansen lives in the subways for a month. It is his vacation. He knows which latrines he can be locked into, and what places will give him something to eat. In the spring there is a knock on the door, and you open it, and there is this vile-smelling, unshaven man, and you say, "Hello, Al." He shaves and he showers, and he goes and gets some clothes and he looks great. He gets a job, and there are any number of places that will hire him since he's a wonderful worker. But then, spring ends. He does his pieces; they don't interfere with his activities, which in turn don't interfere with his job, but when summer comes, Hansen takes one look at the blue sky and one breath of the hot air, and it is time for the beach. So he goes to the beach from time to time till he loses his job. When he has lost his job it is fall, and he has done his performing for the year. He writes some new pieces, but mostly he just takes apart whatever studio he has acquired, leaves his things here and there, and, when the snow falls, Al disappears. And you know that somewhere under the city Al Hansen is riding, dreaming about his new activities and maybe smiling a little.

The way I am writing this might be mentioned at this point. I have over a hundred and fifty pages of notes, indexed by number, to relate to an outline. I have a quart of beer. And everything I write, I say out loud. I don't mind using lots of jargon and slang, because the written language of tomorrow will probably have more to do with our spoken

language than with our written one. And this is a well-outlined conversational ramble. If only the typewriter were a tape recorder, there would be no separation between the intoned sentence and the odd-looking sentences that appear. I go on swigging and collating my notes and reflecting in an organized way, knowing where I am heading but taking my own sweet time about getting there.

That winter the Epitome coffee shop opened up. Lawrence Poons, the painter, took care of it, though he had two nudnik partners. All three were painters, but Poons was the rough diamond of the lot; they all did a sort of geometric iconoclasm, but the other two wound up showing swastikas in Greenwich Village while Poons developed the notion of "reading" paintings. This coffee shop became a good display place for work that was not the Going Thing, although for commercial reasons the Epitome had Joel Oppenheimer, Allen Ginsberg and others to attract tourists—Ray Bremser, Ted Joans, etc. Hansen read his poem, "A Requiem for W.C. Fields," there and a Hansen movie that included lots of W.C. Fields material was projected on his chest. I did various concertos and read from *Orpheus Shorts* and *Machines in the Wind* and various of my poems. We gave a concert there at five in the morning and others at night. We did lectures and read dada, lettriste and Iliazd texts. In the spring I gave my first New York performances; Al Hansen did my last instrumental piece there (his only appearance, so far as I know, as a conductor), *To Everything Its Season*;[12] and we did *Alice Denham*, along with some of my *Aquarian Episodes*.[11] David Tudor did a Wolff piece and Cage's *Music of Changes*. My pieces were very badly performed, but the music critics said nothing about that; one just said it sounded like a flea typing the collected works of Macrobius, and Paul Henry Lang, more seriously, said it was a rejection of all music since the beginning of the Christian Era. Hansen's piece was attributed to the BBC (Broken Bottle Chorus) Orchestra and we were surprised that we didn't get an irate letter from London. Also that spring we did a television performance for Henry Morgan on which I, who climbed out of a bathtub and stomped ink on rolls of paper, was compared to Charles Chaplin, which was very nice but very incongruous flattery. All summer long things were quiet. In the fall the happenings began, and in December Hansen exhibited his "Hep Amazon," a 200 lb. monster of tiny motors that slowly got cued in and out, provoking blinking lights, turning wheels, even a vacuum that seemed like a

fellatio machine. That was the end of Hansen's geometric and neoplastic work. Brecht had his "Toward Events" show, where he displayed medicine chests, card games, pingpong ball drop-boxes, and so on. That was very exciting. And in February the Judson Church had its Ray-Gun happenings, presented by Oldenburg with Dine helping, at which Dine's *Smiling Workman*, Oldenburg's *Snapshots from the City*, Hansen's mutliple projector collage movie of parachutes and pursuits, a Kaprow happening about football, a Whitman rag-happening, my own *Cabarets, Contributions, Einschlusz,*[11] and a collaboration intermission piece all were done. That was the end of something: it made the people involved well known in a young-man-to-watch-sense, and for two of us it started a success syndrome that drove their work away from any danger, experiment, or imagination.

Shortly afterward I did *Saint Joan at Beaurevoir* at a little theater on MacDougall Street, which I still think of as Beaurevoir. The play is about almost nothing, it avoids anything relevant to the performance situation, any articulate sequence of sentences, words or, occasionally, phonemes, any purposeful activity, anything in its usual context. It suggests that history is nonsequential when it is considered at any moment in an orderly way, and that random examination of the past gives sufficient understanding of the present. Except for this historicism it was an experiment in gratuitousness. But I was not interested in historicisim so I went on and wrote *Design Plays*, which is a large mechanical nothing, about nothing, for nothing, and good for nothing, although rather attractive to look at in an innocuous way. Therefore it is my favorite of the pieces I wrote of that sort. I'd sure like to see it. That spring *Stacked Deck* was finally done, but as a very messy melodrama, which raised issues I had not intended.

Around May of 1960 I began to be conscious of La Monte Young's activities out on the West Coast. He sent copies of *A Vision* and *Poems for Tables, Chairs, and Benches*. *A Vision* was very technically involved, but easy to hear. I liked his lengthiness, and suggested he expand the piece enormously. I would like to see it published burned into sheets of lead. However, La Monte complained that it was boring; this suggests something very interesting in him. He is fascinated by a lot coming from a little. The *Poem* is very concrete. One drags the objects over the performance area at given rates, as described in the text. La Monte answered a remark I sent him, that everybody ought to do the

Poem pretty often, with the reply that everybody was doing the *Poem*, did I know anyone who wasn't, but that it was too entertaining and so he wasn't interested any more.

These pieces were followed by the best-known pieces, clear-cut sentences that are simply provocations for events, usually reflecting a taste for the most poetic sorts of imagery and almost always implying an orientation towards either useless or extraordinary activities. Throughout 1961 the same piece, "Draw a straight line and follow it," was written over and over twenty-nine times, and also a sort of jazz that he liked, Indian ornaments and modal effects over extremely monotonous rhythmic patterns, usually a triple time of some kind, and a drone; this sort of jazz has almost completely taken over his attention. Except for new ways of looking at the earlier pieces and the *Death Chant*, I do not know of anything new he has been doing for a couple of years now. He cooks and he plays his jazz with a drone and a drum-player and a sopranino saxophone. This music seems part of his life, which is deliberately alienated if not outside the social environment of our times. My only objection to his work is that it makes a body feel insulated against the world, which is a sensation I do not care for.

There is just enough of his work to give you a taste for it. Then it stops.

We in the States didn't know that at that time Benjamin Patterson was already beginning to do marvelous pieces in Köln, such as the "Paper Piece for Five Performers," the "Sextet" from *Lemons*, and the pieces in *Methods and Processes*. Patterson's pieces are the most concrete of dissociated pieces, the most dissociated of concrete pieces. You get nothing out of doing any of them that doesn't disappear afterwards. While they happen, they are a joy to do, but afterwards, who knows why? I remember liking a piece called "Stand Erect," doing it several times, writing to Patterson that it made me feel religious; and then I forgot about it. Last winter I wrote a piece called "Gångsång." It turned out to be nearly a duplication of "Stand Erect." Occasionally Patterson makes pieces that are simply entertaining, such as the "Variations for Contrabass Viol," in which the performer, working with a bass viol, attaches things (e.g., clothespins) to it, shoots with it and writes a letter, among other things. A piece like this has some appeal to one's sense of the fantastic, but since it depends primarily on the visual aspects of actions, no matter how short, it always seems too

long, since the ideal length of time for any of the particular events would be no longer than it takes to recognize what is going on, and any longer amount of time is not very economical.

Appeals to surprise, shock value, the audience's sense of amazement (or iconoclasm)—these are not things which endure. If there is any weak aspect of Patterson's work, it is this kind of appeal. So much depends on surprises that the effect is sometimes like a joke told in too many words. Often it is not necessary to see or perform the piece; merely to hear about it suffices.

But Patterson, more than almost any other composer, seems to understand that for a composer to divide activities into musical and nonmusical, what-I-do and what-I-do-not-do, is to accept the dualism of good and evil, of black and white and, ultimately, to place one's work on a level of purely theoretical relevance. Patterson goes for the grey and he seems to accept, even to encourage, the unmemorable, disappearing aspect of his work. In pieces such as "A Lawful Dance," where you follow the directions of a traffic light from corner to corner, back and forth, ad lib, till you are through performing, Patterson gets somewhere that nobody else is. Marvelous things happen to you while you cross the street. The last time I performed this piece at Times Square I met and was briefly joined by Bea, Lindy and Shirley, three overdeveloped young ladies with colossal hairdos. They saw me (and a group of others) crossing back and forth, and it occurred to them that it would be fun to join in. So they did, no questions asked.

And afterwards the piece blurs, crossing the street is remembered as crossing Times Square, it is inexorably connected with Bea, Lindy and Shirley. Or was Lindy really Jackie? Have I forgotten their names?

So far we are from Germany. Patterson did these things for maybe two years before any of us heard about them. Cage and Brown made their trips there and I asked them what was going on, but it was always officially Stockhausen and the International Stylists; Cage never told about Paik till I had read about him and asked specifically. And very few people had any idea at all what Patterson was doing. Only Paik and Vostell really cared. And so Patterson married and went to France, as he had gone from the U.S. before, where he did not want to be a "Negro artist" but just one hell of a good one, and among other things, a Negro. Only James Baldwin and Benjamin Patterson have ever attained that proportion. Actually Patterson's way of using periodic repeats and the blues feeling that this produced being so ingrained and natural struck

me so much that when he first sent me a copy of *Methods and Processes* I wrote to him and guessed he was a Negro. But considering this does not get one very far with what he does. The main thing is that his work acquires a remarkable unity with our lives as we absorb it and forget it. It seems oddly ethical, oddly concrete.

Paik and Patterson: Faust and Schweik. Paik is the legitimate school of Schoenberg and Artaud. For him his work seems to come as a revelation. When it is not being expressionistic, it is still at least expressing him, in a most personal way.

Around 1959 or 1960 Paik began to do those pieces where he chops John Cage's necktie off or knocks the piano over and operates on it. In 1961 he began to think about moving the audience around, visiting this or that display of sounds. He did—or began to talk about (which for him, as for Spoerri, is about the same thing)—his "Symphony for Twenty Rooms," and his "Omnibus Music No. 1," in which the sounds sit down and the audience visits them.

These things have to do with the phenomenon that fascinates La Monte Young too—that you can really get inside a sound. In the same way, I used to say when I played bridge that I liked to get inside the cards. It is all the same phenomenon, and it is very much in the air.

In 1961 he did his last big performance piece, *Simple,* for Stockhausen's *Originale.* Here he peeps, covers himself with shaving cream, works with an ancient Norwegian phonograph and dumps water over himself in an old tin bathtub. Also he did a piece—is it called "Solo for Violin"?—where a violin is raised very slowly above his head, and then it is suddenly smashed onto a table and shattered. In 1962 he worked on *Bagatells Americaines*, which were a set of pieces in what he thought of as the American spirit, implicitly unimpressive, uninspiring, unentertaining, perhaps very boring, and with specific relationships to the work of Brecht, Young, Patterson and myself. Hansen, of course, is not known in Europe.

The only two examples I have of this series are these, his impression of what I was doing: "Danger Music No. 1 for Dick Higgins"—"Creep into the VAGINA of a living WHALE!" and (written when I remarked that there was no real danger when there was no risk that I might be able to do this) "Danger Music No. 2 for Dick Higgins"—"Walk the Metro-Tunnel of PARIS from Franklin Roosevelt till Stalingrad. If you feel suffocated, think of WARSAWA-Resistance." What he has done since these pieces, or, more accurately, since Fluxus, I will get to later.

Actually what he has done is to achieve a lot of the spirit of action painting in the medium of performance. The work is almost the exact opposite of Patterson's. For Paik, art is a gnostic mystery that is revealed, the complete antithesis of daily activities. He tells a story that is very revealing: he saw Cage's *Music Walk*, which is a dancerly event-piece, and he loved it and began to think about indeterminacy. Then, taking this very seriously, he decided to meet Cage. He visited Cage at his hotel room. Cage was polishing his shoes. Paik was shocked that Cage was not above such things. And from that moment he has been opposed to indeterminacy and dailiness which, for him, is the intellectual pool from which all our ideas are supposed to come. Most European critics, of course, feel that way—they do not see that only Hansen and Brecht have anything at all to do with indeterminacy, that I am a moralist in the school of Bunyan and perhaps Genet and that my techniques have nothing to do with indeterminacy; that Patterson's medium is experience and his style, like his message, is disappearance; that Young takes things asthetically and avoids anything at all mechanistic. As an observer and thinker Paik is totally commonplace with a bizarre style and a joy in the perverse, a German outlook on the current scene and a fascination for himself, the Artist, imposing Platonic ideals on implicitly hostile (or is the word "philistine"?) society.

If you assume to impress and assume shock, secrecy and hostility as your tools, what do you do when your audience understands you? And horrors, when it approves and is delighted? Do you kill yourself or pretend you didn't hear? There is no need to answer the question; all answers come out the same.

Of course, Paik knows all this. Once he wrote to me that he was old-fashioned inasmuch as he felt like Schiller and Delacroix, that his ideal was the same as theirs, that he liked Beethoven more than anybody else (and, incidentally, hated Schubert).

In Paik, as in abstract art, art (or anti-art) becomes not just a way of life but a form of suggestion, necessary to bring up short those who might otherwise be very complacent. At best this turns people on. At worst it makes enemies of those who might have been persuaded by other means. In the middle between these ends lies the typical—newspaper articles appear which pretend to be shocked (even when the reporter knows better), word gets around, the sort of activity becomes typed (thus blinding observers to what is actually going on), and so the

artist who does this kind of thing finds himself merely being exploited in his most bizarre aspects for his newspaper-selling ability.

Nevertheless it is a very strong tendency and might almost be said to characterize many of the best artists of this day, many of the Fluxus people, and certainly Paik. Everything in art which suggests this tendency—or function—is viewed almost exclusively this way. For example, an ideal is created of disorder, deliberately opposed to rational order. This led Paik, in building his great Wuppertal exhibition, to break up and renail objects which had, as a matter of economy or speed, been nailed too symmetrically, too thriftily or too strongly. It is this tendency which leads some observers, such as Hans Helms, a semantic letterist in Cologne who is the poet laureate of the International Stylists, to feel that this kind of work tends to fascism, through its love of violence for its own sake and through its implicit hostility towards daily chores and the earning of daily bread. Of course, a critique like that is like the blind man's description of an elephant as a kind of large snake with a hollow head. Nevertheless, the necessity to view this tendency in perspective is very great.

Another little story, as an example of something or other: once when I wrote Paik a letter that didn't mean much but which I thought was pretty funny, Paik wrote back that I was very Platonic. Perhaps I had implied some of the above-described tendencies. But Paik's remark was very surprising to me.

Once somebody, Jackson Mac Low, I think, explained that "Plato" means "broad one" in Greek, while my name, "Dick," means "fat' in German—and therefore I sometimes like to become very fat and really be Dick. So I have this one thing in common with Plato anyway. But my point is that, because of Paik's concern with this tendency, he sees it whether it is present or not.

And so one sits in the audience, and one observes. One may or may not be annoyed by the self-consciousness of the presentation, by its slickness (they are the same thing). For all his messiness, is Paik any different from Tudor? There is so much ballyhoo, so many people writing down what is going on, there are so many photographers, bigwig Herr Doktors, document-makers, etc. But the orthodox will be denied, possibly without useful implications, but surely in an inspiring way. Something ordinarily secret will be revealed. A new way of looking at something may be suggested. The presentation will be at least unorthodox and possibly cathartic.

But we didn't know much about Paik or Patterson. Starting in 1961 we knew only of Paik's performances, about which Earle Brown used to tell us. La Monte Young contacted Paik for his *Anthology*. I knew about Spoerri's *Material* and put Young in touch with Rot, Williams and Bremer. But none of us knew, as yet, anything about Spoerri. That came later.

Around this time, Al Hansen composed his *Bibbe's Tao* and his piece with a thirty-word name known as *Hi-Ho Jack Paar Moon*. These are completely spontaneous pieces in which the performers just do what they can with the physical materials available and the environment. Since Hansen does not write out his pieces I am not sure what the difference is, although I have seen both twice. They are superduper *Helzapoppin* blow-ups of life in a busy city inhabited by cruel and lovable perverts. A special piece of this sort was performed in Brooklyn, where Hansen was living for a while, in the back yards of the ring of houses on Hansen's block.

Hansen hung the back yard of his particular house with huge sheets of polyethylene. He built a throne, and set pieces of furniture behind some of the sheets of polyethylene. Once these preparations were made he went looking for performers and rehearsed them. When they were ready, the performance was announced. About a thousand people were sitting on their roofs and in their windows, many swigging away at a bottle, some playing cards while they watched, and so on. During the performance, a very pretty Chinese girl sat on her throne reading aloud from time to time from a Chinese newspaper. A couple of girls made lesbian love on a sofa while a man yelled Maoist slogans. A girl tried to get the audience to eat dirt and grass, offering it as very good for one. Occasionally a light flashed on the roof of Hansen's studio, a sort of shed behind the audience's backs, and a girl danced a peculiarly violent belly dance. Phonographs flicked on and off. A group painted with spray paint on the polyethylene sheets from both sides—"Zap" and "Zowee," the traditional sounds of children's spaceman ray guns, were the most frequently written words. The solvents in the paint dissolved the polyethylene, which tore and hung in shreds, exposing the lesbians and the Maoist, who stopped their activities and indulged in an extraordinary Pepsi-Cola fest. Finally, when the polyethylene artists had retreated about as far as they could go, with a loud clatter the belly dancer fell through the skylight of Hansen's studio. "I'm hurt, I'm hurt," she screamed, but nobody believed her. We all

thought it was part of the piece, till Hansen, looking in his window, saw the girl was lying in a pool of blood. He called an ambulance, which came, together with the police. The audience could not leave, since we would have to go through the studio. To keep us quiet, Lawrence Poons began to yell, "Roar! Roar! Roar!" Tzara's best piece. The people in the windows and on the roofs took up the cry and roared back. The end of the piece—after one hundred seventy-six roars, one asks, "Who still considers himself quite charming?" a characteristically narcissistic statement for Tzara the Pseudo-anything-ist—was completely drowned out. When we left, nearly an hour later, the children were still roaring "Roar!" at each other over the fences. My own feeling about this piece, I might add, is that it was the most exciting expression of nihilism I had ever seen. It was very concrete, even moving, though I felt it was a little thin in hope, and therefore it struck me that for all its excellence, its total effect was not quite salutory. But I cannot deny that this was unquestionably the most brilliant happening that has ever been done, that it came perilously close to going to pieces, and therefore risked all, and thus was able to succeed where the more facile venturers crack their noggins open in failing.

Another Hansen happening might be described here, a less baroque piece called *Car Bibbe*. A hundred cars came to the beach at twilight, when people might well be going home. They filled up the beach parking lot. They flashed lights and honked horns, drove forward and back again rapidly and jerkily, now ten feet forward, now five feet back, now ten feet forward, now twenty-five feet back, wherever there was room to go. To one puppeteer, a teacher whom I know, it was the most maddening thing he had ever seen. He ran up and down the dunes screaming. In the midst of the cars there was a single car with twenty-five people on and in it, all singing and having a fine old time. On the roof one of the people had a broken leg. He fell off and cracked his cast and rebroke his leg. There is almost always plenty of *physical* danger in a Hansen piece as well as intellectual danger. I love his riskiness. Perhaps fools walk in where angels fear to tread, but I think not. "Nothing ventured, nothing gained." I have heard that attributed to everyone from Benjamin Franklin to J. Rockefeller, Sr., to the brothers Gracchi to Maxim Gorki. All I know about the line is that as I live I find it more and more to be true. It is our only answer to the intellectual critics of our own activities, from Raoul Hausmann to Morton Feldman

to Henry Flynt. We cannot answer them directly, since we do not think so fast and cannot match their subtlety. But there is no question that limiting the risk limits also the potential. Better to come up with a magnificent flub than a charming nothing.

And that is why one prefers a Hansen, none of whose things will ever be perfect, to a Robert Sheff, to name one who is no International Stylist but who still plays it safe, and who is all wit but no wits.

VII—Fluxus

Our biggest problem was lack of opportunities to perform in a sustained way, on a regular basis. What we lacked was any sort of institution which could be used as a center for information and where performances could happen on a regular basis. Each performance was too isolated: the effect was one of hit-and-run accidents. It would have been impossible for an intelligent observer of the scene to have accurately distinguished the various directions and tendencies that we held.

Then, in the Spring of 1961, Dick Maxfield made contact with an art gallery, the AG. The man who ran it was a pro-Soviet Lithuanian, trained as an architect and, later, as a historian of early Central Asian art. He had been making his living as a harpsichord salesman and designer of some kind. His name was George Maciunas.

He produced a series of concerts at the AG gallery, which, though poorly attended, were crucial in terms of later developments, since they included Maxfield, Mac Low, Flynt, myself, and even Ray Johnson.

All the composers of events, as opposed to happenings, began to be thought of as a group about this time. This was not, of course, justified. The idea of a group would have been inane to any of us. Nonetheless, each could use the rostrum, and the beauty of our doing things together was not that we were all doing the same thing, but that it caused our differences to be more apparent. This was a concept that Maciunas did not then and has never since learned to understand.

Ray Johnson I haven't yet talked about. He is the thoughtful collagist; also he does synthetic dramas and some poems, which very often make use of the mails. He knows all about things like knives and poisons, rats and clocks, air and packages, glue and ink, Brooklyn and

belly-dancers. For his "Nothing" concert at the AG, Johnson covered the staircase up to the gallery with cut-up dowels, and he turned the lights off. People came, tried to climb the stairs, and were rolled down. It was unlikely that anyone would stay at the top, once he fought his way up, since the gallery was shut; there was no light, nothing to do, and only one way to go—down. It was a parable, just as most of Ray Johnson's things, no matter how carelessly tossed-off they seem (he meticulously hides his earnestness), are really parables or at least ironic comments on something. Many of his collages were once brightly colored, but he has ripped the colored materials, the paint, the words off, till only a half-rough grey sheet remains. He has nothing left to sell. And many of his pieces are blank. Not one, a four minute thirty-two second hymn, as in Cage's case, but many, many, many of them, predating Cage, and there is some possibility that it was he who first taught Cage about empty things. Johnson is conscious that a hole in the ground, a hole in a doughnut and a hole between the walls of a room are not the same hole. He is actively conscious that the emptiness of a sheet of paper makes it useful for writing on. He is conscious that it is stupid to say something when you don't want to or when you have nothing to say, and some of his blank pieces seem to be memos to that effect.

Around that time Young was invited to guest edit an issue of a magazine, in which he decided to collect those in New York plus those in Europe who were moving along allied lines. The magazine went broke, but Young had recruited lots of material, which he decided to turn into *An Anthology*. Maciunas was interested in publishing it. He worked very hard on the *Anthology*, but he did not want to see it all end there. So he began to think about building a magazine, to be called *Fluxus*, to appear irregularly. Not long afterward, Maciunas had to flee the country. The structure that he left behind for performances collapsed. He went to Wiesbaden, Germany. There he planned the first of the various Fluxus Festivals or, more properly, Festa Fluxorum. His idea was of a collective, doing festivals and publications. The basis of the collective was that the work had to be realistic and concrete. On both these grounds it was implicitly opposed to the International Style in music, the Going Thing in poetry, Abstract Expressionism in painting and so on. There was no creed, no possibility of a "Fluxus Group"—which would probably have driven every one of us

away—nothing but the rostrum and the material. We were very excited about this.

Brecht's work had changed very much by then. He was no longer using directions and making spiritual processes. He had begun merely to isolate things that appealed to him. These were usually very daily things and they took a very simple form. I used to say, à propos of some of my more involved directions, that lots of things looked complicated on paper but were simple in practice. But Brecht said that depended on what you meant. If you meant something simple, it was simple, in every respect. I liked that, and since then I have tried to avoid doing things that looked complicated, even on paper.

I wanted to get out of New York, mostly to see what was going on. I had done a lot of performing and finished my movie, *The Flaming City.* I wanted to perform in Europe, and also I was a little afraid of what performers with "professional instincts" might do to my pieces (and Brecht's, Young's, etc.). So Alison Knowles and I went.

We got to Germany, met Patterson, Williams, Paik and Vostell; the Wiesbaden Fluxus had already begun. The previous week-end, in line with his ideal of Fluxus being a united front, Maciunas had invited a bunch of International Stylists to perform: Von Biel, Rose and a couple of others. But they did not like some of the pieces Maciunas was doing and quarrelled with him, and they had a style of living that was too self-indulgent to be concrete with the lively aspects of Fluxus. So Maciunas kicked Von Biel's crowd out and Rose left.

The Wiesbasden Fluxus was the most ambitious of all. It lasted a month, with three, four or five performances each weekend. The beauty of it was that we had no worry for time—we could do many terrific long pieces that could not be fitted into other festivals. We did Emmett Williams' German opera, *"ja, es war noch da"* in English: it was the longest three-quarters of an hour I have ever spent, since it is mostly tapping on a pan in regular rhythms a prescribed number of times. We did a one-hour version of La Monte Young's B-F sharp held, unvarying, sung and accompanied by Benjamin Patterson's bass viol. We invented a piece by a mythical Japanese and improvised it for an hour (on the same program as Young)—it became very beautiful. We did lots of old things of mine—I avoided the new ones mostly, for no particular reason—and we did Brecht, Watts, Patterson, Young, Williams, Corner, all galore. We did "Danger Music No. 3" by shaving my

head and heaving political pamphlets into the audience and "Danger Music No. 16" by "working with butter and eggs for a while" so as to make an inedible waste instead of an omelette. I felt that was what Wiesbaden needed. For a while eggs were flying through the air every couple of minutes. A very smartaleck sculptor named Viebig reached out his hand to dare me to throw an egg—I did (splat), up his arm into his face. During Emmett Williams' opera some college boys came up out of the audience and stood, holding pine boughs, singing college songs. We did Maciunas's metronome-rhythmic "In Memoriam Adriano Olivetti" by raising hats, popping fingers, gasping, sitting up and down, waving heads, and so on. For three weeks this went on. We did Corner's "Piano Activities" by taking apart a grand piano and auctioning off the parts. Most of my *Requiem for Wagner the Criminal Mayor* was done, to the delight of the house super, who left in the middle and came back with his whole family, he liked the goings-on so much. Paik did *Simple* and Patterson did his *Variations for Contrabass*. Vostell came down from Köln in all his majesty. We developed a secret theory that he was a mountain masquerading as man and propelled by will alone. This was only partly suggested by his appearance, because it was very much his quality as he went about the erasures and demolitions and transformations that are his artistic and philosophical field of concern. He smashed toy soldiers as if they were men, erased photographs of automobiles in magazines as if they were caught up in a tornado, demolished light bulbs by heaving them at a glass that separated him from the audience and finally uttered a violent cry and violently splattered and smeared a Sahnetorte all over the glass in a grim evocation of Mack Sennett. Finis Sahnetortis and he went quietly back to Cologne. It was a magnificent mess, and one of the highpoints of all the Fluxus festivals.

Because of its scope, difficult to duplicate elsewhere since Maciunas's facilities were at Wiesbaden, the Wiesbaden Fluxus was all that might be hoped for such a series. Our audiences varied from enormous to tiny, from explosive (we had two riots) to docile and from indifferent to sympathetic.

There was talk about other Fluxus festivals happening immediately after Wiesbaden, but they did not seem very promising. Vostell was invited to have a show of his Décollages in Amsterdam, and the resulting situation, while not done by Fluxus, was relevant to it, since it included so many Fluxus people.

Vostell's work develops the conception of the décollage. In the simplest terms, this means pieces that are the opposite of collages. A painter glues this and that onto the canvas, places this and that piece of clothing on his model. Vostell rips it off. Men are destroyed, they turn to dust. In his lyrical phase, Vostell harps on this. But mostly his work is less lyrical. He stresses transformations and metamorphoses through apparently negative developments. This obviously has political implications, and in fact Vostell's work can be political dynamite. More than one of his performances has been broken up by the police. It is not comfortable to be shown rotting food in the context of torn, ripped and mauled newspapers and magazines. In his Wuppertal exhibition, one of the famous moments was when the audience was driven to a rock quarry. There a television set was playing a sappy Austrian love film about high society, but with the lisping Viennese accents tuned to a thunderous volume. Suddenly Vostell came with a machine gun and he blasted the television set. They say this was one of his great things.

However, Vostell's own direction did not by any means cause him to isolate himself. Quite to the contrary. He had also a magazine called *Décollage,* which was conceived as a newsletter to contain whatever was current and to be given away among those who most needed the information and sold to those who could buy it. In this magazine appeared many pieces by Paik, Brecht, Young, Flynt, myself, etc. Through it the American happenings- and events-people first came into touch with Vostell. Naturally, since his sphere of interest overlapped with Maciunas's, the first conflict of interest among those we knew arose between them over who was to do what. As a result, Vostell first perceived the two greatest points separating them: 1. Maciunas liked to do little things, promise things, but he utterly lacked any sense of responsibility toward artist or public in the sense of getting the bread to the hungry ones (and not the full ones), and 2. *Décollage* appeared, and *Fluxus*—the magazine—didn't. In fact, as I write these words (in 1965) Maciunas is no longer actively involved with whatever is left of Fluxus; at this moment he is sitting with a lady, in a street near here, physically assembling the one hundred copies of the first issue of *Fluxus.* Maciunas was satisfied to have conceived of the magazine. For Vostell, as long as the word is with God, God is a swine for not allowing it to décollage itself into the earth. Vostell perceived these two differences; and though, for the sakes of those of us who were working

with Maciunas, he invited Maciunas to participate in the Amsterdam situation, he no longer felt any particular interest in Fluxus, though he was, of course, deeply interested in various of the participants. Thus began the first schism in Fluxus.

At Amsterdam, in connection with Vostell's show, the gallery owner invited Vostell to arrange a program of happenings, so Vostell announced performances of Busotti, Cage, Brecht, Caspari, Patterson, Paik, Williams, Riley, himself, Maciunas, myself, Young, Knowles, Hülsmann, and Gosewitz. Of these, Maciunas and Patterson withdrew immediately, Cage, Brecht, and Riley were not consulted, and only Cage was performed. I did his "Solo for Voice." Caspari was in Amsterdam, but he seems to have been frightened away. Gerd Stahl and a couple of other Germans were added to the program to make up the lack. And Tomas Schmit appeared for the first time, not to do a piece of his own, because so far as I know he had not yet written any, but to perform Paik's *Moving Theater No. 1.* Willem de Ridder and Jac K. Spek from Holland were listed on the program, but I do not remember that either did anything. First Jean-Pierre Wilhelm introduced us all. Then I sang Cage, and next Diter Hülsmann began to read some shove-it-into-him-pornography. The audience was all jammed into a tiny art gallery with Vostell's art on the walls, and with all this blatant pornography it began to get a little restless. Then Alison Knowles came and did Paik's "Serenade for Alison," a melodramatic striptease for amateurs only, which relieved the air. But when Stahl dragged in a bed, and began a very, very long metaphysical-erotic tape-playing on the bed, the Dutchmen became very upset. "How can you do this in Holland?" one asked me. The jittery room was too much, by now. The remaining pieces that were to be done inside were cancelled, and the audience went outside, where I did my American-accent French cabarets, *Cabarets Exotiques et Sentimentaux.* While this was going on a man showed up with a small crane for Vostell's piece—a juke box playing rock-and-roll was to be lifted high into the air and dropped. This was too much for the audience. A large pile of papers that someone had brought were ignited. Alison Knowles tried to do her street paintings. The head of the gallery became very upset and retired to nurse his poor little nerves, while his wife, who was the brains of the outfit, tried to get the fire put out. The juke box was hoisted up, but it wouldn't come detached from the crane. Vostell kept yelling "Arghh!" but the jukebox was only slowly lowered. I tried to get the audience to stop

feeding the bonfire, but a group of students had decided this was a demonstration against German art and they would not stop. A girl shoved a burning paper at me, I slugged her and was told that in Holland men don't hit ladies (I suppose they get their moustaches burned off instead?), that I should go back to Germany (to Berlin in 1933 perhaps? there are parallels). If I hadn't gotten rough there would have been real trouble. But I did, and Paik and two others backed me up, so we kept the students at bay. Now the cops showed up. They cancelled the rest of the performance. Our m.c., whose name I don't recall, was drunk and tried to measure the angles of the cop's head with a protractor. He was jailed and then given twelve hours to leave Holland. Vostell had planned to make a large décollage: he had brought a twenty-foot billboard from Germany, with posters thirty deep on it. The cops told him to remove it immediately to wherever he had found it. All this time the gallery director was wiping his forehead while his wife tried to calm everybody. At last we took off across the back streets, chanting something a little Tibetan. When we crossed one canal, Paik floated a flaming violin with a radio on it down the canal. At another canal, Tomas Schmit took a swim. Later on, Emmett Williams measured the bridge that I mentioned before with inflationary marks in such a way as simultaneously to perform a Filliou composition for millionaire and one-eyed poet (Filliou has only one eye). Williams was the millionaire and Jed Curtis was the one-eyed poet (wearing an eye-patch). I did "Danger Music No. 17." All in all, it was an amazing collage of pieces and all too concrete with Dutch nationalism. However, it started me thinking about nationalism and how I hated its blindness: therefore I wrote my series of *Vanity Fair, Germania Unveiled* and the rest.

In London, Williams, Spoeri, Køpcke, Filliou, Page, Metzger and Ben Vautier were cooperating on the show where Filliou did the pieces I described. Ben (he does not use the Vautier) exhibited himself as a work of art. He is the master of the Nice Academy, whose members are their work. They do not produce objects of aesthetic interest except by interesting (to them) processes. A baby might be considered a masterpiece of Ben's, especially if the baby dies.

And so, in London, and in Mayfair in particular, where the Down-With-The-Bombers marched (since it was not made in Her Majesty's Angellonde) and the Rolls Royces purred and the overdressed Elite ran galleries of pornography, Ben showed himself, Køpcke set up

things to steal (called "presents"), Spoerri made a labyrinth in which you stumbled among textures in the dark, Page did some moveable junk pieces, Metzger made objections (he is a dogmatist for autodestructive art) and slowly withdrew, Køpcke glued books together and sprinkled pigment around, Williams attached rubber stamps to a white wall (by means of chains) and, instead of stamping on the wall himself, invited the spectators to do so, leaving stamp pads of colored ink around—I was interested that he assumed that people would not tie up the chains or write with lipstick on the walls (which they did do); perhaps he thought such noble thoughts about what people might do reflected well on him (which they did) and hated to appeal to anything but the best in people (which he did). Spoerri arranged for a series of performances to happen, and everyone, even Metzger, did something. Metzger made things fluoresce, dissolved nylon with hydrochloric acid while wearing a gas mask and removed items with magnets that would have been more easily removed by hand. I performed my "Fourth Symphony." Spoerri had a sculpture contest. Emmett Williams did his *Alphabet Symphony*. Køpcke put scotch tape on a record, played it and cleaned up the mess left over from Patterson's "Paper Piece." Every time the needle hit the tape, Køpcke stopped picking up, began the record again and then went back to work. When the stage was all clean, the piece was over. Outside, the Cuba crisis was on. Peace marchers ran up and down the street, chased by bobbies with clubs who knocked them down with theoretically un-English violence. Inside, Alison Knowles performed her "Proposition," in which she made a salad for two hundred people. Schweik. Robin Page kicked a guitar around the block.

In London I had bought a notebook, in which I began to write copious notes on pieces to put together when I got back to the USA. Pieces eventually included in *Jefferson's Birthday*, written before September 1962, were written outright while I was working on the movie. I simply thought along and when I came to something that seemed important I wrote it down. But the ones written after September were written into this notebook, usually with supplementary notes, then collected and organized when I came home. That was March. Now it is September 1963, and I have yet to finish the last of these note-organizings. Because I traveled so much, it seemed like the thing to do to sit and ride and think and speculate. Ordinarily I do not think so much, and so I don't come up with so many pieces in so little time.

The next big thing that happened was the Fluxus Festival at Copenhagen. It took place in the Nikolajkirke, a sixteenth-century church. As it happened, the Danes were very glad to have us there, and we had audiences of four and five hundred every night. Resources seemed to be unlimited; we were given fine rooms in fine hotels. When items needed for performance were difficult to get, one of our Danish friends helped us. The result was that the Copenhagen Fluxus was extraordinarily smooth and well organized. We did La Monte's "Piece for Henry Flynt"—566 slow crashes on the piano—and his fifths piece on the organ. We did the Knowles's, "Proposition," and a wonderful thing happened. An impatient Dane came to snitch a carrot. I banged him on the head with a salad spoon. The bowl of the spoon flew off, hit a lady who had been making a lot of noise, and settled into the hands of a man who had dozed off. I laughed and the Dane ate his carrot. Another thing: there was an Ichiyanagl piece that was just form—things happened now, now and now, and they had to do with a piano (it was called "Piano Piece No. 5"). Rather than play a now-and-then note, we thought of holding the pedal down and throwing things. Patterson suggested the darts from his "Sextet." The result was very beautiful: the upright piano was alone on the stage, pedal depressed, side to the audience. From the wings darts flew in and struck the sounding board, producing a considerable variety of vibrations. Another beautiful thing: we did the second of my *Two Contributions for the Theater,* in which you pick something to happen, wait for it to happen and go away. A young man named Eric Andersen, then a refugee from Darmstadt and the International Stylists, now writing process pieces with a decidedly philosophical bent, chose to wait till everyone else had left the stage. Emmett Williams sat down behind a lectern and chose the same. Neither knew of the other's choice. For forty-five minutes they waited. Then someone told them that there would be an intermission in five minutes, assuming that they would stay there for the rest of the concert and perhaps beyond. But they understood that they were to leave in five minutes and did. But that was a marvelous fifty minutes, because what was happening was very interesting; the relationship between the two men waiting and the audience was always changing; it could be seen and figured out and even anticipated. Patterson did his "Frog Pond," where you make one, two or three syllable squeaking answers, questions or exclamations when a mechanical frog, released by another system, hops into one of

the three columns given each performer of eight in a square divided into thirty-six squares.

One performance was in a baroque theater. Alison Knowles did Patterson's "Solo for Dancer"—a rope was strung over the proscenium-arch lighting bar. Knowles tied her foot up with the rope and pulled herself up the arch all the way to the top. She did Paik's "Serenade for Alison," and Patterson did his "Variations." I did a couple of walky pieces; *Graphis 118* was designed for this stage. And we did some good Japanese pieces—alas, no Shiomi (isn't it interesting that Japan's best composer should be a girl, when Oriental girls have been given a raw deal for so many hundreds of years?), but we did do Tone's *Anagram,* a sort of chronic Bartók glissando for double basses, Kosugi's *Micro I* and *Anima I* (where you roll yourself up in a rope on the floor till you mummify yourself in it) and some Ichiyanagi things. We did my *Requiem for Wagner the Criminal Mayor,* which very much surprised the Danes and produced some interesting situations.

All in all, it was probably the most interesting Fluxus that we did.

It was followed by the Paris Fluxus, which was a very poetic fiasco. This began just a couple of days after the Copenhagen one, so most of us had to rush down from Copenhagen and we were very tired. A dilletante poet, who was the common bank roll for a large number of Paris poets and artists, had been entrusted with the publicity and arrangements, although people whose basis of existence is challenged by a project should not be trusted at all. This dilletante was given five thousand posters to mail and an evening of himself and his friends to arrange. Of course, he did a mailing of his own evening, and ignored the five thousand posters. The hall was almost empty every night but his, when it was full. The result was that we had to cope with the problem of how to handle a nearly empty house. Emmett Williams' "Counting Piece," in which he counts the audience, came into its own and took on an extraordinary irony and majesty. We tried lots of long, slow pieces. There was a very fine surrealist poet, not well known in this country, by the name of Gherasim Luca, who said some of the most beautiful things we had ever heard about some pieces—mine, La Monte's and Maxfield's seemed to appeal to him particularly. In spite of our loathing of surrealists and their fascistic "ism," we were deeply moved by the old man's enthusiasm. I, for one, felt that the Paris Fluxus was worth all its financial catastrophe and its ridiculousness just because of this wonderful old man.

And so it came to pass that we lost most of what money Maciunas had left for *Fluxus* magazine in Paris, where many things had fallen before us, later to be accepted even there. But it was not all loss.

For one thing we got to know Daniel Spoerri, who is a real magician. He has never done a painting, yet he is a visual artist. He has glued things onto tables and hung the tables on the walls. He has devised any number of theatrical notions. (Alas, he feels that to devise a thing is enough, that it is not absolutely necessary to execute it in order to show what can be done. We most emphatically disagree, but each of his ideas is almost unbelievably relevant and concrete.) These days he is particularly interested in the culinary arts, although, unlike Edward Lear and myself, he is not at all hung up on the fantastic element in cookery.

Is there anything more glorious than a cool breeze on a hot day?

There was a quiet time. We had no money for a while, Alison and I. So we spent Christmas with Maciunas, and enjoyed his battles with his landlord, a rascal from Frankfurt-am-Oder named Bengler. When the emotional situation became too tense, we went to Turkey, where we traveled two thousand miles through mountains and plains and along the sea, to villages where the children poked at us in the street because they didn't know whether Americans were flesh-and-blood like they were.

In the meantime, back in Europe, tempers were cooling. Maciunas was much too busy with Bengler to make any trouble for anyone, and Vostell, always gracious, talked himself into one last attempt to work if not with, then around, Maciunas. Possibly this was at the suggestion of Tomas Schmit, who had been most helpful to me at Cologne, who had come to Paris to join us in the Paris Fluxus, who had shown me a large number of pieces written on a roll of toilet paper—some of them excellent—and had gradually become increasingly important to Maciunas, since he, unlike George, was able actually to do things, in spite of possibly less ideological and strategic subtlety than Maciunas boasted. We had performed Schmit's "Zyklus" at Copenhagen. Schmit had done it himself at Paris. It was a very interesting piece to think of—utterly meaningless and painstaking work. One circles oneself with bottles—or buckets or other containers—one of them filled with liquid, the others empty. One pours liquid from one into the next and around the circle as carefully as possible, till all the water is evaporated, accidentally spilled, etc. Unfortunately, Schmit's work is

neither published yet nor available in manuscript nor performed, so his precise tendency is not clear.

There was to be a small Fluxus festival a Düsseldorf—only two concerts. Maciunas, undoubtedly for deeply dialectical reasons, either did not want us present—though we had left him on the best of terms—or did not want the Düsseldorf festival to be a success—which we liked to think our presence would help. By chance we had sent Vostell a postcard from the Pera Palas at Istanbul, Mustafa Kemal's favorite hotel, where we were staying after our Black Sea trip prior to disappearing into the villages of the Bursa area, where we wanted to spend a few months. Vostell noted our address and sent us a telegram, which reached us on the day of our departure; so we switched destinations, ate a last good fish meal, bought some Turkish pastry, and—

We went. There we found that the concerts consisted only of small pieces. What big pieces there were were collaged into simultaneities. This represented a step backward, in that it was a concession to facile taste rather than a tactical progression, even though the Düsseldorf concerts were programatically the most successful we ever did.

After Düsseldorf we did a show in Köln, Knowles, Køpcke, Vostell and I. Knowles did an environment that included a quiet chair away from any fuss. I did three seesaws, called "troubles," in that their implications were troublesome—one was painful, one squeaked but had little else to distinguish it, and the third had enough flowers so that it could not be used as a seesaw. I also stuck a shoe on a wire in front of an easel with the caption, "The subject matter that an artist uses is always more interesting than what he does with it." I was much criticized (perhaps correctly?) for my poor display of technique and my disinterest in anything but what I was saying. Køpcke used whatever was in the place where we did the show, mostly gluing things down and spraying them a color he called "Silver—it's stupid." He did well. Vostell hung fish and suggestive items and toys in front of white canvases, and lungs and chickens in front of two pieces. These last naturally decollaged themselves, so that the gallery stank and we could not allow the usual publicity activities, let alone any prolonged viewing and savoring of the show.

From Germany we fled, via Hamburg (with Køpcke) and Copenhagen, to Stockholm. There we worked with Bengt af Klintberg, Stafan Olzon, Lars Gunnar Bodin, Svante Bodin, Miecke Heybroek and others on a preview of a hypothetical Fluxus festival, which turned out to be

not Fluxus concerts but two—or was it four?—of the best concerts along those lines that I have ever seen. The language of the Swedes made Emmett Williams' *Tag* come alive. It is a very dancy language. And I did my *Graphis 118* and *Graphic 117* in a theater borrowed from Mr. Ingmar Bergman, which was a pretty glamorous situation. Alison did Patterson's "Solo for Dancer" and I wrote—and did—my "Gångsång," not realizing, as I think I mentioned before, how close it was to Patterson's "Stand Erect." But one of the great things that happened was this. When we got to Stockholm, the Baltic Sea was frozen over—even the river that flows through Stockholm was frozen solid—so that the newspapers were full of worries for the ducks that live in the river. But the day after we arrived it began to thaw. It was the coldest winter in forty years, but the spring came. And a few minutes before one of the concerts we found the first balloon man of the year. In Sweden you know it is spring when there are men selling balloons. So we bought up most of his balloons, and did Bob Watts's "Event 13" in which balls are rolled down a ramp, and every time a ball hits the bottom, a balloon is released. It was a wonderful way to welcome the spring, and every time one of the balloons flew up, the Swedes cheered.

But one cannot remain out of one's country forever. So we came back to the States from Sweden.

We found that it had been even colder here than in Sweden. And we were tired. So the natural thing was to stop doing things, which we tried to do. But when you tell yourself, sincerely, "Stop!" it clears the mind, and since nature abhors a vacuum, ideas and activities rush in to fill the void. So we spent the spring in more intense activity than before. And at the end of the spring, we were supposed to do so much more than we could that we had a feeling of glut. It was as if one were a child, and an old man came up and said, "Play!" The same kind of inhibition gradually developed through the spring.

First there was Al Hansen. He was then in his ascendent phase and anxious to generate activities into which he could disappear. He had turned up some young ladies out at Douglass College in the suburbs, and they in turn were involved in some sort of festival of the performing arts. Their festival had been extremely dull, and on their own hook they obtained space in an old gymnasium, which they turned over to Hansen to use for a sort of secessionist concert. Hansen invited Knowles, myself, Patterson, Brecht, Ray Johnson, Larry Poons and

Brooklyn Joe Jones, among others. The result was one of the most striking of Fluxus-type concerts, though, significantly, Maciunas had nothing to do with it. We did various of the European brethren's work that had never been done in the States before. Ray Johnson's "Funeral Music for Elvis Presley" was done. It is a sort of musical pop art piece, in that it uses a typical four bar introduction phrase from rock and roll, interspersed between twenty-second silences by a single bass drum beat, all speeded up and slowed down alternately. Larry Poons rode up on his motorcycle—was he wearing his army uniform—and did his "Star Spangled Banner," a tape made by recording the American national anthem, then cut up, mixed it in a salad bowl, and the pieces put together end to end, so that a perfect travesty resulted. It is Poons's only tape composition, though he is an expert rock-and-roll musician. Alison Knowles went up the rope for Patterson, as she had at Copenhagen, except that the rope was old and slippery, and she could only get a few feet off the floor. So the piece became transformed into something very frustrating. I did various of my lectures and danger musics. Al Hansen did his "Parasol 4 Marisol," a sort of *Bibbe's Tao* type piece, except that it uses beautiful balloons as well as painted sheets of plastic that divide the audience into compartments: onto these sheets filthy and obscene phrases, prayers, invocations, teenage slang and science fiction phrases are written with a spray paint that dissolves the plastic. The result was tatters and a very sad, raggy look, not to mention a terrible smell. But the balloons. They were so big and beautiful! Nobody wanted to see them destroyed. The performers went through the audience, who were holding the balloons, pricking them with needles. The audience guarded the ballons almost with their lives, and the performers had to seize members of the audience and physically hold them still in order to break the balloons. Somewhere a child was crying. And two college girls left, running, to save their balloons. In the meantime, Al Hansen and his (then) girlfriend Joan Hall were dressed in cardboard armor, painting each other first, then undressing each other with cardboard swords.

But the most important thing was Joe Jones's first public appearance. He was a highly trained musician who had been studying Schillinger with Earl Brown. He had taken to involved notational experiments, some of which involved the use of motors. One evening he did the obvious: he connected the motors with musical instruments and began the development of self-playing instruments. These objects

were visually neutral, in order to avoid any sculptural effect; but they made use of their own mechanical nature to the very fullest. No notations would have been either possible or desirable. This is not to say that they lacked a situational or environmental aspect. The ensemble of various drums and violin that Joe Jones put together at Douglass College, for example, called "Lulu and Ensemble," was altogether pathetic. These poor little objects were all alone in a large space, with no players except some rather ragged motors, and with these they produced their delicate and subtle rhythms.

Brecht's work had changed very much by now. He was no longer using directions and making spiritual processes. His musical Quakerism had been abandoned in favor of rather lyrical provocations, done by isolating things or conjunctions of things. For example there is his "Exhibit Seven (Clock)," written in the summer of '61. It goes simply:

• house number

It would be extremely difficult to arrange for the performance of this piece. But it is something that might be kept in mind and observed, as one walks along the road at 8:35 in the morning and passes number 835 Kaiser Wilhelmstrasse, for example. His work with pieces of this sort led to a great increase of his activity, and as a result he and Bob Watts decided to have a "Yam Festival." Either Brecht had done a collage named "Yam" that Watts very much admired, or Watts had done such a collage and Brecht admired it. In any case, the name seemed as good as any, and it could always be argued that "Y-A-M" stood for "Young American Music," which was accidental. The concept was of a massive amount of activity happening in many cases simultaneously all over the countryside, or better yet, the world. As a result, Brecht tried to involve a perfectly extraordinary combination of people in the festival, everything from Texan symphonists to International Stylists, Going Thing poets to happening makers, event people to writers of sonnets. The coordination was supposed to be an art gallery called The Smolin Gallery. But the Smolins, Ira and Rose, originally friends of Kaprow, were utterly and completely beyond their depth. They had neither the understanding nor the dedication required to coordinate any sustained effort. They were a sweet, middle-clas couple whose main interest in the affair was to be in the

artistic ferment which was outside their rather dry way of life. As a result, the Yam Festival included a great deal of absolutely brilliant activity, but it was completely uncoordinated. It was the same old fatal weakness of my country's avant-garde: it was almost impossible for an intelligent outsider who approached us with sincere curiousity to tell just what we were trying to accomplish. Ben Patterson, for example, led a blindfolded tour around the city. But because the calendar on which the announcement of this event appeared failed to say where the tour would begin, and because few people had the inclination to call the gallery and find out, only one or two people came to Patterson's tour. Only a few things were well attended: these were 1. the "Yam Show," 2. Alison Knowles's "Hat Show," 3. the Segal Farm Show, and 4. the "Yam Days."

The "Yam Show" was a collection of visual work by, or by-products of the activities of, the various participants in the Yam Festival. Alison Knowles's show was much more unique. A word about her work might be appropriate here. In the late fifties she was faced by the sterility equally of abstract expressionist painting and of the glue-and-dress-it-up collagist method of making visual art. Her solution was to collage only visual fragments, mostly taken from daily life. As a result, her early work is the first recognizable "Pop Art." Almost pathologically shy at that time, she showed her work primarily at the gallery of that strange institution, the Judson Church, and as a result, while all the well known American artists know her work and borrow her techniques (with her enthusiastic permission), she is unknown to the public at large. In fact, only about ten canvases are left out of about forty, and we know the location of only six. The others have all been destroyed by her, stolen or given away. Given her shyness, she tried to develop a style that would reflect the dailiness and privacy of her life as a woman—for she is female with a vengeance. As a trained silk screen technician, she developed the use of photographic silk screens about 1960. And after that she ignored all technique except as it served her interest in concrete art. Her experience performing—and, later, doing such pieces of her own as "Proposition," which goes: "Make a salad"—led her to tackle the organizing of a "Hat Show," for which she collected huge numbers of hats from the best artists we knew of, from the most conventional to the most experimental, from Red Grooms to Claes Oldenburg (who made his out of glue, cigarette butts and toilet paper, in ten minutes) to Lette Eisenhauer (who worked two weeks on

a mechanical hat) to Wolf Vostell (who sprayed his head with shaving cream). It was a fascinating and unique exhibition.

Vostell came to the States in large part at my insistence. His presence was a shock to most of our people. American chauvinism. For many years our country was on the verge of cultural maturity. We were painfully conscious of the lack of any real depth in our culture. Surely individuals did things here and there. It would be idiotic to deny that Melville, Poe and Whitman were of world-wide significance. Nevertheless, each worked in a vacuum. In order to become a real master, Gertrude Stein—and her whole generation—had to leave their country to find friendship and a place where the ideas were like apples in the air. Some artists need this; some don't. The people who went to Europe did not necessarily become less American—whatever that is. They did become more universal.

But with the second world war all that changed. My people were not naifs. They were glad they did not have to live in the cellars in order to grow up. Many of the best European artists came here. But what kind of artists? They were the Bretons and the Weils, the rats that left the ship when they were afraid it would sink. Our own Gertrude Stein was a Jew, but she refused to leave France, the nation she had adopted, throughout the war. The Aragons and the Heartfields stayed in Europe. The cowards left. So, naturally, there exists a whole generation of Americans, the abstract expressionist generation, who believe, in ignorance but not naivete, that Europans are all like their teachers, the André Bretons and Richard Huelsenbecks, political and moral cowards, too deeply rooted in their own experience to be otherwise. Trotskyists, perhaps—they talk big but think and do small. This, of course, is a very comfortable kind of thinking shared in various places, for example in Russia, where the artists are firmly convinced that the Red Army and the Red Army alone—without the help of the free French, the Czech and Polish resistance fighters, the heroic German underground, the American and British cannon fodder—won the Second World War. But their idea is obviously false. It is one thing to love the traditions of the country you are in, perhaps because of the particular sweetness they give to a bitter life. It is another to use this love to produce hate and blindness. Nationalism is the root of the great evils of our time. And that so many of the best artists in all countries are tainted by it is less tragic than stupid and banal.

That is why we were so enthusiastic that Vostell should come. He

was a real, honest-to-goodness German, of the Goethe-Paul Levy-Heartfield tradition, utterly free. Naturally the older generation found his presence a complete repudiation of their experience. He was no Breton. So they isolated themselves. The Rauschenbergs, Castellis, Karps and Janisses made believe he did not exist—like the "woman problem," whose existence they are all, all much too liberal to acknowledge. It was always, "Hello, Mr. Vostell. Why are you here to disturb our sleep?" But of course for the younger of us it was different. It was wonderful to find that we had brothers in other nations, that we were not alone. That all came out in Vostell's second visit, of which more later.

Allan Kaprow had been planning for a long time to do a happening at George Segal's chicken farm. It was planned for May 19th, 1963, so it fell in nicely with the Yam Festival. Kaprow invited Vostell, Young and Rainer, among others, to do things.

Yvonne Rainer should be mentioned. She was the best dancer of the time, as she thought of the best things to do. She has a tall, magnificent torso, a flat face, straight hair, and Japanese proportions—short legs and arms, light build, etc. She was the leading dancer of the Judson dancers, who operated out of the Judson Church. This church was organized many years ago, and it belongs to the Baptists, one of our most conservative denominations. I would like to know what the members think of the activities that go on there. The minister is a man named Howard Moody, who seems unique in his profession in realizing how little the Christian faith has to do with our times, even among church-goers. And so he organized artistic activities at his church. Either he regards artists as members of another religion, as dedicated idealists, or as night people addicted to art as a kind of drug, or as a combination of these: I am not sure. But he and his assistant Al Carmines have associated themselves with whatever is liveliest in the arts. Knowles, Hansen and Kaprow are only three of those who have done shows there. The famous ray-gun happenings, including Dine's "The Smiling Workman," were done at the Judson Church. And recently those dancers whose work has been most iconoclastic have been working there. The famous review of only questions in The New York Times was given to Yvonne Rainer's dance recital at that church. Yvonne is beautiful—and physical. Her dances are a child's games. She is not so young: that makes her an older child, with all the sweetness that an older child, naked but for a raincoat, dancing in a beautiful

church, can have. She calls for a ball—they throw her a red rubber ball. She plays with it. She throws it to the other dancers. They run lightly, they jump and they play. They mass in geometrical forms, and they move across the performance areas in a highly disciplined fashion. Again—she dances with a man. It is a sort of embrace-the-thighs dance. She flies, he flies. They play. Suddenly she stops. She says: "I love you." He says: "I love you." She says: "I'll always love you." He says: "I'll always love you." She says: "I've always loved you." He says: "I've always loved you." She says: "I'll never love you.' He says: "I'll never love you." The music interrupts: it's the lullabye, "Schlümmert Ein," from Bach's Cantata, *Ich Habe Genug.* They glide diagonally across the stage, and the dancing resumes. Personally, I hate the dance as such, but that is partly because I have seen Yvonne Rainer. It is like a great *Hamlet,* only more so. After you've seen either, you don't need the imitations, the follow-ups.

So we came to the Farm. I exercised the audience, doing my "Lecture on the Dance," which is ancient calisthenics. Later I exhibited a marvelous snake, which some children discovered was made of rubber before they were supposed to. Vostell used a steam drill to dig a deep grave for a funeral of a television set. Young played that endless B-F fifths piece that always takes place in the back of his mind. Yvonne Rainer danced with Trisha Brown and a ball—it was a beautiful pleine-aire thing with a red ball, not a good dance, perhaps, because the sky was so much more enormous than those little girls on the long roof of the chicken house. Al Hansen went deep into the woods and threw toilet paper up into the trees in the darkest glade he could find, which made a sort of Fragonard landscape. Oh, that was a glorious day. We had a good crowd—perhaps eight hundred. And we were at our best. It was our spring.

Our summer began with Yam Day, and it is still continuing.

Yam Day was the following Friday. It was conceived as a solid weekend marathon of activity. But a twenty-six-hour performance was all we could take. It began highly organized, at about 5:00 in the afternoon. As the evening progressed, more and more deviations from the printed program began to appear, as people wanted to do more and more improvisations and unannounced pieces. Then something else began to happen: we began to tire, and we began to avoid the longer and more solid pieces. Around 11:00 we were reinforced by some musicians who had been doing an earlier concert: they were given the

use of the main concert hall, while those of us who cared went downstairs. Upstairs Max Neuhaus gave the usual diamond-and-blood performance of Stockhausen's *Zyklus*, while we sat downstairs, playing La Monte's B-F piece on viol da gambas, lutes, celli, and er-hwus. I became exhausted at around 2:00 in the morning and had to go home. I was back at seven, and I found everyone asleep on the stage, while a poet was reading the last part of his 110-page epic to a sleeping crowd. Shortly afterward, Fred Herko and some others of the Judson Dancers came in. (Poor Fred! He wanted so much to be a sort of male Yvonne Rainer! He was the most beautiful man I ever saw, but he didn't know what to do with himself. One day, a week or so before this writing (1965), he felt a little too much alone. So he left his big dog with a friend, dressed in his Sunday suit and went to see some other dancers. It was early in the morning, and they were half asleep. He was wearing a fine suit and a fine hat. And he danced around them. "Look at me," he said. "I can dance on the air!" And he danced, smiling and light as a balloon, out the window. He was killed. Fred was so much alive that it was hardly to be believed. The sun was just up, and it was a new day. And he flew, like a bird.)

At Yam Day, Al Hansen came, and *he* did things. More and more *little things.* After a while, nobody could stand it, all of these *little things.* So we all left. That ended the Yam Festival.

In the meantime, Vostell had spent every penny he could find to have an exhibition. It was at the Smolin Gallery. He had understood that they would help him, the way European galleries do. But they didn't. It was shameless, the way his show was systematically ignored. So he left, as fast as he could go, back to Europe.

The aftermath of the Yam Festival was bad. Most of us had been disappointed. I remember I could not find work; I had no money at all. And I went to the Public Library to see Ben Patterson, hoping he would buy me lunch, though he had no money either, as it turned out, and was not even eating lunch, in order to save the money for his new apartment, his wife Pyla and his child Ennis. In the U.S.A. Negros must pay more than white people for a good place to live, and this sort of thing brought real cruelty to Ben's life. Ben and I sat outside the library, and we tried to figure out what had gone wrong with the Yam Festival. We decided it was two things: 1. lack of any sort of institution backing us, and 2. everybody kept doing his little piece. These little pieces were, perhaps, each charming, but there was no sense of neces-

sity about them. Ben, even more than I, was upset by this. He doubted he would do any more pieces, and, in fact, he has done very few. The Yam Festival seems to have taken a lot of the joy that used to characterize his activity out of him. And he hardly does anything any more.

So this left us hoping Maciunas would come here, as he had said he would.

Why did we want Maciunas? There is no simple answer. We hoped, for one, that he had learned from his weakness, that his experience in Europe had suggested to him that to get bread you must ask for it, that the more you demanded, mostly the more you got. Second, he seemed to be so much more organized than Brecht or the Smolins. He could and would accept responsibility, although, as it turned out, his accepting responsibility meant that he considered one his property in the slave sense, that he felt no obligations towards one. Third, he was more aware and directed than, for example, the Smolins. He knew what he was doing; he knew why he was doing it. He knew where he wanted to go, though he didn't know quite how to get there. Fourth, he was charming. This meant that he seemed capable of healing the various splits and resentments among us. He seemed capable of spreading oil on the various troubled waters that were left after the Yam Festival, simply by his excitement over, for example, having found some gigantic rubber bands in a stationery store, which he gave to everyone he met. So Maciunas came, and we were anxious to receive him. When he arrived, in September '63, we held a meeting to prepare the ground for an American Fluxus. To that meeting came people who were deeply opposed to one another because of their experience rather than their intentions. Imagine Hansen and Brecht working together! It seemed incredible.

Enter Henry Flynt.

Flynt was not a newcomer to the scene. The son of a wealthy North Carolinian, he had been influenced successively by Cage, Young and Stockhausen. He had written "chance" poetry (of rather undistinguished quality), played quite accomplished jazz saxophone, delved into higher mathematics and purely expressive music before he began to develop his own ideas. These came out of the conception that the only valid part of art was the purely private and indefinable little thing that struck one. Everything else was "serious culture." To distinguish this activity, which he affirmed and which was implicitly useless and unnameable, he called it first "acognative culture," and later "brend."

The world of "serious culture" was, in his view, at least mistaken, if not criminal, and all the artists ought to be put to work doing socially useful tasks. At the time of his lectures at the AG Gallery, he had not yet clearly formulated these ideas in a social setting; yet the conception of social waste and useful work was there and clearly oriented toward political activity of some kind. He gave lectures, wrote various essays in a style so tortured that, by comparison, Hagel would seem a miracle of conciseness. However, about late 1961, Flynt made contact with the ultra-radicals, with groups to whom the Communist movement was a more progressive variant of the Social Democrats. Finally he located a group known as the Workers' World, who apparently are secessionists from the Socialist Workers' Party (Trotskyite), and who stand somewhere to the left of both Trotskyites and Maoists. They seem to be so ideologically pure that they are unable to do anything but demonstrate and demand of the police that they be beat up. (The police are usually all too willing to cooperate.) This undoubtedly preserves their ideological purity, but it does not increase their effectiveness. Having found a group emotionally to his liking, Flynt proceeded to amalgamate his own ideas with theirs. They, in turn, appear to have found that his line on culture dovetails with theirs, and to have accepted him as their cultural spokesman.

So Maciunas was here. He was confronted by us, who wanted to work with him as an institution, because we loved him, because we respected his abilities as a graphic designer, and because he was able to attract a sizable group of collaborators. On the other hand there was Flynt, who had worked with Maciunas as long as anyone else, though he had long since give us up as, at best, tools of the devil. Because of Maciunas's interest in planning and projecting baroque schemes that came to nothing, he offered Flynt much advice on strategy (at which he was perhaps good) and tactics (about which he was positively infantile). For example, on the strategy end of the action, he got Flynt to see that the kind of aesthetic attitude Flynt advocated could be used equally well by a fascistic state as by an ultra-Maoist one, and that this would be a problem.

The change of emphasis that this brought about was disappointing to those of us who found Flynt's ideas interesting and even healthy, in a society that chased its tail in a morass of good and bad, earnest and trivial culture, attempting to escape itself and to avoid the possibility that anyone might really want to do or say anything.

The new strategy that Flynt and Maciunas worked out was, 1. to confine Flynt's concept of work taken aesthetically to a future, more communistic state; 2. to avoid purely propagandistic cultural work, even as a temporary concession, on the assumption that it, a. tended too much to develop a hunger for more and more "serious culture," and, b. was less effective as a means of promoting the cause than demonstrations and pamphleteering; 3. instead, to ally oneself with traditional and folk arts of the colonial peoples, especially, since it was in America, with jazz, on the assumption that this would somehow increase one's solidarity with the struggle against imperialism. For this reason, Flynt and Maciunas founded "Action Against Cultural Imperialism."

Of course, this wasn't even good Marxism. It certainly had no working-class character, and it absolutely denied that fundamental precept of any Marxist attitude toward art, that art expresses the class that produces it. To promote the Cambodian pi-phat gamelan style, as opposed to occidental marches, scarcely promotes the Cambodian struggle against Western (or Annamese?) Imperialism, though the style should by all means be preserved as part of the Cambodian national heritage. In fact, one might argue that Cambodian gamelan music promotes feudalism and those very forces in Cambodia who favor Annamese or U.S. interests, and that band music tends to break the grip of the Confucian ethic on the people. With an issue more at home than this—with jazz—the situation is, I believe, fundamentally the same. The men who are going to win freedom for their people in the South do not read Le Roi Jones's jazz reviews, nor do they admire Ornette Coleman or Miles Davis, though they may be flattered by these men's attentions. One suspects that they listen to their own styles of singing, of band music, of juke box music, of blues, and with an ear that is much more attuned to implications in a song than ours, so that their songs' implications would bypass us entirely, and their most militant song might seem like an old church hymn to an outsider like myself.

So, while Maciunas was organizing an American Fluxus Festival, he was also, in the same room, at the same time, almost in the same breath, working on his "Action Against Cultural Imperialism." We did one pre-Festival concert, a sort of ironic appearance in front of the American Perfumers Association. Their quarterly banquet was to take place; at the last minute, their entertainment fell through. Maciunas's sister, who belonged, remembered that he was connected with some

sort of "musical group," and we were invited to perform. Maciunas, Knowles, Mac Low and I were wined and dined. My main memory of the dinner is of a charming old man who boasted that he was making an artificial vanilla out of synthetic rubber, which was so cheap that in a year it would be impossible to buy any kind of natural vanilla. But after the dinner, we laid it on thick. It would have been a difficult concert for any audience. Some left, and the others became petrified—sat in their chairs and remained silent, dumbfounded, rigid, till after we had gone. Actually, they were not a bad audience. The real irony, however, is that this had become such an appropriate audience for Fluxus.

Mac Low was the first to blow the whistle. He quit, forbade Maciunas to do any of his pieces or to use his name for any purpose whatsoever. After that, many things soured. We were no longer interested in working hard for Maciunas. He seemed at all times to be expressing complete contempt for our time and our energy. For example, I was asked to cross-check a group of mailing lists I was given, to throw out duplications, etc. It was a large mailing list, and the job took nearly two weeks. Maciunas took one look at the mailing list, decided it was too large, and discarded it, asking someone else to do the same work with a few smaller lists. Second, Maciunas's shameless announcing of publications that did not exist, projects that would never be done, promises that would never be kept had become utterly ridiculous. It was disappointing to the artists involved, and it was a very neat way to sabotage the interest of a lot of people who wanted to know what we were doing—who sent inquiries, or worse, sent money and orders, which were, of course, never acknowledged.

The Fluxus Festival was finally done, in the back room of Maciunas's studio, where it was attended by curious artists and personal friends. Since Maciunas's studio was downstairs from my studio, and since many of my friends continued to have hopes for Maciunas, I decided that I would do whatever I was particularly asked to do for the festival, as long as the invitation came from a friend or involved the work of a friend. I would do no work of my own that I was asked to do, unless it could be done with no preparation at all, and I would contribute no time to any Fluxus project. A good many formerly active people seem to have adopted this view, and that was the second stage of the phasing out of Fluxus.

In the spring of '64 Vostell came to America again. Once again he met

with painful indifference from the established groups that were most inclined to chauvinism. But in the course of this visit a regroupment began to take place. Vostell made an alliance with Kaprow. This led to a joint lecture, which was frankly a sad affair in which each asked the other artificial questions that led to premeditated intellecutal murder and to the tracing of the birthdays of ideas. But this was followed by the long and absolutely brilliant décollage happening, "YOU", at a suburban house with a stable, swimming pool and abandoned tennis court. I will not describe this happening here, since it is detailed elsewhere. But its success led to a realization among many of us that large work was now necessary, nay, imperative, to destroy the effect of Fluxfussiness, Fluxtininess and Fluxabsurdity. In Fluxus, the tendency had been growing increasingly Yam-like even at the Carnegie Hall concert in June, which climaxed the American festival, and was its sunset. "Now this person does his *little thing*, now that person does his *little thing*, now another *little thing*, now another *little thing*." That last Fluxus concert gave the effect of looking at somebody's postcard collection.

Based on the success of "YOU," Kaprow was enabled to put together the performers and organization to produce, on a professional basis, Stockhausen's *Originale*.

Originale has certain structural points in common with Kaprow's *18 Happenings*, which it postdates. Kaprow discussed this with Stockhausen, and was given permission to do the piece. Neither did Stockhausen see fit to duplicate the style or the effect which had been used at the premier at Köln, so long as the score was followed. Kaprow therefore brought together a huge ensemble—perhaps forty-five strong—of many of the most seasoned and sophisticated artists, performers of happenings, and creators of happenings, along with first-rate musicians. The result was a spectacular and exuberant circus, Kaprow at his very best. Naturally Kaprow included various people who had been involved in Fluxus, including Paik, Charlotte Moorman (who had produced the Fluxus Carnegie Hall concert), Lette Eisenhauer (who had performed in various Fluxus concerts) and the Japanese inventor-painter Ay-o. I also performed. I was anxious to see what Kaprow would do with Stockhausen's score, and to help with what I felt was a healthy tendency—not, obviously, because I supported Stockhausen. However, Maciunas and Flynt also had their point of view about Stockhausen. To them, he epitomized "Cultural

Imperialism," because he was 1. clearly a contributor to serious culture, 2. successful and therefore meaningful to fight, 3. apparently hostile to jazz, and 4. a spokesman for a kind of International Style in the arts, which seemed to their mentality to be colonial in outlook. I have not mentioned Maciunas and Flynt's earlier demonstrations—these were quite a fizzle. In the previous April they had demonstrated against Stockhausen and handed out a broadside so "radical" that even the musicians thought it was a joke or perhaps a publicity stunt.

But there was no mistaking their seriousness at *Originale.* Their picket line was orderly, but filthy: their posters accused Stockhausen of racism. And their broadside climaxed with this line: "Stockhausen—Patrician 'Theorist' of White Supremacy: go to hell!"

So Maciunas's tactics and strategy finally bore their fruit: he embarrassed only himself and those who were left in Fluxus. Brooklyn Joe Jones suggested that maybe Maciunas ought to resign, which Maciunas, hoping for a reprieve, did, appointing Bob Watts his successor.

And so ended the second phase of Fluxus.

IX—Since 1964

In Fluxus, priorities were given to the production of the works of those whom Maciunas felt were most wavering in their loyalty, in order to encourage them. Others of the original Fluxus people felt that this was very unfortunate, that the first thing to do was to produce the work, the second thing to develop its theory, and only on the third and least important level to be involved with any politics of necessity that might arise. I experienced on my own part a sort of crisis in 1964, which had a very happy after result. As I mentioned, Maciunas had suggested that Fluxus publish my complete works. I told him that this would be absolutely impossible. In the first place, many of my works were quite unpublishable by any normal graphic means, and in the second place, there were simply too many works. So Maciunas had suggested that Fluxus publish one year's cross-section of my work. This seemed practical enough. I was delighted by the idea, so I chose an arbitrary starting point of April 13, 1962 (which was Thomas Jefferson's birthday; Jefferson is one of my favorite people in American

history), with the idea of my writing the last work on April 13, 1963, a year and a day, as they say in the old stories. All works that I had begun in that period I would complete, and it would provide a cross-section of all my work, in whatever medium, during a given year.

All the works were duly sent to Maciunas to be printed. Nothing happened.

The work was not manufactured and I needed the acting scripts. So, one day after Maciunas's return to New York, and after I had obtained for him a lease on the loft downstairs from my own studio-loft, I asked him, "When do you think this book will finally materialize?" He told me, "Sometime in middle 1965." I told him I needed the acting scripts before that, since the text included most of my recent work. His answer was that he had more "diplomatic" things to do first. So I went out and got myself thoroughly plastered. Then I went back to Maciunas's loft, picked up my manuscript, took it upstairs to my own loft and went home to Alison Knowles, to whom I was married at the time. I said, "Alison, we founded a press." She practically, well, dropped her load. Then, regaining her composure, she said, "Oh really? What's it called?" I said something foolish: "Shirtsleeves Press." She said, "Oh that's no good. Why don't you call it "Something Else"? So I did.

The name meant to me exactly what I thought our editorial policy should be—to follow the criteria that we had determined for Fluxus as well as I could, always without reference to our past commitments: every book, a new problem, and every moment or exciting new body of art, our first.

Characteristically, Maciunas, in his own history of Fluxus, gives only a chart showing people's involvement and noninvolvement on a graphic basis. Many, if not virtually all, of the older Fluxus people get cut off at this time, in 1964. He is, par excellence, a great graphic designer. We can, if we wish to be dogmatic, criticize some Fluxus publications for their zest for excessive art nouveau or Victorian typography and layout, for their constant use of baroque ornamentation. However, in the hands of Maciunas these things mostly seem merely stock in trade. The handling of these elements, the balance—this is what is most striking. Previously, starting with his return to New York in 1963, he had begun to sponsor a set of newspapers, taking over George Brecht's newspaper (which had been issued in conjunction with the Yam Festival and which was called V. Tre). Maciunas issued

about five papers under the name of *CC V Tre,* but his main interest was in performances, so the Fluxus publication itself, the *Fluxus I* year box, as it was called, only appeared in 1964. Most of the Fluxus publications have appeared since then. It was as if, once freed of the necessity to deal with a large number of artists on a human level, Maciunas was now able to work in his own way. And so, at this time, he came into his forté as a publisher.

Still, in the fall and winter of 1964 and 1965 Maciunas produced various performances in what was called The Washington Square Gallery, which was actually a large loft building converted to gallery use. My twin daughters were veteran Fluxus performers when they were only two months old, thanks to this series, though Maciunas dates my departure from Fluxus to the previous summer in his chart histories (including the one in *Film Culture's* "Expanded Cinema" issue, from 1965, where the most definitive version of his history chart is printed). So I actually performed with him in 1965, and with others in Fluxus concerts through 1969.

As Maciunas had come to the point of no longer trying to arrange for street performances or Fluxus festivals in New York, he now produced the brilliant series of publications for which, I think, he will be best remembered. Out of the perhaps one hundred items listed in his catalogs, only about thirty-five exist; but these are, without exception, magnificent. 1967 was the culminating point of Fluxus publications, just as 1962-1963 was the culminating point of the performances, speaking of course of Fluxus in the sense of Maciunas's organization rather than as a movement.

By late 1967, it had become clear to Maciunas that the real necessity was to reestablish the old rapport that Fluxus had had with its participants, and to this end Maciunas developed the idea of having a series of "Fluxhouses," as he called them. These Fluxhouses would be owned cooperatively by the people living in them (essentially artists doing works for Fluxus was the original intent), and since that time this has been the main activity of Fluxus. There have been a few publications in the form of object books or games, but otherwise, the Fluxhouse concept has been Maciunas's hoped-for tactic for reentering the arts community. We can only speculate on the reasons for his choice of strategy, which seems so improbable. It would be my guess, based on various very difficult remarks which have been made by Maciunas in interviews about the founding of rival organizations, that he assumes

the appearance of the Something Else Press has eliminated the necessity for Fluxus publications. But, of course, this is not the case, since the Press is oriented primarily toward the production of primary materials without very much emphasis on unusual format. It appears to us that format has a very active relationship with work, but that, if one wants to present works practically, simply and inexpensively, it is impossible to require too much handwork or too many implications about "what a book can be" (unless that is the main purpose of the book, as in the case of Vostell's *De-Coll/age-Happenings* or Knowles's *The Big Book).*

However, Fluxus publications are usually loose materials in boxes. If they're held together, they are held together simply, mechanically, by screws, paper clips, rubber bands, nuts and bolts. In other words, very different statements about format are served by using extraordinary ones; but by the same token it is possible for the Something Else Press to place its publications where Fluxus publications would never be able to penetrate (for example, in libraries). Furthermore, Something Else Press publications can be made infinitely less expensively than Fluxus publications, with their rather involved material orientation. Nevertheless, there is no question that while it was not the intention, it *was* an effect that Something Else Press's development led to a decrease of the necessity for Fluxus book-format involvement, in view of the fact that now many of the artists who founded Fluxus out of necessity have Something Else as an alternative outlet.

Fluxus made format into an art form, and as formalistic art the Press is not comparable to the achievement of Maciunas in his Fluxus publications: therefore there should be no sense of competition. But Fluxus has, among other things, caused us to look at all sorts of mass-manufactured multiple objects as potentially publishable art. Of course, many of us were doing this before Fluxus, but the ways in which Maciunas has done it, with amazing anonymity, has been an extremely valuable contribution to design. If one were to criticize Maciunas's contributions (and, ultimately, Maciunas is inseparable from the Fluxus organism), one would have to do it on the basis of his having introduced too much emphasis on the handmade element in publishing, just as William Morris did before. In fact, William Morris and Maciunas are extremely close, not only in their goals, but also in their interest in applying aesthetic approaches to the manufacture of all kinds of objects. This is an ideal that may take one far beyond what

any amount of paint on any number of canvases might do, since it has the possibility of affecting us in our daily lives on a daily basis.

VI—All kinds of conclusions

Now I have described where many of us came from and where we are. We do not want the same things, that is clear.

The remaining thing for me to do is to try to extend my observations on my own activities.

Since the emphasis in my work is on simple things that happen, or on moral and philosophical notions that catch my attention, there is no reason for me to emphasize one kind of work more than another. I am as much a composer as a poet or dramatist or, for that matter, printer.

Ordinarily when something takes one's attention, one keeps thinking about it till one is through with it. Therefore, it seems natural for me to make a whole string of works along the same lines. There is a series of constellations, of concretions, of musical processes, of contributions, of suspension plays, of danger musics, of lectures, and so on. These are not necessarily forms—my forms arise from my, or occasionally from my performer's, intentions. My names for the series are of no importance whatsoever, except to signal that this piece probably has something to do with that. But since something of my orientation might be clarified by explaining these names, I think I will. A constellation is simply my image of a group of things happening simultaneously—whether or not they begin or end together, at some point they overlap. A concretion is a physical manifestation of an intellectual structure, concept, or point of view. I used to just think about ways of things happening, in the abstract, and so I did a lot of constellations and concretions. But I do not think like that much anymore, and so I do not call pieces "constellations" or "concretions" anymore. I picked up the terms from common parlance, used them for my own purposes, and now they don't seem relevant anymore.

My notion of a "contribution" was of something that neither opposed nor directly derived from the structure of simultaneous events in its vicinity. The relationship was precisely that of butter and bread. I have digested this relationship pretty much, and no longer do pieces that emphasize it exclusively.

A lecture, taken aesthetically, seemed to me to be any didactic statement of a point or point of view in which there were distinct differences among the teacher, the person being taught and the material being taught. For me it was an unattractive situation, to be used only if none other seemed capable of making one's point. Therefore I have done very few lectures. Even an essay is too close to lecturing, so I do very few essays. But there is no question that it is an effective way of putting ideas into the air, so perhaps it is best not to avoid it entirely.

A musical process is simply any way of putting events into time abstractly—i.e., with the narrative and/or causal structure concealed. It is implicitly where I began, and is at the basis of so many of the things that are going on. However, when the emphasis is no longer on the system being used but on the particulars of what happens, then the musical-process aspect of the activity may be assumed, but it is less important to note it than something more specific.

A suspension play, for me, is one in which causation and sequence are suspended. I usually do this by setting the events that take place into correspondence with lighting or other environmental cues. A performer takes his cues not from something someone else says but from the change of light, from the fact of someone asking him a question, from the warmth of the air or from how well he likes something he smells. These events may take place over and over again, and they take their context from proximity. The result is that rather obstruse intellectual points can be made very striking. The quality of the piece, as in any other sort of manufacture, artistic or otherwise, depends on the quality of the material used and on the workmanship with which it is used. In a didactic piece written this way—for example, most of the longer pieces in *Jefferson's Birthday*—the method of working is to select fragments that 1. seem to exemplify the points one wants to make, and 2. are capable of adding up cumulatively to an effective statement of one's point. I seriously question whether this is any different from the method used in writing any other kind of didactic piece. However, the peculiar suitability of the suspension play for didactic use does not mean that it cannot be used for any other kind of theater piece. My first work in the form was *Stacked Deck*, a sort of procession out of a seventeenth-century book of characters. My second, the Tiger Lady episode in *The Ladder to the Moon*, is simply poetic and cumulative, without any particular end in goal—thus emphasizing the musical process aspect of the form. It is only with

The Tart or Miss America that I have begun to develop the didactic potential of the form. There I first start to suggest people as presences, to insist that a man is as he does, that he has not the slightest existential being. One thing I like best about *The Tart* is that the people we see change their being almost completely every time they are in a new situation. They are more like the people that I know than the people in any sort of narrative drama. Since then I have used the suspension play principle to make critiques of perversions of love (*Vanity Fair or Yezhovchina*), heroic interpretations of history and rugged individualism (*Tamerlane I and II*), various national characteristics, the cultural effect of war (*Nicopolis 1396*), urbanism (*City of the Dead*), and so on.

All the same, there exist, side by side with these didactic suspension plays in *Jefferson's Birthday*, pieces such as *Lavender Blue* or the middle section of *Adam and Eve*, equally based on my insistence that if you add people up they become factions while if you take them apart they become lies, and yet less antipsychological than deliberately structured, cool and autonomous, no more purposeful and no less than a Bach fugure.

The nature of purposelessness interests me very mch. It is a great source of mental refreshment to do something for no particular reason, especially when it is not interesting or refreshing. One simply becomes very conscious of nothing in particular. That phenomenon is implicit in a lot of my work. I am not so interested in the possibility of doing something gratuitous, like Paik, or in the "purpose—"that comes before the"—lessness" (without which the concept is impossible), as I am in finding a fish somewhere.

Somewhere in his *Magnalia Christi* Cotton Mather complains that when he preached to his congregation about how they had come to this continent to begin a land of righteousness and to found the kingdom of God on earth, someone in the back piped up, "Nonsense, we came to catch fish."

That brings me to my *Danger Music* series. The first tells how I began doing them. But, of course, it was just the accident of my thinking about the kinds of danger in the arts and in our times at the point when I was hoisted up that determined the entire series. The series is mostly finished now. I am not as interested as I was in doing more pieces.

But the Danger Musics are a sort of arbitrary group—a choice was made to think about danger, and it happened, and the pieces became thought up, and after a while they weren't thought up so much any more. They are, then, a sort of extension of my older idea of concretions.

"Concrete" means: "Real, not ideal; of or pertaining to immediate experience; physical, not abstract or general." If one wants one's work to be immediately striking and to avoid any of the dichotomy of an extraordinary situation—such as going to an expensive concert—as opposed to a daily sort of situation—such as walking about the house—if one wants this, one might well try to do the most concrete possible work.

Whether or not such work is art is a purely academic question; it is surely something. Nor is it, as one sometimes hears, antiart, since it is not an attack on art but a simple entity in its own right. It is perhaps, nonart, just as a baker is a nonwelder or a shoe is a nonvegetable, but to call such work nonart is not particularly relevant. When I make a piece, such as *Danger Music Number Twenty-One* (Comb Music), which consists solely of the one word, "Colored," I am suggesting a great many associations and possibilities, even the possibility of provoking perhaps a beautiful vaudeville, so that we are back in the situation where beautiful art may be provoked by my nonart, which is the traditional relationship between a painter and his subject matter, to choose an obvious example.

Since the point of many other pieces is not aesthetic but intellectual, these might be described best as nonart producing more nonart, using means conventionally associated with art. But it is more to the point just not to pay much attention to the art-ness or nonart-ness of work. I think art is as art does, and that's that as far as I'm concerned. There is no relationship between the degree of concreteness of work and its quality or its effectiveness. On the one hand, one project I have going at the moment is a collection of games that are suggestive of social points of view—*Tag,* in *Jefferson's Birthday,* is one of these; I have as another project a large set of fugal textures for the theater called just that, *Fugal Textures.* I am not sufficiently interested in formal consistency to allow any technical consideration to keep me from doing whatever seems appropriate at a given time. I do not care deeply what I do as long as it seems constructive or, even more, suitable.

That is why I like to think of what I do as just sort of generally a folk-cultural activity, like the songs we all have sung and the games that we have played.

One very warm April day in 1959 I was sitting, scarcely even thinking. Over the rooftops the smoke came slowly up from the factory chimneys. There wasn't much sense to it, but it was very quiet and hot and nice. I was reflecting that not all axioms apply to art all the time. In art the whole does not have to be greater than any of its parts or equal to their sum. I began to think about doing a piece which, by its directions, would be independent of the numbers of people doing it, of its duration, even of its own quantities of material. It should be free to grow and to shrink and to use its own life for its own suggestions. I did the piece very simply. I wrote simple material on cards, and I wrote directions separately. If a lot of performers wanted to do a long performance, they could look over the cards on which the material was written, see what kinds of things were used, and do more of the same. Or the cards could be divided among a large number of people and repeated extensively. On the other hand, one performer might like to do a very short performance. So he could perform just one card. All are equally good ways to do the piece. I was thinking about all this, and my idea split. One half later became the very boisterous theater piece, *Clown's Way.* The other half, *Some Quiet Chimneys,* turned out to be a poem that simply reflected the quiet of the day and the rooftops and the smoke.

I know what I want to do next—more movies. Movies are completely untapped as yet. The narrative movie begins to become increasingly hackneyed, no matter how fine the acting or how gorgeous the color. The art movie is isolated from its society because it assumes an ethic that is hostile to any socially productive activities. I have in mind a whole slew of people from Jack Smith to Truffaut, from Stan Brakhage to Resnais. The violence of universal sexuality, of a life devoted to poetic activity and of the severance of personal feelings is both the underlying tie between these people and the reason why this work seems rather limited in its scope, more suitable to those who advocate a life of violence for its own sake—leading perhaps to a march on Rome—than to any sort of devotion to the end of giving all men meaningful lives through meaningful and rewarding work. The art movie has come to wear a black shirt, its philosophy is Nietzschean. So standardized is this that any film that does not insist on the sublime,

the universal sexuality and poetic violence, is stigmatized as an anti-film. It is very easy to run around waving a camera, shooting the dead, the destroyed and all kinds of exhibitions of emotionalism short-circuiting. The resulting kind of apocalypse seems more vital than it is because of its nervous energy. But when the result is not charming or titillating or raucously funny (fine qualities, I think, but rare), it is socially nauseating. There is nothing revolutionary in refusing to say no (or yes either), in denying that the sky is blue because one claims to speak a different language. This is, in fact, precisely what the makers of the art films are doing, and it is precisely what the Goldwaters and Welches, like the Hitlers and Mussolinis before them, would like them to do. There is no challenge to the mind in boasting of one's social impotence. The Smiths and Brakhages, I predict, will wind up by being supported vigorously by the Fords and Rockefellers for a while, until the fashions change.

The result is that the film has yet to begin. The film, as an art, is not a mauled and scorched, a chemically and physically altered, a raped object; it is a means of documenting what can be seen by a single, objective-by-definition eye-lens. One shows the eye what one loves, what one hopes and dreams, what is terrible or beautiful, anything, anything at all. A camera is innocent. It just keeps on looking, so long as one winds it up or flicks its power switch, while the filmmaker just notices and thinks and considers.

Therefore I am going to do lots and lots of film work, among other things.

One hopes to draw the mud, somehow, from the water.

But a century that began with the end of the U.S. Civil War and the supremacy of a kind of culture suitable to another age is fast ending. This is the time our fathers hoped for. We flowers thrive on compost heaps. And some of us may turn out to be trees. The more trees, the bigger the forest.

We have many lives to live, among us.

Originally written 1963-1965.

Newhall, California
May 21, 1970

[1]John Malcolm Brinnin, *The Third Rose* (Boston: Little Brown & Company, 1959) p. 324.
[2]Gertrude Stein, *Narration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1935) p. 19.
[3]Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, "Doppo il Teatro Sintetico e il Teatro della Sopresa..." in *Noi, Rivista d'Arte Futurista, Numero Speciale* (Rome, 1924).
[4]Robert Creeley, "Air: 'Cat bird singing..." in *Black Mountain Review* 6 (1956) p. 164.
[5]Joel Oppenheimer, "The Rain" in *Black Mountain Review* 5 (1955) p. 34.
[6]Joel Oppenheimer, "Un Bel Di" in *Evergreen Review* 7, 28 (1963) p. 86.
[7]Robert Filliou, "Père Lachaise No. 1" in *phantomas* 38/40 (Brussels, 1963) p. 22.
[8]Tristan Tzara, in "Inquiry among European Writers into the Spirit of America," in *transition* 13 (Paris, 1928) p. 252.
[9]Morton Feldman, "Dr. Schuller's History Lesson," in *Kulchur* 9 (1962) p. 88.
[10]Morton Feldman, "Sound, Noise, Varèse, Boulez" in *It Is.* 2 (1958) p. 46.
[11]Dick Higgins, *100 Plays* (New York: Richard C. Higgins 1961).
[12]Dick Higgins, *The Musical Wig* (New York: Richard C. Higgins, 1961).

Postscript to Postface: Fifteen Years Later

Time ain't waitin' for nobody. Some of my friends and colleagues, discussed in "Postface," have stopped making art processes. Køpcke and Maxfield are dead. Happenings got absorbed into a newer tradition—Art Performances. Fluxus, which wasn't a "group," has become one, somehow, as the people continued to know each other and to work with each other, and as common characteristics emerged among the group—the games and gags, the minimalist and highly objective (more than impersonal) styles. Beat and Black Mountain poetry fused—I was, I find, quite right in discussing it as a single style, the "Going Thing" School—and converged into the St. Mark's in the Bouwerie style of the 1960s, best remembered now for Anne Waldman's and John Giorno's op-pop frame of reference. But the break that I detected then in what *we* (our people, whether they knew it or not) were doing after, roughly, 1958—as being qualitatively differ-

ent in conception and teleology from the art and music and literature that had come before (and which still exists as an invalided entity, supported by transfusions of dollars and media-blessed prestige: the best poems of the 1950s are being written today by John Ashbery & Co.)—that break was more profound, even, than I could realize when I wrote "Postface." Analyzing its implications for art history and theory has been my main preoccupation, apart from my art work itself, during these years. My findings and theories are in a new book, *A Dialectic of Centuries*, the final sum-up of which is also an essay in this book, "An Exemplativist Manifesto."

"Postface" itself has an interesting history. It was written as part of my feeling that an artist must not only create his work but also, if that work presents any difficulties, create a conceptual environment or paradigm in which its difficulties can be surmounted. Maciunas, the organizer of Fluxus, seemed to take a very emblematic view of our history: naturally my work, which belongs to many worlds at once, confused him. I felt it might, similarly, confuse other people. He had invited me to collect a full year's worth of my writing (to publish my complete works, which he had offered to do, would have been unfeasible, I felt)—so I chose April 13th, 1962 as my starting date, which turned out to be Thomas Jefferson's birthday: thus the title of my projected book, *Jefferson's Birthday*. As the collection evolved, I found myself explaining more and more history to Maciunas and others, and finally decided that I should make a full essay of it, which set down my commitments and views within a broader context. Thus it became a "Postface" to *Jefferson's Birthday*, to be published with it, back-to-back in one volume, so you would have theory on the one hand, practice on the other. Alas—Maciunas was ever just one step ahead of the creditors. And moving all the time kept him broke. He returned to America in 1963, and took a studio downstairs from my own, at 359 Canal Street, where he had a "Flux Shop," gave Fluxus festivals and published Fluxus books, which were always tiny, since that was all that could be afforded.

I gave him my manuscript around June of 1963, but heard not a word until November, when the book might be expected to have been produced. Finally, I cornered him: "When!"

"A year from next spring."

Disaster. I went out and got drunk. Then I came back, took the manuscript upstairs to my desk and went out to get a little more

drunk. In the wee small hours I stumbled home to Alison Knowles, and announced that we had founded a press: I'd do the book myself.

"Really," she said. 'What's it called?"

I didn't know. I said something feeble, like "Shirtsleeves Press."

"That's no good," she said. "Call it something else."

And so was founded the Something Else Press. The name was written down that night, and in the morning I nursed my hangover and struggled along—delighted by the new project and writing my "Something Else Manifesto." The name pleased me. Whatever the Going-Thing types would do, I would do "Something Else." Automatic expulsion of the trendy and fashionable types from my publishing house.

And, in due course, *Jefferson's Birthday/Postface* appeared, a 384-page monster (in terms of trade publishing, anyway), which set the stage for the next development of Happenings and Fluxus into the ferment of the mid-sixties. The Press did rather well for itself; it introduced Concrete Poetry to America in the form of the first substantial anthology here, Emmett Williams's *An Anthology of Concrete Poetry*, which sold 18,000 copies. There was a series of inexpensive pamphlets, large works by John Cage, Marshall McLuhan and Claes Oldenburg, as well as fascinating books, which the public barely discovered, by George Brecht, Robert Filliou, Toby MacLennan and even myself (ah well). When I was told by those who should have known better that what I was doing (or, rather, what my Fluxus friends were doing) was "dada," I decided to show that we weren't by showing what dada *was*, minus the historicistic prattlings of Herr Doktors and Amurrican Art Historians, by reissuing the *Dada Almanach*. We also reissued all the works of Gertrude Stein that we could, to steal her back from the rarebook freaks and collectors who had appropriated her. It was a very heady time.

As for "Postface," I updated it to 1965 for a book that Vostell was doing in Germany: the whole thing was to be done by him. In fact, the book used only a whiff of the earlier essay, though they did use my update. The result was a very weird hybrid with weird proportions. *Jefferson's Birthday/Postface* went out of print in 1967 or 1968. I kept thinking I would like, if it ever were reissued, to do the whole text: but now that the time has come to do it, I see that a cow doesn't need two extra legs to walk—six legs are no better than four. The history of Fluxus after 1963 is closely tied up with the history of Something Else Press and running it two more years into the next beast serves no

purpose at all. One day a fuller history will be needed: The life of that Press (which was so much like an art movement of its own) should be told. But not now. So I've scrapped my extra pages: they're to be found in the Wolf Vostell and Juergen Becker *Happenings* (Reinbeck bei Hamburg: Rowohlt Verlag, 1965), if one must find them. I think that this version of the text has its own integrity, and there's little point in dragging it out on a Procrustean Bed. Except for a few corrected spellings and facts, and a few sentences that had been scrambled, it is now the 1963 version once again.

So much has changed, and so little. Feldman is still grinding out the same music now as he did then, and my objections are still the same. Some of the Black Mountain poets, notably Jonathan Williams (who, for instance, has done some outstanding concrete poetry), have stopped doing the Going Thing and have emerged with considerably greater stature.

Something Else Press is gone now. I left it in 1973 to concentrate on my own work, and the people who took it over had no instinct for fund-raising and grantsmanship or for major sales. It went bankrupt in 1974. I started a new publishing operation, Unpublished Editions, which is completely a co-op. Each of the seven members does his or her own books, we have a joint catalog and other such group efforts, and each is paid as books are sold. So each book is unique to its artist as an autograph is unique: no conservatising editor meddles. In a way this extends the old Something Else Press vision.

But Fluxus too continues. Old members have left and others join: The movement, if that is what it is, has never fractionated and ruptured à la dada or surrealism. Maciunas is not a pope. We work separately and we work apart; thus nobody gets claustrophobia. The program is broad enough to allow for a good deal of variety. It would have to be.

I heard a young writer say, the other day, "Oh, she's a *pure* poet," by which, I take it, she (whoever she was) was not doing intermedia of any kind—sound poetry, visual poetry or whatever. Before Fluxus and the kinds of things that are discussed in "Postface," I don't think there would have been such a strong sense that one *could* be pure, as such—one wouldn't know what it meant. "You don't know what good health is until you're sick," as the saying goes. Well, not, of course, that Fluxus or Happenings are sick (or were). But their sensibility has spread far beyond the people who had first hand experience of them;

they have become points of reference. And the cultural shifts of which they are a part have continued. With that in mind, one can, I think, correctly read or re-read my "Postface." I was writing about a small world that has since grown.

New York
9 December, 1977

An Exemplativist Manifesto

i-the model

The artist, the notation and the work, and the audience—these are three separate settings or complexes, normally separate though in some specific works or media they may converge upon each other.

The audience constructs, by means of the notation and work, an image of the set of possibilities intended by the artist. Any realization of such a set will necessarily be to some extent arbitrary, and is therefore an example rather than a fixity. For this reason, such art can be called exemplative. The emphasis rests on precisely what the work is an example of, and not on the precise structure or realization of the work.

ii-the dialectic

In exemplative art, the action is always between: it cannot take place at any one pole without the conception of another. It is therefore

between the heart and the mind,
between the personal and the objective,
between the unitary and the general,
between the warm and the cold (as Af Klintberg put it),
between the water and the stone.

The idea is developed through its embodiment in the actual work, and thus the work is an instrument for conveying a thought-and-feeling complex by implying a set of examples of it. The audience perceives the work, not merely as an end in itself, but as a communication of the entire range of possibilities of an aspect of reality. The profundity of such a work cannot be merely profundity of thought or irony, as in most recent art (since Eliot and the neoclassics in poetry, the antiromantic reaction in music—and ranging up through the recent structuralist movements in all the arts), but will also have to reflect the profundity of feeling as well.

iii-the artist

Because of the sterility of most recent art, in which innovation has been purely a technical matter, the artist has become dehumane-ized, and has experienced deep ambiguity about how he or she should behave—leading, in some cases, to despair and inactivity or to a failure to escape from a mold, to a cookie-cutter approach to art (for instance, the music of Morton Feldman) where the artist acts like a robot and grinds out endless replicas of his once-strong works—for fear of losing his identity. That we are living at the end of an age (the normative and usually pessimistic view) is an illusion caused by the passéist habit of cannibalizing works of the past, including of the artist's own past. What the new artist will cannibalize is sher own life (his or hers), and this is always fresh and changing. The old artist worries who he is; the new one observes shemself among the shoes and makes a work of it. For the new artist, the past lives in the present, and works from the past take on new meaning as models of present experience. One finds

Goethe in the post office and brings him home for dinner. We—the new artists—are our own people—neither in competition with our ancestors, nor responsible either for their sins or their greatnesses. We are pan-tribal, pan-professional. No single identity can suffice for the new artist, whose eye is on sher (his or her) life and not on inherited or arbitrary boundaries.

We *are* according to what we do, not according to the bounds of the roles that limit our fathers' views of themselves. We epitomize the world, and by so doing we come to epitomize ourselves—becoming both ever more deeply ourselves and ever embodied in the world, and are thus unalienated from our brothers and sisters: When we offer ourselves, it means. It is not the passéist participation in a professional charade.

We enact: We do not act in the sense of playing roles but stress the interplay among many roles and ourselves. One role could never be enough for this—roles become media for developing ourselves and our work.

The art form, par excellence, of the passéist—of what I call the "cognitive" person (named for sher psychological attitude)—is the fiction, the illusion. For the cognitive person, reality must be interpreted and colored—it has no place, raw, in art.

Our arts, on the contrary, seem always to involve some aspect of performance—

we enact,
we do,
we perform or commit aesthetic acts.

We commit an act of education when we teach or when we present our live manifestations. Even our most static works are the result of such acts and, thus, have a performance aspect—the poem, the painting, the collage and the photograph, the unnamed complex work that lies in the intermedium between these—there is always interaction among

their elements;
their elements perform roles—

the action of the artist (what it involved for the artist to produce the work) is always sensed in the work, and so the work can never be a fixity. Like life itself, our works are impure—always the centers of emanations of experience.

iv-the work

Our art is always the center of an emanation of experience, unlike cognitive art, which embodies statically and without implications, except for other cognitive works. It revels in its virtuosity and attempts perfection. But perfection, while not to be despised (unless it is merely an end in itself), is only one of the possibilities. In place of perfection we offer implicativeness as a goal—the work has not only its own integrity but suggests a whole vast range of further possibilities. The dancerly dance is always deadly—but the dance of life is very rich. We do not love a Gertrude Stein play or a Shakespeare sonnet or a recent John Cage orchestra piece because it is perfect—but because we feel our lives in these works. They do not symbolize life (which would be just another form of static embodiment), but they actively reflect it—suggest and propose things about it.

Such works cannot be ends in themselves. Instead they always participate in the ongoing process of sharing an experience. Among the criteria for evaluating such works must always be the efficiency and force of their suggestion and proposal.

Since this process stresses not the single realization as the work, but the dialectic between any single realization and its alternates, for many exemplative works the method and format of the notation are far more crucial than in the works of the cognitive past. The look of the written text, the graphic element of the musical notation, the prescription for the dramatic presentation—in exemplative works, much of the meaning interfaces here with the work as the final audience will see it. In fact, in such a system all form is a process of notation, among other things. The audience sees or senses the bare bones of the work along with the flesh, so the clarity with which these bare bones are assembled becomes a criterion of the value of the work. And the act of such assembling is part of the work—another performance aspect of it, even if, for instance, the finished work is a painting and thus immobile. A truly exemplative fugue or sonnet would have to imply the essence of many fugues and sonnets—all of them, even. This emphasis on the form-notation complex leads to a sense that, if any notation is a prescription for action (or from action), and if the action of any work should tend to be unique (since every group or individual experience is somehow unique), then each form should tend to be unique for each work. The vision of the artist seeks some unique

embodiment—suggesting in the particular the whole set that is exemplified. In exemplative art, then, the artist will always be involved in an ongoing process of inventing new forms—his works and styles will seem, to a cognitive observer, to be terribly chaotic and inconsistent. To us there will be a consistency, however; it will lie in the kinds of materials that are chosen to express and epitomize the artist's reality, and in the things about the forms that he invents which stay the same—the artist of the goat, the artist of the shoe, the artist of the small. This may well lead to a new imagism.

But make no mistake here: Neither the process nor the notations are ends in themselves in being fixities. A notation made to be a notation, for instance, without its being specified what or how it notates, is not a fixity (like a painting one painted merely to paint a painting)—because it implies not one but an enormous variety of possible interpretations.

The question for an audience to ask, then, when confronted by an exemplative or other non-cognitive work, is not the usual "Who did this and why," but the newer "What is this, and how does it work?"

v-the audience

Each member of the audience can answer these last questions (and so get beyond the questions to actual enjoyment) only by asking three further questions:

1) What is the artist sharing? This corresponds to—but does not equal—subject matter in our traditional arts.

2) What possibilities does this form make actual? In practice this may well be the first question asked—confronted by a work, most of us have to discover a motivating process before we can tell what we are supposed to enjoy. Few of us are satisfied entirely with our own interpretations, which may miss possible areas of enjoyment—"I like that dance because I like to watch fat women move" sounds strange and incomplete.

3) For whom and what, and to whom is the artist speaking? This seems secondary, but in practice it is a necessary stage in incorporating a work into one's own reality—"Is this for me, or is it for someone else? Is it part of my world, or is it academic to me?"

The audience that asks such questions would be the perfect one—the one the artist must always use in sher model, mentally, since it can gain the maximum impact from sher work. Though artists (especially composers) like to claim they cannot predict an audience and

therefore must ignore the question, who would want to do a work that nobody, even oneself, could be aware of? Can an art exist like a tree falling in the wood with nobody to see it? Wouldn't it, too, seem incomplete? Thus an artist's conceptual model always includes an ideal audience, usually a projection from one's own experience—"I write for myself and others" was Gertrude Stein's formula, written in her notebooks. And by identifying these key questions, which an audience for exemplative or other non-cognitive art should have at hand, the artist and educator are able to begin to deal with the problems of developing such an audience.

vi-the psychology

Traditional psychology in Western art is geared
to winning,
to moving,
to convincing,
to delighting,
to amusing,
to impressing, and
to the common denominator of all these, to controlling the audience. Thus the artist in any medium becomes as much a strategist as he is an artist. Thus he or she becomes sher own fiction, with sher eye on shemself and on sher role and its potential—it is in this sense that I have called any such artist "cognitive." This was true of virtually all Western art between the Renaissance and the late 1950s, when the social and cultural revolutions of our century finally broke our historic mentality down—precipitating a time of tremendous ferment, from which only now are some of the clear outlines of things to come emerging.

Many of us—increasingly, most of us—are post-cognitive or even non-cognitive in our outlook: this is a dominant phase of the post-modern experience. Obviously it isn't just the artists but almost every person who has come of age since the late 1950s (and many of those who came of age before that watershed time) who revels, for instance, in the affirmation of sher identity through doing a vast variety of things, conducting multiple careers and taking on many more roles than our parents would have dared. In our organizational struc-

tures—in our sexual politics and means of earning a living, for example—we have looked for and often found far more flexibility than our parents would have felt comfortable with. Communes, the hippie movement, the cult of the unwed mother—these are only very superficial and, usually, middle-class expressions of a need that goes far deeper and cuts across all classes and sexes—to increase the options open to us. We would feel utterly stifled—in fact, some of us do—if we had to live up to the roles our parents knew. Their fears of going beyond themselves, their guilty feelings about survival and their successes and failures—we understand them (though perhaps our children won't), but they are not ours. We have no fear of becoming; our thought processes are meditations (for our parents, the purpose of meditation was medicinal—it was to clear the mind and restore perspective. It had to be slow, for fear of losing control. But we begin where they left off—we need not control in order to experience, so we can meditate at any speed and virtually in any situation)—"meditations," they are, in the sense that they are liberated processes of thought and feeling, as opposed to directed ones. We are quite capable of experiencing these as emptiness and beyond concrete conceptibility. All this adds up to a new mentality, at least for the Western world.

Exemplative art is merely the first art to reflect this new mentality. It is not done only by self-proclaimed exemplative artists—the only one of those, to date, is myself, since I coined the term. But I coined it to describe what many of the new artists are doing—and if some of these choose to use the term, fine, I'm glad it's useful. But other arts with other names will come along, reflecting the new mentality, the movement into which is irreversible—we cannot erase, even if we want to, what we know (and know we know). There have been other arts reflecting this new mentality—but not in Western culture, at least in recent times. The search for siblinghood, rather than some naive, Luddite search for an innocent nature or some quest for the exotic, explains the new centrality, among us formerly privileged Westerners of this world—among white males, especially, it's interesting to note (how few female contributors there are in *Alcheringa*, the main art magazine expressing this search!)—the new centrality of the arts of ancient times, other cultures and the tribal societies. This is no mere exoticism: nothing stays exotic when it has been experienced for any length of time. Rather it is a movement away from the negativity and fear and guilt of our parents and into new alliances and less alienated relation-

ships—by means of the arts as media for exchange. Our involvement as Westerners in such an exchange involves a new dialectic, which we then project onto our whole aesthetic experience—we must learn in order to teach, we must teach in order to learn. This explains the didactic element so common in post-cognitive art.

vii-some conclusions

Should a list be prepared of exemplative artists? I see no need for one. Such artists, reading this text, will recognize themselves—and non-artists, thinking of what I have said, will recognize exemplativism in art that they already know, especially in very recent art. A list would seem definitive—and one would wonder who had been left out. Manifestos of the past were written as part of the journalism of launching a career or a movement—but this one is to call attention to what is involved in a new mode of work which has already been under way for some time—to mark and hail the value of a groundswell that has developed into a huge wave.

But there are still cognitive people around, and for them exemplative art will remain bewildering, uncohesive, insubstantial. Though we can understand and appreciate them, they cannot appreciate us, at least on the gut level. They copy our rhetoric to seem far out—they trope their tropes and take themselves very seriously indeed. But it's the seriousness of a terminal disease—not the seriousness of a prisoner writing his first sonnet or a composer working out some new form for epitomizing sher deepest sonic experience. Far out toward what? Toward eccentricity and alienation—no wonder, then, that they speak of "late poetry," of art as clinamen and misprision. It's all they dare accept of themselves.

But such people control the media: we do not. They thus are in a position to determine the economics of our lives, which we are not. Our strategy must therefore be geared toward our survival—the rest can come later.

This means that we must use the pudgies' resources when these are offered, but we must also remain independent of them, since they can be withdrawn at any time. If we teach, it must be without the sense of being confined to a teacherly role—it must be with some degree of contempt for the limitations of the teacherly professions. If we work in

the art industries—in publishing, in museums or galleries, for printers—we must similarly maintain our independence from the assumptions that the pudgies—the cognitives—would like to force on us, and must move wherever possible toward more open-ended roles for these organizations. We must gear ourselves for the conversion, ultimately, of *all* professions into media.

Beyond such oblique cultural guerrilla warfare, our strategy must be such that we gain, from every act of art that we commit, some tactical advantage, even if it is only among ourselves (which gives freedom to breathe). When we make our own organizations—magazines or publishing, for instance—we must not overexpand beyond our actual audiences, or beyond our ability to reach those audiences. This is an age when the dinosaurs are dying, and the future belongs to the warm-blooded little mammals. Most of our work, for now, should be designed so that even if it were not paid for we would not be financially ruined. Survival is among our moral obligations, so long as it is distinguished from cowardice.

Thus any economic benefits that come to us from our activities—splendid! But let's remember how passing these can be and, again, maintain our independence of them. We should not risk our future freedom (on which our identity depends) by making too great commitments in the present for us safely to sustain. Pudgy believes in Santa Claus: we can't afford to.

Next: cognitivism—cognitive attitudes, taken collectively—creates the illusion that there are movements when what there is are slight shifts of popular style and format. Thus, for a cognitive person, the arts must always belong to the world of fashion—one movement is in, then another comes along to replace it—while *our* innovations, instead, simply accumulate and add to the possibilities. The cognitive artist is always in danger of being replaced, so he or she experiences great anxiety from every change. We merely include each new development in our present bag of tricks—we don't have to worry so much about our image as poor Pudgy does. If fashion changes and we have to work more modestly for a while, very well, we'll enjoy our privacy. If we were to be as professional as Pudgy or as the pudgies, and were therefore always to work for those who paid us the most, we would be working most of the time for and among people who were not interesting to us—and, in due course, our arts would suffer. We would, if we did that, no longer be sharing our experience so much as exploiting it—and

exploitation, in the long run, always hurts the personhood of the exploiter. We must always, therefore, act like dedicated amateurs (even when we are lucky enough to benefit in a major material way from some work we have done)—devoted to our freedom enough to participate only when and where it seems appropriate to do so. The pudgies' institutions are our compost heaps, good for our roots' tendrils—the source of a little dollar fertilization. But we need not take them seriously. They can mirror our light, but can't originate it. The pudgies sit on each others' boards, swapping compliments and insults, impressing each other. We don't. Nor do we

scream,
yell,
cheer, or
regurgitate exclamation points when there are envelopes to lick and seal. We need no prizes to show when we have done something beautiful. We know the dancer from the dance. No external uniform or costume is necessary to identify what we are doing. A truth that must be shouted (like an art idea that must be proved) is probably academic: Pudgy can make a career, shouting and proving—but ours is the art of vanilla ice cream. How can you prove the taste of vanilla ice cream? Can you argue that it is not peppery? Or isn't it, perhaps, better to see, by comparing the taste with our experience of the peppery—to see that it is something else?

The pudgies are losing—fewer and fewer take them seriously. Their English departments are being dismantled, merged with speech, dramatic arts and linguistics. Good riddance. Nobody—seldom even the contributors—reads their magazines, most of which therefore cannot survive except through massive grants—and they have almost no private readers, only institutions. *Antaeus, Tri-Quarterly, Poetry Magazine, Arts*—who reads such things? Who could? Mostly only the table of contents gets perused, and the magazine goes back to the shelf. Pudgy's point in writing for such a magazine, or in having a picture of his art, was really just to be included—any ideas or opinions beyond the standard, professional ones would therefore be beside the point, threatening.

Pudgy the critic knows the horses but only dares to ride the ponies. He insults the horses—but it's done from fear. He would mount one if he dared, but he's too self-conscious to manage to balance. Still—in his dreams, when his truth comes out, it's the horses he rides, not the

ponies. And in time, then, he is fickle—and forgets the ponies, as he stares at the horses.

Pudgy the artist is no different. He knows what needs doing—but is afraid to seem unprofessional, so he doesn't do it. Deeper and deeper his despair grows—and hollower and hollower his work.

Meanwhile the exemplativists are happily swimming—probably in the raw. It seems more natural that way. The water's fine and the tide is theirs—ours. "Come on in," they—we—yell to Pudgy. Who is it that stops Pudgy from coming along in for a dip?

The water we swim in is our life—and swimming is an art. Any art (from Latin: *ars* = skill) is tested here by how it works in the water. The rest is dross: "gaudyverse," the romantic poets called it. Our world is vast and growing; we always knew it, but now we're acting upon it, trying to be as complete as each of us uniquely can. We are trying to be altogether together. As the old joke says, the whole of the doughnut is its most valuable part.

—for his brothers and sisters:
Dick Higgins
Barton, Vermont
26 August, 1976

Richard Morris

Romantics and Antiromantics or an Essay on Why Robert Bly Doesn't Like the Poetry of Anne Waldman, with a Long Digression on Bukowski

In *The Seventies* No. 1, a long surrealist manifesto by Robert Bly that masquerades as a magazine, Bly makes some very interesting comments on the so-called "New York School" of poetry:

O'Hara and Berrigan, to name two extremely talented poets, are both for the most part poets of pleasure, a very different thing from being a poet of emotion. The St. Mark's poets are very aware of that distinction—this is nothing new to them—and some actually prefer the poetry of pleasure to poetry of intense emotion, and they like the eighteenth-century poetry for precisely that reason. Surely in a brutal, job-ridden, Puritanical, Billy Grahamized America, poetry of pleasure describing the six or seven lovely things you did that day, is a victory of sorts.

The trouble with all this is that the pleasures Berrigan, for instance, describes, tend to be pleasures of the conscious mind and not of the unconscious. Occasionally we find the poets in bed with a girl, but we get little feeling of the mystery of that pleasure. Usually it takes place quickly just

before the girl goes off to work. Most of the pleasures they describe are of an even more rational sort, like finding the Sunday *Times* on the doorstep, then throwing it out, or seeing a good movie with Lon Chaney in it, or eating marshmallows in a Chinese restaurant.

These poets, Bly says, lack intensity; there is a "leisure-class mood" about them; they are, he charges, "essentially the products of a rich country, who see nothing to fight for and never fight." He concludes, "This is not to say I hate their poetry; on the contrary, I enjoy it, but they long too much to stay in one part of the psyche, a fairly well-lit part, as Hemingway called it, and the result eventually has to be boring."

I can't help feeling that this reaction of Bly's is a very strange and interesting one. It is as though he were saying, "I like the stuff they write, but you really can't call it poetry." He doesn't say that it is boring—in fact he implies the contrary—yet he can't help but feel that it must become boring "eventually." This is a somewhat illogical attitude, perhaps, but it is not an attitude that is really inconsistent with Bly's approach to writing.

Robert Bly is a romantic. As such, he is preoccupied with the emotional and irrational sides of experience. When he puts down the New York poets, he is saying, in effect, that poetry, to be poetry, must be supercharged with emotional feeling. Hence instead of talking of finding the *Times* on his doorstep, Bly speaks in his poems of such things as "Chirst bound on a burning wheel," of tornadoes, of the Virgin, of murdered men hanging in trees, of an Assyrian lion. And anyone who reads his prose will find him referring to such things as "riding on dragons," the "Great Mother," of leaps between the conscious and unconscious minds. In *The Seventies,* Bly describes some odd theories he has about these leaps, and presents a somewhat perverted version of the "three brains" theory of Paul MacLean and Arthur Koestler, but none of that need concern us here. In the end, he is after just one thing: emotional intensity. If he is a surrealist, it is only because he feels that surrealism is the best method for attaining such intensity in poetry.

Although I have a great deal of admiration for Bly's poetry, and although it would be interesting to write at some length on the way he and the poets he admires mix romanticism and surrealism, this really isn't the subject that I want to pursue here. What I want to do is to look at some of the poetry that Bly objects to—and at poetry that resembles

it. I want to make an attempt to see just what qualities it has that make him so distrust it. Since it would be impossible to examine the work of more than a few poets in any kind of depth without writing a book, I will look at two superficially very different poets (whose work I also admire), and try to show that there is a quality in the work of each that makes it very unlike that of Bly. But before I do that, it will be necessary to digress in order to dredge up some terminology.

In an essay called "Tragedy and the Whole Truth," Aldous Huxley discusses an episode in the Twelfth Book of the *Odyssey*. Scylla has picked six men off Odysseus's ship and has devoured them. Odysseus adds that it was "the most pitiful scene that these eyes have looked on in my sufferings as I explored the routes over the water." Later, Odysseus and his men go ashore for the night, where they prepare their evening meal. They prepare it, says Homer, "expertly." Only after they have satisfied their desire for eating and drinking do they think of their lost companions and weep. Then, as they are mourning, they quickly fall asleep.

Homer doesn't stop to dwell on the tragedy of the situation; he simply shows Odysseus's men behaving as men would behave in those circumstances. He knows that men must satisfy the demands of hunger and thirst before they can indulge in the luxury of grief. He knows that even men who have seen their friends eaten before their eyes will lose none of their customary skills; they will still cook "expertly." And he knows that men who are fatigued enough will fall asleep even as they are mourning. As Huxley puts it, Homer is an author who tells the "whole truth."

Huxley goes on to point out that such Homeric irrelevancies would have no place in the work of a writer such as Shakespeare. Imagine, he says, "a scene showing the bereaved Macduff eating his supper, growing melancholy over the whiskey with thoughts of his murdered wife and children, and then, with lashes still wet, dropping off to sleep." Treated in this style, *Macbeth* would cease to be tragedy. To Huxley, tragedy and "wholly truthful" writing are two irreconcilable genres.

"Wholly truthful" is an awkward-sounding term. Hence I propose to substitute the term "antiromantic." I use this instead of something like "antitragic" because the latter would characterize this kind of writing in too narrow a way. A "wholly truthful" writer is not someone who chooses not to write tragedy; he attempts to describe life as it is, without romanticizing or stylizing it, without exaggerating the emo-

tional content of any experience. He's a writer who describes all the irrelevancies because so much of life *is* irrelevant. As Huxley points out, this kind of style would not have worked for Shakespeare. Neither would it have worked for writers such as Shelley and Dostoevski.

An antiromantic writer is one who renders the most emotionally charged material in a manner that betrays little emotion at all. He does not attempt to attain great emotional intensity in any particular passage of his writing the way Bly (or Shakespeare) does; he hopes to move the reader in a different way: by cumulative effect. The Homer of *The Odyssey,* the authors of the Icelandic prose sagas and the early Hemingway were antiromantic writers; Aeschylus, Donne, Henry Miller and the later Hemingway were not. Note that I am speaking only of style here. When I compare modern authors to Homer, I mean that they describe fictional events in similar ways, not that their work has Homer's epic proportions.

There must be numerous poets writing today who would be called antiromantic. But when I look for examples, one name, that of Charles Bukowski, comes to mind before any other. Of course Bukowski writes no Odysseys; he simply describes life as it happens around him. But look at how he does it, for example in the poem "the world's greatest loser," which describes a cripple who won't give up trying to beat the horses.

> he used to sell papers in front:
> "Get your winners! Get rich on a dime!"
> and about the 3rd or 4th race
> you'd see him rolling in on his rotten board
> with roller skates underneath.
> he'd propel himself along on his hands;
> he just had small stumps for legs
> and the rims of the skate wheels were worn off.
> you could see inside the wheels and they would wobble
> something awful

Or, look at the way he describes two men who have jumped out of a smoking car:

> they both stand and look at the car,
> one holding the whiskey, the other the water bag.

I hardly think that "a sound in the brush" can be considered one of Bukowski's best poems, but it is a good example of how a poet like this will handle emotionally provocative material:

the sorrow of Scibelli,
friend,
as he turned at a sound in the brush
and was bayoneted
by a man 5 feet tall who didn't even know
his name,
who then sliced his jugular vein,
took the gold from his teeth,
both ears,
then opened his wallet
and tore up the photo of a soft-faced
girl named
simply, "Laura,"
who was waiting in Kansas City
for an earless, tooth-ravished
bloody
Scibelli
who just happened to die a little earlier
than most of the rest of us,
also for
Cause
Unknown.

And is there any reason for him to get any more involved than this? After all, as he points out in another poem,

it's 99 degrees in Burbank
and those who will survive will survive
and those who will die will die
and most will dry up and look like toads eating hamburger
sandwiches at noon

Some of Bukowski's critics see all this as a kind of nihilism. But I'm not at all sure that I would agree. Bukowski is simply refusing to endow life with a meaning that it does not in the least deserve. A confirmed antiromantic, he refuses to ennoble human experience by viewing or describing it in the way a romantic writer would, or by attempting to elevate it to the level of tragedy. There's a marvelous passage in his recent book of stories, *South of No North,* that sums up everything I have been trying to say about his style.

The men at the campfire stiffened. A slight wind blew from the west smelling of horseshit. Somebody coughed. The women crouched in the wagons, drinking gin, praying, and masturbating. Twilight was moving in.

Since this is a western story, one can read that as parody. Nevertheless, it is typical of Bukowski's style. With Bukowski, whenever life tries to be romantic or tragic or noble, reality always intrudes in the form of that wind from the west that smells of horseshit. And as the two cowboys walk toward another in the twilight for the showdown, some of the women do pray, but the rest go on drinking gin or masturbating, or whatever they were doing when the ruckus started.

The closest Bukowski comes to showing any excitement is when he writes about an "old-fashioned whore" he saw in the drugstore, a dyed blonde with large breasts who was a little bit fat.

and I'm sure she drove off to someplace
magic
where people were always laughing and
the music was always playing
and the drinks were good
and the furniture and rugs were nice
and the mountains were tall
and there were 3 German shepherds on the lawn,
and when she made love you knew it

But even as we read this, one of Bukowski's rare dreams, we realize that, in effect, he is saying that dreams aren't real. Life could only be like that in "someplace magic."

Superficially, the poetry of Anne Waldman is nothing like that of Bukowski. Nevertheless, I think the notable characteristic of her poetry is that she (along with a few of the other New York poets) takes antiromanticism one step further than Bukowski does. This is why Bly reacts so strongly against her work (and Berrigan's and O'Hara's).

As far as I know, Bly has never made any comments on Bukowski's work. I can't imagine, however, that it would have the power to make him as uncomfortable as that of the New York poets does. For, however antiromantic Bukowski may be, in the end he presents a vision of life. It is at this point that his antiromanticism fails. For, in the end, isn't presenting a pessimistic vision of human experience a kind of romanticism? Bukowski starts out as a cynical, jaded, unromantic, dirty old man—and he winds up as another Schopenhauer.

The work of the best of the New York poets avoids this by having no

vision of life whatsoever. As a result they are able to produce a kind of poetry that is genuinely new and uniquely modern. They incorporate everything into their poetry. Everything they experience is interesting and worthy of being written about. When Bly characterizes them as "poets of pleasure," he misses the mark. Their poetry is not preoccupied with pleasure any more than Bly's own. He is uncomfortable with their poetry because he wants to talk about things that have some special significance for him. But to the New York poets, everything is equally significant. Homer brought in the irrelevancies; sometimes these poets seem all irrelevancy.

Several years ago, Anne Waldman published an astonishing book of poems called *Giant Night,* in which she talks of the books she's reading, of turning on the TV, of thoughts that run through her head, of almost anything. She mentions a Beatles song, buying Ted Berrigan a beret, the fact that Linda Schjeldahl's mother is in town, her opinion of Elmer's Glue-All and her reactions to ringing doorbells.

"Wake Up Poem" is just what the title implies; it's a poem about waking up in the morning. It begins with a stream of consciousness account of the author's thoughts as she awakens, and ends with a description of the things that are happening around her:

Now you drink a glass of iced coffee
Now you turn on the fan
the phone rings
Did I say the phone rings!
I meant the doorbell
Answer it
It's for us

Waldman can write poetry about almost anything. Here, for example, is an excerpt from a poem about sitting in a sidewalk cafe:

You sit and sit
And gobble your coffee
Then it's all gone
You want some more
You get some more

She can write about odd thoughts that happen to run through her head.

A true friend does not get upset
when you cannot speak to him
in any language but the language of the kangeroo

She can write about the trivialities of everyday life.

Today: write a few letters
read a few books
make a few hamburgers

Once in a great while, Waldman allows herself a romantic image. In "Giant Night" she begins:

Awake in a giant night
is where I am
There is a river where my soul
hungry as a horse drinks beside me

But before long she is dwelling on the mundane, thereby implying that it is equally interesting.

Night! Night! I wish you'd go so I could go
to the post office, the bank, the supermarket

Why aren't they open at night? I wonder
Then realize I'm not the only person who's
considered in the grand scope of daily living

In "How to Write," Waldman says,

If I were a man right now I'd be getting out of the draft
but I think I'd want to be a poet too

Which simply means alive, awake and digging everything
even that which makes me sick and want to die

I don't really, you know

The third line contains the key to what she is doing. As a poet, Waldman digs everything. Everything is equally important, equally moving. How natural it is that this kind of poetry would be misinterpreted by someone like Robert Bly. After all, it is antiromantic poetry in its purest form. Waldman and a few of the other New York poets have created a new kind of poetry that could not have been written in any age but our own.

Does this mean that it is superior to poetry such as Bly's, which is not so unique an expression of our time? Perhaps, perhaps not. I suspect that we'll be able to answer that question only after the passage of some time. I'm not even sure what my opinion will be next year.

Science, Literature and Magic

Nature and Nature's laws lay hid in night:
God said, 'Let Newton be!' and all was light.

—Pope

It did not last: the Devil howling 'Ho,
Let Einstein be,' restored the status quo.

—Sir John Squire

Of course it hasn't always been like this. Chaucer wrote a treatise on the astrolabe, an instrument used to measure the altitudes of stars; Leonardo was, if not a scientist, a brilliant engineer; Goethe was both scientist and poet. Perhaps it would be unreasonable to expect that many people today should be capable of making contributions to both the sciences and the arts; but we can at least wonder why more people are not interested in both fields, and why contemporary science is not

reflected in literature. Lucretius's *De Rerum Natura,* a poem, was a scientific and philosophical work on a grand scale. Dante's references to medieval science, if they are often mystifying today, at least remind us that he attempted to incorporate an entire world view into his work.

As late as 1800, the idea that a synthesis between science and literature could be carried out was apparently not thought to be a strange one. In a much-quoted passage in the preface to the second edition of the *Lyrical Ballads,* Wordsworth claims:

> Poetry is the first and last of all knowledge—it is as immortal as the heart of man. If the labours of men of science should ever create any material revolution, direct or indirect, in our condition, and in the impressions which we habitually receive, the poet will sleep no more than at present; he will be ready to follow the steps of the man of science, not only in those general indirect effects, but he will be at his side, carrying sensation into the midst of the objects of the science itself. The remotest discoveries of the chemist, the botanist, or mineralogist, will be as proper objects of the poet's art as any upon which it can be employed, if the time should ever come when these things shall be familiar to us, and the relations under which they are contemplated by the followers of these respective sciences shall be manifestly and palpably material to us as enjoying and suffering beings. If the time should ever come when what is now called science, thus familiarised to men, shall be ready to put on, as it were, a form of flesh and blood, the poet will lend his divine spirit to aid the transfiguration, and will welcome the being thus produced, as a dear and genuine inmate of the household of man.

Nowadays such ideas sound hopelessly naive. During the first seventy-five years of the twentieth century there have been several scientific revolutions. Every phase of our life is influenced by a rapidly accelerating technology. Physics has changed our conceptions of the nature of space and time, and has questioned previously accepted concepts of causality; new techniques in radio astronomy have allowed us to look further into the past than would have been thought possible a quarter of a century ago; molecular biology has explored the origins of life, and has, with the discovery of the structure of DNA, uncovered the mechanisms of genetic inheritance. Entire new mathematical disciplines, such as Information Theory and the Theory of Games, have been developed. The technological "fallout" that has resulted from new discoveries has been enormous; without transistors, synthetic fabrics, computers and automation, to mention just a few things, our lives would be very different. Yet today's poet or literary intellectual, like any other layman, knows about as much about mod-

ern science as the rat who is forced to run a psychologist's maze or press a bar in a Skinner box.

Some critics have professed to be astonished that such a situation should exist. In *Literature and Science* Aldous Huxley comments:

> That the poetry of this most scientific of centuries should be, on the whole, less concerned with science than was the poetry of times in which science was relatively unimportant is a paradox that requires to be elucidated and explained.

In his description of the "Two Cultures" C.P. Snow reacts with what might almost be termed indignation. According to Snow, asking someone to describe the Second Law of Thermodynamics is the scientific equivalent of asking, "Have you read a work of Shakespeare's?" And understanding basic physical concepts such as mass and acceleration is the scientific equivalent of being able to read. If Snow does criticize the scientists for their lack of interest in literature, it is the literary intellectuals who are subjected to the harshest condemnation:

> They are impoverished too—perhaps more seriously, because they are vainer about it. They still like to pretend that the traditional culture is the whole of "culture," as though the natural order didn't exist...as though the scientific edifice of the physical world was not, in its intellectual depth, complexity and articulation, the most beautiful and wonderful collective work of the mind of man.

Snow evidently considers the split between the "Two Cultures" to be an evil in itself. In the eyes of other authors, however, it is also a major cause of the malaise of our time, a determining factor in the creation of "the split personality, the unevenly adjusted man" who is supposedly symptomatic of our period.

One sometimes cannot help having the fleeting impression that these people must believe that if only we could make a knowledge of calculus a requirement for the Ph.D. in English, and somehow force Charles Bukowski and Allen Ginsberg to study quantum mechanics; that if Norman Mailer and Philip Roth would only immerse themselves in molecular biology; if only Leslie Fiedler would quit writing about Indians and learn about topology and tensor analysis; if only Paul Goodman had turned his intellect to the elucidation of the Second Law of Thermodynamics, then all our problems would suddenly disappear. Furthermore, they sometimes behave as though such a program would involve no intrinsic difficulties. Huxley, for example, tells us:

If he possessed the requisite sense of language and the impelling desire to express himself in terms of beauty, Einstein could write the most intoxicating lyrics about relativity and the pleasures of pure mathematics. And if, say, Mr. Yeats understood the Einstein theory...he could give us, out of the Celtic twilight, his lyrics of relativity.

We are not, or course, expected to ask what would have been gained if Yeats had written, not about Byzantium, but about space-time. Huxley begins with the assumption that any intelligent reader will agree that some good would result, and thus concerns himself only with arguing that it would, indeed, be possible.

We cannot deny that modern science and mathematics offer, just as much as the arts, manifold opportunities for the exercise of creative imagination. Numerous scientists and mathematicians have testified that an elegant theory will invariably evoke aesthetic feelings in anyone who is equipped to understand it. Just as the artist attempts to express the ultimate realities of human experience, the scientist tries to elucidate the ultimate realities of the physical world. Sometimes even this distinction disappears. Those who work in pure mathematics study problems for their intrinsic interest, without giving any thought to the question of whether applications even exist. It would not be unreasonable to say that such an activity is more akin to poetry than to physics; it is certainly less concerned with the material world than literature is with political content, or dance with music. And if we try to distinguish between artistic and scientific creation on the grounds that the latter is more "objective," we will still find men, such as Michael Polanyi, who are willing to argue with us.

Huxley's idea that a synthesis between literature and modern science can somehow be effected strikes us as an absurd one. However sympathetic we might be to his arguments, we feel that there is something funny about the notion. When Snow exhibits to us the width of the gap that exists between the scientists on one hand and the artists and literary intellectuals on the other, we are able to feel something of his indignation: but in the end we come away unconvinced that it really makes very much difference whether or not the literati understand what the scientists are doing.

Paradoxically, we do not find it strange that Mathematics and Astronomy should have been placed among the Seven Liberal Arts, nor are we astonished to see Dante expounding physical, astronomical and philosophical theories in *The Divine Comedy.* Although we would

be surprised if a modern playwright had his characters talk about quarks and quasars, we have no trouble accepting Shakespeare's numerous references to astrology and alchemy.

It would be unreasonable to assume that today's artists and intellectuals are lazier than their counterparts in other ages, or that they possess less intellectual curiosity. We feel that if they know so much less of science than their predecessors, it is because the modern world is somehow different. If asked how it is different, we are likely to find ourselves at a loss about how we should answer. Then, finally, we come up with some such statement as, "Well, science is so specialized that no one can understand much of it any more."

But even as we say this, we feel that it is too easy an explanation. The argument just doesn't sound convincing. If we look a little harder, we are likely to realize that this "specialization," at least in the sense that we ordinarily understand it, is a myth. Specialization has nothing to do with the great advances in science, the major theories on which everything is based. Relativity is not more specialized than Newton's Laws of Motion. On the contrary, it is more general; Newtonian mechanics is contained within relativity as a special case. We are sometimes awed by the bewildering variety of fields contained within modern physics; but if we were to consider them more closely, we would discover that virtually all of them are based on a single theory: quantum mechanics. The sciences do not deal with an appreciably greater number of basic concepts than they did a century ago; there are only more applications. In fact, it would be possible to argue that the basic ideas are fewer, that the trend has been toward consolidation. During the nineteenth century, for example, the mathematical physicist James Clerk Maxwell succeeded in combining explanations of the phenomena of electricity and magnetism within a single theory. Today, quantum mechanics is used not only to explain the structure of the atom, but is applied also to such diverse phenomena as the emission of light from a hot body, molecular binding, superconductivity and the working of a laser.

Then what we are witnessing is perhaps a kind of cultural lag? Perhaps we simply have not had enough time to assimilate the concepts of modern science. René Dubos, among others, expresses this view:

> That the earth is round, and that all living creatures that we know have a common ancestry, is not obvious either to my senses or my common sense,

yet these concepts have become integrated in my daily thoughts and thus constitute part of the fabric of my culture. It would be surprising if the general concepts of elementary particle physics and of relativity theory did not in some way become integrated in the general culture of the next generation.

One who is not blessed with prescience cannot deny that this may be possible, but he is entitled to ask why it is taking so long to assimilate these things. After all, relativity theory dates from 1905; quantum mechanics, which was developed by Schrödinger and Heisenberg in 1926, has a heritage that goes back to Planck's quantum theory of 1899. Surely by now we should at least have begun to grow familiar with these things, should have begun to incorporate them into our everyday thoughts.

All the evidence indicates that we have not. For example, one of the first places in which we would expect to find scientific concepts introduced is the genre to which we have given the not very apt name of "science fiction." Science fiction, has, of course, little to do with science; it always has been, and is still, the literature of the fantastic. Its authors habitually imagine technologies that might be possible in the future, but they rarely deal with science itself. When they do, they often become ridiculous. Ten or twenty years ago, for example, they were fond of using the "space warp," a device that would make travel at speeds faster than that of light possible. Within the framework of relativity, such an idea is nonsense; it is an absurd misinterpretation of the concept of "curved" space. There is reason to suspect that velocities greater than that of light might just be possible in certain extreme or limiting cases, but the "space warp" remains a fictitious concept.

We are reluctant to refer to *Brave New World* and *1984* as "science fiction," because they are so obviously not works of popular literature. Both Huxley and Orwell describe complex technological societies, but if there is any "science" in their books, it is psychology, not physics. Although the distinction between science and technology often becomes blurred, it is a real one. There is quite a difference between a machine and the principles on which it operates; to identify a steam engine with the Second Law of Thermodynamics is to speak nonsense. This distinction is even recognized by patent law; it is possible to patent a design for a machine, but you cannot patent a scientific discovery.

Perhaps we should consider it fortunate that literary people concern themselves with science so rarely; this way there is less gibberish

in the world. When a poet or a novelist or a critic does decide to talk about modern science, he is likely to make a spectacle of himself. Lawrence Durrell is an excellent example. In *A Key to Modern British Poetry* he tries to find connections between physics and modern literature, and succeeds only in demonstrating that he has not the slightest idea what modern physics is all about. He tells us that relativity connected Planck's quantum theory with Rutherford's and Soddy's law of radioactivity (it did nothing of the kind), that relativity "sidetracks causality" (he is confusing relativity with quantum mechanics) and that Einstein conceived of time as "a sort of time which contained all time in every moment of time" (as absurd as it sounds). Finally, Durrell admits that he doesn't know enough mathematics to understand the things he has been talking about, and tries to explain modern physics in terms of a Renaissance philosopher named Giordano Bruno, whom he supposes to have been a precursor of Einstein.

Durrell is not a complete fool. He makes some suggestions about interrelationships between physics and literature that, though they may sound strange, cannot altogether be dismissed. He begins innocuously enough by telling us that, "In ancient Greece mathematics, music, poetry and sculpture were intimately connected and the systems of education then in vogue recognized the fact." Durrell goes on, "Today we still acknowledge this underground connection between the arts and the sciences when we find ourselves using phrases like 'a man of his age' or 'the prevailing currents of thought.' "

So far, nothing very astonishing has been said. After all, the artist and the scientist live in the same world, and their lives are shaped by the same social forces. There must be some hazy kind of interaction between artists and scientists. Durrell, however, does not wish to probe into the nature of such vague interactions. He wishes to establish more definite connections, and attempts to do so by asserting that relativity and quantum mechanics have changed our conceptions about the nature of time. For Durrell, this fact has enormous implications.

> If time is, as I believe, the measure of our death-consciousness, you cannot revise your concept of it without affecting your ideas of death and life. Some of these ideas are germinating among the oracular utterances of *Gerontion;* others are to be found in the *Four Quartets* of Eliot and in the *Duinese Elegies* of Rilke no less than in Joyce's *Ulysses.* Time is one of the great clues to the modern outlook.

And several pages later he tells us:

I am not suggesting that modern poetry is constructed to illustrate the quantum theory, but I do suggest that it unconsciously reproduces something like the space-time continuum in the way that it uses words and phrases: and the way in which its forms are cyclic rather than extended.

Durrell's idea is a kind of elaboration of Wyndham Lewis's suggestion, made twenty-five years before, that the creative artist receives "blindly... all kinds of notions and formulae" from fields outside of his own, and that

Without knowing it, he receives into the central tissue of his work political or scientific notions which he proceeds to embody, if he is a novelist, in his characters, or a poet, in his technique or emotional material, without in the least knowing what he is doing or why he is doing it.

Durrell and Lewis would have us believe, then, that even though a writer may have little understanding of modern science, its concepts are nevertheless embodied in his work. If the poet is too ornery to read up on quantum mechanics, or if he is simply not willing to make use of science in the way that Dante did, it doesn't make a bit of difference; through the workings of some strange metaphysical principle it will all wind up in his work anyway, possibly in the company of any number of things that haven't even been discovered yet. (After all, we shouldn't expect that the scientist will always get there first.) The gulf described by Huxley and by Snow doesn't exist; Yeats did write "lyrics of relativity." If he thought he was writing about Byzantium or about Irish myths, that was only because he was unfortunate enough to die before Durrell's book was published.

Some similar ideas are expressed by Siegfried Giedion who, however, makes less extreme claims. According to Giedion, during the nineteenth century "the different departments of human activity steadily lost touch with one another," so that today we are faced with a separation between thinking and feeling. Of our doubts that science and art have anything in common, he says:

The question would not be raised except in a period where thinking and feeling proceed on different levels in opposition to each other. In such a period, people no longer expect a scientific discovery to have any repercussions in the realm of feeling. It seems unnatural for a theory in mathematical physics to meet with an equivalent in the arts. But this is to forget that the two are formulated by men living in the same period, exposed to the same general influences, and moved by similar impulses.

In Giedion's view, although we have forced science and the arts apart, there are still social forces at work that find outlets in both art and science, and that create unconscious parallelisms of method. The conceptions of space and time that we encounter in relativity have equivalents in Cubism and Futurism. If these relationships are not apparent to us, it is only because we have forced ourselves artificially to compartmentalize our experience.

Because Giedion's views are expressed more moderately than those of Durrell, they seem more reasonable. Yet there seems to be no compelling reason why we should accept them. Giedion says that there are analogous elements in relativity and Cubism. But couldn't we just as easily invent analogies between relativity and abstract expressionism, or between quantum mechanics and the work of the impressionists? And what are we to make of Cezanne, that forerunner of Cubism, who was an old man of sixty-six when Einstein's theory was published in 1905? Einstein was then twenty-six and Picasso twenty-four.

In the absence of any good evidence for direct connections between contemporary science and art it is best to maintain an attitude of skepticism toward claims that such relationships exist. If I am told that the things the poets are writing have something to do with the things the particle physicists are doing, I am perfectly within my rights if I maintain that I will consider this view metaphysical rubbish until someone shows some evidence. To hold this view is not to deny that there may be interactions between science and the arts, but simply to deny that there is anything obvious or special about them. Poetry has something to do with physics, but only in the sense that the National Guard has something to do with divorce laws. Science and the arts, because they exist within the same civilization, interact with one another, but no more than the other elements of that civilization.

If I am disinclined to believe that there are any "underground" connections between science and literature or art, I point to the lack of evidence for the existence of any such relationships. But this lack of evidence cannot, by itself, convince me of anything; I am convinced because I have tacit feelings that tell me that science and literature have nothing to do with one another. But why should I have these feelings? Perhaps this is the really interesting question. If it is to be answered, it will be necessary to take a look at what modern science is like, and to try to see whether there is anything that distinguishes it from the science of the past, which *has* been assimilated.

The most obvious thing is that no one understands it. Relativity is confused with the doctrine of relativism, and it is thought (mistakenly) that Einstein's theories somehow compromised the objectivity of the physical world. The layman imagines that Einstein was an inscrutable genius, great because no one could understand him; he is willing to believe such nonsense as, "There are only six men in the world who understand relativity," and at the same time he thinks that the content of the theory can be reduced to statements like, "Einstein said that everything is relative."

Actually, Einstein's 1905 paper (which, incidentally, did not have the word "relativity" in its title; it was called "On the Electrodynamics of Moving Bodies") did not introduce any ideas that were particularly difficult to understand. It is true that relativity is described in terms of mathematics, but then so are Newton's laws of gravitation and motion. The layman does not understand Einstein's mathematics, but he can't calculate the orbit of Mercury, either, or use Kepler's Third Law to deduce inverse square attraction. It is not much more difficult to explain the implications of Einstein's theory than it is to explain that Newton's theory implies that planets must move in elliptical orbits. If you don't understand the mathematics of an elliptical orbit, you can still be made to understand that an ellipse is a kind of flattened-out circle; if you had geometry in high school, you *already* know that it's a kind of flattened-out circle.

The difficulties presented by relativity theory would not seem so formidable if the theory were not frighteningly *strange.* It tells us all sorts of funny things about how you will shrink if you go fast enough and how time slows down; it throws out the concept of simultaneity in certain circumstances, and then caps everything off with an innocuous looking equation, $E = mc^2$, which, as everybody knows, is somehow responsible for the atomic bomb. For most people, all this is too much. Mention the name "Einstein" and they run screaming in the direction of some relatively simple subject—Zen Buddhism or Scientology.

It was for his contributions to quantum theory, not relativity, that Einstein received the Noble Prize; and in fact it is quantum mechanics* that is really the cornerstone of modern physics. Yet this theory is

* When I say quantum *mechanics,* I mean the 1926 theory of Heisenberg and Schrödinger, which we still use today.

even less familiar than the relativity theory; if the layman knows anything about it at all, it is only that quantum mechanics has something to do with a strange entity called "Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle." Anyone who attempts to go into the subject deeply is likely to find himself rapidly getting uptight. He may be able to accept the wave properties of an electron without much difficulty. But when he discovers that it is a probability wave that describes the electron, for godsake, rather than something real, like an ocean wave, he may be tempted to give up.

On the other hand, few people find the idea of gravity a difficult one. After all, everyone has held objects in hand and experienced their weight. Nor is the rest of Newtonian mechanics felt to be especially esoteric. Everyone understands the assertion, "For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction."* Concepts like "momentum" and "acceleration" are not felt to be particularly difficult; they are, in fact, part of our language. Everyone understands intuitively what they mean.

The Newtonian world is the world of common sense. The objects with which it deals are those we handle every day of our lives, or see every time we look up at the sky. Newtonian physics describes the behavior of planets and of billiard balls. It can be used to analyze an automobile accident or to describe the forces acting on a baseball. It can be applied to the analysis of musical sounds, and it can explain why a gas should expand when it is heated.

The modern theories, on the other hand, are not only more abstract, but they deal with a kind of reality entirely unfamiliar. No one would think the implications of relativity odd if we habitually moved around at relativistic velocities. They seem strange only because no one ever has. But these theories do more than contradict common sense; they describe a reality that the words of our language were never meant to describe. J. Robert Oppenheimer gives a good illustration of the difficulties involved in describing quantum mechanics with ordinary

* Or at least he thinks he does, until asked to explain the following paradox: A horse is pulling a cart. He does this by exerting a force on it. Therefore, the cart exerts an equal and opposite force on the horse. How then can the cart move?

words:

> If we ask, for instance, whether the position of the electron remains the same, we must say "no"; if we ask whether the electron's position changes with time, we must say "no"; if we ask whether the electron is at rest, we must say "no"; if we ask whether it is in motion, we must say "no". The Buddha has given such answers when interrogated as to the conditions of a man's self after his death; but they are not familiar answers for the tradition of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century science.

The person who knows no mathematics is perfectly capable of grasping the implications of the theories of modern physics, but as physics grows stranger and more abstract he is less likely to exert himself to do so. Poets are not likely to try to incorporate concepts that elude their intuitive grasp into their work. Even if they did, who would understand them? To use a not entirely adequate metaphor, we might say that modern science can be likened to a spherical cavern that is gradually being enlarged by teams of diggers. A man is positioned in the center. Three hundred years ago, when the cavern was a small one, he could watch with interest as Newton dug only a few yards away. But today the cavern is so large that he can barely make out the figures in the distance, or tell what it is that they are doing. And next time he looks, they'll be farther away.

It is not even certain that the supposed philosophical implications of modern science should be taken very seriously. Oppenheimer, for example, points out that scientific findings do not compel any particular metaphysical beliefs. He says of the much-discussed atomic lack of causality that it is "of no consequence and no moment" for ordinary bodies and ordinary happenings. We are bound to neither causal nor noncausal ways of thinking when we consider the world at large. At the very least, this is a plausible view. After all, if all other quantum-mechanical effects disappear in large objects, how can we maintain that acausality somehow persists? If relativity had any effect on philosophy, it was simply to take thought about the nature of space and time out of the hands of the metaphysicians. If physics disproved Kant's assertion that Euclidian geometry was truly *a priori*, it did so by pointing out that the subject was one that should be discussed by scientists, not philosophers. The nineteenth-century astronomers were able to make an ass of Hegel, who had maintained, on philosophical grounds, that there could be only seven planets. But they did it with telescopes, not with dialectical arguments.

Newtonian science contributed, in large part, to shaping the world view of an age. Modern science, because of its relative inaccessibility, seems to be creating a void instead. If we fail to understand the majority of its discoveries, we only become aware of how much there is that we don't know. It used to be said that nature "abhors" a vacuum. Today we would not endow nature with such anthropomorphic motives. But the *human mind* abhors a vacuum, and always has. The mind has always demanded comprehensible explanations of the natural order. And these explanations have always been provided—by myths, philosophy, religion and, in the last few centuries, by science.

I have suggested that the question: "What have modern science and the arts to do with one another?" be given the answer, "Very little." But if the question is rephrased: "What will modern science and the arts have to do with one another in the last third of the twentieth century?" I think I would have to answer: "As modern science becomes more abstract, and as its implications continue to elude our grasp, our artists, like most of those who are not scientists, will in all likelihood turn to astrology, Eastern religion, prophecy, occult systems and the like."

Author's Note: This essay was originally published in 1970. Since then we have witnessed a growing popular interest in science, which seems to falsify some of my conclusions. However, I wonder whether I might not have been correct—in a way—after all. For it is not science per se which has captured the popular interest, but rather books which present science as a branch of mysticism. The Tao of Physics *and* The Dancing Wu Li Masters *have inspired an entire genre. I sometimes wonder whether we might not soon find ourselves in the position of having to distinguish between the "straight science" that is practiced by scientists and the "mystical science" that is written about for consumption by the public.*

"Star Wars" as a Zoroastrian Myth

Watching the movie "Star Wars," it is impossible not to be struck by the fact that everything is presented in terms of black and white, with no intervening shades of gray. The "Dark Lord" Darth Vader is evil personified, while the Princess Leia Organa seems to be the embodiment of goodness and courage. Luke Skywalker and his companions become involved in a struggle that must culminate in the destruction of Vader's "Death Star"; no half-measures can be sufficient. Fairly early in the film they become aware that it will not be possible to remain neutral in the coming struggle, and that if the Death Star is not destroyed, then the entire universe will fall under the domination of evil.

Nothing could be easier than to dismiss "Star Wars" as no more than popular entertainment. In fact, it is probable that this is all that writer-director George Lucas intended it to be. Nevertheless, "Star Wars" is

something more than that. Like Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy (which, interestingly enough, also has its "Dark Lord"), it is a retelling of an ancient myth about a cosmic struggle between the powers of good and evil, of light and darkness.

The myth is one of which we are all aware, if only unconsciously. We make reference to it every time we equate God with divine light, or refer to the Devil as the "Prince of Darkness." The luminous halos that appear in Renaissance art are references to this myth. So are such expressions as "black-hearted," "black magic," and "dark deeds." So pervasive is the identification of light with good and darkness with evil that, in the old western "B" movies, one could always tell the good guys from the bad guys by the fact that the former wore white hats and rode white horses, while the latter were commonly dressed in black (a convention that is continued, by the way, in "Star Wars," where Luke and the Princess Leia always wear white, and where even Vader's face is covered by a black breath mask).

I doubt that there is anyone who, while watching the space battle with which "Star Wars" ends, doubted for a moment that it would end with the destruction of the Death Star. Like the ancient Greeks who viewed the tragedies of Sophocles, the modern moviegoer is viewing a myth with which he is already familiar. He knows from the beginning what the outcome must be. He knows that the Death Star will be destroyed because, in every version of the Zoroastrian myth, the forces of light ultimately triumph over the powers of darkness.

This myth is at least two-and-a-half thousand years old. As nearly as we can determine, it was first proclaimed by the ancient Persian prophet Zarathustra (whom the Greeks referred to as "Zoroaster"; hence the name "Zoroastrian"). In Zarathustra's cosmology, the world was a battlefield on which Ahura Mazdāh, the Spirit of Light, warred with Angra Mainyu, the Spirit of Darkness. Their battle was destined to continue until, at the end of time, Ahura Mazdāh and the Powers of Light would prove victorious. Although the outcome was certain, it was incumbent on every human being to take one side or the other. Everyone who lived a moral life contributed to the final victory; those who committed evil deeds caused Angra Mainyu's demons to gain power.

This myth first began to have an influence on Western culture when the Persian king Cyrus the Great overthrew the Chaldean empire of Babylonia in 538 B.C. and released the Jews from captivity. For the next

two centuries, Palestine was part of the Persian empire. During that time, numerous Zoroastrian ideas found their way into Jewish religious doctrine. One of the earliest effects was the transformation of the Persian Angra Mainyu into the Jewish Satan.

Although the Jews had an elaborate demonology, there was no concept of a Devil as God's personal adversary in early Judaism. The identification of the serpent in the Garden of Eden with Satan was a Christian interpretation that was bound up with the doctrine of original sin. There is no basis for this identification in the story as told in *Genesis,* where the serpent is only an animal who is "more subtil than any beast of the field." And in *Job,* "the satan" (*satan* is a Hebrew word meaning "adversary") is described as being one of the "sons of god"; he is really nothing more than a kind of public prosecutor who takes a cynical view of human behavior. He is certainly not yet a Devil who acts as a leader of the forces of Darkness.

The idea of Satan as the personification of evil became part of Jewish thought during the post-Exilic period. By the beginning of the Hellenistic age, the dualism of light and darkness had become well established. The apocalyptic books of the period speak repeatedly of battles between two Powers. Often the origins of this cosmic conflict are seen as beginning with a primordial war in heaven, and the idea of Satan as a fallen angel is developed.

By the time the Dead Sea Scrolls were written, Zoroastrian ideas were very much in the air. This is demonstrated by the many references to the myth in the Scrolls. In the *Manual of Discipline,* for example, the doctrine of the Two Spirits is developed. Although the Spirit of Light, like the Spirit of Darkness, is presented as being a subject of God, and is thus not identical to the Persian Ahura Mazdāh, the influence is obvious. Another Scroll prophesies an apocalyptic war between the "Sons of Light" and the "Sons of Darkness," and describes the final battle in excrutiating detail, down to the lengthy speech that must be made by the High Priest before the engagement can begin.

Zoroastrian ideas had some influence on the New Testament writers, who make frequent references to "light" and "darkness." This is especially evident in the Epistles and Gospel of John. It is John, for example, who calls Jesus "the light of the world."

Some authors go so far as to suggest that Jesus may have believed that he was living in a time when the powers of darkness would soon make their final bid for supremacy. This would explain the idea found

in the Gospels and in early Christianity that the end of the world was at hand. Christianity, however, became preoccupied with developing an eschatology of its own, and failed to adopt many of the essentials of the Zoroastrian myth. The idea of a Devil was retained, but not much else.

The myth, however, was adopted in one form or another by the various Gnostic sects, and by the religion of Manichaeism (described by its former devotee St. Augustine in his *Confessions*). Since it would be too much of a digression to discuss the manner in which these sects adopted and modified the idea of the dualism of light and darkness, I'll simply note that they preached the Zoroastrian dualism for quite a long time. The last Gnostic sect did not die out until the beginning of the fourteenth century. Even then, Gnostic ideas persisted. They can be found, for example, in the prophetic books of William Blake.

Gnosticism and Manichaeism were persecuted by the Church as heresies. The persecution reached a climax when Pope Innocent III proclaimed the Albigensian Crusade in 1208. During the Crusade, the Gnostic Catharsis of southern France were slaughtered like Vietnamese villagers. Nevertheless, it took the Inquisition another hundred years before the last traces of the heresy were finally eliminated.

The Zoroastrian myth was driven underground. So violent was the conflict in which this happened that it has remained underground for more than six hundred years. Even today we are only unconsciously aware of it. The idea of a dualism of light and darkness is no longer thought of as a heresy. Yet there is still sufficient odium attached to the idea that we are unwilling to consider anything that makes use of the myth to be "serious" art. We complain that the various retellings of the myth contain characters who are "one-dimensional," and that they "have no shades of gray." We try to explain away the obvious power that these retellings possess.

I wouldn't go so far as to claim that there is some universal "something" in the human psyche that makes the myth seem so powerful. The falseness of such a contention could easily be shown. We have discovered no mythologies that make use of the myth before the time of Zarathustra. And even though the halo, a Zoroastrian motif, can be found in Buddhist art, Zoroastrian ideas were never able to take root in the East.

However, the appeal of the myth to Westerners is undeniable. And if "serious" literature fails to make use of it, then we can be sure that

there will be "popular entertainments" such as "Star Wars" that do. A myth that can survive for more than two millenia, and that persists despite some of the severest persecution known to religious history, is not going to die out just because contemporary critics tell us that it can't be used as a basis for serious art.

Academic Ghettoes

This essay didn't turn out as I originally envisioned it. It was my first intention to take a somewhat skeptical look at theories of literature. But then, as I was struggling through Harold Bloom's book *The Anxiety of Influence*, I suddenly realized that we have no theories of literature anymore, only theories of criticism.

Bloom's "theory of poetry" is simple enough: every poem is a misinterpretation of some parent poem; by misinterpreting, the "strong poet" avoids being overwhelmed by the influence of his predecessors. The reader may entertain the nagging suspicion that there is more than this to poetry, that even Bloom can't think that this is a complete theory. Nevertheless, the chances are that he will believe, at least at first, that what the author is trying to do is to give him some insight into what goes on in imaginative literature.

But then Bloom lets slip a statement that reveals what he's really

doing. "Criticism is the art of knowing the hidden roads that go from poem to poem," he says. At once, everything becomes clear. Bloom is propounding a theory of criticism. Convinced that he has developed a new critical weapon, he is instructing other critics in the proper way to aim and fire it. Figuring out why poetry affects us and showing the reader how baffling works can be approached are the least of his concerns. He is a critic writing for other critics.

Anyone who peruses that part of critical literature that is not devoted to analyses of individual authors or pieces of writing soon realizes that most of it has the same character. Some critics are very candid about this. "I believe that the methods I have been describing are very useful to critics," says William Empson in *Seven Types of Ambiguity.* But the poet is better off staying away from them, Empson continues; if he takes them too much to heart, they may fuck up his work. Northrop Frye, too, makes it clear that he is writing for other critics. In *Anatomy of Criticism,* he states explicitly that his major concern is to give criticism a "scientific" foundation.

Meanwhile, Kenneth Burke tells us that language is "Symbolic Action," and instructs us in the art of ferreting out a Symbol, however skillfully it may be concealed. R.P. Blackmur demurs briefly; *he* thinks language is Gesture. Then I.A. Richards comes along and gives us a list of the equipment needed in order to do linguistic analysis. Even when a critic is tackling an individual poem, one sometimes get the impression that it is other critics to whom he is speaking. When Cleanth Brooks analyzes "Ode on a Grecian Urn," for example, one feels that he is less interested in Keats than he is in showing how a poem *ought* to be analyzed.

With so much artillery in the hands of the critics, one might think that poetry wouldn't have much of a chance. This is precisely the fear that was expressed during the 1950s by such poets as Randall Jarrell and Karl Shapiro. In his essay "The Age of Criticism," Jarrell confessed that he was afraid the critical enterprise had come to dominate contemporary literature. In a somewhat too strident essay in *In Defense of Ignorance,* Shapiro elaborated on the idea, charging that poetry had become a "criticism-ridden art," "a part of criticism and a phase of pedagogy."

I really can't say how accurate these characterizations are, since I have no first-hand knowledge of the literary scene of the fifties. This was approximately the time when I was in high school. Then, I

thought poetry was the stuff they tried to stuff down my throat in English classes, and I didn't even know that such a thing as literary criticism existed. But the ideas expressed by Jarrell and Shapiro have been echoed so often that one must take them reasonably seriously. In this regard, it is revealing that during the fifties there were apparently only two kinds of poets: "beat" and "academic."

But if this kind of description was accurate then, it certainly is not today. Anyone with the slightest familiarity with the poetry of the seventies cannot help but be aware that poetry is now behaving as though criticism didn't exist. The poetry of the fifties, according to Shapiro and Jarrell, seemed to get written solely to enrich the ground for criticism. Today's poetry, at least that which is published in nonacademic magazines, does everything but this. It incorporates every possible influence and seeks to branch out simultaneously in every direction. One trend that I find especially interesting is the fact that Dada and Surrealism have been reasserted, so that some poetry contains elements of "antiart," something that criticism finds it especially difficult to deal with.

Criticism, on the other hand, virtually ignores the fact that there is such a thing as contemporary literature. It grinds out essay after essay and book after book on Eliot, Pound and Williams, and is oblivious to living writers unless, like Robert Lowell, they have been declared to be national monuments. It discusses "Modernism" as though that movement were of vital contemporary interest, when in fact what is being described is something that flourished roughly during the period 1915-1925. Sometimes critics talk quizzically of "post-modernism," as though wondering whether literature was still possible after Eliot and Joyce. It delights in the private mythology of Yeats, but is oblivious to the work of such writers as Frank O'Hara and Charles Bukowski. And, finally, it backs away from the uncomfortable task of dealing with literature altogether, and narcistically begins to consider questions of critical theory.

I don't mean to say that criticism has no effect. On the contrary, it has affected the tastes of most of us who read literature. Because it is attracted to those works that provide the most "meat" for analysis, it has taught us to admire the "complexity" of Donne over the relative "simplicity" of Herrick. It has enshrined "The Waste Land" and the "Cantos" and has downgraded poems that can be read without the aid of a sheriff's posse of critics and a library of references. It has taught us

to admire work that seems made for critical analysis, and to scorn what seems too "easy."

However, criticism is no longer the dominant literary form that it once was. In the 1950s, a "literary magazine" was, apparently, something that devoted ninety-five percent of its pages to the publication of criticism and reviews, and the remainder to fiction, drama and poetry. Today, although magazines like the *Hudson Review* and *Partisan* and *Sewanee* linger on, they no longer have the overwhelming influence they once possessed. *The New York Review of Books*, perhaps, has more, but mostly among the professors who make up the bulk of its readership. One no longer feels the temptation, as Kenneth Koch did in 1955, to go "to the *Hudson Review* with a package of matches" and set fire to the building.

This is not the place to talk about the changes that have taken place in literary publishing since the somewhat misnamed "mimeo revolution" of the sixties. However, it is worth noting that the term "literary magazine" now generally describes something that publishes original literature. The practice of criticism has been banished to academic ghettoes.

It may be that, as critical theories multiply, as commentaries are written upon commentaries, criticism will become a benign and esoteric activity analagous to the study of the Cabala. Whether it does or not, it need not be of any concern to us. It has become just another academic pursuit of interest only to professors and their graduate students. And if some Ph.D. student or another does manage to find an eighth type of ambiguity, or expand on Bloom's six Greek terms (*clinamen, tessera, kenosis, daemonization, askesis, apophrades*) for the ways in which a poet can rebel against the influence of a predecessor, we need not become very excited. Even if someone proves that language is not Symoblic Action, or Gesture, but really Tumescence, we ought to be able to ignore the discovery and live.

Although I think that academic criticism has become largely irrelevant, this essay is not a polemic against critics or an incitement to the assassination of some of the more prominent academicians. If anything, I would like to see more criticism, not less.

In the first part of this essay, I was perhaps a little too harsh on Blackmur who, unlike the others mentioned, really didn't do much theorizing. He shared some of the academic prejudices, perhaps, but he did write about his contemporaries. And, in one essay, he came up

with a pretty good definition of what criticism should be: "the formal discourse of an amateur." In other words, a piece of writing motivated by a genuine interest in literature rather than by committment to doctrine (or a desire to get tenure). To put it another way, good criticism is a work of art, which takes another work of art for its subject matter.

This is exactly the kind of criticism that we don't have. Our literary magazines publish more poetry than anyone could possibly want to read, and more fiction all the time, but practically no criticism at all. They do publish a few book reviews, and an occasional interview in which some poet or another manages to say some suitably obscure and poetic things. However, there is no real critical discourse.

There isn't necessarily anything wrong with such a situation. Criticism really isn't needed. There have been "great" literary ages, after all, in which there was no critical writing whatsoever. The Elizabethan age seems to have got by without dramatic criticism (unless one counts such things as Robert Greene's characterization of Shakespeare as an "upstart crow" full of "bombast," or Ben Jonson's eulogies). The Greeks managed to write tragedy before they had Aristotle to instruct them in the classic unities. There's no reason for believing that we need critics any more than they did.

Good criticism is nothing more or less than talk about literature that is interesting. If we can get along without it, there is no reason why we should. Perhaps we shy away from it because we're still too intimidated, or turned off, by the academics. I hope we won't continue to be for long. I like to listen to and to read interesting talk about contemporary literature. Therefore I hope that it will not be long before some "amateurs" begin to write about the things that they've been reading. We've all listened quite long enough to the talk of the "professional" academics about the things that they have studied.

Leaping Around in the Three Brains

For some time Robert Bly has been trying to promote a certain kind of surrealist poetry. In *The Seventies* No. 1 he has put his ideas about this kind of writing together in a manifesto. And some of them are pretty weird. Bly begins by lamenting the fact that most contemporary American poems have no "dragon smoke" in them; our poets don't know how to leap from the conscious to the unconscious and back again. Now, whenever you hear people saying things like that, you expect them to follow up by launching into a diatribe about the deleterious influence of the Establishment or the Academy. Not Bly. He puts the blame on Christianity, which, he claims, fucked up Western poetry six hundred years ago by causing us to distrust our animal instincts. The decline began sometime in the thirteenth century, he says; by the eighteenth century we had a "psychic disaster." According to Bly,

Freedom of association had become drastically curtailed. The word "sylvan" by some psychic railway line leads directly to "nymph," to "lawns," to "dancing," so to "reason," to music, spheres, heavenly order, etc. They're all stops on the same railroad. There are very few images of the Snake, or the Dragon, or the Great Mother, and if mention is made, the Great Mother leads to no other images, but rather to words suggesting paralysis or death.

But then, in the eighteenth century, Blake and Hölderin and Novalis began to take poetry off to "obscure psychic woods." These woods were real woods, Bly says; occult ceremonies took place in them. Poetry began to be rooted in the unconscious again, and exciting associative leaping came back.

Such "leaping poetry" is still being written in the twentieth century, Bly tells us. As examples, he gives us Lorca, Neruda, Vallejo and others, mostly in excellent translations by Bly himself. American poets should read these people, Bly urges. They should translate them, write like them. If they did, American poetry would not be "drying up like a desert."

Bly goes on to discuss a few American poets. He mentions Robert Creeley's "poetry of steady light" (which he likes) and the so-called "New York School" (which he can't take very seriously). Then he jumps into the "three-brain theory." There are three brains inside our heads, he says. The reptile brain, the mammal brain and the "new brain." The reptile brain is concerned with physical survival, while the mammal brain is associated with "love of women, of children, of the neighbor, the idea of brotherhood, care for the community, or for the country." The new brain is associated with spirituality. Bly goes into a digression about the latter. He talks about various saints and discusses getting into the new brain by means of meditation (or "sitting," as he prefers to call it). And then he comes back to his main concern, poetry:

When the new brain is receiving energy from the other brains, then leaping poetry is possible. In other words, leaping poetry probably cannot be written without great spiritual energy.

Finally, Bly gives us some of his translations of Rilke's *Sonnets to Orpheus,* and a few poems by some contemporary Americans who, he claims, are capable of doing a little leaping.

When I finished this book, I wasn't sure what to make of it. It seemed to be a mixture of striking insights, moving poetry and rank nonsense. And it wasn't always easy to tell what was valuable and what was doubletalk. Bly certainly showed successfully that association (or

"leaping") could be a kind of content in poetry. He produced translations of the Spanish surrealists that were better than any others I had seen, and showed how exciting their poetry was. But when he tried to tie it all in with his own version of neurologist Paul MacLean's three-brain theory, he seemed to be going off the deep end.

I wasn't able to find MacLean's original papers, but after reading an account of the theory in Arthur Koestler's *The Ghost in the Machine*, I think I can safely assume that whatever is far out in Bly is original with Bly, and does not come from MacLean. When Bly tells us that "John Foster Dulles represented the reptile brain in the fifties," that Nixon is "a mixture of reptile and new brain, with almost no mammal brain at all," that spiritual growth depends on the ability to transfer energy into the new brain, and even that Bach was a composer of the new brain while Beethoven worked primarily out of mammal-brain emotions, he is perverting MacLean's theory and constructing his own pseudo-scientific system. The result is something that is even worse than Scientology. There is simply no evidence for the statements that Bly makes. We know that the human brain evolved by building new structures around the old ones—one on top of another—so that, in a certain sense, we do have three (or more) "brains" in our heads. But to say that Nixon is a mixture of reptile and new brain is to pass from scientific fact to wishful thinking. Sure, it sounds good. But statements of this kind have little to do with neurology.

Similarly, we should discount everything that Bly says about the three brains and the writing of poetry. No sane neurologist would make the claim that it will be possible to explain poetry in terms of physiological structures in the brain in the foreseeable future, if ever. Yet this is exactly what Bly attempts to do. He often makes it sound plausible. But this doesn't mean that any of it is true.

People are ready to believe almost anything nowadays. So I suppose a lot of kids will be picking up this book and taking all of this three-brain crap as gospel, while they pass over the rest. If they do, they will be ignoring everything that is good in this book in favor of all that is most dubious. Because Bly does know what he's talking about when he tells us what makes a surrealist poem go. He knows what leaping is, and he can show us how it's done. He knows who the exciting modern European and Latin American poets are, and he knows how to make their work into magnificant English verse. In fact, some of his translations may be too good. For example, Bly calls Rilke "the greatest

spiritual poet of the twentieth century." Then he tries to back up this claim by giving some of his translations of Rilke's *Sonnets to Orpheus*. But Rilke wrote the fifty-five sonnets in two weeks, after spending ten years on his major work, the *Duino Elegies*. In the original German, the sonnets sometimes look as though they were written too hastily. If Bly's translations are better than the German originals, can I believe the claims he makes about Rilke?

The Moon Shot: Poetry, Technology and Norman Mailer

I spent one evening of the summer of 1969 in front of a television set getting stoned and watching Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin walk around on the moon. They had been a couple of hours late getting out of the Lunar Module, but otherwise they behaved predictably. They said all the dumb things you would expect astronauts to say ("That's one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind"), they set up a solar wind experiment, commented on the lunar surface ("Magnificent sight out here"), set up a kind of starched plastic flag ("Being able to salute that flag was one of the more humble yet proud experiences I've ever had") and collected rocks. And, not surprisingly, the President of the United States called up to say a few words:

Neil and Buzz, I am talking to you by telephone from the Oval Room at the White House. And this certainly has to be the most historic telephone call ever made. I just can't tell you how proud we all are of you. For every Ameri-

can this has to be the proudest day of our lives. And for people all over the world, I am sure they too join with Americans in recognizing what a feat this is. Because of what you have done, the heavens have become a part of man's world. And as you talk to us from the Sea of Tranquility, it inspires us to double our efforts to bring peace and tranquility to earth. For one priceless moment in the whole history of man, all the people on this earth are truly one. One in their pride in what you have done. And one in our prayers that you will return safely to earth.

While Richard Nixon was saying this, Norman Mailer was sitting in the midst of a crowd of journalists in the movie theater of the Manned Spacecraft Center in Houston. He was going to write a book about the moon landing. America's biggest novelist writing about the biggest technological achievement of the decade. But why journalism? Why not write another novel? Well, for one thing, he had been offered $450,000 to do the book. And there was something about having your hand on the "rump of history." (Mailer had coined that term previously when speaking of his unsuccessful New York mayorality campaign.)

Mailer's *Of A Fire On the Moon* is really two books. Mailer spends one hundred and fifty pages describing the moon flight; and then he goes back, starts at the beginning, and uses three hundred pages to go over it all again. The first time around, he can't find anything very significant about the event. The astronauts look like athletes and talk like corporation executives. If there is anything heroic about them, their training will not allow them to show it. Going to the moon, after all, is little like the traditional heroic exploit; it depends on teamwork and a highly developed technology. An astronaut could not be flamboyant; he had, rather, to be a corporate WASP, a representative of middle America. According to Mailer, the proper standard of behavior for every public situation seemed to be, "Do not under any circumstances say anything more interesting than Richard Nixon would say in the same situation."

As Mailer describes the lift-off and the events that preceded it, one has the feeling that he has not yet warmed to his subject. In fact, his narrative seems more interesting when he describes the failure of a vending machine that had been set up for the journalists covering the event than it does when he is talking about the moon flight. He appears to view all the events associated with the flight as being ultimately insignificant.

But in the second part of the book, when he begins to write about

the technology of the flight, his interest picks up. So much so, in fact, that he seems unwilling to leave out even the smallest detail. Thus we are told that the rocket was three hundred and sixty-three feet high, and that it weighed 6,484,260 pounds. Its engines, Mailer says, took nine seconds to develop seven-and-a-half million pounds of thrust. Its first stage carried 212,846 gallons of a kerosene called RP-1, which was ignited with liquid oxygen. He tells us that the pipes used to pump liquid hydrogen into the upper stages were fifteen hundred feet long and ten inches in diameter, and that the rocket was pulled onto Pad A on Launch Complex 39 by a tractor powered by two diesel engines each a fraction under three thousand horsepower. The manner in which Apollo-Saturn reached earth orbit and went into a lunar trajectory is described as exactly as possible, and then Mailer goes on to explain the details of the construction of the Command Module, the Service Module and the Lunar Module. Mailer tells us that the lunar day is twenty-seven days, seven hours, forty-three minutes and eleven-plus seconds long, and that temperatures on the surface of the moon range from 243 degrees Fahrenheit down to 279 degrees Fahrenheit below zero. We are told that the computer in the Lunar Module, or "Lem," was two feet long, one foot high and six inches wide, and that it had a vocabulary of 38,916 sixteen-bit words. Mailer describes how the astronauts ate in space, and gives statistics on how many hours of sleep each man got at night. He even tells how an astronaut shits.

I'm not what you'd call Norman Mailer's biggest fan; yet I can't help but consider *Of A Fire On the Moon* to be an astonishing book. In it, Mailer comes as close as any author has to achieving that marriage of poetry and science that Wordsworth was calling for when, in the preface to the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, he suggested that the time might come when "the remotest discoveries of the chemist, the botanist, or mineralogist, will be as proper objects of the poet's art as any upon which it can be employed," and that the poet could "lend his divine spirit to aid the transfiguration" of science into something familiar to us all.

I doubt that Mailer wrote this book in the manner he did because he had been reading Wordsworth. One gets the impression that the interest that he shows in science and technology arises partly from a feeling that the people involved in the flight were mediocre.

Thus, if the astronauts refuse to be (or are incapable of being) heroic,

perhaps there is still some romance left in technology. If the men are predictable, machines often are not. While the spacecraft is in lunar orbit, the Lem seems, for some inexplicable reason, to want to tilt toward the surface of the moon. Once Armstrong and Aldrin get to the lunar surface, they have difficulty in getting all the pressure out of their capsule—after experiencing failures in radio communication on the way down. When they go back up and dock with the Service and Command Modules, there is a moment when the spacecraft oscillates wildly. To Mailer, all this suggests the following metaphor:

> So it is with physics and engineering. Physics is the church, and engineering the most devout sinner. Physics is the domain of beauty, law, order, awe, and mystery of the purest sort; engineering is partial observance of the laws, and puttering with machines which never work quite as they should work: engineering, like acts of sin, is the process of proceeding boldly into complex and often forbidden matters about which one does not know enough—the laws remain to be elucidated—but the experience of the past and the hunger for the taste of new experience attract one forward.

Mailer is perpetually looking for mystery. He wants, for example, to believe that the lunar surface is somehow "sinister," and is disappointed when Armstrong says that the moon is a "hospitable host." Undismayed, Mailer turns to other topics; he says that gravity is something which "stirs the depths of insomnia," that it is a mysterious force in a "charged and libidinous universe." He sees the concept of energy as "the greatest mystery in the unremitting mysteries of physics," and asks, "Is it the currency of the universe or the agent of creation?" He talks of engines possessed of "a variety of spirits benign and wicked," and asks whether the reign of technology may not have failed to extirpate magic.

If there is magic in manmade machines and in the laws of physics, Mailer asks, what might there be in the depths of space? Talking of Apollo 11's flight, he says, "And it was disrupting God knows what Valhalla of angels and demons, what eminences of benignity and eyries of the most refined spook essence." The flight was a great technological achievement, to be sure, but might it not also be a blasphemy?

But in the end, there was no magic, no mystery. The ship made it into lunar orbit without any mishaps; Armstrong and Aldrin descended to the surface of the moon, where they collected their rock samples, set up their flag and put on a TV show. The next day they

blasted off for a rendezvous with Collins in the Command Module, and returned to earth and a routine splashdown in the Pacific Ocean. And by doing all of this, they did not find mystery; they eliminated it:

> If the moon was not sinister, then NASA was heir to a chilling disease, for they had succeeded in making the moon dull, the moon, that planet of lunacy and harvest lovers, satellite unlike any other moon in the solar system.

The moon flight became a banal event. A superb technology sent three out of several dozen completely interchangable astronauts to the surface of earth's sister planet. When they came back, the chaplin on the Hornet, the ship that plucked the astronauts out of the ocean, tried to make something out of it all, but his pieties were as meaningless as those that have been uttered by men of God on every other public occasion:

> Let us pray. Lord God, our Heavenly Father, our minds are staggered and our spirits exultant with the magnitude and precision of this entire Apollo 11 mission. We have spent the past week in communal anxiety and hope as our astronauts sped through the glories and dangers of the heavens. As we try to understand and analyze the scope of this achievement for human life, our reason is overwhelmed with abounding gratitude and joy, even as we realize the increasing challenges of the future.... A man on the moon was promised in this decade. And though some were unconvinced, the reality is with us this morning, in the persons of astronauts Armstrong, Aldrin, and Collins. We applaud their splendid exploits and we pour out our thanksgiving for their safe return to us, to their families, to all mankind.

The chaplin went on. Finally he got to the "in the name of the Lord, Amen," to which Collins added his own amen. Then they played the anthem, and the astronauts stood at attention.

Some time after he had gone home to write the book, Mailer reports, he saw the dinner party that President Nixon gave for the Apollo crew on TV. Mailer's host projected a color film of a boy and girl making love on the television screen, so that as Nixon spoke a vagina fluttered butterfly wings over his nose and mouth. During that summer Mailer also attended a funeral that a friend gave for a car that had ceased to run, and bet another friend that he could not go through a meal without saying fuck (Mailer won the bet); and all the while he got on abominably with his wife. During that summer he made several trips to Houston, feeling "like a man looking for the smallest sign."

For something was lacking in it all. The science and technology had been worthy of poetry, but the men had not. They had simply been

participants in a staged event, not aware of any sense of adventure. And in the end, this made the flight meaningless. Or, as Mailer puts it,

> In this hour they landed on the moon, America was applauding for Armstrong and Aldrin, and the world would cheer America for a day, but something was lacking, some joy, some outrageous sense of adventure. Strong men did not weep in the street nor ladies copulate with strangers. Any armistice to any petty war had occasioned wilder celebrations. It was almost as if a sense of woe sat in the center of the heart. For the shot to the moon was a mirror to our condition—most terrifying mirror; one looked into it and saw intimations of a final disease.

A Literary Counterfeiter

At first, George Hitchcock seems to be something of an anachronism. Reading his play *The Counterfeit Rose* (Kayak Books), one has the feeling that this isn't the kind of thing that should have been written during the 1970s. It should have been done two hundred years ago, in Italian, perhaps as a libretto to an opera by Mozart.

The plot of this baroque comedy is simple enough. Conte Ugo di Montereggio, a retired general, wishes to test his wife's fidelity. He attempts to do so by hiring an actor to impersonate Jacques Casanova and try to make love to her. In the end, the actor runs off with the Conte's daughter instead, aided by the real Casanova and Lucrezia, the Conte's wife. For somewhat more than two-and-a-half acts, Hitchcock's play is nothing more or less than a comedy in an outdated style, which consistently manages to be funnier than any museum piece ought to be.

And then, in the last scene, Hitchcock gently dismantles the romantic world that he has so carefully constructed. "That is not the world! That is not the truth!" Lucrezia exclaims to Casanova. "The truth is that my daughter has run off with a wretched mountebank; that tomorrow the gilt will peel from the sword, the cloak turn moth-eaten, and she will awake to dirty bed-clothes." Casanova replies by showing her a counterfeit coin that is famed for being more beautiful than the real one that it imitates. Love is like that coin, he implies. A few moments later, Casanova leaves. It begins to grow cold. Lucrezia goes indoors.

In his novel *Another Shore* (also published by Kayak), Hitchcock again turns literary *poseur*. This time, it is the French surrealists of the 1930s whom he imitates. The unnamed narrator of the novel is recruited as a spy. He parachutes into a surrealistic country where he experiences all sorts of bizarre adventures, including a love affair with a beautiful and mysterious girl named Flavia. In the last chapter, his adventures come to an end, and he returns to the United States. Back in the "real world," he lapses into a life that seems drab and dull. The book ends on an ambiguous note. The narrator runs into an actress that he had met some years before. He finds her striking, if somewhat cheap. "Tomorrow," he says, "I know that I will be at the same corner at the same hour and if she passes again I cannot answer for the consequences."

Another Shore resembles *The Counterfeit Rose* in that Hitchcock successfully appropriates a style from the past. Then, just as the spell is complete, he allows a more modern sensibility to emerge, and returns us to the present. Other authors would do something like this as a literary joke. Not Hitchcock. What he is doing can perhaps best be described by going back to *The Counterfeit Rose* and quoting Casanova's fable about the coin:

> It was made by Gian-Battista Mascagnelli, engraver to the third Duke Cosimo of Tuscany. He had been a painter in his youth and he returned to rose thalers out of love of beauty. He minted the most exquisite coin that had ever been in Florence. They came into such great demand that no one would be without one. Unfortunately, they were, of course, all counterfeit.

Hitchcock is a superb literary counterfeiter who delights in creating a convincing romantic world, heightening the illusion by writing in a distinctly unmodern style. And then, at the end, he will remind us that, however delightful it all might be, it *is* counterfeit.

Yesterday's Burdens

I suspect that, if I had been living in 1933, when Robert M. Coates's *Yesterday's Burdens* was first published, I might not have been very interested in it. Indeed, as Malcolm Cowley tells us in his afterword, at the time it was dismissed as "being of the 1920s," and thus it "became an example of the good book that some people talked about, but almost nobody bought." As a result, *Yesterday's Burdens* quickly went out of print. It remained out of print until 1975 when it was published as a volume in Southern Illinois Press's "Lost American Fiction" series.

Nineteen thirty-three was a year in which the critics were arguing about proletarian literature; one shouldn't be very surprised to discover that Coates's book was ignored. Paradoxically, it's a novel that should be more difficult to pass over today. Not because it fits literary fashions better now than it did forty-two years ago, however; the book is of interest because it possesses certain qualities that contemporary fiction lacks.

The best fiction of the '60s and '70s has a certain quality of *outrageousness.* The reader is likely to find himself going from the outrageous world of *Catch 22* to the psychopathology of Donleavy's *Ginger Man* to the outrageously mythical Africa of Bellow's *Henderson the Rain King.* He (or she) reads Mailer (who manages to be outrageous simply by being Mailer), dips into Capote's *In Cold Blood* and goes from there to the overwrought literary decadence of Vladimir Nabokov. Sighing for relief, he turns to other authors, and finds himself confronted with Roth's Portnoy, Vidal's Myra (and Myron) and, finally, Erica Jong's Isabel's "zipless fuck."

I'm not saying that Coates is a better writer than these authors. On the contrary, I suspect that some of them will be remembered much longer than he is. I do say that *Yesterday's Burdens* is eminently worth reading. Coates is a self-conscious stylist who is concerned, not with impossible plots or pathological characters, but simply with the art of writing. In fact, his book hardly has a plot at all. As the author himself tells us, "It's a novel, or rather a novel about a novel, or perhaps one might better describe it as a long essay discussing a novel that I might possibly write, with fragments of the narrative inserted here and there, by way of illustration or example."

The book is full of impressionistic descriptions of New York in 1930. Sandwiched in between them are descriptions of encounters with a young man known only as Henderson. We discover that Henderson is having an affair with a married woman, and that his wife has left him and gone to Paris. Twenty-five pages before the book ends, the author informs us that Henderson has either 1) become reconciled with his wife, 2) gotten himself shot by his girlfriend's husband or 3) become despondent and committed suicide. There is no more mention of the protagonist until, on the last page, Coates says simply, "I never saw him again."

This doesn't seem a very promising method for producing a novel. Indeed, very few authors could have brought it off. Few contemporary authors, that is. Fortunately, back in the '20s and '30s there were writers like Coates who thought of fiction, not as the telling of tall tales, lies and misadventures, but as an art. I could dwell at some length on the reasons why I feel *Yesterday's Burdens* is well worth reading. One of the most important is that a novel like this could not be written today.

"Stirless He Lay"

Translating prose is difficult enough. Confronted with a word for which there is no exact English equivalent, the translator is often forced to use an approximation which fails to preserve the shades of meaning present in the original. Translating poetry is a task that borders on the impossible. A literal translation is no longer poetry; all the aural qualities of the original—rhyme, meter, rhythm, assonance, alliteration and so on—are lost. It isn't difficult to go along with Robert Frost's remark to the effect that poetry is what gets lost in translation!

Pushkin is Russia's greatest poet, and *Eugene Onegin* is his greatest poem. There are seven modern English translations. Six of these are rhymed versions, which, as such translations must, frequently do violence to Pushkin's meaning in order to preserve rhyme and meter. The seventh is Vladimir Nabokov's (*Eugene Onegin: A Novel in Verse.* Translated by Vladimir Nabokov, Revised Ed., Bollingen, 1975).

More than once Nabokov has lamented the fact that he had to abandon his natural idiom, his "untrammeled, rich and infinitely docile Russian tongue" to write in English. It isn't especially surprising, therefore, to find that, while other translators have tried to make *Eugene Onegin* into an English poem, Nabokov has preferred to do a translation that is literal throughout, in order to be as faithful to his beloved Russian as possible. He has, moreover, appended a massive commentary to the poem. Thus his two hundred and forty page translation is really only a small part of a four-volume work that is nearly nineteen hundred pages in length. But since I don't have the space to remark on the practice of smothering poems with commentary, I'll confine myself to a discussion of Nabokov's method of translation.

In his foreword, Nabokov tells us, "In transposing *Eugene Onegin* from Pushkin's Russian into my English, I have sacrificed to completeness of meaning every formal element.... To my idea of literalism, I sacrificed everything (elegance, euphony, clarity, good taste, modern usage and even grammar) that the dainty mimic prizes higher than truth." Apparently, the translation is an extremely accurate one. Those critics who attacked the original 1964 edition on this score were generally reduced to quibbling. (See, for example, Edmund Wilson's article in the July 15, 1965 *New York Review of Books* and Nabokov's "Reply to My Critics" in the February, 1966 issue of *Encounter.*)

If Nabokov is to be criticized at all, it is because, in his quest for accuracy, he goes too far. For some reason he feels compelled to impose Russian word order on his English translation, coming up with such lines as, "If this I write it is because/already a long time I do not sin." Wouldn't "If I write this, it is because/I haven't sinned for a long time" have conveyed the meaning as well? If the original does not sound strange to the Russian ear, why make it into something that sounds so odd in English?

Nabokov is not content with distorting syntax; he continually uses words and phrases that are not even English. At one point, for example, he says, "Bluing, the heavens glisten." Well, *bluing* is something that used to be thrown in the wash water with the bleach and detergent. If Nabokov really though it was necessary to coin a new word for "becoming blue," then perhaps something like "bluening" might have been a happier choice. (But I suppose it wouldn't have translated the Russian "literally" enough.)

One of my favorite words in this translation (and, apparently, one of

Nabokov's; he uses it on several occasions) is "stirless." At one point, we read, "stirless are the pines," and at another, of a man who has just been killed in a duel, "Stirless he lay." Not only is "stirless" not an English word, it isn't even a particularly appropriate coinage. I don't know what associations it evokes in your mind, but several of those that pop up in mine are ludicrous.

I could multiply the examples. But I think I have made my point. Vladimir Nabokov has done a magnificent job of translating Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* with near-perfect accuracy. Unfortunately, the language he has translated it into is some strange invention of his own; it certainly is not English.

On John Brockman

1.

I have nothing to say and I am saying it.
—*John Cage*

2.

Brockman's *Afterwords* (Anchor, 1973) is ("like Gaul," I am tempted to say) divided into three parts. In the first, he does away with man. In the second, he attempts, somewhat less successfully, to abolish the universe. In the third, he shows us what we always knew: that the world is meaningless.

3.

Man is dead, Brockman tells us. "Man" is an abstraction, a model that is no longer useful. Neither are such concepts as "consciousness,"

"feelings," "emotions," "mind," "ego," "spirit," "soul," "pain." All experience can be accounted for in terms of neural operations. Nothing else is happening. The brain has an input, and it produces an output. There is no "thought." Man is dead.

4.

At first, Brockman seems to be replacing one set of abstractions with another. But then he stops to tell us, "The author doesn't believe a word of what is set forth and is not interested in formulation of new dogma." Man is dead. The model of the brain as an input-output mechanism is no more real than the concept "man."

5.

"Man" is a model that no longer works. But don't replace it with a new model. Experience is not to be interpreted this way; experience simply *is*.

6.

Brockman is not explaining anything here. There is nothing to be explained. He is making an injunction: Do not make models. "Reality" is not in any model; it simply *is*.

7.

If there are no questions, there are no answers.
—*John Cage*

8.

Sometimes Brockman's statements are obscure or meaningless. "The operation of the brain is a nonlinear process." What does "nonlinear" mean in this context? Brockman speaks of "operant patterns on the neural level." What is "operant" here? He states Goedel's proof in an odd way: "For any formal system capable of producing arithmetic there is a truism proving the system which cannot be proven within the system." Would someone not already familiar with the proof understand this? Brockman then goes on to replace "system" by "consciousness," and apply the proof to man. This is nonsense.

9.

But if one is saying that there are no explanations, must his statements always make sense? Isn't it enough that they are suggestive?

10.

Brockman has replaced "man" with neural patterns in the brain. "Man" and all the abstractions associated with the existence of "man" are dead. But don't believe any of this, he warns: we can no longer use models (sets of abstactions). So much for Part I.

11.

Part II is less successful. Universe does not exist either, Brockman says. There is only the mathematical description. The mathematical description *is* the thing. The verbal models we make do not mean anything; they are unjustified extrapolations.

12.

Therefore, do not use the "rotted names": mind, space, time, people, place, life, death, world.

13.

Truth is a matter of convenience, Brockman claims. Nothing makes any difference. There is nothing left to say. We cannot know more than we know. Facts smirk. Our knowledge has led us to one place: nowhere; our knowledge has proven one thing: nothing.

14.

None of this is entirely satisfying. For one thing, the strategy of reducing the universe to mathematical description is not as convincing as the strategy of reducing man to neural impulses. The trouble is that any mathematical description is just amother language with its own "rotted names." It also is a model.

15.

I am objecting to one of Brockman's premises. He would say, There are no premises.

16.

But the rest of Part II is no more convincing. Like Wittgenstein, Brockman wants to climb his ladder and then throw the ladder away. But if one does not construct the ladder well enough, he will not get to a place where he can dispense with it.

17.

One cannot disagree with Brockman. To do so, one would have to use the abstractions that Brockman will not admit into the argument. But one can refuse to be enlightened after being shown Brockman's ways of looking.

18.

The trouble is that when one finishes reading Part II, one finds that, in spite of all Brockman's efforts, the universe persists.

19.

The world is unintelligible, Brockman says in Part III. Something we've always known. But it takes someone like Brockman to point it out. The world does not mean anything. It is neither significant nor absurd. It *is*.

20.

Get rid of the comfort words, he tells us. All concepts are waste. Comfort words: magic, myth, religion, art, ideology, science, literature. Meaning and necessity are preserved only in the linguistic practices that embody them.

21.

The world is unintelligible. We've always known it. But we weren't willing to admit it. (Now it is "I" who am speaking; I am no longer paraphrasing "Brockman.") It has been the business of Western civilization to impose an order on chaos, ever since the Greeks began making the world conform to the grammar of their language. Thus the scientist imposes order upon a chaotic universe, while the artist imposes order upon unintelligible experience.

22.

The constructs are breaking down. At one time we could say "Life imitates Art." It was the business of the artist to make the models by which we interpreted "human experience." But we no longer have single, accepted artistic traditions or agreed-upon models. We are approaching the point where experience simply *is*.

23.

One could go on talking about this fragmentation that is so characteristic of the modern experience; the models are breaking down everywhere. Even in physics. When classical physics began to disintegrate, we were able to replace it with quantum mechanics and with relativity. But now the mathematical model provided by quantum mechanics is beginning to break down too, and we can no longer be certain that we will find a new model to replace it.

24.

At this point Brockman would add, "Don't believe it. Don't believe anything I say. There is nothing to say, nothing to think about."

25.

What Brockman writes is not philosophy. He is no more a philosopher than John Cage is a composer. He's not even a poet. Most poets, like most physicists, are still trying to put order into the world.

26.

How long will they be able to continue the attempt?

27.

The world is unintelligible.

28.

I was almost tempted to end this piece with a quotation from Cage about chaos. Brockman, like a few artists such as Cage, are concerned with bringing us into contact with the chaos that is reality.

29.

But Brockman (and probably Cage also) would deny that there is such a thing as "chaos." Or "finality," or "reality," for that matter.

30.

Don't believe any of this.
—*John Brockman*
I've seen nothing.
—*John Cage* (quoting Satie)

Bad Ass Comix

Because the popular arts traffic in formulas, they sometimes reflect the values of a society with greater accuracy than "serious" literature. In "serious" literature, the personality and outlook of the author plays too important a role. The popular artist, on the other hand, is more likely to give his audience the simplistic messages that it demands, and to picture his readers or viewers as they see themselves.

Not so many years have passed since everyone was talking or writing of the so-called "counterculture." But aside from a few cursory glances at rock lyrics, no one seems to have paid much serious attention to the popular arts that it created.

The popular arts I am referring to are rock music, the cartoons that appeared in underground newspapers, some poetry and underground comic books, or "comix," as they were called. In this essay, I am going to take a look at a few representative comix. It would be absurd

to use these to draw any far-reaching conclusions, or to find in comix any causes of the counterculture's demise. Nevertheless, the comix may provide some insight into what the counterculture looked like from the "inside."

The most significant characteristics of the comix were not necessarily the most obvious ones. In many of them someone is getting fucked, or sucked, or hacked to pieces on almost every page. Some readers would profess to be horrified by all of this, but I can't see that the presence of sex and violence has, by itself, all that much significance. It was sex that drew audiences to the ancient Greek comedies, and the Romans were so enamoured of violence that they put on mock battles in the Circus Maximus, in which people really got killed. If we have the same hang-ups, it probably only shows that we're civilized.

The bizarre quality of many of the comix isn't so astonishing either. A subculture that is preoccupied with the drug experience and with mystical religion can be expected to produce work like this. The comix are more indebted to psychedelic art, to Tolkien and to Lewis Carroll than they are to anything genuinely spiritual. But this is to be expected; no one turns to pop culture to gain enlightenment.

The most striking thing is not the preoccupation with sex or the bizarreness, but the fact that there were so many bad-ass heroes. There are no cowboys shooting up outlaws, no Supermen or Captain Marvels, no U.S. Cavalry riding to the rescue, no Prince Valiants, not even any Frodos. Instead we have Ruby the Dyke, Captain Pissums and his Pervert Pirates, the Checkered Demon, the Wino Pervert, Mr. Toad, Weedman, Art the Fart, Wonder Warthog and assorted mutants, monsters and cretins. The underground comix's version of the superhero is Captain Guts, who beats the crap out of all the degenerate dope-smoking creeps in the name of Law and Order.

Some of the bad asses, like Mr. Toad, don't do anything worse than throw the landlord in the garbage (*Thrilling Murder Comics* No. 1), but more often they resemble Ruby the Dyke (*Zap Comix*), who kills and mutilates at every opportunity. On one page she will rape someone with a dildo; on the next she will be found hacking off penises. Sometimes the bad asses kill one another. They are never killed by the good guys, however, for the simple reason that there aren't any.

The characters who are not bad asses are typically semicomic fuckups who have been reduced to passivity. Sometimes, like Lewis Carroll's Alice, they go on strange trips in a world over which they have no

control (*Mother's Cats Comix*). Often, their experiences, unlike Alice's, are terrifying. Other characters encounter the bad asses and are raped and tortured. A few, like Amos Dedmore (*San Francisco Comic Book*) are relatively lucky. The worst thing that happens to Amos is getting pissed on by the neighborhood kids.

Even the comic characters do not find life easy. The Freak Brothers (*The Collected Adventures of the Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers*) get beat up and ripped off; they are sold parsley for dope, and their life is a continual struggle to avoid being busted. However, unlike their counterparts in the bad ass comix, they manage to avoid death and mutilation.

Trashman seems to be the closest thing to a hero that the comics have. Nevertheless, he has more trouble than success. At the beginning of the story in *Subvert Comics* No. 1, he is running away with his companion Dr. Eugene Cranker, after his band of revolutionaries has been wiped out in an ambush by unnamed assailants. Trashman and Cranker have hardly gotten away before they are captured by a gang of Amazons who gang rape the two men and then order them to clean out some latrines with their tongues. The "Black Garbed Avenger" and his friend finally manage to escape, and by the time we get to the second-to-last page, we find Trashman shooting up some of the bad guys with a machinegun. But the end of the story finds Trashman on the run again. "Let's get the fuck outta here," he says.

The creators of Trashman, like most comic book artists, shied away from espousing real revolution. Trashman, an agent of the "Sixth International," fights for the oppressed, not in today's world, but in a late twentieth-century society that exists after a nuclear war between the United States and the Soviet Union. By placing him in a mythical world, they could satisfy the popular taste for stories about revolution and yet avoid uncomfortable confrontations with reality.

Other comics presented revolution in an even less serious light. In "Armed Love," a story in *Young Lust* No. 2, the revolutionaries are cannibals. After they capture a cop, they begin debating about what they should do with him. This goes on until one member of the group says, "True revolutionaries waste nothing! I say we eat 'im!" There are no objections to this proposal. "Time we got somethin' for our tax dollar," another says. Apparently, it is not feared that unforseen consequences will result from the presence of cop bones in the garbage.

In *Motor City Comics* we find another parady of revolution. Lenore

Goldberg and her Girl Commandos are evidently unwilling to kill anyone or to blow up any buildings. They commit no revolutionary acts more extreme than giving some liberal intellectuals a bad time by subjecting them to verbal abuse. They are able to defend themselves when attacked by the police, but they don't seek out confrontations. The last frame finds Lenore giving her boyfriend a blow job. "Viva la revolucion," he says. "Mglorp slurp gulp slish..." reads the balloon over her head. Apparently "revolution" meant having a good sex life.

With a few exceptions like R. Crumb's Mr. Natural (who really isn't much of a guru), only the bad asses are in command of their world. The comix were bizarre, funny and entertaining; one could read them over and over again without tiring. But, in the end, the message they conveyed was a strangely joyless one. There are no more heroes, they tell us; the pigs will bust you, dope dealers will burn you, the hip capitalists will rip you off. The government is oppressive, they said, and the liberal intellectuals are fools; revolution isn't possible—you can't change a world as corrupt as this one. So spend your time fucking, be as screwed up as you want, and take in all the strange experiences that existence has to offer. If you really want to be master of your fate, the only way you can do it is by emulating the bad asses and rejecting values altogether.

Like all messages offered by pop culture, this was a parody of reality. Nevertheless, the alternative culture apparently found it congenial. Other media provided more optimistic formulas, and often reached audiences much larger than those of the comix. Nevertheless, it would be hard to maintain that the pessimism of the underground comic books is without significance. The attitudes that the comics reflected may not have dominated the counterculture, but they were there. Is it any wonder that, before long, the hippies were referring to themselves as "freaks"?

Books that Fucked up My Head

Books have been messing me up all my life. I doubt that I can remember even half the books that have been responsible for all my momentary (and some not-so-momentary) enthusiasms, or the works that gave me gross misconceptions about one thing or another. I remember even fewer of all the sentimental writers who, at one time or another, managed to snow me with a false or slightly experienced emotion. I suppose I'm a little better off than all those people who never read anything; they seem to have at least as many bouts with foolishness.

But there is a kind of book that is in a different class. This kind has been fucking up my head since I was in high school. Of course I've known this all along, but that hasn't stopped me from reading them. And I can't see that I'll stop in the foreseeable future; I'll go on reading

all those books that give romanticized accounts of the lives of writers and artists whether I believe them or not.

Sometimes they're autobiographical novels. These exist in great enough variety to satisfy any taste. If you're not in the mood for one of Kerouac's accounts of the life of a young writer who meets a lot of crazy people who do a lot of crazy things, there are Thomas Wolfe's enormous novels about a young man who is struggling to leave an eight-foot stack of manuscripts behind him when he dies, or William Saroyan's stories about a young writer in San Francisco, or James Joyce's portrait of a young literary intellectual. I wonder sometimes if the fascination of these works may not derive more from their romanticizing than from their literary value. It is possible to let Kerouac go on forever telling you about all the drunks he went on, but who wants to reread a literary artist like Marcel Proust? Most people can't even get through *Remembrance of Things Past* the first time.

And then there are all those accounts of Parisian artists and American expatriates, all of them poor, all of them unrecognized, all of them burning with genius. After reading these books one wonders how they ever found the time to write or paint. The hours they spent working are rarely described, but their love affairs, hopes and despairs, their crazy friends and their witty conversations are all gone over in detail.

Reading all these things had an effect on me, especially during the years I spent in college. For years I hung around coffeehouses (I don't think I ever met a real writer or artist in one, however), put down the "bourgeoisie" for its "materialistic" values, tried to have crazy friends and believed that there was something virtuous about being poor.

I was trying to believe in a fairy tale. With my middle-class background, I had never come into contact with people who were really poor, and so I didn't understand that real poverty is about the least ennobling experience that a human being can have. I didn't see that if all these poets and painters had been as poor as their biographers tried to make them appear, they would have spent all their time scrounging up meals, and wouldn't have had much time left for art or literature. I didn't see that the crazy friends were untalented people who tried to play the parts of artists because they couldn't do anything else (this is still true today; if you prove to be incompetent at everything you try you can always call yourself a poet). I didn't realize that the conversations of most writers and artists contain few profound insights; that they are, instead, mostly professional gossip: who got

published or exhibited where, who put who down in a review, who gave who VD. Worst of all, I didn't realize then that writers and artists are, more often than not, pretty unappetizing human beings. Because it is difficult to get recognition, they often compensate by cultivating absurdly inflated egos, and experience exaggerated jealousy over their contemporaries' smallest successes.

Now, as I look back over the last two decades, I don't think that I really regret having believed in a fairy story. I always knew in my guts that it wasn't really true. In any event, having illusions sometimes makes it easier for us to survive in this unreasonable world. We are rarely satisfied with things as they are, which is all the more reason for not giving up our visions of life as it should be. I see that turning out poems and stories is not going to get me compensation in the form of an extraordinarily romantic life, but if I hadn't been capable of feeling romantic about it all I would never have begun.

And maybe the world isn't entirely devoid of romance after all. I will probably spend my entire life writing. For all I know, my work may come to nothing in the end. This is exactly the kind of gamble I want to take. If I hadn't encountered books that fucked up my head I wouldn't be able to.

Who Are the Greatest Poets? An Informal Survey

It is often said that eighty percent of the physicists who ever lived are alive today. I wonder whether a similar statement might not be made about poets. Perhaps we are nowhere near the eighty percent mark yet, but I wouldn't be surprised to learn that the majority of the poets who had ever written were alive right now. It should be obvious to anyone familiar with the contemporary poetry scene that there are well over a thousand fine poets currently writing in English, and no one knows how many thousands of fair, mediocre and incompetent ones. It would be interesting to speculate about why this should be so (I doubt that such obvious factors as the population explosion, the increase in college enrollments, and so on, can entirely account for it), but that's not the subject I want to pursue here. I'm more interested in the effects that the presence of these hordes of poets is going to have.

If there are more poets than there ever have been before, and more

good poets, it is also likely that there are more poets who are really of the first order, who are part of the group that will take contemporary poetry wherever it is going to go. In other words, the poets our critics will have to deal with. Who are these poets? That's not an easy question to answer. However, if *anyone* knows who they are, it will be their peers, other poets, especially poets who are also editors.

Before I attempted to write anything on this subject, I wrote to sixty-five poet-editors of various different "schools" and asked each to name "the best poets currently writing in English." In order to influence the results as little as possible, I said nothing about how many should be named or about how great a reputation a poet should have to be included. I wanted the people answering to use their own criteria, not mine. Neither did I say anything about the nature of this article; I said simply that I needed answers to the question for an essay I was working on.

Some didn't answer. Others declined to make up lists for various different reasons. In the end, I had thirty-eight lists of various lengths. One of these contained one hundred and twenty poets; I threw that one out, and collated only the lists sent by those who had attempted to be more or less selective. I left out poets who cited themselves (unless they had also been cited by one of the other respondents), and left my own name out. (Anyone who asks such a question will find himself included in the lists of at least a couple of people.) I wound up with a list of one hundred and eighty-seven names, each of them a poet whom someone thought was one of the three or four or eight or fifteen best poets writing in English today. The figure of one hundred and eighty-seven does not, however, have any special significance. I could easily have gotten a list of three hundred or four hundred simply by mailing more letters.

Certain poets tended to be cited more often than others. The three who were mentioned most often were Robert Creeley, W.S. Merwin and Gary Snyder. However, there are several reasons why I do not believe that this fact has much significance. First, each of these three men was cited in only twenty-four percent of the responses. In other words, more than three-quarters of the respondents thought that Creeley was *not* one of our very best poets; the same can be said of Merwin and Snyder. (Although it's irrelevant to the point of this article, it might be interesting to point out that eighty-nine percent of the respondents did not include Robert Lowell in their lists, while ninety-

seven percent left out James Dickey.) Second, any informal survey of this sort cannot help but be biased. If I had mailed the letters to different people, Diane Wakoski, Denise Levertov, Charles Bukowski and Robert Bly might have come out on top instead.

I think that the implications are obvious. At the very least, there are hundreds of poets writing in English who are good enough to gain the deep admiration of their contemporaries. There is no small group that really stands out from among them. True, poets like Robert Bly, William Stafford, George Oppen, James Wright, along with Creeley and Snyder and others, can get something between twelve and twenty-five percent of the vote. But the only reason for this is that these poets have been well known long enough for all of us to have read them, while a lot of us have not yet read Lyn Lifshin or Ai or Charles Simic, or at least have not read them very thoroughly.

It is difficult to prove anything by taking an informal survey of this sort. And the poetry scene is certainly not the kind of thing to which opinion surveys are most applicable. Nevertheless, the results seem to me to be very suggestive. They seem to indicate that we no longer live in the kind of age in which it is possible to single out three or four or a dozen "major" poets from all the rest. We cannot do it now, and I doubt that the advantage of fifty years' perspective will allow us to do it in 2023. If we have major poets at all, then they are those one hundred and eighty-seven—along with the two hundred or so who didn't happen to make this particular list.

But isn't this just another way of saying that "major" poetry no longer exists, at least not in the sense that it once did? The day is past when one could pick out a few poets as ones who stood far above the rest. There will be no more Donnes or Popes or Wordsworths or Shelleys, no more Pounds or Eliots, not even any Hart Cranes. A few poets will continue to become well known, but that has little to do with the subject under discussion. Remember, it's Rod McKuen who is the best-known poet in the United States today.

Our major poets (from this point on, I'll be using this term to refer to our three hundred or four hundred best for lack of a better one) have become so numerous that it is no longer possible for the most interested reader or the most dedicated critic to keep up with their work. Admittedly, the person who simply likes to read poetry isn't likely to find this much of a problem; it simply means that he will always be able to find plenty to read. But what is the critic to do? Forget about

literatuare and make model trains instead? Follow Samuel Delany's suggestion (in "Popular Culture, S-F Publishing, and Poetry" in the Winter, 1973 issue of *The Little Magazine*) that he turns his attention to less densely populated—and therefore more tractable—fields, such as science-fiction and porno?

Fortunately, things aren't all that bad yet. In poetry, as in most of the other contemporary arts, we're witnessing a proliferation of "schools" and styles. Fifteen years ago, you were either "academic" or "beat" (and if you resisted classification, it did you no good; there were too many English Literature professors running around trying to place tags on people); today, it is possible to be affiliated with any of a dozen different schools. One can even follow trends and styles that have not yet been named. Some styles go so far as to leave the traditional conception of the "poem" behind. We have found poetry, visual poetry, a poetry that is being written in prose forms (and which is entirely unlike the old "prose poems"), even minimal poetry (see Joyce Holland's magazine of one-word poems, *Matchbook*).

If there are so many major poets that the critic cannot adequately deal with them, he can turn his attention to the major trends instead. He can do this, that is, if he manages to shake off the idea that it is still possible for an individual artist to be influential or "important" in the sense that he once could be. The older living poets, and those recently dead (here I refer to people like Creeley, Rexroth, Olson, Frank O'Hara, not to poets like Auden and Pound, who belong to an earlier generation), are the last of these. And none of them can compare in importance with major figures of the early modern era such as Williams and Eliot. The essay dealing with an isolated work or individual was once the mainstay of criticism. Today, nothing could be more irrelevant.

The following are the poets cited by those answering the question. No importance should be attached to the exclusion of any particular writer. A more extensive survey would have produced a much longer list.

Keith Abbot, Ai, Alta, Jack Anderson, David Antin, John Ashbery, Margaret Atwood, W.H. Auden, Margaret Aivson, Kofi Awoonor, Imamu Amiri Baraka (Leroi Jones), Samuel Beckett, Michael Benedikt, Ted Berrigan, Wendell Berry, Robin Blaser, Robert Bly, Edward Brathwaite, William Bronk, Gwendolyn Brooks, Michael Brownstein, Charles Bukowski, Basil Bunting, John Cage, Hale Chatfield, Tom Clark, Andy Clausen, Lucille Clifton, Andrei Codrescu, Victor Cole-

man, Leo Connellan, Victor Contoski, Clark Coolidge, Stanley Cooperman, Cid Corman, Gregory Corso, Robert Creeley, Victor Hernandez Cruz, J.V. Cunningham, Frank Davey, James Dickey, Ed Dorn, Alan Dugan, Robert Duncan, Russell Edson, Larry Eigner, George P. Elliott, Kenward Elmslie, Theodore Enslin, Mari Evans, William Everson, Peter Everwine, Irving Feldman, Lawrence Ferlingheti, Ian Hamilton Finlay, Dwight Gardiner, Allen Ginsberg, John Giorno, John Godfrey, Judy Grahn, Marcus Grapes, John Haines, Michael Harper, Jim Harrison, Robert Hayden, Ben Hiatt, Geoffrey Hill, Jack Hirschman, Sandra Hochman, Barbara Holland, Anselm Hollo, Danny Holloway, A.D. Hope, Dom Silvestre Houedard, Ted Hughes, Richard Hugo, David Ignatow, Lawson Inanda, Ronald Johnson, David Jones, D.G. Jones (same as David Jones?), Robert Jones, Erica Jong, Donald Justice, Robert Kelly, X.J. Kennedy, Galway Kinnell, William Kloefom, Bill Knott, Kenneth Koch, T.L. Kryss, Philip Larkin, Don L. Lee, Denise Levertov, Lyn Lifshin, Robert Lowell, Lewis MacAdams, Michael McClure, Howard McCord, Hugh MacDiarmid, Thomas McGrath, Jackson Mac Low, Daphne Marlatt, William Matthews, David Meltzer, James Merrill, W.S. Merwin, Thomas Meyer, Robert Mezey, Herbert Morris, Howard Nemerov, Duane Niatum, Kathleen Norris, Alice Notley, Toby Olson, George Oppen, Joel Oppenheimer, Simon Ortiz, Ron Padgett, Pat Parker, Linda Pastan, Simon Perchik, Marge Piercy, Allen Planz, Charles Plymell, Charles Potts, Al Purdy, Carl Rakoski, Rochelle Ratner, Tom Raworth, Ishmael Reed, Kenneth Rexroth, Carlos Reyes, Adrienne Rich, Laura Riding, Jerome Rothenberg, Sonia Sanchez, Peter Schyeldahl, James Seay, Hugh Seidman, Anne Sexton, David Shapiro, Karl Shapiro, Charles Simic, Myra Sklaren, W.D. Snodgrass, Gary Snyder, Wole Soyinka, Barry Spacks, William Stafford, Charles Stein, Terry Stokes, Anthony Stowers, Mark Strand, Hollis Summers, Robert Sward, May Swenson, William Sylvester, Nathaniel Tarn, John Thomas, Peter Thomas, Tony Towle, Diane Wakoski, Robert Wallace, Keith Waldrop, James Welch, Philip Whalen, Frances Whyatt, Richard Wilbur, Emmet Williams, Jonathan Williams, Keith Wilson, James Wright, Rebecca Wright, Louis Zukofsky, Bill Zavatsky.

The Academic Reviewer

The Holy Bible (God, $4.95) is published in two volumes, *The Old Testament* and *The New Testament*. Of these, only the former, a collection of the myths of an ancient Semitic tribe with a war god named Yahweh (often called "Jehovah" here) is of much interest. The harsh conditions of life are reflected in the character of the god, who is jealous, capricious and cruel. Highlights of the book are the *Psalms*, the story of Job, and poetry by the legendary King Solomon, particularly *Ecclesiastes*, a poem on the vanity of human strivings. Beginning "Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity," Mr. Solomon carries his theme through a series of variations, creating what must be considered to be moving philosophical verse. This is a book worth getting for the poetry it contains; one could easily do without the accounts of the battles.

The Prose Edda (University of Reyjavik, 1300 A.D.) by Snorri Sturlu-

son. Masquerading as a textbook on Icelandic verse forms, this book manages to incorporate some fascinating tales from Norse mythology. Of particular interest is the story of Odin's theft of the mead of poetry. In his hurry to get away, the god lets a few drops fall to earth. This, the author comments, with obvious irony, has since been known as the poetaster's share. Highly recommended.

Tosca (Parmesan & Sons, 1896), by Giacomo Puccini, is an opera, not a book. Nevertheless it is of vital contemporary interest. The highlight of the work comes in Act 2. Scarpia (one of the "pigs") is having a revolutionary named Mario tortured; he tells Tosca, Mario's girlfriend, that he will let his prisoner go if she consents to ball him. But, unbeknownst to Scarpia, Tosca has a dagger concealed in her ——— (Puccini never makes it quite clear *what* she has the dagger concealed in); thus, thinking he is going to get a "piece of ass," Scarpia gets stabbed instead. While he is dying (as baritones always do, with the orchestra playing *tutta forza con grande slancio*), Tosca and Mario "split." Mr. Puccini has written a disturbingly compelling revolutionary work.

Albert Einstein's *Zur Elektrodynamik Bewegter Körper* (Annalen der Physik, 1905) is a strange and mystifying work. Introducing, rather gratuitously, an odd concept, which he calls "Relativity," Dr. Einstein embarks on a bewildering series of speculations that cannot but leave the reader mystified. Finally, after asking, "Ist der Trägheit eines Körpers von seinem Energiegehalt abhängig?" the author pulls the strange looking formula "$E=mc^2$" out of the air. I think this is a work that one can safely pass up; such abstruse (and, one is tempted to say, possibly meaningless) speculations can have no practical implications, and are certainly of little concern to anyone except a few scholars with interest in such narrowly specialized subjects as this.

The Art of Love (Appian Way Books, 3 B.C.), by Ovid, is another in the dreary series of sex books that are currently being published. This work is of interest only because it is so old-fashioned. (Subjects such as "seduction" are discussed at inordinate length.) It is not surprising to see that the author was unwilling to publish this book under his own name ("Ovid" is a pseudonym for Publius Ovidius Naso); one might wish, however, that in the future he would allow himself to be swayed by his reservations more completely, and not publish books like this at all.

Peace (Zeus & Dionysus, 340 B.C.), by Aristophanes, is a serious and moving work by a young playwright previously known only for his

black comedies. The protagonist of this new play is Trygaeus, a visionary who farts his way up to heaven riding an enormous shit-eating beetle named Pegasus. It is Trygaeus's intention to talk to God and get things straightened out in the world. Asked by his black servant, Rastus, "What y'all gwine say to de Lawd?" Trygaeus replies, "I just want to ask him what he plans to do about genocide and nuclear fallout and the population explosion." Even though this work is badly marred by tinges of racism, it should be required reading for anyone concerned about the state of the world today.

Odes (Adonais House, 1822), by John Keats. What can I say about this one? It's *morbid.* The author, obviously a very sick man, dwells excessively on the subject of death. The following stanza from "Ode to a Nightingale" is only one of several horrible examples I could give:

> Darkling I listen; and, for many a time
> I have been half in love with easeful Death,
> Called him soft names in many a mused rhyme,
> To take into the air my quiet breath;
> Now more than ever seems it rich to die,
> To cease upon the midnight with no pain,
> While thou art pouring thy soul abroad
> In such an ecstasy!
> Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain—
> To thy high requiem become a sod.

One would think that someone who styles himself a poet could find less depressing subjects to rhapsodize over.

The Small Press

Nineteen sixty-five seems a good starting point. The "hippie" scene was flourishing, and the political activism that we associate with the latter half of the sixties was getting under way. Meanwhile the small press was in the midst of what is sometimes called the "mimeo revolution."

I've heard the objection made that there was no mimeo revolution then; that the mimeo magazines actually started in the fifties or, conversely, that even in 1965 most literary magazines were done by letterpress or offset printing. Both objections miss the point, I think. The significant thing is that it was in the sixties that poets began to publish their own magazines in large numbers. These magazines were typically either mimeographed, or printed in what I call a "typewriter-offset" format (that is, an 8 1/2 × 11-inch magazine that is stapled together on the left-hand side, for which type has been set on a typewriter). The

normal print run was generally something like five hundred copies. Little attention was paid to physical appearance. The important thing, it was thought, was to get the poetry into print. As often as not, these magazines were distributed primarily by mailing list. After copies were sent to a few sympathetic bookstores, and a handful to subscribing libraries, the rest would be mailed free to poets, editors and other interested people.

I imagine that the literary historians of the future will see all sorts of parallels between the mimeo era ("mimeo-typewriter-offset" would be more accurate, but a little awkward) and other characteristic happenings of the sixties, such as countercultural movements and political activism. If they do, I think it will be a mistake. To be sure, a lot of the poet-editors of this period dropped acid, but so did Henry and Clare Booth Luce. And if the writers of the period tended to have leftist sympathies, that was nothing new. American writers have tended to congregate on the left as long as "leftist" has been a word.

The poets and magazine editors of the sixties were more interested in literary than in political revolution. Even John Sinclair, who was later to found the White Panther Party, was primarily interested in poetry and jazz when he was editing the mimeo magazine *Work*. It was only after the people in the Detroit Artists' Workshop were harrassed repeatedly by the police and repeatedly busted for possession of small amounts of marijuana that he became a political radical. d.a. levy, who was driven to suicide because of persecution by the Cleveland police and District Attorney's office, never became a political revolutionary at all. Talking to editors, one often got the impression that they saw themselves as cultural revolutionaries only; many seemed to think that if we could only get everyone to read poetry, our entire culture would be transformed (an idea that may not be as far out as it sounds). Attempting to overthrow the government with poems and trying to accomplish the same end by setting off bombs are two very different things.

I don't mean to imply that writers and editors of the sixties were isolated from the events that took place around them. They were as aware of the things that were happening as anyone. But I do think that the mimeo era owed its existence to literary, not political, events. The latter may have influenced and colored it, but they didn't play any major role in creating it.

In order to see why the mimeo era came when it did, it is necessary

to go back to the 1950s, the period that Randall Jarrell so aptly characterized as the "Age of Criticism." In the fifties, serious literature was dominated by the academic quarterlies, magazines like the *Kenyon* and *Hudson* reviews. These magazines published more criticism than poetry or fiction, and what they did print of the latter seemed to have been tailored to fit prevailing critical standards. Although the Beats provided good copy for *Time* Magazine, and although a "new" poetry was being written by the poets associated with Black Mountain College, neither group successfully challenged the academic stranglehold. When, in 1955, Kenneth Koch described the poets of his generation as "trembling in universities," he could offer no solution; he could only say, in humorous despair,

> And supposing one goes to the *Hudson Review*
> With a package of matches and sets fire to the building?
> One ends up in prison with trial subscriptions
> To the *Partisan, Sewanee,* and *Kenyon Review!*

In time the Beat movement died. Meanwhile, the work of the Black Mountain was beginning its long journey toward the esoteric. Before long, many of the followers of Olson, Creeley and Duncan (and indeed, some of the masters themselves) would be writing only for the initiated. It remained for the writers and editors of the mimeo era to bring poetry back out of the universities into the streets. (I suppose that the term "into the streets" has become an especially bad cliche by now; nevertheless, I can think of nothing more appropriate here.) As they have in *every* age, the more innovative poets of the era took poetry out of the rarefied atmosphere in which the critics and professors and Culture vendors had placed it, and made it into something that was again relevant.

Suddenly, there were thousands of poets who were interested in the kind of poetry that wasn't getting published. I don't think my experience could have been much different from that of any of the other people who started magazines then. After *Evergreen Review* went slick and *Contact* folded, I couldn't find a literary magazine that I wanted to read. I tried *Poetry* for a year. Then I tried a couple of well-known reviews, and gave up. Other kinds of magazines existed. But there was no way for me to find out about them. They weren't to be found in the library, or in the local bookstore, and there was no Dustbooks *Directory.* So in 1965, with the help of a friend, I started *Camels Coming.* The

first issues weren't very good. But no one really noticed. What was needed were more outlets for the poetry that was being written.

The magazines of the sixties were true "underground" publications in the sense that almost no one knew about them. They were poorly distributed, and their publishers rarely made any attempt to cater to a public that expected something slick. On the contrary, many were deliberately sloppy looking and often abrasive. One editor went so far as to bill himself as "Willie Gobblecunt."

It was inevitable, however, that the little-mag scene would change. Although it might be gratifying to the ego to consider oneself part of a literary underground, there's nothing very romantic about putting out a publication that almost no one reads, or putting money into it year after year without ever getting anything back. In those days there were no grants available, so an editor either used his own money or didn't bring out a magazine. By the time of the first COSMEP Conference in 1968, editors were already becoming very concerned about finding ways to get broader distribution. At the same time they were becoming more sophisticated about printing and production techniques. In just a few years, there would be significant changes, not only in the physical appearance of the typical magazine, but also in the number of books being done.

Today, there are as many small presses as magazines. More often than not, the volumes that they publish are as well-produced as anything brought out by the commercial publishers of trade paperbacks. Although poetry still dominates them to some extent, the small press is bringing out books and magazines dealing with almost every subject.

It's probably inevitable that, as my generation grows older, some of us will view the sixties, and magazines like *Work, The Marrahwannah Quarterly* (also called *The Marijuana Quarterly*), *Olé, Fuck You, Kayak, The Outsider, Vagabond, Litmus, Eight-Pacer, The Willie,* and perhaps even *Camels Coming,* with a nostalgia that obscures their faults and exaggerates everything good about them. Some of us may even imply that a sellout took place somewhere along the line, that there was a revolution going that was somehow subverted.

If we do, don't believe us. The small press is performing the same function today that it was performing then: publishing good writing (and a lot of bad writing) that couldn't get published anywhere else. If small publishers today aren't so brash about what they're doing, it's

only because it is becoming more widely recognized that it is to the small press one must go to find out what is happening in American literature, or to read about alternatives in American life.

A Dadaist Manifesto

At one time literary trends would change relatively slowly. It was this fact that made it possible for literary historians to place the work of the past in one or another of the various critical pigeonholes, labeling one "romantic," another "naturalistic" or "modernist." There were always a few works that resisted classification, but these could either be ignored or shoved into one slot or another by brute force.

Today, however, there are so many artistic movements that classification of this sort seems all but impossible. Anyone who has followed what has been happening in art criticism since "pop art" burst upon the scene in the 1960s can see what the pigeonholing approach leads to. One "ism" after another has been discovered, played up, promoted and quickly forgotten. The attempts to impose some sort of critical order upon contemporary trends has led to nothing but chaos.

Academic literary critics, on the other hand, have not attempted to

come to terms with contemporary writing. As a result, as far as the critics are concerned, "modernism" was the last definable literary tradition that we had. By "modernism," the academics refer, of course, to the movement that was drummed up by Pound, Joyce, Eliot and the boys in the 1910s and 1920s. When a critic is confronted with any significant work of more recent vintage, he responds by making a few quizzical remarks about "post-modernism," and then quickly backs away.

I often have the suspicion that this critical cowardice stems not from the disinterest in contemporary literature evidenced by so many academics, but from the fact that writing is becoming something fundamentally different from what it was in the past, so much so that traditional criticism is unable to deal with it.

That we have a multiplicity of trends in every art form today is obvious. It might be that this fact has some deep significance that has, so far, eluded most critics. The old adage that there is no "progress" in art may blind them to the fact that the contemporary arts, if they have not "progressed," may at least be evolving into something very different from what they were in the past.

Look at conceptual art, for example. Conceptual art isn't the result of a particular philosophy or outlook in the way that such movements as classicism and romanticsm were. It is less a definable trend than it is an outright refusal to play by all the old rules. Each work of conceptual art is nothing less than a unique attempt to repudiate or shrug off the idea of artistic tradition altogether.

It may be that, in our time, all the old literary and artistic traditions are becoming exhausted and it is no longer possible for artists either to continue, to elaborate upon, or to transform the traditions that have been handed down to them, as they have always done in the past. This may be the reason we find them striking out in so many different directions at once.

It is not hard to understand why this might be happening. Consider, for example, the fact that there is only one Homer, even though there must be tens of thousands of poets writing today who are at least as talented as he was. The increase in the world's population since Homer's day, along with modern literacy rates, should be enough to ensure that. Why, then, are no *Illiads* and *Odysseys* being written? The answer is obvious: because Homer cornered the market on the epic poem. Even in Vergil's time there was a marked falling off in the pos-

sibilities available to any poet who wanted to attempt something original in the form. Similarly, there must be a hundred playwrights in New York City alone who are roughly the equals of Shakespeare. And why are no *Hamlets* being written? Because Shakespeare got there first.

It is possible that, as this process of exhaustion goes on, we might eventually reach the point where there is nothing left, where all literary traditions become played out entirely. I suspect that we are approaching that point right now.

If we have reached the end of literary tradition, it doesn't necessarily follow that there will be no more literature, only that we will no longer have "novels" and "poems" and "dramas" in the old senses of the terms, and that terminology such as "naturalistic" or "surrealist" will no longer seem very adequate. Each work of literature will be a unique *gesture* that transcends all the old categories.

Because criticism lacks terminology capable of dealing with work of this sort, we may find the critics referring to it as "dadaist." If they do, they may, paradoxically, not be far from the mark. For, after all, it was the dadaists who first foresaw the end of traditional art and literature, and who are our most important forerunners.

Donald Phelps

Destiny as Melodrama

Throughout that ongoing fantasy-chronicle-critique that comprises his books of the past generation—*Views of a Near Sighted Cannoneer, Shake It For The World, Smartass, You and Me*—Seymour Krim's signal achievement, I think, has been to restore the act of publicization to a traditional kind of grandeur and iconic enchantment, ridding it only temporarily of the waxy sheen imparted by the publicists. It is singular in at least one respect, this Globe Theatre of Manhattan (through the first two books, at least; in the last he begins moving about, through several geographic and spiritual latitudes, to telling effect); because, as Jimmy Breslin and Gore Vidal and Mario Puzo and Peter LaFarge have agonized and swaggered and threatened and achieved, we have also witnessed the theatre being built, rivet by rivet, rafter by rafter. Which is by metaphorical way of saying, since the bald statement seems self-evident almost to the point of fatuity, that Seymour Krim is one of

America's very most private public writers; so much so, that while beholding the cataract of imaged wealth and vileness, while being regaled by Krim's own rhapsodic, browbeating, fiercely confidential hortations, we can, with preposterous ease, miss the progressive significance of his distinctions and assessments, his gauging of energy, talent, the reachings-out of germinal craft in younger writers, the signs in older writers of restored or new-directed energy, or else of attrition, or succumbing to some public role. (About Krim's predilection for roles, much remains to be said, some of it, in due course, here.) The total effect is of an exegesis being delivered, at top lung capacity, in the Mermaid Tavern, on a Friday night, while the speaker is on a step-ladder, plastering the ceiling.

The very appreciable burden of the corporate work is Krim's endeavor to confront the world—"the world" in the sense both of raw experience and of the various cozening, bullying, addictive institutions and goods; in confronting it, at once to re-create it *and possess it*—how much artistically, how much materially and/or erotically, even Krim, I strongly suspect, cannot say for certain; but insofar as the two drives fuse, and supply each other with images (see, for example, the essay in *Views of a Near Sighted Cannoneer* on advertising and fetishism), the result is some of the most vivid, and infectious, illustration of avidity as a creative force since Balzac. And, in the course of this affirmation-as-conquest, this mission-exhibition, he re-creates—in the senses both of creatively records, and reconstructs— his youthful personality: bookish, anxiety-blistered, tremulously deferential to both persons and traditions; traits, fissures, which he not only protests (in the old Protestant sense), but subsumes as fuel for his voraciously charging, wondrously sustained act of affirmation: the affirmation of writing as a sort of absolute behavior, an encompassing action, implemented at all times by the will, which it therefore praiseth; and as a considerable force in the world.

What I think I find most admirable, endearing and goading about Krim's commitment and his discharge of it is its literalness: the Siamese twin of his candor. Literalness as a virtue has been absurdly interred by various literary critics—a profession where due process is seldom known—something like once every decade—a rate corresponding roughly to the rate at which writers must needs rediscover it. For the majority of authentic writers recognizes, with the saints, that sooner or later the literal way is the only way. Krim's specific

commitment is to render *both* the massive presences and the fractious, wheeling energies of his microcosm, contemporary literary society; to portray, glorify and voice those energies, which are embodied, as he views them, in writers like Norman Mailer, Jimmy Breslin, Pete Hamill, James Jones: writers whose work—so, at least, I would summarize Krim's restatements and variations—thrives on the instant play of their intelligence, sensibility and imagination upon the situations and data that the world offers them as journalists; and who at once personify, rebel against and project to their readers their common world. Krim's depictions of these men dilate with a deeply romantic élan. Let no one use the word "romantic" to patronize him: his Balzacian earnestness of appetite, fused with his Old Testament work-dedication, would redeem his romanticism in full, even without his richly-weathered craft. So, too, the numerous—not lesser, surely, in Krim's constellation; only smaller-orbited—figures who people *You and Me* (Peter LaFarge, Kenneth H. Brown, Bill Ward); each of whose orbits presents, nonetheless, a study for the galaxy. And in all instances, that romantic élan is hounded, checked and, at best (as in many chapters of *You and Me*), creatively charged by a long-time excellent editor's craft-assessing, rhythm-conscious (the rhythms of an art discerned in a life, at which Krim surpasses), discipline-possessed eye. By seeking for these figures the dignity and dimension of embodying, great and small, a common world, Krim is seeking for them the stature of archetypes, for which we can recognize his passion and his need; yes, even amid his occasionally brilliant railing at popular myth and archetype, in *Views of a Near Sighted Cannoneer.* Even here, at catcalling crescendo, as in the marvelous best of the "White Cadillac" essay on white society's romantic docketing of black (Harlem-centered) culture, Krim cannot but recognize, and attest, his own imagination's pelvic thrusting toward just such archetypes and myths. This is Krim's cherished image: the individual artist-personality emerging from a ground of popular myth, *yet never totally emerging:* the context consisting of that archetypal blur, infiltrated with Seymour Krim's own awareness. The best of Krim's essays, it strikes me, involve in some wise his own perplexity at the fusion of his consciousness with the popular-mythic imagination of the United States; which, at the same time, feeds both his presuppositions and his fantasizing energies. The essays on Joe Turner, and Peter LaFarge, and in his most eloquently self-lacerating declaration in *You and Me,*

"Epitaph for a Canadian Kike" (a nosegay for the sculptor Sam Goodman), offer cram courses on the enigma of popular culture; the ubiquity of its images, and our rediscovery of those images in what seem often to be our most deeply stationed premises, our farthest-reaching corridors of reflection. Krim himself, I more than suspect, continues, in that last and best essay collection, to be more deferential to such categories than he is aware, even at this point: he continues referring to a stereotype called the Novel, the citadel of everything obsolescent, elitist, expressively frustrating, and massively Square on the American literary terrain. And yet, this solid-enough-appearing edifice, like so many others, tends to dissolve into a rich blur the more Krim's, and our, scrutinies play upon it.

His encomiumizing of writers like Hamill and Breslin, writers so far inferior to himself, in my opinion, has to do, I think, with Krim's sense, as I receive it time after time, of actuality as ingrained within the Real: something implacably solid, and ultimately formidable. "The enemy," he calls reality, in one of his essays on Mailer, I believe. The action of converting actuality, of catalyzing through the traffic of consciousness and actuality, is either inaccessible to him or rejected by him. What we get instead—the psychic context of his essays—is the *pressure* upon him, and on many another writer, of an actuality he can neither reject nor convert. "Consciousness," as anything dissimilar from "awareness," almost never enters into his considerations; consciousness of *any* kind separate from the will to make manifest, and the will to consolidate. Reality seems to be eternally enticing and baiting him with the wheedle-threat: "Make me more real!"

This sense of pressure, I believe, accounts for the *kind* of literalness that often distinguishes his work, and sometimes embogs it: a literalness that makes obeisance to the idea of language as ingrained in reality, and as somehow ultimately inseparable from that massive pressure, that defiance, which is reality, which is the Establishment itself. He overesteems Hamill and Breslin and Tom Wolfe, I think, because they are in "the midst of things," the vortex of such reality, and can deploy it with such zesty and stylish poise. It is their *placement* that he adores, the sporty toughness and mobility of their address; and in his altertype, sometime patron (who wrote a preface for *Views of a Near Sighted Cannoneer*) and long time rival-image, Norman Mailer, something more: a triumphantly imperial personality, whose willful, rococo escapades—so fecund of both seventeenth-centuryish

reflection and Ludwig of Bavaria fantasy—succeed in colonizing, clothing and subjugating the world that Krim finds a taunting, tasking opponent.

I find, in most of Krim's essays, a foregrounded, rhetoric-congested space, a tone of down-to-the-wire urgency, an insistence less often bullying (that, too, at times) than supplicating, with a supplication that you see and understand everything, *and all at once:* a tone redolent of the Kid's First Break on a Big Time Sheet, and slightly bemusing, perhaps, considering that Krim has been producing professional journalism in so many of its aspects (from news coverage for the New York *Herald Trib,* to editing literary sections of *Swank* and *Nugget*) for so very long, and so ably. I am constantly and, usually, sympathetically struck, not by Krim's overrating, in his full-length portraits, of subjects like Joe Turner or Bill Ward, but rather by his quest for *sufficient space* to accommodate them and their settings, fully extended. Just this demand for appropriate space, equal unto the present realization of the subject and the latitude of its outreachings is, I think, one of the central, seldom-specified dilemmas of those (among whom I count myself) concerned with reviving and regenerating the essay in America. Space for the figure and its landscape; space, too, for its anticipated lengthening shadows, its voice's echoes in the landscape-to-be; as unerringly recognized by Krim, the capacity and illusoriness of American space cannot but be a factor in American literary form.

What becomes clear by degrees is that Krim's style and rhythms, both within each essay and in accumulation, project his exertion to counteract that which is deliberate, over-qualifying, overly *seeking* in his consciousness: legacy of the (in his view, at least) library-bound, potentially suicidal Jewish youth of such a febrile, collapse-prone intelligence. His ardent diligence, his integrity, forbid him the recourse of willful obliviousness to qualification, to the distraction of small relevant questions about his own perspective, experience, attitudes; forbid the biliously hangdog assertiveness, robed in pompous, *macho* pseudo-impartiality, of Jimmy Breslin, whom on that account Krim so admires. (Or used to: "The Million Dollar Jewboy Caper," in *You and Me,* is a handsome golden toad of delayed retribution; its head housing, I suspect, a diamond of self-revelation.) Neither can he, or will he, detach himself, remove the *mauling* ingratiations of his consciousness, enough from his ongoing environment (I suspect that "detachment" is one of the few acknowledged dirty words in

Seymour Krim's vocabulary) so that from the dialogue of intelligence and situation can issue that authentic conversion of experience, the work proceeding intact from its creator, which is what "objectivity" means to me. So he *asserts* his doubts, his hesitations, his self-reproaches as all pertaining to that endless hemorrhage of affirmation, that unstayed action, and at the same time, converts them into facts, which augment his terrain. And so, too, in his endless courtship of the actual, he has, in fact, it seems to me, achieved a theatre of the imagination, as consistently bounded by his artistic concerns and quarrels as that of Henry James. For the landscape is bounded, canyonlike, by a sense of structured tradition, which he can never really bring himself to surmount; so that even the brief news stories included in *Shake It* (among them, the impeccably composed "When We Went to John Steinbeck's Funeral Service, This is What Happened") deal with surely not insignificant, but structured and essentially peaceable events, rather than the raw-head-and-bloody-bones realism for which Krim often clamors.

The word "theatre" dominates my reflections on Krim's work: those out-thrusting personae, like Sam Goodman and Peter LaFarge, whom we often see in shifts of role (the passage, in Krim's imagination, of "role" from its sociological to its theatrical sense, is wonderfully crystallized in his procession of vignettes depicting Peter LaFarge's increasingly pathological histrionics); the front-and-centered address of his voice; above all, the priority that he gives to performance as such in his body of work; and to the dilemma—how and where, and to what reception?—that the issue of performance must invoke for any essentially private and self-confronting writer, meaning any writer. As a result, he puts a premium on power as *impact:* the capacity of journalism (what he, with others, has miscalled "the New Journalism"; it was sired, in this country at least, by Winchell for intimacy and by Murray Kempton for literary gloss, and its antecedents surely include Ernie Pyle's World War II dispatches) for involving the mass audience in the emotions and perspectives of the writer and, implicitly, in the issues with which he is dealing. As far as "altering reality" (a phrase to which Krim has had frequent recourse) by such means is concerned, I can only offer thanksgiving, on behalf of his soul and many another, that he seems to have no really clear notion of that mission's implications; which implications have, nonetheless, spoken rather decidedly

for themselves recently, as in the "Son of Sam" coverage, which flouted due process in every headline after Berkowitz's arrest.

In the consciousness that Krim has proclaimed and reported for us with such animation and, often, stentorian force, the public has taken its place—meaning, of course, the convention of the public; not as mere condition of which the writer must sometimes remind himself; but as a dimension of his consciousness, as a determinant of its architecture. Thus, he enacts, as he has so movingly articulated throughout his fifties' and sixties' essays, the situation-dilemma of the writer-as-performer: a dilemma that, indeed, came to a head in the fifties, among writers like Krim and some of his most notable contemporaries—men like Manny Farber, Willie Poster, Robert Warshow, even—*sue generis*, yet of this landscape—Weldon Kees and Paul Goodman. These and others took alert and not infrequently alarmed cognizance of the reshiftings, the reconsolidations, occurring among mass audiences; how the very concept of "mass audience" has come to transect a great variety of economic and cultural strata. All attended with a vigorous, often mordant acumen to the increased permeating latitude of "popular art"; and in the seminally original writings of Farber and Poster, in the poetry of Kees (more than in his film or jazz critiques), we discover an apprehension, at times creatively hopeful, at times sanguine or supine, about the dissolution of form itself, the organism of art, the covenant of artist with audience, in deference to a ubiquitous process, a universal flux: the private consciousness opening its doors, windows, finally removing its panelling, to the inward-rushing popular-mythic awareness that performers like Mort Sahl and Lennie Bruce, at their levels, and Senator McCarthy at his, were fervidly enacting before their respective audiences. Very much as though Einstein's Relativity, gaining second wind, had now overtaken even the *illusion* of fixity, i.e., form itself.

Throughout the writings of Farber, Poster, Kees and others, we can see evolving a redefinition, in some instances a mystique, of manifest *performance:* the sovereign acknowledgement of the public as not a mere amorphous Vapidity, nor even an unwaivable condition of production, but as the ultimate plane of the actual, against which the writer's works are defined, codified. Plane? Yes, or canvas; for it is not irrelevant, I suggest, to notice how painting-centered was American culture of the fifties and early sixties; how oriented to the basic prem-

ise of manifest performance, not in the simple-minded pragmatic version of "making good," but in terms of reassessing one's, the writer's, dialogue with the actual, and reincorporating one's art as a vital component of total behavior.

Seymour Krim and Manny Farber are two major survivors of the group to which I refer. Farber, at last (see the recent *Film Comment* essays by him and his wife, Patricia Patterson; as well as the interview with them by Richard Thompson in the May-June *Film Comment*), has codified and confirmed the—critical principles? not exactly; esthetic? not so Northrup Frye would notice it—the "critical-artistic deportment," which scooted and iridesced throughout those diverse film and painting essay-reviews of the fifties-through-seventies. Like Krim, Farber utters and practices the oneness of the artist and critic as a presence moving watchfully through an at least equally mobile landscape. And, like Krim—for me, indeed, Farber's more loosely-girt, more fluid rhythm of confrontation illuminates the same instinct and determination in Krim—Farber is perennially careful (in the seventeenth-century sense, "concerned") about somehow reconciling the writer's necessity of acting, through the writing, so as to leave some *mark;* and the equally beleaguering necessity, or importunity, of giving meaningful and honest translation to cultural experience, acting as intermediary and as full-time seer. Farber and Krim have rejected that limp abandonment of the dilemma—by surrendering to the "enemy," reality, and then claiming hostage's privileges—that characaterizes those depressed artists of whom I have written elsewhere; but they have also rejected, it seems to me, an important department of the will. For, even while pertinaciously maintaining the will that declares and spells out the presence of the artist, which demands witness, given and recognized, from even the most frivolous-seeming, most ephemeral shapes of our culture, they reject the will that engages the intervention of the intellect as catalyst, and also as authority; which, in criticism, insists upon at least seeking that structure of values, that differentiation beyond mere identification of quality, which experience in itself will never hand us.

In art, in fiction, the insistence is upon form, no matter how apparently "formless": This is the artist's survival map. Along with "consciousness," "form" is a word I have known Krim to use only in its most passively conventional sense, i.e., as category: the form of the novel. Failing or refusing to recognize form as the ultimate self-identification

of the artist, he fails to recognize (although, as generous as astute, he has numerous times accredited these writers as writers) the authentic "new journalism" of writers from Isaac Babel to Paul Goodman (who, supremely I should say, helped to sire a new style, awareness of environment and metaphysical rhythm in American writing) and James Baldwin (for his essays, rather than his fiction: essays in which, with his aristocratic consciousness as central reference, Baldwin responded and prophesied; like Krim, holding to accurate articulation as an item of faith in retaining the decent remnants of a hand-me-down and, with utmost justification, ambivalently-regarded culture, against the holocaust that he, Baldwin, was among the first precisely to observe and predict). These writers commonly command and hallow, both, the interpenetration of their intelligence and their material—the landscape before them—that is inaccessible to, rejected out of hand by, those newspaper and magazine reporters whom Krim would nominate as the Leatherstockings of a new literary perspective. Writers like Goodman and Baldwin, or Ed Dorn and Douglas Woolf (never mentioned by Krim) admit no *a priori* privileges at all to notions of structure; much less any journalistic perogative for distancing themselves from, or leaving ambiguous their relationship to, the reaches of current history as they find those reaches pertinent to *them*. To them, the imagination is a cardinal implement for determining and crystallizing such pertinence; and the cardinal purpose of the will, as all recognize, consists of just such crystallization, the final making-clear, the ultimate declaration of their self-appraised powers, and those powers' objects, at that customs-booth that oversees the border country between the writer's private and public selves.

And yet, to make these distinctions is, for me, in no sense to dismiss or scorn Seymour Krim's distinct and original—not far, I suspect, from unique—contribution to American critical journalism of the past two decades: i.e., his first-person-stanchioned, at times riotously informal sociology of the ever-widening place between elite and popular letters. "Original" means that he has rediscovered and recast in his own way, on his own terms, the accomplishment of his true antecedents, Addison and Steele: not only to assemble a gallery of characters who also conduct and translate some of their period's major appetites, fallacies, and demons; but, through his own fusing warmth of visceral devotion and zest and carnal vigor, to create, in one of America's most eruptive and schismatic eras, the valid equivalent of a normative eye,

the sense of a quotidian present that can make the recent prodigies of our culture more humanly intelligible. Normative in the terms that our culture can best acknowledge: not droning, not grass-roots nasal, not stucco-insular, but hilarious, beseeching, raucously exclamatory. "I Am the American Murder Man," in *You and Me,* is one of the most abundantly observed, trenchant and just accounts of the American imagination that I can recall having read in years. It is grounded, and directed, by Krim's meditations on the public—not of the United States primarily, but of England, in which he spent several seasons: a dislocation which, along with others he describes in *You and Me,* have worked the all-important change, I believe, of separating him from the old, anchoring obsession: being one with his environment. England justified and strengthened positively that sense of dislocation that had caused such perplexity to him, and us. Small coincidence, I suspect, that *You and Me* also features some of his most just, edged and strongly-voiced criticisms.

Edith Warton and the Invisible

for Jane Richmond

The cardinal point to bear in mind, it seems to me, is the scale on which she loved property—honored it as an extension of identity, when, transcending itself as mere possession, it becomes token of one's faith in the physical world, and of one's obligation to it. Edith Wharton's warm and stringent solicitude conferred this sense of property on those landscapes that her universe comprises: the mildewing New York aristocracy of *The House of Mirth* or *The Custom of the Country;* the New England of *Ethan Frome* or "Summer," with its weather-bleached, inertia-fungused Puritan remembrances. What we experience from her renderings of such regions and provinces is not their fragmentary narrowness *as* regions; nor yet any artificial attempt to dilate them as microcosms, like a view of Washington in a crystal globe. What we experience from these landscapes, seen under the

appraisal of Wharton's ownership, is, first, their *intactness* as landscapes: unmarred by any obvious self-projections on her part, unviolated by any cannibalistic efforts at "understanding" or "insight." This intimation of their serene totality is what we feel at first about Edith Wharton's landscape-properties; then, reading on, we sense, like a body's reflected warm exhalation, the *presence* of her ownership, the almost tangible precision of the distance she maintains; and the loving alertness that this distance conveys to her covenant with all the sensual world, natural and man-created; and the covenant that *this* entails, in turn, with the invisible components of the world, its rhythms, its pressures.

For all the filigreed busyness of her writings' surfaces, their transactions and ceremonies and intrigues, her writing exhibits, always, the most childishly elementary, the most childishly authentic response to the world of sense: her common denominator, her supreme criterion of reality. The sovereign registrar of this reality is the eye. Vision takes precedence, easily, over hearing, smell or taste, suggesting both Wharton's precise remove from what she is recording and—more important—her insistence on viewing her actuality as a friezelike concordance and flow of figures and background. And, beyond this, her ability, which one learns presently to identify, to indicate the flux and progression of nature, and of history, which counterpoints and underscores nature. She has a Chekhov-like aptitude for identifying people as at once figures in a landscape and human eminences in motion.

In reaching the above few conclusions about her work, I have taken time enough for the rises, dalliances and descents of any Edith Wharton protagonist: over half my life, from junior high school, when I knew her as a writer of much-anthologized ghost stories, to my reading a few years ago of *The Age of Innocence.* Even at this date, my not disagreeable but rather muffled first impression was of an author's personality more than half-submerged in her own material, so that I tended to visualize Edith Wharton as a kind of illustration, a Currier and Ives print in pink and grey, for her own text. Her craftsmanship struck me as of an, at times, near-hermetic smugness; and the overall effect, despite my liking for her seemingly unstudied precision and dry equanimity of tone, was of a gentle wash backdrop to, say, the maneuverings and convulsions of James's novels. Even though he was sometime mentor to her, Wharton seemed to me a gentle elder to his hectic intensity.

Several years and many Whartons later, my major injustice to Edith Wharton, to paraphrase Mr. Edmund Wilson's essay title, seems to me to have lain in judging her by a retrospective work. Such misjudgment also hampered my appreciation of her genuine and individual powers—narrative rhythm and narrative form—which appear in force even amid *The Age of Innocence*'s relative serenity. Such powers, let me add, may easily be underrated, if not missed, in a single reading of Wharton; for they are allied, not to the nervous exigencies of plot-rigging or pyrotechnic mise-en-scène, but to the cumulative motions of time and history; and they are seldom fully appreciated until, looking back over *The Custom of the Country* or *The House of Mirth*, or the stunning novella "Bunner Sisters," we realize with what insinuating force the rhythm of the narrative has guided and molded our impressions of an individual's total life, thus interpolating itself with the rhythms of our memories. Moreover, the most hypnotically insistent of Wharton's powers resides in her ability to suggest what is *missing:* the void of time; the weight of wasted years, aborted energies.

Although, given a minimum of the patience and attention which she deserves and abundantly rewards, any of Wharton's major novels or novellas should provide an appropriate introduction to her work, i.e., it seems to me that what I consider her diptych—the novels *The House of Mirth* and *The Custom of the Country*—exhibits her range—not in the word's usual sense, for the scope of her material was rather drastically limited, but in the varying intensities, far beyond the reach of ordinary virtuosity, of her imaginative and emotional scales. Neither does "range" connote the range of imaginative play, of multiple self-projection, but the range of her *seeking*, as dictated by the restless persistence of her justice, the rigorous tact of her solicitude for the most accurate apprehension of character and scene. Above all, however, these novels display in concentrated prospect Wharton's tireless concern for form, and her peculiar understanding of form as a means for the author to comprehend her people, and insure a just perspective of them.

The complementary panels of these works confront us with the wasting and perversion of Nature, as personified in the beauties and energies of two young women: the one, intelligent and vulnerable and desperate; the other, vacuous and greedy and intuitively resourceful as a mink. Both of them, whatever their respective gifts and perceptions, are doomed to use only a fraction of these—through combina-

tions of events which may present themselves superficially as fate, or luck, but which in fact signify the terrible, inert forces of the expiring societies in which, and against which, the young women struggle; forces that do not so much oppress as blindly restrict and control their actions.

The House of Mirth, Wharton's first novel, is one of her most nearly romantic; "nearly" signifying the finger's length of irony which Wharton maintains between her intelligence and compassion, and her subject. By virtue of the glamorous patina which she admits to her setting and heroine—a glamour which, however, she rigidly refrains from selling—Wharton counterpoints the ever-tautening desperation, and ultimate despair, with a poignant sweetness I think she seldom equalled afterward.

The book's nearest impingement on romance is its theme of identity at bay, and finally annihilated. The identity is that of Lily Bart: society beauty and social ornament, who, with no income of her own, skims and darts around the edges of social acceptance—and self-awareness—in the hope that her beauty will somehow keep her on course along the network of intangibles by which she lives. We see her—the earlier scenes passing in diorama-like glide—through a succession of dinner parties, trips abroad, small borrowings from gentleman friends (borrowings which increase, even as the circumstances and the friends become ever more importunate). Then the rhythm becomes more heavy and grinding, the book's advance martial and massive; and the devastating intelligence is borne home upon her, and us, that her charmingly listless way of making a living is, indeed, just that: a living, on however illusory day-to-day terms, deprived of which she will die. And it is made no less clear that, however frivolous or fatuous the structures by which they abide, the people whom those structures sustain may prove as brutally jealous of them as the constituency of a twelfth-century French court. And, clearest and most formidable of all, there emerges the realization that Lily's destruction is being precipitated, not merely by the envious bitchery of Edith Dorset, or the slippery gallantry of George Dorset, or the callous snobbishness of her sometime admirer, Selden, but by the insensate, mechanistic ruthlessness of traditions, and reflexes determined by those traditions, which have survived any possible reasonable function, or any plain intelligence that might have given them humanity. *The House of Mirth* remains one of Edith Wharton's bleakest conjugations of the

verb "to need." And—despite a certain excessive rhetorical density, a breathless over-expostulation—it eloquently prefigures what is to become her most original discovery about the world of her surveillance: the presence of that which is missed; the weight of the intangible.

The most notable part of the book's suggestive force, it seems to me, proceeds directly from Wharton's extraordinary introductions of stasis: the massive near-immobility of her descriptive passages, the set-pieces of dinner or lawn party. Near-fixity, which, seen in perspective, nevertheless discloses a haunting, mock-sluggish mobility. At times the book seems propelled solely by the now-famous inventories of library or dining room or garden. She entertains a strong Puritan regard—a feeling at once too deep and too tough-minded for sentimental affection—toward the prospect of things "in their proper places": furniture, food, little rituals, like the Bunner sisters' gift-giving.

Nor does her sense of placement, of obligation to setting, exclude her characters. The touching vividness of Lily Bart's beauty only underscores how wanting in any forceful initiative she generally seems—as distinct, yet as inseparable, from her associations as the heroine of a bas-relief frieze. And yet—thanks once more to Wharton's extraordinary proprietary authority—Lily never, at least until the book's last third, seems inadequate as a figure on that account.

Nevertheless, before the novel is over, Edith Wharton's slightly equivocal restraint in her depiction of Lily has led to what I cannot help but regard as a misjudgment: an overemphasis not of sentiment, but of dramatic weighting. I am thinking, in fact, of those passages that ought to have remarshalled and amplified all of the foregoing sections: the scenes in which Lily is brought to earth, to poverty and self-denigration and despair. The entire sequence should have, in effect, rallied behind it every social, emotional and psychological component of the novel's first two-thirds, and should have accomplished this, not with Wagnerian thunders or Verdian raptures, but with that dry devastation that Wharton imparts to the conclusion of her much later, much greyer novella, "Bunner Sisters."

And yet, reading about the agony of Lily, I was surprised at my nagging sense of inanity; and even my annoyance with the sequence of scenes, and with Lily herself; almost, I realize now, as though I were hearing from Lily's own lips an interminable *largo lamentoso* on having to work in a factory, having to stay in cheap hotel rooms and take

work as an upper-class call girl. Lily talking, and—a most unexpected manifestation!—Edith Wharton just at her shoulder, shaking her head and tsk-tsking.

Yet—as against my silly and pat and unjust response—the reasons for Wharton's lapse are, I think, as richly complex as the sense of her presence one receives elsewhere in the novel. It results, I should say, from a collusion of imaginative overreach and a failure of narrative rhythm: rhythm as it represents her combined sense of direction, weight and perspective, all conducting the novel's organic progress. The prevalent rhythm of *The House of Mirth* is that of classical comedy; which is not to say chichi and over-patterned syncopation, but the rhythms of small encounters and maneuverings; of engagements with seemingly temporary, yet interlocking, day-to-day problems.

Such a rhythm would seem ideally apposite to the chronicle of a woman in Lily Bart's situation: to the underscoring of miniature cares, embarrassments, consolations by the manifold pressures of sheer survival-necessity. Wharton, in her opening chapters, beautifully comprehends as a totality, and with an implicit understanding between herself and her readers, this tragi-comic counterpoint of so many women's lives; and it is this understanding that lends her command of classical comic idiom and cadence such dramatic suggestiveness, and enriches with such significance her feeling for set-pieces and ceremonies and routines. This sense of incessant cross-reference between the seeming-miniature and the momentous heightened my sense of the novel as a dry, minor-key, gavotte-tempo version of Meredith's *Diana of the Crossways.*

Indeed, my only demurral about Wharton's disposition of narrative form in *The House of Mirth* is her failure to surmount it, and the way in which she overprojects her will to surmount it. The failure, I think, is actually a failure either to endow Lily with the kind of daemonic identity that would justify the high-tragic emphasis of the ending, or to devise another ending, more drab and far more sour, by which Lily in life forfeits that *espirit* which has won us, along with her author; teaching us what Wharton was to learn superbly later on: that the prospect of continued life, with its cycles and accretions, can prove more lethal to identity than death itself. There are at once too obligatory a logic and too willful a sympathy, hindering the pace and muffling the impact of Lily Bart's last days.

Wharton's fractional failures in *The House of Mirth* only portray the

more vividly the warm volatility of her discontent with any established form, any assigned distance: her awareness of the demands that her content itself, comprising so much of immobility and distance, placed upon her capacity for judicious sympathy.

That sympathy and that sense of formal obligation are never separate in her work; and, when their joint endeavors fail, feeling and obligation thwarting one another, we encounter a kind of unconvincing dramatic syllogism, like the conclusion of *The House of Mirth,* or, much later, a story like "False Dawn," in which the brilliant repletion—weather, food, decor—of the opening scenes is dithered away afterward in Edna Ferberish squarings-off between Old and Young Ideas.

On the other hand, triumph has produced *The Custom of the Country.* One of Wharton's masterpieces, sardonically brisk, expansive, multifacetedly tender, the novel documents the Tamburlaine-like progress of midwestern heiress Undine Spragg through New York and Europe; as well as through four marriages, and at least as many stages of spiritual atrophy. At once monolithically stupid and guilelessly predatory, Undine superficially seems as remote from Wharton's sympathies as Lily Bart is near them. Yet, in my opinion, *The Custom of the Country* would merit reading if for no other reason than that, as one of Edith Wharton's most acclaimed "satires," it should do most to annihilate any notion of her as a satirist. A word, I might add, that I have no present interest in redefining, especially since satire seems so generally to exclude what I honor most highly in art: complexity, empathetic range, mystery. I can presume to suggest, however, that very little satire indeed has ever engaged itself, as Wharton ceaselessly does, and most notably in this novel, with the processes of erosion and attrition, or with the pathos of shrivelled human potential. Whereas satire deals in reduction through simplification, Wharton's comedy is nurtured by her sense of impounded fullness, of human potential, complexity and power. Her very Aquarian consideration of surfaces, and the irony that it entails, also is an earnest of her faith, however disabused of romance, because of the continuous possibilities, however shoddy on occasion, because of the impounded fullness, however often left to rot, to which the surfaces testify. Her surfaces in *The Custom of the Country* may seem simple and explicit enough, but only because she so venerates them, and will not slacken her self-demanding humility toward them. Wharton never sentimentally

suggests anything deeply surprising, any hidden consolation prize of sensibility or generosity, to contradict our impression of Undine Spragg's Dumb Dora exterior; but she does assert that, as a human surface, it is the seal of a total human existence, and so deserves, from the artist, a reverence of detachment beyond the detachment of mere disinterest or impartiality. She has a good aristocrat's regard for banked, implicit richness. That is why, rough as it may seem, her treatment of Undine can so absorb and move us. That is why a judgment like Edmund Wilson's is so off-the-mark when he summarizes the novel, with characteristic, slapdash brusqueness, as a Sinclair Lewis-like study of a gold-digger. Undine's conquering progress through mansion, chateau and divorce court is in no wise monotonous, as are Fran Dodsworth's amorous fandangos in the most distinguished of *Custom's* literary by-blows, because Undine begins her progress as a child, albeit a silly, over-indulged child, and because her progress involves the strangulation of her child's soul. The book ends with one of those returns and reencounters with which Wharton will so often represent the curling back of existence upon itself, like a shred of birch bark. Undine has returned to her childhood by remarrying the husband of her childhood, and is faced, in turn, with another cheated and neglected child: her eight-year-old son.

Unlike the typical demonological protagonist of satire, Undine is far more the victim than the agent of the pernicious forces in the novel; hardly less than her decent first husband. We are grossly mistaken in supposing that Wharton despises Undine's pushiness, her little-girl avidity for what seem to her the splendid inaccessibles of aristocratic life. The capacity for such pushing is one that Wharton can easily venerate, and does, in the persons of burly gallants like Elmer Moffatt—Undine's first and final husband—or Mr. Rosedale, the jovial Jewish parvenu of *The House of Mirth.* The pushing instinct, the reflex of advance, is, Wharton recognizes, a basic motion of life. Spiritual horror, for her, consists of this good, this saving impulse being rendered inane by the inert weight of time. Undine *is* detestable by the novel's end, but only because she is so witheringly sad, because her innocent, animal voracity has been turned into frigid greed, without ever finding its proper object, that which would liberate her energies. Wharton is one of the very, very few American writers with whom I am familiar—James T. Farrell is another—who can thus portray people as victims, without yielding a hair's breadth to the vicious self-pity or

facile partisanship of victim psychology; who can bear firmly enough in mind the laws of proportion governing her characters' lives to show them as victims in the very fullness of their statures, in the dignity of their relative powers, without subjecting them to the fantastical exigencies of romanticism and thereby, incidentally, cheating the imaginations and sympathies of her readers.

This achievement of Wharton brings home to us again how completely she eschews the eroticism of power, one of the few kinds of eroticism that she does not so much as suggest in her work. The struggles or submissions of her people are couched in no terms less elementary than those of survival or more ambitious than those of aspiration to the simplest freedoms. There is no hint of that tumescent ferocity which fuses all other degrees of eroticism in the power struggles of James's *What Maisie Knew* or *The Awkward Age;* a primary reason, I suspect, why, as I noted before, Wharton's characters often seem so much older than James's, her households like perennial spas or rest homes. In one of the most Jamesian stories Wharton ever produced—that lovely novella, "The Old Maid"—the entirely persuasive spiritual skirmishes of the authentic and adoptive mothers culminate in a story of resignation and reconciliation—and, to be sure, human waste, although this time with its compensations—which we peruse in vain for any trace of those runaway wills that, in James, go coursing like currents of ignited gasoline through the conduits of human relations.

Wharton's omission of power-eroticism from her fiction extends, I think, to the curb she places on her characters' wills—power, of course, reflecting the gratuitous play of will. So impeccably, at best, has she justified such restraint, that one feels futile in asking how much her aversion to power-lust is the cause, and how much the symptom, of that deep-laid remove which—only occasionally, surely—we find disturbing in her work. For just as the power drive in James's writing acts as a catalyst for still deeper-lying, more definitive erotic drives, in Wharton's work the strict denial of the power drive seems to reflect the repression that she continually imposes on her characters' initiative, on their gratuitous projections of themselves. Wharton, of course—no matter how occasionally intense or even violent the preoccupations of her characters—is generally concerned with showing them in normative situations, which, even at their most extreme, seem not too remote from situations with which the reader is

familiar. Yet one is given pause for at least a second or two to realize how much this purpose and practice of Wharton's may be ascribed to a self-accepted limit on her imagination and, therefore, her energy; a limit so chronically accepted by her as to make us wonder the more about its possible suffusion of her work, and reconsider the kind and degree of realism that she has presented to us.

Yet it seems to me one need consider this question only for a little while to realize that, however voluntary or involuntary the limitations of imagination and will in her fiction, or however symptomatic of some represssion or restraint, the achievements of Edith Wharton that such restraint has admitted, or predicated, come near enough, at least, to justifying her work to permit us to assimilate our reservations into our overall impressions of it. The restraint stands, and always will stand, I daresay, as a ceiling not only on her imagination, but on her capacity for realism—since, in reality, people's wills, of course, do habitually overshoot all possible goals, and occasionally—as they never do in Edith Wharton's work—people succeed in dictating their own limitations, rather than, perforce, submitting to limitations imposed elsewhere. And yet, how much more frequent in our experience—and how much more rare in fiction, surely in much of the fiction, of whatever quality, available to us—is that which Wharton offers us: the discernment of those traceries—conflict, anxiety, frustration—that distinguish superficially "normal" conditions. Her bequest to her characters and her themes is to render them not as typical, but rather as archetypal: that precisely appraised magnitude and weight, that perception of shopkeepers or farmers or salesmen as emanations of their circumstances. And all this she accomplishes through the density of particulars that obviously represents a department of her consciousness; not even so much the sustenance, as the substance, of her imagination.

She had, I think, as persuasively definitive, as little Carnegie Hall-mystical, an apprehension of Destiny as many writers I can call to mind. For in her most intensely graphic, most massively compact works—*Ethan Frome,* "Bunner Sisters," "The Old Maid," "Summer"—she perceives Destiny as the operation of the inertia that was evidently her moment-by-moment awareness and dread: as the accretion, in all-but-physical mass, of memory, habit, random discernment, flotsam acquisition—that avalanche immensity of the past which, even as it seems to thrust us through the present by sheer bulk force, also threatens momentarily to immobilize us and engulf us. A phrase like

"My dear Time's waste," or a cliché like "Life stands still," takes on chillingly concrete relevance when Wharton writes about life, the will's desperate animation succumbing to the sheer enormity of existence; and the bulk of unreflective, unengaged hours or years avenging itself upon belated awareness, on final-hour attempts to justify or even salvage life. Her trenchant appreciation of what "choice" and "free will" actually stand for in so many lives readily divined the deadly suasions of that ever-present alternative—nothingness, the abandonment of decisions and the capacity to make them, that cancels out all other alternatives. That glacial imminence of nothingness finds its way even into some of her most curious productions: those quasi-allegorical ghost stories—"The Eyes," "Pomegranate Seeds," "Afterwards"—which actually offer poetic metaphors, encapsulations of her major themes, with the very pedestrian prudence of her treatment lending their illuminations a graphic, near-surreal vividness.

I am not in love with the practice of bestowing the word "poetic" as honorific upon certain kinds of prose. Yet I must acknowledge that some of the finest prose owes its good, nervous audacity, its alert composure, to poetry's direct address, its untethered resource, and, above all, to its confrontations of stasis, its suspensions of experience. I think that Wharton's prose shares this debt to poetry with that of James T. Farrell (recalling especially Farrell's orchestrations of *Judgment Day,* or *Ellen Rogers*) and that of Thomas Hardy, of whose work Wharton, in her later fiction, puts me so much in mind (particularly when I reflect on Hardy's heroes and heroines, who, the stanchions of their histories collapsed, are left prey to those intangibles that depredate Wharton's characters: intangibles that, in Hardy's work, are manifested as chimeras, obsessions, ideals spectrally adrift from any realistic moorings). As her work consolildates its complex intensity and warm, exploring empathy, so too, I feel, is consolidated her sense of form: of form as not only the apprehension and elucidation, but the evocation of experience, the very weighing and gauging of experience. She discovered in the novella what was in many respects her ideal form: one that, in its co-operative leisureliness and intensity, admitted and aided her projecting, formulating, realizing in her prose the coexistence of fixity and dramatic mobility. The novella's relative compression brings into heightened relief the sensuous lucidity of her images, her variations of tempo and perspective, with, if anything, replenished imaginative force and dramatic energy (especially as her

novellas increasingly accommodate her command of theatrical techniques—soliloquies, expository dialogues, steeply pitched scenes of discovery and confrontation—devices that do not vulgarize or bind, but rather enrich and liberate her narratives). And with no sense of enervated simplification, the novellas reflect a persistent emerging of those meditations that have underlain and strengthened and, in my opinion, survived the more explicit commentary of the earlier novels. Notably, her *tour de force, Ethan Frome*—the serpentine whippings of whose successive flashbacks correspond to the coiling of thwarted destiny around the paralyzed dependences of a joyless marriage; the magnificent "Bunner Sisters," Wharton's own extrapolation of the New Testament's most cruelly sapient text: "And he that hath not, even that which he hath shall be taken from him." And, above all in my view, "Summer," the most lyrical and sagely humorous and somberly mellow of Edith Wharton's masterpieces; its successions of scenes, with their compact force of image and drama, like a series of highly colored genre prints (there is a low-keyed, methodical, piercingly bleak description of mountain poverty, so exactly imprinted that one feels that a photograph of today's Appalachia could be superimposed upon it with no blurring). And the rugged sweetness of its resignation—its strong submission to the sheer corporate weight of life, and the brute fact that so *much* life has been lived—offers its own lucid coda of her career, which is, in great degree, of course, that of an artist who could not, or would not, claim the imaginative sovereignty over experience that proclaims and justifies itself in the greatest artists. Her deference to surfaces, the foremost tender of her diffidence, would seem by the last phase of her career to have hardened—as one can infer from her least pretentious output, the ghost stories and Guignol melodramas—from an earnest of faith to a pattern of resignation. Yet, at her abundant best, that reverence for surfaces served to hone the vigorous skepticism that formed the outward edge of her faith's blade. And if she never ventured to penetrate that Ark of the Covenant, her knowing fidelity and the eloquent astuteness of her witness entitle her no less to claim it as hers.

Four Walls

The Works of Georges Simenon.
The Room. Hubert Selby, Jr. New York: Grove Press, 1971. 288 pp. Hardbound: $5.95

FOUR WALLS (I)

I daresay almost any of Georges Simenon's multitudinous novels could claim the title that he has given the opening section of his *The Man with the Little Dog:* "Four Walls." The all-but-changeless central image of these stories is a room; which is also the cubicle of his protagonists' souls: their half-voluntary enclosure by routine; their not-quite awareness of what has happened, or failed to happen, to them. Simenon's descriptons of these rooms exercise the minute trinkety fascination—heightened by his own arid delight in inventories—of

Joseph Cornell's cabinets, with their scraps and wisps of keepsake or trash. The typographer's little apartment, with its alphabet models on the walls, in *The Widower;* the teenager's attic room, with its toy racing cars and scattered clothing, in *The Confessional;* the Turkish consul's office in *The Window Across the Way,* which barely holds at bay the murder-hatching Soviet night; the monkishly bare furnished room of the *voyeur* in the appalling *M. Hire's Engagements.*

The "suspense" dog-tag has been conferred on Simenon by numerous American reviewers, as though he were hardly distinguishable from Hitchcock, or Helen MacInnes, or, for that matter, James M. Cain, whom, in fact, he does somewhat resemble. Yet, very often, the pressure that Simenon invokes in his best fiction has only secondarily, or not at all, to do with that external violence favored by the suspense-vendors. It has to do, rather, with that room, the protagonist's consciousness, which Simenon is at such repeated pains to make us keep in mind; it has to do with the spiritual vacuum, at the center of this cubicle, which he induces us to feel; and, above all, it has to do with our apprehension of what is happening from within, i.e., the threshold of awareness that his characters are in the way of achieving; the imminence of some consciousness that can throw their well-programmed universes into, not mere disorder, but chaos. And conversely, he is unexcelled at showing us not-quite awareness, nonperception. Intruding no editorialization at all—neither the obvious kind, the helpful rundown, or hit-and-rundown, of his characters' motives, nor the more subtle kind of poetic paraphrase, stream-of-consciousness reverie. His prose, deliberate, tightly cadenced, haunts the shell of his protagonists' quasiconsciousness: a state sustained by their hamster-like comings and goings.

Authentic suspense can be rendered only by an artist's apprehension of the least resolved or adjusted tensions within himself. In Simenon's case, the crucial tension, I believe, involves his own often-publicized immersion in routine—the programming of his daily life and work; his periodic all-but-hermetic isolation from public life; the love of inventory—as against his own awareness of the peril implicit in any such isolation: the peril of spiritual vacuity. This fundamental tension, Simenon faithfully imparts to what I so far, in my reading of him, consider his best novels: *Le Haut-Mal (Epilepsy); Les Fiancailles de M. Hire (M. Hire's Engagements); L'Ours en Pelouche (Teddy Bear); Au*

Bout du Roileai (End of His Tether)—all books that, as my favoring of French titles would indicate, have not, to my knowledge, appeared in America in English translation; and such of his translated works as *The Blue Room* (a variation on the murder-exchange plot superior to that situation's reshufflings by either Patricia Highsmith, in *Strangers on a Train,* or Fredric Brown, in *The Murderers*); *The Accomplices; Sunday; The Premier; The Window Across the Way; The Man Who Watched the Trains Go By.*

The extraordinary length of the scarcely fractional foregoing list—remarkable enough as a list of novels, the more so as a list of triumphs—cues me to a necessary parenthesis about the magnitude of Simenon's output. Such oceanic production is full of dangerous undertow for the critic; who may either automatically downgrade even an enthusiastic response to the work of so prolific a writer (who supposedly "simply can't be that good," even when he *is* good); or serenely generalize about a large, but unrepresentative percentage of an author's work. I feel obligated to announce right here that I have read only a meager number of Simenon's Maigret novels (perhaps his best-known work in America); and don't find that what I have read compares in originality or conviction with the best of his non-Maigret novels. I very much like Maigret as a detective-hero, and intend to read more of the series (now enjoying re-edition in paperback); but I find, at the present stage of Simenon's work especially, though I make the suggestion very tentatively, that the very premise of a *hero*—the man who always comes back—is almost too much of a concession on Simenon's part; his protagonists most usually being men who may never come back; whose cabinet-sized universes face imminent, permanent collapse. I should round off this long-winded self-interruption by further announcing that I have yet to read—and much look forward to doing so—some of Simenon's reputedly best "straight," i.e., noncriminous, novels: *The Little Saint, The Bells of Bicetre;* or his autobiographical work, *When I Was Old.*

Yet I feel strangely unapologetic about generalizing on Simenon's Black Sea of work from my rivulet of reading—for two reasons. First and foremost, I admire much of what I have read; and while it may indeed be ill-advised to generalize about a small percentage of work that one dislikes, there is everything in favor, I think, of generalizing on an equal percentage that one admires. Second: the sense of formula Simenon

brings to his writing makes each single example of it a sort of microcosm: the formula acting as focusing-lens for the author's strengths and defects.

Much, indeed, ought to be said about this formulaic aspect of Simenon's writing. For while I think it has relatively seldom provided him with a mere easy out (although undoubtedly it has expedited a quantity of feeble and flat-footed writing), it has done just that for many of his both friendly and hostile American critics, who sidestep a central issue of his writing by, respectively, (a) encomiumizing him as a "master story-teller" and sedulously ignoring the story he has to tell (the same well-nigh-suffocating mulch was deposited upon an inferior but often interesting author, John O'Hara; making it quite possible to suppose that his work had not altered one particle during its span of forty-plus years); and (b) claiming that Simenon's formula-writing is a mere mass-production ploy, a means both of continuing to write commercially and of standardizing (also, of course, in time, diluting or hypostatizing) one's desired effects.

As far as I am concerned, the focal truth about Simenon's use of formula is that it provides him with a means, not of closing himself off from experience, but of opening himself to it: it is a portal between the cubicle of his own systematic intelligence and the all-fluctuating world, a way of conferring on the world an order both precise and flexible. Moreover, it enables him to do what is obviously of preeminent importance to him. (Padding his income seems an inadequate explanation for Simenon's all-but-profligate output; and I think it time to recognize generally that inordinate productivity in writing, as much as its opposite, rules out money-making as the sole, or even primary, motive.) Without inventive amplitude, without emotive richness or sonority, Simenon has, for something like four decades, used what lies at his disposal: his empathetic curiosity about varieties of human relationships, plus his instinct for formulating those relationships, which undoubtedly once prompted him to study law and medicine; two studies to which—medicine especially—his work bears abundant witness even today. Formula is Simenon's way of working the permutations of human beings in conjunction with, or opposition to, each other. And melodrama is his means not of simplifying, but, at his best, of elucidating and offering definition to such relationships. He can only prove his formula, his clarifying mechanism, by addressing it to as many and various situations as possible.

Hence, he is a superhack, quite as was Charles Dickens: who parlayed his ferociously compulsive extravagance and quite as savagely compulsive economy. Like any Cockney housewife with last Sunday's mutton-bones, Dickens simmered and remixed and re-presented these theatrical types, those stage situations. And gradually, to be sure, in terms of that very formulative frenzy, divined the great themes of *Our Mutual Friend, Little Dorrit* and *Bleak House:* those of the world's appearances; their incessant mutability; their hallucinatory, often crushing deceptiveness. Without the range and fecundity of Dickens' imagination, without his poetry, Simenon nevertheless shares, at least partly, Dickens' rapture with the world's appearances. It is to the surfaces of the world that Simenon addresses his formulae: which represent not his efforts to subjugate experience to mechanical order; but, rather, to articulate the, to him, precious surfaces of life which, like window panes vibrating to a passing automobile, convey to us the internal pressures of people's responses.

As I read it, Simenon's major theme—the starkly basic shape of which has governed his work more and more, like the bone structure in the maturing body—is human responsibility versus death-in-life. The consoling lucid warmth (despite its claustrophobic overtones) of the room is opposed to the distracting, even literally maddening network of the ties we form, the human past we spin out of our entrails. This past insinuates itself as memory; with which Simenon's noncommittal, even voice, merging with rather than supplanting his hero's thought, is in constant touch. Beyond the walls of the room, we discover dependencies of which we never dreamed, both on and of ourselves; we find ourselves responsible for others' lives, by ways that we might suppose had been annulled, or "taken care of by time"—which, of course, takes care of nothing, save the increment of debts. In the wonderful story, *The Man Who Watched the Trains Go By*—almost fablelike in its mixture of easy, earthy comprehension and magical lambency of detail—the shipping clerk's psychopathic envy is inflamed when, in the dreamlike opening chapter, he sees his employer in a pub, a bottle of yellow gin before him: a vision that leads to the death of his boss's expensive courtesan, and the clerk's flight from society, and the world.

Our hugest potential for destruction lies with our abuse of such dependencies; either by neglecting them, or by too-possessively insisting on them, as extensions of our own ego-room. So, in *Le Haut-Mal,*

the redoubtable matriarch murders her inept, epileptic son-in-law in order to prevent her and her daughters' farm from being laid waste; by so doing, she speeds the dissolution of her family; yet, with the unflagging instinctive persistence of a builder-wasp, she keeps the shell of the family intact. The story, with others of Simenon, reminds me of James M. Cain on the potential evils of protectiveness *(Mildred Pierce, Double Indemnity)* and the ambiguous magnetism of the family fireside; but, like most of Simenon that I know, it is free of the plot-juggling that sometimes mars Cain. In the prototypical *Le Veuf,* the widower of the title realizes that he has literally brought about his wife's destruction by that gentle, implacable self-absorption that formerly enabled him to save her life. The violence in Simenon is epiphanic: it signals the final death-throes of a private universe in which vital human dependencies have been either shirked or exploited inhumanely; and it is not his least achievement that, amid such universal currency of violence as we now see around us, Simenon can still present violence as plausible, psychologically and morally, and as the unique occurrence it inevitably is.

The most significant balance which Simenon, as master of equilibrium, maintains throughout his books is between pulp melodrama's exploitation of experience and the novel's gratuitous offer of experience, the gratuitous mystery of itself. Melodrama is much like politics in its reliance on exploitive power; and yet, indeed, the paradox of melodrama, especially as we find it in pulp writing, seems to be that it never exploits experience anything like fully: it exploits the effects, but maintains much of its power by leaving the main body of experience, the processes, to be inferred. What Simenon gives us is the sense of a formidable mass of experience that has been assimilated, and then—yes, as by a vacuum—drained from the scene that he presents us. The effect is like the topography of a water-hole, or the reverse of a mask, with its indentations and lumps; or like that quite singular mask, the French face; which, even among French children, can convey such an erosion, a planing, by experience. I suggest contrast of Simenon with one of our outstanding commercial writers: John D. MacDonald. The kind of journalism that MacDonald often excellently practices—with its slabs of information about Miami hotels, or Everglades real estate—is geared to convincing the reader that MacDonald is in command of the setting and can deliver it as bona fide experience, warranted by his documentative skill. Simenon is almost

totally without documentation: his authority is sensed as it determines what he vouchsafes us of his scene. It is patent in the residuum of his observations: a casual remark about how the hotel-porter in a market-town (one of his favorite settings, along with the seaport village) helps the incoming trucks unload their produce, then gets drunk with the drivers; or a glimpse of the waiters in an outdoor cafe trying to keep the rain-filled umbrellas over the tables from emptying. It all represents a draining-off of the exotic-empirical; trying, instead, to find points of correspondence between his and the reader's intuition for the actual. *La Mort d'Auguste (The Death of Auguste)* is about what would seem the typical situation of a 500-page John O'Hara novel: the coming-apart of a Parisian family as they clamor over the will of the late patriarch-restaurateur. It runs only some 180 pages, however; and what has been most notably boiled off are those typical O'Hara courses in civil law, politics, finance. Unquestionably, from the imagery and rhythms of his account, Simenon is ideally situated to lecture us on all these subjects; yet such haranguing would not answer his standard of rendering experience solvent through fiction.

And his rigorously conditioned tact in this respect refers, I feel, to something darker and more massive in Simenon's fiction, which has insisted upon itself more and more, I suspect, in his writing of the last two decades. I mean his awareness of the void, of nonexistence: the universal counterpart of that nonawareness which I have described as central to his books. The awareness of imminent nothingness pressures the husk of experience that he exhibits to us, sharpening the brittle frost-flower precision of his descriptions; just as the burgeoning awareness of the void within themselves pressures his heroes' meticulously charted lives. The earlier books of his I have read—from the thirties through the forties—feature a more drastically romantic, even heroic, image of human potentiality. The farm-woman in *Le Haut-Mal,* or Kees Popinga in *The Man Who Watched the Trains Go By,* or the heavies in such Maigret stories as *The Hundred Gibbets* or *The Enigmatic Lett.* But by the fifties and sixties, the adventurous, if criminous, Walter Mittyism of Popinga has degenerated into the sulky frustration of the can't-do-anything-right "hero" of *Au Bout du Roileau:* a story that begins like those murkily bewitching Carné-Prevert films of the thirties—*Port of Shadows, Hotel du Nord*—in which surrealistically casual encounters turn into significant, demanding relationships. But the last half finds the two-bit thug—Simenon's answer to Jean Gabin's

romantic loser—on a downward ramp of failure, ending in the blood-stained farce of a police shootout. The total action of *The Premier*—a novel beautifully suspended between the mellow sedateness of its booklined setting and its jagged subsurface anxieties—is of a long, bowing withdrawal, at once graceful and watchful, in a minuet-time, from public life and, inferentially, from life itself.

As the romantic tintings of the younger books fade away, the focal tension of Simenon's novels becomes, more and more, the self-identification that is forced upon the leading character by the very blind bulk of unrealized experience that threatens that identity; and threatens chiefly through the allure of abandonment to the void. I can think of no other writer of comparable popularity who is such a virtuoso of suicide. Death—not violence, nor yet the calla-lillied sentimentality of songs like *Gloomy Sunday*—saturates books like *Le Veuf* or *La Mort d'Auguste*. Yet, even in so skimpy a work as *Le Confessional* (in which there is no actual death, only spiritual sterility) the momentousness of self-discovery, of merely realizing "Here I am, let me only act accordingly," is enough to counter the nullities of nonlife and unrealized life. And in what may be his most sheerly cruel, yet surely most humanly persuasive work—*Les Fiancailles de M. Hire*—Simenon virtually compels us to attend the self-realization of a wretched mini-crook, whose single act of love results in his literally being hounded to death; and forces us to perceive, in the very midst of our absorption, that this is a man whose existence, in actual life, we should probably have valued at zero. Here, as elsewhere, Simenon never adopts the easy route of identification with his protagonist by assimilating him to his, Simenon's, and our patterns of thought and feeling. The dreadful poignancy of M. Hire's catastrophe derives from Simenon's acknowledgement of the mammoth bulk of what we do not know about him, and can never know, this side of Eternity. In other words, Simenon is able to enlist our more-than-compassionate respect for M. Hire, and all his protagonists, by re-acknowledging the Void: that void outside the cubicle of our sentiments, our self-knowledge, our souls.

FOUR WALLS (II)

I can readily imagine many persons who admired *Last Exit to Brooklyn* feeling disappointment or even resentment toward *The Room;* disclaiming it as that signature work which I feel it to be; finding it

mandarinish, repetitious, perverse. It seems to me, on the other hand, that the apparent increased narrowness of *The Room* over *Last Exit* is, in truth, the result of Selby's having located the center of his work: his own identity and, accordingly, that terror of the void that infiltrates *Last Exit's* events and characters. This emotion Selby here acknowledges and marshalls, fortifying his sovereign theme: the ways in which love must lurch and butt itself into this world; and how, in the process, love becomes, often, so befouled and deformed as to become unrecognizable to itself.

The Room consists entirely of the fantasies—vengeful, self-justifying, lubricious—and memories of a nameless man in a jail cell, awaiting trial (evidently for attempted robbery; although there is no sure indication of his guilt or innocence). The book is in no true sense a prison novel: the jail's temporary housing, its rudimentary routines, merely furnish, like the rooms in Simenon's novels, a correlative to the tenant consciousness.

This consciousness we experience as an almost unremitting agony of self-lacerating fury and shame, relieved only (for the hate-fantasies, multiplied and elaborated throughout the novel, merely exacerbate the frustrations that buttress them) by a few heavily compulsive sexual reveries. The arena of the hero's mind *is* the Room of the title; theatre for the novel's ritualistic movement.

A few years ago, writing about Gil Sorrentino's remarkable novel, *The Sky Changes*, I used the phrase "loss of space" to denote what I thought was signified by the work of Sorrentino and a number of other American writers, notably Selby and Fielding Dawson. The "space" I referred to was the author's omniscience, for so long the donne of much fiction. The group I had in mind comprised partly, by no means exclusively, former disciples of Charles Olson. Their signal contribution to contemporary prose was and is, I think, an intensification of Olson's principles, founded on the primacy of concrete knowledge. They, it seems to me, by rejecting the boundless space of metaphor and God the Author's Eye in favor of the identity's specific locale, were helping to restore that urgent pressure, that hard imminence of the actual, which, I felt, had disappeared from too much American prose.

In *The Room*, what one might suppose as the infinite space of metaphor is, instead, the scarcely-bearable interior pressure of Selby's own relentless wakefulness, focused on a cubicle of human passion. The cubicle is by no means metaphorical; its formidable suggestive-

ness devolves entirely upon what has justly been called "correspondence"; the capacity of the specific, by standing for itself, to suggest various analogies and extensions, without the short-cuts of metaphor and conventional allegory. The ceremonious, frigidly governed exactness of Selby's prose, here—unmistakably, not merely more, but *other* than journalism—makes the transposition to fantasy no "escape" at all; but a shift to a geography more gratingly oppressive than *Last Exit's* Brooklyn.

The primary actuality of the book is the protagonist's single tortured voice; here, I think, another possible reason for future unpopularity. For, while *The Room* engages a compass of journalistically-nuzzled topics—police brutality, political corruption—all are filtered through that voice: a possible police victim, who is an unquestionable borderline paranoiac. Selby is anything but convinced of socio-political doctrine, however benign, as the peak attainment of the novel. This, I think, does not involve his conservative skepticism of progressive dogma; but rather, his conservative belief in certain facts that take priority over any dogma; and make impossible, for him, the blaspheming of the specific, on any propagandistic behalf.

The central specifics of *The Room* are those of a human soul. Its most harrowing and poignant effects result from that soul's discovery, or rediscovery, amidst a phantasmagoria of atrocious and grotesque detail, of those needs that we at once assume to be basic and, at the same time, so often treat as the most dispensable. The protagonist's most ferocious transports involve the two police officers who arrested him; whom he now fantasizes as his prisoners; and whom—as methodically and fervently as a supplicant performing the Stations of the Cross—he pictures himself reducing, through the most elaborate regimen of torture and degradation, to the level of "performing dogs," with guidewires fastened to their genitals. Dogs and police symbolize his own earliest memories of mortification and terror; and, as the fantasies, depicted with baroque meticulousness, become ever more savage, we see them as the man's ever-more-convulsive struggle to exorcise his own sense of vulnerability; then, as they reach crescendo and, beyond that, dead end, we see that the very ecstasy of his rage has forced him to divulge a greater vulnerability: the composite need to protect and be protected, to teach, to love—all invoked by the career, however hate-crippled, of his creative fury. The monstrous and farcical vision of his human menagerie has become a Goya-like parody of

the community, of the family, with himself as patriarch-teacher; which, like all parody, ultimately becomes that which it parodies.

I see *The Room* as a religious novel of singular originality and force: at its core, an act of self-identification which is a cardinal act of faith. If it suffers, in this and that passage, from over-writing and point-belaboring, the writing nevertheless carries an authority and purposefulness beyond the best of *Last Exit to Brooklyn.* Again and again, as it consecrates the singularity of human experience, *The Room* breaches the sometimes very thin wall that separates prose from poetry. It is religious in no soupy "metaphysical" sense, nor in any sense that will delight doctrinaires and proselytizers. The loneliest and most grueling of devotions: sustained only by a more-than-humanitarian dedication to what is most ugly and painful in this world.

"H"

I

In that fraction of America I'm able to observe, hypocrisy seems by way of becoming Everybody's Sin. Not that everybody practices it, necessarily; but at one time or another everybody seems given over to fingering it: both in the sense of "fondling" and in the underworld sense of putting the finger on someone else. Greed, cupidity, even cowardice, all have receded considerably into that rational half light summed up by the phrase: "Well, everybody to his own opinion." Hypocrisy alone occupies the white baby spot of authentic sin; and people's willingness to cite it seems equalled only by their unwillingness to provide it with a consistent definition. Let us admire a few examples:

Item #1. William Buckley, in an essay, deplores people's ability to

begin abusive letters with: "Dear Sir." In a *Dissent* article, Irving Howe deplores the ability of C. Wright Mills to begin an abusive letter (to Howe) with: "Dear Irving."

Item #2. In an *Esquire* article, military expert S.L.A. Marshall laments Allied bombings of civilian Germany in World War II as both defective strategy and defective humanity. A correspondent in *Esquire's* "Letters" column, next issue, cites Marshall's argument as hypocrisy, inasmuch as war itself is inhuman. It may be added that these remarks paraphrase, in great part, Albert Jay Nock's reflections on World War II, in his "Memoirs of a Superfluous Man."

Item #3. An English critic, reviewing an English anthology of essays on the seven deadly sins, considers as how these seven should be replaced with a more up-to-date roster, including hypocrisy and what the reviewer refers to as self-righteousness.

Item #4. A friend of mine, in show business, describes to me his feud with a lady entertainer who, he says, appropriated some of his comedy material. "And next time we meet," he adds, "she'll go: 'Sweetie! Isn't it a shame, the fuss our lawyers are making!' And," he concludes, "I'll be just as big a hypocrite!"

Item #5. A noted financier, of less-than-savoury reputation, dies. At his funeral, the preacher, in the course of his oration, cites those weaknesses with which the deceased was charged during his life, asking that the survivors set aside all rancor. Next day, in the *New York Post,* Barry Gray interrupts his tilting against Walter Winchell to attack the preacher for "bad taste" in his reference to the dead man's frailties. I mention Gray's elegy to an acquaintance, who reacts with cries of, "Hypocrisy!"—not against Gray, nor against the subject of debate, but against the preacher; who, my humanistic friend is confident, would not have said anything unfavorable had his client not been prominent and his weaknesses well-publicized.

The first outstanding characteristic that I observe among these diverse examples is that hypocrisy emerges as a peculiarly subjective concept, easily as vagarious as, say, sex appeal. This is, I think, its most arresting characteristic as sin—one could almost as easily, and perhaps as accurately, call hypocrisy a myth as a sin or vice.

Still, I should like to try to define, or at least to describe, this dust devil—indeed, almost a demon corporation, so many are its faces. I should like, first, to attempt a classic definition, identifying what I feel are more and less serious kinds; to distinguish it from the misconcep-

tions and myths circulated about it; to ask, Why it is so popular? And, *tout à fait,* What are its virtues?

II

Hypocrisy is a sin unlike any other sin; first, because it is also a connective tissue, an integument, for other sins—notably envy, greed and cowardice. It is comprised, in great part, of these sins; and it helps to fortify them, euphemize them and justify them. Moreover, hypocrisy works against that sense of reality which, for a time, rationalizes and expedites the lesser sins; but which also, invoked in time, buttresses resistance to them. Hypocrisy is, ultimately, the sin against reality—not only the reality that can be stroked and counted, but also the superior reality that involves our imaginations and emotions in what we observe.

In this respect, hypocrisy represents an almost perfect symmetry of emotion and judgment, neither quite prevailing; this also sets it apart from other delinquencies. Hypocrisy begins and ends with separation from the world—with retreat into that damp alcove of consciousness which does not leave even the bellyful consolations of greed or the adrenal joys of wrath. Such pleasure is diluted, and made acid, by the same discretion that prompts hypocrisy to begin with.

And yet, in an important respect, hypocrisy partakes of both greed and envy—and, to a lesser extent, of cruelty as well. The hypocrite, like the greedy or envious person, attempts to possess reality—possess, at least, that part of it that refracts the image of himself that he desires; confers on him the precious gift of power without responsibility. He enacts this possession by sacrificing a part of what he knows to be true. The fatal price is that the sense of the world that one obtains—a sense of one's own adequacy, for which one lobotomizes one's highest intelligence—produces immobilization of reality; reality is impaled on an idea, an ideal, an ambition, a pet obsession.

This may be a basic reason why the concept of hypocrisy continues to exercise such unsettling persuasiveness over popular imagination; it threatens our role-playing machinery by suggesting to us that our notions of the roles we and other people play may be inadequate; and that our own ability to square our roles with reality may be inadequate,

too, if we find ourselves committing hypocrisy to fulfill the gap between our "real" and our unachieved selves.

I suspect, in fact, that this is one of the myths of hypocrisy most in need of detonation: the myth that it is synonymous with forms and role-playing. In support of such a notion, of course, there limps into memory a whole gallery of variously exaggerated or misrepresented or misinterpreted figures: Tartuffe; Uriah Heep; an image of the "Victorian bourgeois"—no less formidable for being so vaguely founded, spotless vest supporting a high-polished massive gold watch, one hand bearing a mammoth Bible, its pages marked with drooping ribbons, the other brandishing a blacksnake whip, to be used exclusively on five-year-olds in iron foundries. Above all, or below all, there are the Scribes and Pharisees, favorite target of Jesus's vituperations—eyes cast up to heaven, hands folded (when those same hands are not engaged in robbing synagogue poorboxes): just amorphous enough, just historically specific enough cozily to accommodate all our aversions to compulsiveness, ritual (when excessively inconvenient), piety (ditto) and that dear phrase, always ready to contravene any inordinate self-demand: self- righteousness.

In a very important sense, I think, it is fallacious to talk about "separating form from reality," since form is reality: a way of dealing with experience by regulating behavior: not in the sense of mechanizing one's actions, but in the sense of keeping the mechanical part of behavior under control and therefore leaving free the plasticities of emotion and imagination. Form is also a way of keeping time under control—so that the present, which we reproduce in patterned behavior, neither dominates our thoughts and actions nor dissolves into a stunned timelessness. This, I believe, describes form in art, in work, in social behavior.

The consecration of the foregoing types as hypocrites is the result of somewhat wide—not always unwilling—misunderstanding about form; the result, too, I suggest, of a mistrust of form and of the kinds of self-loss, the kinds of self-discipline, that it entails. How often has "formalism," in the language of contemporary art criticism, been the more formal alternative to "conventionality" or "hollowness"?

I have mentioned the sour popularity of the Pharisees—a popularity explained in great part by the willingness of many people to subscribe to fifty percent of any of Jesus's sayings: always reserving the right to select which fifty percent. The key saying in this case—among a broad

scattering of occasionally slanderous references by Jesus—is the famous speech about "justice, mercy and love," in which he castigates the Pharisees for overattentiveness to ritual crockery, washing of hands, etc. In fact, what Jesus is here criticizing, and what he is criticizing in every speech where he does not merely anathematize, is *not* the forms (rituals, etiquette, etc.), but the skimping of form, by depriving it of emotional content, of the context of urgency whereby form becomes a way of confronting reality. How many of Jesus's zealous half-subscribers allow themselves to remember the conclusion of that speech: "All this should ye have done, *nor neglected the other*"?

The fault of those Pharisees was that they permitted form to deteriorate into symbol. Symbol is the taking possession of reality by the imagination, as by a parasitic bacteria, which retains the appearance while pre-empting the content. To say that something—a flag, a dollar bill, a stained-glass window, a ceremony—has become symbolic, is to say that it has detached itself, in some important way, from the meaningful action that form (whether the form of a Holy Communion, or the form that determines the building of a boat) both regulates and keeps solvent. Form, underneath its seeming compulsiveness, involves an admission of one's vulnerability to the unforeseen, including the unforeseen in one's personal nature. Symbol is a gloating over one's proprietorship of the unforeseen.

It is as much a mistake to think of hypocrisy as invariably passionless as it is to think of love as invariably passionate. This is one error not committed by Molière in his *Tartuffe*, the main character of which, in other respects, is a windy brochure of the commonest, most boring fallacies about hypocrisy (the most important being that Tartuffe succeeds in deceiving nobody except his host, a self-disclosed ass, and his silly old mother. In conclusion, lest any stray ambiguity be left us, Molière caulks up the last pinholes by making Tartuffe a criminal. Needless to say, Tartuffe is never permitted by his creator to display the most interesting trait of hypocrisy: its capacity for infecting the seemingly sincere and candid). Tartuffe comes as near as he ever comes to authenticity in the scene where he tries to rationalize his passion for Elmire in terms of his professed religious faith.

Hypocrisy is probably envisioned, popularly, as bland and pallid because this enables people to imagine it as distant from them; also to imagine it as the property of intelligence alone, which, for many of us, is more easily denied than are the passions. The supremely tragicomic

protagonist of "Seduced and Abandoned"—a Sicilian father, furiously intent on shoring up his family's honor (rendered more opulent by his status as the village's leading citizen)—bounds from one corner to another of his little society like a meteorite of fury, love and abject desperation. These passions are made no less valid by the basic hypocrisy of the values he is defending (although, as Germi, the director, leaves us no room to doubt, they are the highest values of which the father's community is capable; and, occasionally clownish, occasionally villainous, he earns his stature as tragic hero of that society). Goneril and Regan embody devasting passions; Macbeth is passionate. Indeed, hypocrisy's chief bedevilment consists of making the cruelest furies seem to have been thrust upon us, like visitations, by events outside our understanding; but to which, as we realize later, we have denied our understanding. In that sour epilogue when we realize we have been hypocrites, those actions that seemed least voluntary turn out to have been dictated by a Bismarckian will; while the most dashingly wayward emotions turn out to have been meachingly short-sighted and prudent.

Caricatures like Tartuffe help to further the myth of hypocrisy as the playing of a role, or wearing of a mask. In fact, when Tartuffe is exposed, he abandons his identity not only as a *bona fide* fanatic, but as *bona fide* hypocrite as well. Raffles, clubman by day and cracksman by night, is obviously not a hypocrite; Sherlock Holmes, in his multitudinous disguises, is not a hypocrite; Mr. Pecksniff, with his immutable consistency, is—a far truer model of hypocrisy than the lizardy buffoon Uriah Heep, who was influenced much too much by Molière and by Dickens-Copperfield's snobbery against lower-class "pushiness." In fact, Pecksniff's cambric-tea consistency is the *sine qua non* of the hypocrite, because he believes in it; not because he occasionally is forced to pretend or disguise. A disguise, successfully carried off—carried off, that is, with conviction both for those who see it and he who wears it—jars the surfaces of life, therefore advancing life, which molds itself, albeit temporarily, to accommodate the shape of the disguise, until there is no more disguise (cf., Lord George Hell of Beerbohm's "The Happy Hypocrite").

Hypocrisy is dedicated to the mad belief in immutables and irreducibles, and exerts itself towards reforming life to the shape of those irreducibles. The mask-wearer (like Melville's Confidence Man, who progresses from the role of con-man to that of secular saint) dedicates

his mask to the mutability of life, thereby to faith in life; hypocrisy dedicates itself to the immutability of life, thereby to death. This is its faith. Such is the theme of James Agee's last two essays of the trilogy he wrote on Chaplin's "Monsieur Verdoux"; and, whatever serious questions they invite as film criticism, these two essays, I suspect, should also invite our acclaim as some of the fullest and most trenchant analysis of hypocrisy in contemporary literature.

The paradox of hypocrisy is that it sees virtue, and identity, as unchanging substances (rather than as systems of response to a variety of challenges); which, because they *are* unchanging, are also self-replenishing and independent of moral behavior. Therefore they can be parcelled out, in an endless succession of small compromises and lies and, in time, moral outrages, whose nature is disguised by their being seen as necessary conciliations to the "complexity of experience." Such outrages may include the recent New York State Law empowering the jury to decide in favor of life or death in sentencing convicted murderers. They may include the apologetics of many liberal-radicals, both for the Bay of Pigs and for the Castro administration. They may include the mystique of protest invoked by leftists, who define every crime committed by a Negro—ranging from simple mugging or vandalism to the bloody jubilations of street-rioting and wholesale thievery—as "social protest" of the same kidney as that of Bayard Rustin, Martin Luther King or A. J. Muste. The tacit assumption of such hypocrisy is that a simple moral judgment—the judgment that something is good or bad—is untenable, *per se, because* it is simple; it is not enough that such a judgment may be the emerging nose-cone of long-term awareness of complexities. Every serious moral judgment, however simple-seeming, must be guided and tunneled by a terribly heightened responsiveness to contradictions and paradoxes that may be, in fact, irreconcilable. But such judgment remains the final step in a succession of actions—actions consisting of smaller decisions, perceptions and reactions shaped by those perceptions. It is no less final, because the fugue of response leading to it must resume after it has been made; and it is no less important for being simple, or for being only one in a series of moral judgments which death alone can terminate.

Hypocrisy deceives itself that complexity—the rugose surface of "actual experience"—is the goal. It never achieves this goal, because its real, self-protective concern is to reduce complexity when in sight of it,

by whittling down the sense of moral urgency that produces those stresses and conflicts which comprise genuine complexity. The result of such constant whittling-down must be, not only chaos, but a peculiarly vapid chaos, which, with each successive compromise, becomes more milky. James Agee veered toward the deadfall of such compromise: never to the point of milkiness, but always, when veering drastically, to the point of saddening the reader who could recognize him at full moral strength. His criticism was often at least faintly marbled with hypocrisy: inevitably, I think, in a man for whom the drives toward expressing intricacy of response, and toward realizing an elementary clarity of primitive experience, were so wrackingly irreconcilable, and so nearly equal in intensity. I only minded this seriously once or twice: notably, in his remark, during the essay on D. W. Griffith, to the effect that Griffith, in *Birth of a Nation,* "leaned over backward" to be fair to the Negro; and, that he demonstrated a knowledge of the Negro peculiar to a "good kind of Southerner." In its tone of mingled psuedo-folk wisdom and Agee's more personal kind of ellipticism, their proximity making them wryly parody each other; in the distance between what he obviously recognized in Griffith, and his desire to recognize something quite different; and, worst of all, in the sincerity of his love for Griffith, and his intensity of desire to render that love persuasive to his readers; I find this the most saddening passage in Agee's critical writing: a passage which, thank God, he seldom came near to duplicating.

Complexity is one catch-phrase used by hypocrisy, as talisman; another such catch-phrase is *irony.* Since a number of critics have scattered it broadside through our literature and popular vocabulary, the concept of irony has become versatile well beyond the image of old Gloucester saying: "I never got him!" of his legitimate son, or Oedipus Rex proclaiming himself the most fortunate of mortals. Coupled with hypocrisy, irony doles out gratifications to both vanity and cowardice—vanity, because one can indulge in all kinds of evasive statements, sensible of the criticism or insult couched within them; with the felicity, both comic and melodramatic, of dispatching a parcel of one's identity, anonymously wrapped, ticking fiercely away. If the package never detonates, the pleasure is in no wise lessened. This latter is the appeal to cowardice: genuine irony serves to weigh and direct its missile of significance: to clarify, in fact. Irony with hypocrisy works to de-clarify, to perpetuate uncertainty.

In this capacity, it has been my bodyguard and comforter scores of times. Some stranger in a bar would show me what seemed to me the perfectly awful poems of his recent labor, and—unable, I felt, either to lie or tell instructive truth, I would smile thinly and nod—but bolster this smile, this nod, to myself by filigreeing them with images of Mandarin irony. Or, meeting someone who bored or exasperated me, I would outfit the most colorless "yes" 's, and "really" 's, and "It seems like it" 's and tinny little laughs with the splendid brooches and coronets of secret irony. God knows how I did it—do it—and God, I am afraid, knows why.

Murray Kempton has enlivened a number of my subway rides home from work with the humorous dexterity of his occasional pieces in the *New Republic*. But he has also exasperated me with that phony irony which he drops like a scrim-curtain between his audience and himself, and which is obviously intended gauzily to disclose a shadow-figure, Kempton's chosen persona: immutable on the face, a Smile of Lofty Compassion Tempered With Humane Irony. Anyone—anyone, that is, unfamiliar with Kempton and his pretensions—might expect a cascade of thoughts and after-thoughts from an article titled, as Kempton's was in the *New Republic* of March 20, 1965: "'I Hadda Shoot': The Cop as Victim of a Victim." For the situation, professional, moral and psychological, of the New York City policeman is as cruelly intricate, as freighted with possible damnation, as is the position of any New York City employee. The hardness of the two recent, sinister laws—the "no-knock" law and the "stop-and-frisk" law—should be blinked at by nobody; but one's eyes should take in, not only the menace offered by these outrageous laws to members of minorities, the poor and anyone who has ever given the police reason to suspect him of misbehavior; but also the gradually worsening situation in which police are required not only to risk their lives and the lives of others, but to act as judges, juries, and betimes, as executioners—*on the spot*. They are made aware, daily, of this responsibility; while also being made aware, daily and with no excess of gentleness, that the status of judges and juries is not theirs; that if they overstep unseen boundaries, they, and the community they serve, may be penalized by a judge who liberates a suspect even when a crime, or intended crime, has been proved. In short, operating in a world as remote from the world of courtroom law as the world of Red China is from ours, the police are taxed with the burden of autonomy *and* the burden of the

dependent instrument: a situation that makes for the *non plus ultra* of hypocrisy; and which—realizing itself in monstrosities like the "stop-and-frisk" and "no-knock" laws—puts the onus of hypocrisy upon the honest among them; while the brutes and dullards are provided with nothing which they have not been pre-empting, and cheerfully, all along. One might have expected of the Kempton article—judging by its title—a realization of such professional hypocrisy; with, perhaps, interesting speculation on how it is engendered by courts, police hierarchy and the public. One might, indeed, have expected even a stringent and fruitful irony.

All that Kempton provided was a coloratura display for the species of hokum mentioned before. His first move, in the last sentence of the opening paragraph: "No invocation to science seems to alter our basic problem, which is not the brute cop or the rogue cop but the dump cop," which, presto, reduces Detective Devlin (the cop who mistakenly shot innocent bystander Gregory Cruz) to the dimensions of a secondary character in a 1935 Warner Bros. movie: a natural for Tim Kennedy or Ed Gargan. This stereotype plays drum major to a procession of slippery journalistic maneuvers (Kempton shies at Devlin a quote from an unnamed "afternoon journal," which referred to Devlin as "battered nearly unconscious" by the smaller Cruz); dubious sociology ("It is a melancholy fact of municipal socialism that, when a large white mainlander begins working over a Puerto Rican . . . the normal assumption of those watching is that this is police business"); and top-lofty posturing (Devlin's precise account of the alleged crime as "a mugging which resulted in a homocide" is smirkingly put down by Kempton as "police Mandarin, which aims at precision while never achieving clarity"—a distinction which, in view of his frequent rhetoric, Kempton might have taken to heart).

In sum, apparently a fairly single-minded polemic, easily duplicated. But the self-image that Kempton prefers to maintain is anything but single-minded; and in the article's final passages, he introduces his patented combination of irony-and-compassion to lend a spitball twist to the simple trajectory of his essay:

"But worse than dumbness, here is a policeman who, in the true center of his being, has every fear and resentment that belongs to any oppressed minority in a city of oppressed minorities. While nobody noticed, Devlin had been broken by the loneliness of his beat; he could no more contend with a smaller man than he could have with a

monster; fear and self-pity had rendered him useless. He had learned the form and lost the reality."

How many tragic heroes can have looked forward to their lives and careers being wrapped up so consummately? Macbeth required considerably longer than Officer Devlin. Irony and compassion.

But they don't work. Irony and compassion are equally false, for the common reason that none of Kempton's peroration involves any *thinking* about Devlin: any interaction of intellect and feeling on behalf of the man's reality, or the reality of his situation. This is not to say that such a combination must have produced an article partisan to Devlin, who surely perpetrated a frightening malfeasance of justice. I mean to say that everywhere in this article Kempton treats a human being and a human catastrophe as *faits accomplis.* The stereotype of the "dumb cop" prevails at the end as at the beginning: a trampoline on which the reader's ego can prance. The "irony" of Kempton's tone does not complicate the flatness, but underscores it, for the self-aggrandizement of the reader. So does the "compassion"—the appeal to masochistic sentimentality, demanding from the reader nothing of self-inquiry or self-extension. To feel at once so large-hearted and so astute; and both with the premium of being reassured in what we suspected all along! But, of course, nothing is enlarged; everything—everything pertaining to reality—is atrophied and drained. Such is the product of false irony, used to expedite false compassion; and both practiced with the highest intentions.

This depletion of reality, this greed for reality, betrays the connection between hypocrisy and childhood. One of the pernicious fallacies about children is that they are free of hypocrisy (the little nuisance at the emperor's parade—"Mah-mee, he isn't *wearing* any clothes!"—who doubtless looked forward to a career doing cover stories for *Time*). In fact, most of the kids over five whom I know can hold their own in hypocrisy with most adults. This should seem self-evident, given the kind of single-minded pruning away of the world which adult "sincerity" usually requires; and given, too, the world in which children must survive, a little hypocrisy is just as well for them. Actually, our stereotype of children's "sincerity" is another device to convince ourselves that we possess more knowledge of children than we do. We attempt to compensate ourselves for their unpredictability and mysteriousness by euphemizing these qualities as naive candor.

Hypocrisy is childlike in its desire for permanency; in the "now" with

which it transfixes experience; in the way it strives to convert experience into nutrition, for which the intelligence and feelings merge into an enormous stomach.

The archetype of such childlikeness is a far finer specimen of hypocrite than Tartuffe: Meredith's Sir Willoughby Pattern of *The Egoist.* Sir Willoughby's vocation is the conspicuous consumption of love. His estate, a seraglio of friendship, houses his scholarly chum, Whitford, beneficiary of Willoughby's wealth and favor; his ward, Crossjay, to whom Willoughby is a doting and authoritative uncle; the jaunty Irish major to whom Willoughby is sturdy companion; and a warbling chorus of spinster aunts and cousins. Willoughby is a formidable squire to these properties (it is a mistake, widespread, I suspect, to visualize him as a silly-ass fop). The root of his hypocrisy is his childish parasitism; through which, in his monolithic self-deception, he makes involuntary parasites of his dependents. Sir Willoughby's virtues (as Meredith repeatedly and eloquently emphasizes) are quite genuine, but he betrays them by immobilizing them—by standardizing them amidst a real world from whose reality he cringes.

III

In the foregoing pages, I have tried to suggest a corporate image of what I suppose to be the most serious kinds of hypocrisy; and to suggest the degree to which hypocrisy can be defined and separated from other vices. To this extent, the foregoing section can stand, itself, as a specimen of hypocrisy; inasmuch, that is, as I have tried to anatomize the vice, without attempting to show how it is refracted and measured in the world today—measure, in effect, its going value. Nor have I tried to suggest the values counter to it; nor its virtues.

I have just been reading Georges Bernanos's extraordinary novel, *The Diary of a Country Priest,* much of which comprises the protagonist's self-questionings and agonizings over his sensations of distance from his God. Through these excruciations, the priest emerges as a man entirely of a piece with his vocation; in other words as an authentic saint. Yet, reading the novel, I teased myself with the speculation: how many people today—something less than three decades after first publication—how many people, not a few of them devout,

would regard the priest as hypocritical? Not that we see him robbing poorboxes or tyranizing his catechism classes; I doubt that even his wine-bibbing, which *is* in the novel, necessitated by a poor stomach, would count for much in the assessment. What would count, I suspect, is his hoarding of his thoughts; his self-enclosure; his "wasting" so much of psychological and spiritual energy in "morose, futile introspection," rather than "losing himself" in work with boys' clubs and church suppers. Nor would the obvious convinction, the lucid sincerity, of the priest count for much with the hypothetical moralists of whom I speak. How sincere can a man be, engaged in such flagrant vanity, such ostentatious unconstructiveness? How much can such frivolous sincerity count against the frowning sincerity of Reality?

I have supposed here a situation that, by extension, accounts, I think, for rather widespread interpretations of hypocrisy in the America I know. I cite the examples offered at the outset of this essay. Reading them, and several scores of others, one could be pardoned for supposing that hypocrisy involved reserving the right to judgment on moral issues (and daring, on occasion, to express that judgment); observing certain forms of behavior; recognizing, but also respecting, one's restrictions as a human being. Supposing all this, would the reader be very far wrong?

I would suggest that the reasons for the dilution of hypocrisy as a moral concept, and for its prevalence as a moral shibboleth, are one: the increased availability of a human being's behavior to his fellow humans. Robert Phelps remarked this during a recent conversation, noting that all sorts of believers must appear as hypocrites to those outside the circle of their belief. Thus, Martin Luther King must appear a hypocrite, talking nonviolence while precipitating violence by the appearances of himself and followers. (Indeed, this was delicately suggested a little while ago by the editors of *National Review.*) Lyndon B. Johnson must appear a hypocrite, preaching human concord while countenancing napalm bombings in Vietnam. (Indeed, this was not-so-delicately suggested a little while ago by Nat Hentoff in the *Village Voice.*) The Pope, for preaching Christ's charity from the traditional opulences of a venerable palace, in the purple and scarlet of royalty. James Baldwin, for peaching racial harmony in the rhetoric of vengeful bloodshed. Nor is it to the point that all such charges can be contested with argument and evidence by partisans of those men whom Robert Phelps cited and whom I cite. When the last debater's point has been

tucked in, the contradictions invoked by the opposition remain, and the opposition sticks to its turf.

Robert Phelps observed that this situation, or rather ant-hill of situations, is produced by the incommunicability of one group to another. I am inclined to believe the opposite. Men's behavior, as I said before, is too much available to others; and "behavior" should be extended to include language. Language, once (perhaps) a maze, has flattened, under the press of mass communication, into a network of conveyance. It is too easy to see "mere words" for what they are; too easy to discern that they are never abreast of our actions. It is too easy to read contradictions like those I have cited, in the yellow clarity which suffuses us all; and the very nearness of one group to another, of one man to another, which makes impossible the literal fulfillment of ideals, makes all-but-imperative the verdict of "hypocrisy" on the ideals of one another.

Yet, what counter-value do we find opposed to this ant-village of hypocrisies? Let us return a little to *Diary of a Country Priest.* What would his postulated critics expect of the hero? One might readily answer, "sincerity"—a kind of sincerity, I would suggest, which is very nearly interchangeable with "reality"; a kind of sincerity which involves the ability to identify one's self with the prevailing concept of, or feeling about, reality: identify one's self with it and seem to dominate it. As illustration, I think of Spencer Tracy, for whose acting the long-standing epithet has been "sincere," even among people who would be hard-pressed indeed to define their notion of such "sincerity"; or to say what difference they saw between Tracy's kind of sincerity and the some-thousand-odd other species which suffuse Hollywood, almost to the exclusion of acting. What I have long felt, in watching Tracy on the screen, is not sincerity in the sense of modesty or plasticity, but in the sense of monolithic firmness which consolidates the moods of a very complex personality; and which, furthermore, seems repeatedly to set the standard of reality for the film in which Tracy is appearing.

Let me emphasize that I am not attempting any Frederic Wakemanish irony on the huckster aspects of "sincerity." I feel sure that the sincerity I am trying to define warrants no such inverted commas, and that, if anything, it has forced back the boundaries of our former distinctions. In illustration of this, trooping on Mr. Tracy's heels come the fanatics.

Fanatics have very much in common with hypocrites; most important, they subsist on the idea of an eternal present tense, a childish *now,* which they are privileged to supervise. Imagination merges into reality; today is snatched up in tomorrow's ever-yawning hopper—indeed, in fanaticism's eyes, today may as well *be* tomorrow.

The fanatic's most heroic presumption—that he and this pilothouse of today in which he is buffeted and which he buffets, will last forever—is, given a fanatic of any intelligence, the outstanding hypocrisy of all. The significant point of difference between hypocrites and fanatics, it seems to me, is the superior activeness of fanatics and their ability to beam this activity at a purpose (apparently, at least) outside of themselves. In some fashion, in other words, they claim priority over what most people recognize as reality. This, I suspect, is why fanaticism (even when applied, today, as a scare-word by political partisans, to some fanaticism opposite to their own) does not claim the same prestige as actual vice—as hypocrisy. The fanatic instills our weaker clay with a sense of assurance, which usually smothers whatever secondary uneasiness his antics may cause our sense of reason. Hypocrisy mirrors our own unassurance in itself; invoking our execration.

Hypocrisy has, of course, been both practised and charged against opponents by all sorts of political and religious and esthetic factions; but I tend to think that the liberals, at present, hold something of a monopoly on its more opulent forms. This, I believe, is because a wide spectrum of liberal attitudes and techniques and principles now hold public esteem and (in more mixed, but still considerable, degree) public power; so that the fallacies of much liberalism are offered a broader playground than before, and its fantasies and fallacies have grown apace. The outstanding of these is what I might designate as the Koko fallacy; naming it after the character in *The Mikado* who reminded his emperor that, since the monarch's order insured that an act ordered was as good as done, his name signed to an execution warrant obviated the need for executions. In similar tone, the liberals (a word which connotes to me, if not to all liberals, a considerable spectrum of left-wing opinion) enjoy a plastic sense of time: according to which, words must become actions, and therefore must be as good as actions; fantasy must become reality, therefore must be as good as reality. Every good plan, every heroic aspiration for their fellow human beings must be realized, which is to say, activated, pronto; but that *pronto* signifies that the hope and its gratification are as good as one. Hence,

any compromises of the putative ideals with which it germinated are essentially nonexistent, since (the fulfillment having been immediate) the intermediate steps, including compromises, take place in non-existent time.

We might clarify our impressions of liberal hypocrisy further by considering the little phrase "self-righteous"; which, in the number and kinds of meanings it has been forced to accommodate, is well-nigh a Volkswagon of liberal technology. I can recall when believing one's self in the right, particularly after having applied reasonable tests, was something less than social, intellectual, political and esthetic atrocity. I seem also to recall (and some recent checking of texts appears to support me) that a number of Jesus Christ's exhortations to his disciples were toward, rather than against, what would now be called self-righteousness. ("You are the salt of the earth," etc.) It should be remembered, however, that Christ, whose teachings were often encumbered with what Nat Hentoff has identified as coalitionist liberalism ("Make friends with the Mammon of unrighteousness"), permitted the identity to remain intact as a vessel of grace, as well as the tract of land on which all important moral battles were to be fought.

What liberals today demand is a figure of far more self-abandonment, humility and attunement to social realities than Jesus. A prime requisite of aspirants to the post is not merely that they regulate their moral judgments as subject to charity, on behalf of a recognized world, as well as to conscience; but that they consider anything so hedonistic as purely moral judgment as, at best, something luxurious. So the term self-righteousness has grown and grown in its accommodations and its uses. I have mentioned Nat Hentoff, who, from his firm position on the tail-gate of the Coming Thing, deploys "self-righteousness" so as to suggest a social nastiness roughly equivalent to crotch-scratching. And he manages further to imply that anyone found guilty of this public fetidity by Nat Hentoff excludes himself, and any of his arguments, from the need for further-amplified refutation—by Nat Hentoff. In the current (May 20,1965) issue of the *Village Voice*, Nat, aided by this Little Patented Demolisher, eviscerates, in only about ten words, an essay by Stanley Kauffmann, amounting to some five thousand words, in the current *Dissent*.

Are we to infer from the foregoing that individually-oriented hypocrisy has been replaced by a mass commodity? I suspect not "replaced" so much as jostled aside. The behavior of governments and institu-

tions is almost the only behavior within public survey in which the discrepancy between action and the pose comprised by action, and motivation, count for something morally, on an appreciable scale.

I think, for example, of the strange, sacerdotal inflection which, in recent years, seems to have been imparted to the concept of "law," so that the law has become, in many (or too many?) mouths, The Law—not an essential mechanism for regulating public behavior and administering government, but a sacred bull, the holy snout of which finds its way into an increasing number of the most personal and heretofore inviolate areas of living. The attitude seems to be that any moral posture can be certified by getting it stated as a law; and that this will not only guarantee the moral attitude being realized, with or without the consent of those troglodytes who don't happen to share it, but that the statement of moral attitude as law justifies its implicit force—not only the force that it countenances against the consciences of those who disagree with it, but also the force that it countenances against previous laws, which it might be seriously compromising. I am of somewhat this feeling about the recent civil rights laws, which I feel sure are good and their effects necessary, and yet which seem so much like mechanical implementations of laws that might have been recognized as implicit in the Constitution. The government found it necessary, not to invoke constitutional law, but to thicken it.

A friend of mine recently said, describing the mildewed gentility of the hotel where he was staying, that whenever anything went wrong, they put another rug on top of it. That seems, in good part, to characterize the procedure of devising "new" laws—which may actually be elaborations or explications of old laws—whereby the function of law changes from that of setting a norm for people's orderly conduct to that of leaning on people's shoulders, guiding their hands and breathing down their necks. I can scarcely venture to guess—nor, I think, can anyone—how much the benevolent civil rights laws, or any number of lesser benevolent laws, may exact, perhaps in future generations, in terms of consciences left slack, which ought to have been stiff and quivering with the fundamental tension between man and his ordinances: consciences which have not been pointed, or even elbowed, toward making their own moral decision—the rest, however, would have to be guess-work; and I have said that I can't venture to guess.

All this, I suspect—the "all this" comprising the last eight pages or so of this sermon—tends to demonstrate, however indirectly, what I have

just said about the possible morality of present hypocrisy. Or, perhaps, not "morality" but a certain sort of climate, a climate of privacy, of which certain lesser forms of hypocrisy may once have been embodiments. Not only do we see each other too clearly, as in depthless light that reduces all details to one dimension—we also resent, very often, the preference of people for supposing that there is anything about them not readily understandable, and judgable. For example, I think of the tenet that we should be as candid and as emphatic about our resentments as possible: "frank" is the alluringly broad-shouldered word. For in doing so, we bring things into the open and discharge our violences, which may otherwise accrete. I don't see anything at all wrong in being candid when one knows what one is being candid about: i.e., when the heart and the head are in some sort of constructive cooperation. But I distrust immensely the proposition that, when they are not in cooperation, the head has enough and plenty to do as a sort of highly-priced plumber for the vast septic tank which is occasionally supposed to constitute the human soul. In addition to "frankness," "catharsis" is another popular word for the process I describe, and a notably unfortunate one, it would seem, considering that such metaphoric catharsis may often decline to very nearly the level of the vegetable capsule variety. I may also note that the real assumption underlying many variations of such psychology is that all emotions are alike, even as they are alike in intensity and importance throughout the many variations of method acting, in which all characters—be they farmers, waterfront stevedores, lawyers or old ladies—react emotionally on an equal scale, and with equal kinds of articulateness.

I prefer the hypocrisy that holds that feelings are understood not necessarily by disgorging them upon the living-room carpet, but by trying to see them in the context of forms: and by our willingness to accept those forms (whether those that society proposes or those we improvise) at least to the extent of resisting them, rather than pretending that neither they nor the need for them exists.

A tributary passion of the devotion to sincerity I've been speaking of is the admiration for clarity, which commands a redoubtable cross-section of admirers. I summon the instance of Jules Feiffer, who—in the *Herald Tribune*'s "Book Week" of February 30, 1965—fluttered up a storm about John Wayne's statement to the press regarding the successful outcome of Wayne's cancer operation. Wayne had told repor-

ters that he had "licked the Big C"; which led Mr. Feiffer to announce that "I cannot and will not react sadly to news of anybody being stricken by the Big C. How can I? It doesn't mean anything." And, before that meager, pernicious chorus of "For you, you mean!" scattered amid the rapt audience of *Village Voice* lovers could die down or be booed out of existence, Feiffer vaulted on to his terminal lament that "More and more we have this penchant for deadening the meaning of the language...making (words) over into play words, show biz words."

I might say that, although Feiffer allows that he has "always admired John Wayne's style in movies," I doubt very much whether John Wayne could have pleased Feiffer if—with his writers at his elbow throughout the post-operative period—he had expressed himself in a rhetorical combination of Daniel Webster, Churchill and David Dellinger. The name "John Wayne" is just too easy a finger for gooching Mr. Feiffer's audience. Furthermore, I distrust no little Mr. Feiffer's animadversions about the dreadful way in which language nowadays is used to mask our True Emotions, to Insulate Us Against Reality. Mr. Feiffer's trade of fifteen years has consisted of distilling sexual frustration, mother fixation and suicidal impulses into comic colas for the liberal hipsters of his readership. His own language displaying a sometimes admirable talent for mimicry, it has never appreciably exceded the eloquence of a tape-recorder or old *Dragnet* script. I might add, too, that Wayne's statement seemed to me both touching and felicitous—one of the few things he has said that I will ever want to remember—and that I found it touching and felicitous, above all, because he used the terms of his trade, of the folklore his profession has engendered. Far from seeming mufflingly euphemistic, "Big C" strikes me as most descriptive of cancer's menacing sovereignty.

But, back to Mr. Feiffer as stylistic mentor and tilter against what he deems hypocrisy. I'm amazed by the power with which language is accredited by Feiffer and other writers—writers like George Orwell, Dwight MacDonald, and others who have long plainted that euphemism, or midcult jargon, or newspeak, are, like formidable white corpuscles, devouring not only the good red spheres of our language, but reality itself: "itself" meaning, here, "for which these writers have been lobbying." As against these claims, I have long felt that words and their uses were shaped in great part not only by emotions, but by a congeries of factors—culture, habit, alternate forms

of communication—which are constantly beating and kneading our vocabularies, at least as much as the other way around. I don't see why a seemingly euphemistic term cannot both contain and express as much emotion as a more seemingly honest phrase: I think that people who speak of friends and relatives as having "passed away" might—amazingly enough—feel and be expressing as much sincere grief as those who can say that he is dead and worms do eat him.

Much is descried, I think, by considering the prose of those writers I mention, and some of their fellows: a prose which—whatever might be its qualities of dexterity and compactness and fluency—is prevailingly dead to the colors and textures of language, to its mutability, to its vivacity. MacDonald, with all his mouth-filling espousals of Style (and I mean not only MacDonald's mouth, but the reader's; his language seems to accrete on one's palate like residual toothpaste), seems to concentrate most of his considerable energy on divesting his own style of all animation: pat little manifestoes, Polonius-like listings of what is wrong with a George Stevens spectacle or what comprises successful comedy. The gardenpath gravel into which George Orwell, throughout so many essays, converted language is abundantly reflected in Orwell's comments on Dickens. For all his occasional sharp observations of Dickens's secondary peculiarities, Orwell was simply numb to Dickens's all-but-erotic passion for language: a passion which led him at times into the bullying pursuit, for pages upon surplus pages, of a sentimental frippery, but also into those extraordinary passages—like the one about the Veneerings' brand-new household—in which a central image, or concept, or even word, becomes the tortuously and wondrously wrought centerpiece for comic extravaganza (like this one) or pathos (the "old-fashioned" passage about Paul Dombey), wherein drunken effulgence is countered by a bleak ferocity of devotion. You may seek such a Dickens patiently amid the gravel-bright phrases of Orwell's criticism.

I propose that just this numbness to language produces the superstitious veneration of language that exaggerates antipathy to euphemisms and "newspeak" and jargon. The men I speak of express such dread in the tone of jungle savages who come into possession of a sunlamp; which they never learn to use, but nevertheless venerate: the Big Medicine with One Shining Eye. Their anti-hypocrisy is, in its way, a grim wariness of reality, which is intricate, fluid and overbearing.

Thus, I suspect what is often called hypocrisy today turns out to be merely the enclosing of one's self and one's abilities in an island of self-awareness. Indeed, what is called hypocrisy may often turn out to be no more than the willingness to stand by this little capital of one's own soul and the feeling that the boundaries of that soul are the boundaries of one's effectuality. And the attitudes, the behavior which this begets may—as in the example I offered of the Country Priest—seem hypocritical to those who regard the soul, or one's most intimate judgment of one's own acts, as community property; so that, in fact, the relationship of one's soul to the outside community, which once provided the most valid definitions of hypocrisy, has become, in many quarters, meaningless; and the concept of hypocrisy, not a kind of moral control over one's view of one's self, but, indeed, a mechanism for pretending that "self"—even in the sense of that engine which must beget any moral behavior—does not exist. I am exaggerating, I suppose; yet not, I suppose, very much.

I am speaking, indeed, not so much on behalf of hypocrisy as on behalf of not fearing a majority notion of hypocrisy—a fallacy which must fall by its own inner contradiction of terms. Its inner virtue, I suppose, is a continued respect for authority: a dirty word which I small-letter only to distinguish it from the Transit Authority, the Housing Authority, and that Authority which every self-respecting anarchist (and nearly all of them seem to be) misprizes and challenges, save, perhaps, occasionally, in himself. What I mean by authority is very nearly synonymous with form, my own impression of which I have already talked about, a little; which makes reality more significantly real, by keeping in one's heart an idea of what reality might become; and expressing this hope, at present, through an order of one's own. Authority is form, with the ideal being born witness to and administered by a human being: "administered," i.e., by reminding people of the ideal, by reminding them of the order which is supposed to harbor the ideal in their hearts. A man in authority testifies to the ideal, and testifies to his own limitations as a man; but testifies as well to his power, given him by his community, for invoking order. It is authority that maintains both community and spiritual separateness in people; because the judge, or priest, or leader who propels and prods others and himself toward some better version of themselves, also helps define which matters of the soul are the concern of no one but the soul itself. By this definition, clearly, I think, "unlimited authority" is a con-

tradiction in terms: authority which is not dictatorship, or madness, or God on High, must survive by limiting itself. What I like most in the various eulogies I have read of Synanon is the impression I have of an autonomous patriarchy that is at once formal and very subjectively and flexibly oriented. Of course, drug addiction—in which physical and spiritual afflictions often intersect—provides an almost unique occasion for a setup, the aim of which is not merely recovery but reconstruction according to an ideal of clarity and self-dependence. As I say, I like this feature of Synanon—an authority based on morally exacting ideals (physically exacting, too, what with the "cold turkey" methods, etc.) and a goal of not mere rehabilitation but conversion, which it seems to me, must, if followed consistently, keep the synthesis of moral conventions that comprises the group's ideal from slackening into just conformity or acquiescence. On the other hand, there are many things that, again, simply from accounts I've read, I should be inclined to dislike or suspect in the way Synanon is run: chiefly, that while it seems independent of the country at large, which is fine (one may shudder at the thought of its becoming a national institution, and its ideals, so right in its situation, national ideals), it also seems to have no open end, no vent by which the men and women may change not only themselves, but, through the insights and weapons they have acquired, the community outside as well. And I hedge a little at the idea (so gratefully noted by several writers who have contrasted Synanon with AA) of excluding God entirely, especially since the doubtless talented men at its head are an uncertain alternative. To this degree, the priests of the various Pentecostal and Baptist churches in New York, who have undertaken their own rehabilitation programs, enjoy a decided edge. At any rate, Synanon represents one of the most interesting instances of true authority, social and spiritual, surviving in today's United States; and of how such authority, when not dictatorial or commandeered, may bridge the chasm between confrontation of the world (without surrender) and the trajectory of faith.

I have gone too far, and, perhaps, much too wide, even to review, here, the questions I have left unanswered, the uncompleted definitions whose loose ends rattle an obligato to these final sentences. Let them, rather, remain unanswered and uncompleted. And let me conclude with a definition of hypocrisy which will, I hope, not complete them but dome them with its wholeness:

"L'hypocrite est avant tout un malheureux qui convient imprudem-

ment de son attitude envers autrui avant d'avoir eu le courage de se definir soimême exactement, car il répugne à se voir tel qu'il est; il se cherche une sincérité, sacrifie à cette impossible gageure des avantages certains, et finit par se duper. Pour mentir utilement, avec effi cace et sécurité plénière, il faut connaître son mensonge et s'exercer à l'aimer."

The Holy Family

The movement of Herman Melville's *Pierre; or, The Ambiguities* begins as a thick coiling: the delineation, in prose of near-suffocating archness, of the specific Glendinning family, upper New York landed gentry—Mother Mary; Pierre Jr., the Rock and Scion; the deceased father, his portrait-ikon lodged in the sitting room, his younger, more sinister portrait prudently tucked in the closet. From this coiling, the motion of the book becomes, with the appearance of Pierre's mysterious lost sister, Isabel, increasingly peristaltic; the tone acquiring more of the author's accustomed heavy deviousness, his thick-breathing expostulation (was ever any author more obvious and more devious at once?). Then—tanglefooting across New York in pursuit of the doomed menage that Pierre has gathered around him (Isabel; the outcast farmgirl, Delly; and later, the cast-off fiancée, Lucy). At this stage, the consciousness of Pierre—the unfolding of which commands the

novel—most nearly merges with the consciousness of Herman Melville, whose voice, to the near exclusion of all other voices, takes the fore. And this obstinate, exacerbating, perverse and at times nearly unreadable book—one of our few masterworks of total iconoclasm—climaxes in one of the most far-reaching and wholehearted demolition jobs in all literature, by demolishing itself.

Pierre is surely to be read as both prologue and supplement to that mordant, brassy chamber work, *The Confidence-Man,* not merely because *Pierre* block-letters some of the seeming ambiguities (as apart from the genuine, structural ones) of that zigzagging later work; but because *Pierre,* an authentic supplement, takes on territory that *The Confidence-Man* excludes or subordinates—that is, the citadel of orthodox sentimental-liberal Virtue—and thereby undercuts a number of those critical sentimentalities (the Christian-oriented ones, especially) that have been visited on a supremely antisentimental work. For the focal characters of *Pierre* are endowed at the outset with confidence in the highest: confidence in the fixed categories of Vice and Virtue (Pierre himself); confidence in the right-workings of Destiny, with initiative and stick-to-it-iveness manning the throttles; confidence in one another's love (all and sundry, but particularly Isabel, who, without moorings or experience, must sustain herself by instinctive, trusting love); and, collectively, confidence in what Melville here offers as a peculiarly American union, that of the Family: that is, the hierarchy of the European family (here a matriarchy, which Pierre first destroys) buttressed with the Puritan rigors and warmths of cooperation and mutual trust. The Family is Pierre's total achievement, the end of his maddened pilgrimage to New York City, in pursuit of freedom through virtue: a patriarchy this time, but a virginal one, approximating the Christian Family of iconography, even to the Apostles (the name given to the jejune Bohemian colony of downtown Manhattan, in which the fugitives find themselves).

Mr. Lawrance Thompson, in his Afterword to the Signet edition of *Pierre,* most comprehensively traces the book's elements of parody on Christian fable, such as *Pilgrim's Progress.* Rather too comprehensively, really, I suspect; because, in belaboring the parodistic or allegorical strains of Melville's writing, we run the risk of giving him what he never asks us for, and, indeed, insists that we reject: a category. It is fantastically easy to embroider such schemata for any of Melville's important works, provided one overlooks what is not only

obvious, but ever-present: Melville's own obsession with the circumstances of reality, whose fluctuations, self and mutual contradictions and changing colors repeatedly bedevil him, his protagonists and us, with the subversive insinuation that, perhaps, appearances are all-important: not those appearances that are subsumed by conventions but those appearances that our encounters, our experience, comprise. Thus, in *The Confidence-Man,* does he reach the way station—not conclusion, surely!—that the nearest to perfect *agapé* which any mortal man can achieve is probably an alert openness to all human possibilities: the worst, surely, as well as the best.

The great failing of Pierre—a human, rather than a moral failing—is his confidence in an attainable *purity* of goodness; not sugary or pollyannaish, nor yet the time-serving duplicities of his minister, the Reverend Fallsgrave. Pierre's sort of confidence is too intrepid and too openhearted for any of these obvious sentimentalities; yet his vision of goodness is sentimental at its core, and in no merely metaphysical, but in a very particularly American liberal, sense. For this is the sentimentality that holds with reconciling all parts—so long as those parts appear good in themselves—in a community of virtue. The Holy Family once more; but one sees more clearly the danger of merely literary analogies. Pierre begins as abstraction, true, or rather as a honey-dipped prototype of sweet, upstanding American youth; but—in the course of a life which entails all manner of interpolated reveries, sermons, essays, exhortations and commentaries—Pierre becomes, increasingly specifically, a *young American upper-class man of the middle nineteenth-century;* whose character, thereby, shoots backward to the Puritans, and winds foward into our very times, with their Kennedys and Lindsays and Percys.

The terrible maturing of Pierre with which the novel is occupied consists of his discovering, in ever more ruthless succession, those ambiguities which are the book's subtitle. The initiator of these is his supposedly illegitimate sister, Isabel, who first presents herself to him, like one of the Fates, at a farmhouse sewing circle. Isabel, with her guitar and her aura of irrational fantasy, brings into Pierre's life not only the fatal cleavage of his world, but a darkly intuitive, potentially esthetic animal intelligence that begets all later amibiguities. Isabel embodies that connective current of subconscious experience, which Pierre fearfully recognizes, first, in his father's portrait, then, in Isabel herself, then, in the painting at the gallery.

These ambiguities are the reversals and betrayals, and above all the erosions—the tarnishings of love, of faith, of young aspiration—that cause the parturition of Pierre's values and the naive fury propelling him towards those values. His root error, as I have said, is sentimental: the colonial sentimentality of protection and renunciation. For *Pierre* is quite as much a novel of caste and status as of metaphysical considerations.

It reminds me in this of other, quite diverse novels—James's mighty *The Awkward Age,* with its arabesqued wit, its Restoration reek billowing through the London salons; or Ford Madox Ford's *The Good Soldier,* with its own landscape of rapacious innocence, and rotting mellowness. Melville's frontier work is much more brutal and erratic-winded than the other two; but it cleaves open the theme of sentimental protectiveness and its murderous work upon both subject and benefactor. When he burns his old possessions—most notably the fatal secret portrait of his father, which Melville has elliptically called a painting of the Devil—Pierre is not freeing himself at all (as he is forced to realize). He is putting himself in bondage to the profound hypocrisy (yet, really, how resistible?) of "protecting the family name"; while insuring the honor of his sister, he commits her to celibacy and dependency on him. The only possible clear-cut beneficiary of the arrangement is the terrified, inarticulate farmgirl, Delly, who can, perhaps, expect security of a sort as the family servant. But the true nature of such a protectorate is luridly arc-lighted during the trio's catastrophic arrival in New York City: especially the interlude at the police station, which Melville gives the hell-bent tempo and detachment of monstrous farce.

Throughout the book, Pierre's advance is toward the solitary silence that Benito Cereno, the Negro Babu, Bartleby and Billy Budd gather around them—that silence which is not so much a defiance of the world as the one gesture a man can make toward it, who can neither renounce it wholly, nor immolate himself in its swarming identities. It is a silence which, nevertheless, *must repeatedly be broken:* broken because of the irresistible stress of the world, of its tendrils, upon the elected solitude of one like Pierre, and because that solitude was elected as a gesture toward mankind: the very least, the very most, that he can offer it. The climactic agony of Pierre's extended passion comes with the realization of this stress, this imminent parturition of the wholeness and purity to which he has sentimentally aspired. And the

realization comes fully as the ideals of virtue and truth merge into, and are cancelled by, the single ideal of freedom.

Among the cardinal images of the novel are those of rock: notably the crucial image of armless Enceladus and the Terror Rock, Pierre's sardonic counterpart—the tilted boulder, inscribed with the initials of Solomon the Wise (which Melville, typically, introduces here and there throughout the book into a New York terrain almost as surreally whimsical as Li'l Abner's Dogpatch)—and, also, armor, husks, musculature and carapace; coalescing in the Beckett-like scenes of Pierre as would-be author, inertly swaddled, before a writing desk consisting of a plank across two barrels, with hot bricks underneath to keep the ink fluid. But the very edge of grotesquerie to this scene—grotesquerie being Melville's prime device in *Pierre,* as irony is in *The Confidence-Man*—tips us that Melville cannot accept Pierre's isolation as metaphor, for the very reasons that Melville persistently distrusts metaphors: the ambiguities of the world, its distractions and dependencies, which turn Pierre's projected great book into a botched fabric of derivations and forces Pierre out of his carapace of silence. At last, Lucy, his former fiancée—whom he renounced in order to devote himself to his sister—arrives, like some ghostly novitiate, at the moribund holiness of the synthetic household. And even she brings in her train the hideous clamor of the world: the curses of her mother, the vengeful threats of her brother and suitor, Pierre's once-loved cousin. The world will not be kept out.

The iconoclasm of *Pierre* is indeed thorough, is inexhaustible in that the forms destroyed are shown to have been awry from the first. So with the family, Pierre's original family: the incest-larva within its shell of warmth and comeliness. Also, the implicit homosexuality of Pierre's young affection for his cousin Glen Stanley who, when Pierre removes himself finally, tries to compensate by wooing Pierre's jilted fiancée; then, losing her, turns on Pierre, enraged, and tries to knife him. The Glendinning house is presided over, not only by the double-ghost of the father, but by that of the grandfather. Mother and son address each other as brother and sister; and when the avowed sister, Isabel, appears, she in turn becomes first Pierre's pretended wife and then, in all but actuality, his mother (as Pierre himself careens from late adolescence to immobile age, and back); then, his lover. As presented by Melville, however, the incest motif does not pre-empt the foreground; rather, buttresses the more important theme of the

family's perverse sterility and the breakneck folly of trying to reproduce this sterile form, to pay tribute both to the world's appearances and one's sense of irreducible rightness.

Pierre—and this, I suspect, accounts for its perplexing ragbag of faults and virtues: but, too, for its overall justification and, surely, triumph—represents an enterprise that a mind jealous of its sanity could hope to undertake only once: approaching every density—moral, social and artistic—not only in the foreknowledge that such density, once in full view, will disintegrate, but with one's own will riven between wishing to make the rock disintegrate and wishing to hold it, at least for a while, intact.

Pierre and *The Confidence-Man* both take place within a sort of continuous foreground, a relentless present; but while *The Confidence-Man* moves with a kind of loose artifice, a *boulevardier's* gait, through its succession of dialogues, *Pierre* is a series of massive broken blocks, fragments of commentary or monologue, whereby Melville's own voice holds the book to the present; his voice supplanting Pierre's voice, his consciousness eventually becoming Pierre's consciousness. In one of the most beautifully discerning—one of the freest and noblest-spirited—essays ever written on Melville, Charles Olson points out the loss of space in Melville's later books; of that ample distance which *Moby Dick* commanded and glorified. Olson is quite correct, of course; but how could it have been otherwise? As unavoidable as that James should have composed *The Awkward Age* in a series of string quartets. Not that *Pierre* entails questions of composition or form, save "form" as the rawest reflex of necessity. But *Pierre* is all about a closing-in of the world and of a man's mind evolving through that closure. It is a book that, in truth, *gets nowhere,* save from one household to another, and thence to the prisonhouse, and the grave. Melville cannot leave anything to the inferential "logic" of a plot's permutations and resonances. This is not to justify some of the worst things in *Pierre;* but it *is* to indicate, I think, how the work as a whole ultimately justifies itself.

It helps to account, I believe, for all the underscoring and now-hear-this-ing, the rib-caving nudges and—despite the book's overall effect of foreshortening, even truncation—the redundancies among which *Pierre* flounders, again and again. It begins, indeed, with some fifty of the most nearly unreadable pages ever bestowed by a notable author upon his readers: chapters and chapters of elephant-rumped

coyness, shambling and hauling its way across the page, all in purported parody of American middle-class romance. It actually put me in mind of the Calder Willingham fiasco, *Eternal Fire!* Parody, I should mention—especially as here espoused by Melville—strikes me as a fundamental denial of that function—the *renewal* of experience—by which the greatest art survives.

In the laborious smugness of *Pierre's* opening sections there is something not only grating and depressing, but counter to my general impression of Melville as a man and writer geared to incessant struggle between stasis and almost delirious mobility. Melville was surely more aware than most men that to parody is to emulate. Yet, rereading the Saddle Meadows sections of *Pierre*—as well as some of the later, less heartburn-inducing but often ponderous blocks of romantic lament or exhortation—I feel better able, not to exculpate, but to justify, overall, such kinds of overwriting in *Pierre.*

I have noted earlier that Melville could not on any terms afford an intricate plot, a far-flung narrative mechanism, in his story of ambiguities. Such literary apparatus must presume a kind of circumstantial logic that Melville was by way of questioning and controverting. Pierre himself joins his hopes to such trajectory-logic when he embarks for the city with his forlorn entourage. Melville cannot conduct his narrative by charts and compasses, because he has no faith that the reality answerable to such will not disintegrate and reshuffle before charts and compasses have ever been consulted. And so he must insist on his own presence, as the axis of his reality, in the book. The same is true of *The Confidence-Man*—in which Melville devises a persona for himself: the effulgent Cosmopolitan. (Nor does Melville withhold his own voice.) But *Pierre* is not, could not be, such a cannily yet loosely artificed extravaganza. *Pierre* is a novel about a singular young man who, aspiring to freedom through an assemblage of goodnesses, finds eventually that all have merged into the single goal of freedom; that, in turn, the other virtues have been cancelled out; and that the sought-for-freedom has coagulated into mortal immobility. Melville's consciousness, the weight of his will, cleaves to the singularity of Pierre and, as with Ahab and the Confidence-Man (though not Bartleby or Don Benito), must affirm rhetorically the self-incubating uniqueness of his character; but always referring to the gravity of his, Melville's, own ego. The thickening that develops around Pierre as he establishes himself in New York corresponds to the increasing density

of Melville's voice throughout the book. He cannot himself depart far from it; because, of course, the other component of his voice, of which we often hear only the burly roughness and tomcattish playfulness, is its tremulousness. The persistent tremor of Melville's faith in the projections of his ego—the external reality that he creates in the beginning of *Pierre*—will not let them stray far from his sense of himself; and when he must withhold his presence perforce, as he must in the opening passages, the effect is turgid and wearingly unnatural.

Pierre represents to me the outermost reaches, within the boundaries of any sanity, of a raw desperation to which confinement is death and freedom is immolating chaos. It is an ultimate of that straitjacketed thrashing so recurrent in Melville's freest writings. Yet, it creates also the imagery of a world—the somber downtown Manhattan of Pierre's refuge-prison, in its chrysalis of what seems to be chronic winter: a portrayal of a city as bitterly explicit in its muted bleakness and its haphazard violence as the Ontario of Wyndham Lewis's *Self-Condemned,* decades later. The scenes move at lock-step tempo: from the horrors of the cab-ride and police station to the more covert, scrounging horror of the cheap hotel where they spend the night; to the commune of the Apostles, with its grotesque sadness and squalor and arresting contemporaneity—these gentle, pottering Bohemians who court perfect health by currycombing themselves and living on apples and graham crackers. These scenes have the grey density of lithographs; the more so in contrast with the canopies of expostulation that Melville raises above them periodically. They give *Pierre* that haunting richness, as of accumulated and shifting experience, which lingers with us despite the book's spastic tempo and convulsive hyperbole.

Pierre has been described as a succession of parodies; but, I think, Melville never, after the opening, again rises—or descends—to those early chapters. What does prevail thereafter may often be confused with parody, yet it is not, in the same sense. Indeed, passages abound (like the concluding paragraph of Book XIV) in which I give it to anyone's guess whether Melville is trying to be funny or not. His tone throughout such passages is his much more natural and familiar one: a sardonic extravagance that is *aware* of the potential parody in the sentiments its expresses, hence is forever rising to a nervous chortle, or turning upon its own redundancies. Among American authors, I have encountered this quality mainly in Negro writing. Melville, so

torn between the pressures of concrete experience and his ambition of aggrandizing it, could never be unconscious of the sardonic laughter that rides on full-throated passion: that imp-ridden sense of "somebody else, somewhere else" laughing himself into fits at one's outbursts and gesticulations. But, as with his whole range of uncertainties and insecurities, this vulnerability of Melville's becomes his strength when it becomes the source of his grotesquerie, that sense of the large and grand depending upon the small, the trivial, the explicit (which gives much of *Pierre* the effect of an immense spinning top wobbling about on a tiny table). One might imagine that Herman Melville invented *reductio ad absurdum* and anticlimax. And his bedeviling awareness (wry or jovial or agonized) of the concrete reinforces the theme of *Pierre:* a young man setting out with the largest of ideals, who must descend into the smallness of the world and of his own human heritage—his nature and evolving passions.

A chief source of *Pierre's* grotesquerie is the deterioration of symbols, that Melville here displays, validly, as the forgings of human mind and human will; not, as in Hawthorne, say, the impositions of an omniscient and omnifluent author. The pressing context of human and spatial limitation, in *Pierre,* converts its rituals and ceremonies and relics into desiccated travesties of themselves: the mother and son's breakfast; the chest, with its supposed wealth, locked and bound eternally; the enormous suit of Pierre's grandfather, the grand old Pierre, the old protector, who cared ritually for his horses every day of his life so that when he died, they pined away for want of his tending hand. Even when the ceremonies are not mechanical, they are so futile as to carry their own caul of bitter laughter: Pierre's possessions heaped on the front lawn; or Pierre wadding his pistol with a threatening letter from his cousin. It is not immaterial that the crucial art in *Pierre* is painting, which enacts the dual role of a medium for establishment respectability (the family portrait of Pierre's father; Lucy trying to sell her drawings) and for the alarming psychic discernment of common impulse (the hidden portrait of Pierre's father as well as the painting of "The Stranger" in the art gallery). The painting that Melville here observes represents at once an actual fixity and a seeming fixity that houses the frightening community of the mythical subconscious.

When Melville must enlist his symbols from his characters' natural terrain—trees, rocks, etc.—as extensions of perception rather than as the characters' own conscious devisings, he is liable to be many times

more strained and arch than Hawthorne; but also, to me at least, occasionally more vigorous and even persuasive. A pivotal image of *Pierre,* possibly its most forceful, is also one of its most zanily arbitrary: the great rock formation that Melville, *in medias res,* dumps into the dizzily erratic countryside of his New York, representing the armless Titan, Enceladus. Despite the slapdash abruptness of its appearance, and the gushing landscape description which surrounds it, the figure of Enceladus—with all its imminently burlesque flagrancy—spills us into a startling magnitude of darkness: an almost-solitary enlargement among all the diminutions and fracturings of Pierre's world. The tortured suspension of Enceladus, his crucifixion of immobility, is *Pierre's* axis of dignity, counterpart to the axis of its author's frenetically charging, self-confined ego. This whole passage—rather than the pantomime of slaughter, the stereopticon *Hamlet,* which wraps up the narrative—is *Pierre's* deliverance, its true denouement.

Let us put it so: *The Confidence-Man* is a work of fragments, its argument being that its characters reach out for faith and compassion that lie beyond the boundaries of their own natures and yet—because of those very boundaries—must settle for faith distorted, for half or quarter-truths, prisms of truth. They are trapped by their distances from one another, represented by the compartments of space, and the time-suspending dialogues, in which Melville and the Confidence Man locate them. Their failed charity and faith go arm in arm with a failed misanthropy: a petty cynicism and bile. Just so does genuine misanthropy, as represented by Colonel Mooredock or Charlmont—a true apprehension of the evil potential in Nature, general and human—lie hard by that genuine *agapé* which accepts the world's appearances *as* appearances.

Pierre is a work of those absolutes, sought after as glories, which branch, or fragment, when we attempt to lay hold to them; recalling us to our human dependencies, our interconnectedness with all other men and women. Surely, Pierre's counterpart is Hamlet as much as Christ: Hamlet who, like Pierre, tries to launch himself upon a straight course of action, only to find that supposedly simple path branching into the lives of everyone around him. At last, too, Pierre's headlong pursuit of truth must recall him to that human family from which he has isolated himself.

Doing Time

On the Yard. Malcolm Braly. New York: Fawcett-Crest, 1967. Paperbound: $.75

The Total Beast. Mack Thomas. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970. Hardbound: $6.95

DOING TIME (I)

Malcolm Braly's *On the Yard* is one of the most lively and densely textured recent American novels around. A chronicle of a California prison, the book oddly enough suggests Katherine Anne Porter's *Ship of Fools*—a far better publicized, but almost equally undervalued novel—in its organically consistent emphasis on people's awareness of the images which others harbor of them; and the various and generally disastrous consequences to which such awareness can lead. Braly, also, like Porter, though without much of her schematic self-

consciousness—evokes a various, swarming though enclosed society, a hive of rascality, perversion and intramural operating, which—however—never gives us respite from the awareness of its given, quite specific environment; in fact, the Yard, which furnishes both the title and central image of this metaphorless book. We are introduced to the world of Braly's West Coast pokey by Society Red: an old-timer, from his early teens in the Southern cane-fields; whose unhappy experience with plastic-surgery therapy (trying to convert him to the good life by reducing the size of his ears) clues us in to the theme—never declared, yet ubiquitous—of Braly's book: the vulnerability of men to each other; and their efforts to salvage some token, some ego-talisman, of their innate privacy, their sense of their own mysteriousness: through festishes, through petty vanities, through slowly-acquired social masks, through, in short, a range of devices with which the "free world" is abundantly familiar; and the opposite temptation—which, more than temptation, amounts to need—to display themselves *as* themselves, to exhibit what they have acquired! Which paradox (apparent) summarizes, I think, the prison world of *On the Yard.*

The action, imagery and characterization of Braly's prison-tapestry are richly varied and constantly mobile, without ever displacing our awareness of his landscape *as* a landscape, an authentic landscape, its own commentary on itself. Nor has Braly fallen upon the hook of facile allegory; prison, like war, being a natural allegory unto itself (as, for example, the distinctly talented William Eastlake failed to remember, in the pretentious fiasco, *Castle Keep*); it offers its own typifications, due to the artificial nature of its enclosure. One's challenge (as Braly grasps perfectly) is to be as specific, as observational, as one can; *not* to underscore self-evident generalizations.

The book's title, *On the Yard,* emphasizes the field-situation of prison-life, and, in this, its supreme vulnerability. *This* is merely the most important of the sentimentalities that Braly avoids: the sentimental myth of prison as an autonomous society. Almost fanatically antiromantic, he is never ensorcelled by this romantic cliché. He sees prison, most accurately, I—who have never been in one—feel, as a *three-walled* society; always alive to the thin tissue of respectability that "society" attempts to impose on it; always the more alive to its own drive, the drive to salvage its, however perverted, ego-freedoms and thrusts, thus trying to erect a new kind of society; yet still abjectly dependent on the old.

Braly has provided his readers—those lucky and/or percipient enough to hook onto the Gold Medal paperback edition of his novel, soon to be republished as a Gold Medal Premier Book—with a reflection on human experience, through the medium (that is, the heightening, the sharp-focus) of melodrama. The rascalities and put-ons of *On the Yard* (ranging from the warden's house-man down to a medical orderly, stealing morphine from a terminal cancer patient) are as precisely-envisioned, as near-grotesque, as Chester B. Himes's tricks and traffics in his incomparable Harlem detective series. Yet—as distinguished from Himes's quite valid tone of sardonic theatricality—Braly's tone is as offhand, as lacking in braggadocio—yet as confident of its information—as an old con clueing in a young one. And, withal, much more detached, more edged, more trenchantly perceptive.

And the bite of *On the Yard* is deeper and more virulent than the bite of much classical tragedy, if only because the fates of its characters are not pre-apprehended, as are those of tragic heroes. Yet the inscription of their doom is as clear as is that of Oedipus Rex or Orestes. However, the prescription of these persons' common fate—Chilly Willy, master of the hustle, king of the yard, and one of Braly's two opposed protagonists; Paul Juleson, the other, inadvertent wife-killer and chronic evader—the sense of their common inevitable doom, doom-as-identity, both being marked as society's castoffs, not only by external judgement, but by their sense of themselves—makes, for us, their identity and their destiny not less, but *more* subject to ironic variations. Chilly Willy has—mainly, at least—resigned himself to a successful existence within prison walls, as a king make-out and operator; Juleson thinks he retains some ambition toward respectable life, although his past image of respectable life has proven totally false and frustrating, and has helped precipitate him into his current position. What hurtles both men toward annihilation, of different sorts, is the re-entry as by *doppelgangers* of their self-images, which they have so long tried to tame, or repress: Chilly Willy's aspiration toward the authority and responsibility of a true father; Juleson's, toward self-justifying masculinity, inevitably touched with *machismo*.

I have mentioned, but would like to elaborate on, the way in which Braly uses the tempo and stresses of melodrama to render gratuitous experience. This is not mere fancy footwork on his part; the values of melodrama, the emphasis on large token gestures, the simplifi-

cations—especially its stress on manifest power, which gives it such kinship to politics; all these traits contribute to the emotional sets and responses of the men about whom he is writing. And these traits, too, are constantly belied and cheapened and subverted by the cumulatively emasculating atmosphere of the prison; the atmosphere, of course, that fuels those fantasies initially, giving them emotional focus.

Braly's narrative virtuosity, which is very unassuming in tone, but increasingly impressive as one rereads his novel, gives us an extraordinary range of scene and action, very seldom yielding to contrivance; and, thereby, an impressively complex sense of time. As the loping dialogues, with their scabrous humor or harsh wariness or bluster, give place to the packed, brisk vignettes—a progressive-minded guard being heckled and hectored by his charges; two boxing rivals in an off-limits crap-game—Braly uses his formidably keen and attentive narrative gifts to honor the clarity of an event, but almost never to over-construct or speciously "wind up" a scene. (There are, as I say, a couple of exceptions, the most important one being the showdown scene between Juleson and Chilly's Mexican enforcer. Here, the death of a man—though anything but an "easy" resolution, quite the opposite; there are no such quick resolutions here! everything piece by piece!—is still dispensed so briskly and almost glibly, that the coincidence, though plausible, on which it depends, seems not to pay for itself in the coin of narrative logic. And there are instances of overeditorializing, underscoring.) Thus, the storytelling tempo of each scene, which so absorbs us in the characters' mean or fearful or savage enterprises—leads us always back, open-endedly, to the prison itself, which perpetuates, as it cancels, all such schemes and predations. Braly's grace and softspoken knowledgeability, the balance in his voice of intimacy with tough detachment, permit him free passage, not only from scene to scene, but from person to person; everyone given his inning, specifically in the dreams or erotic fantasies that represent the *sine qua non* of identity for all persons; the massive, lamebrained trusty, the old Italian maintenance man, as well as the *machismo*-haunted intellectual. The disastrous "realization" of these fantasies, toppling the world upon their authors, occupies two splendid almost antipodal scenes: a young neo-Nazi's loony escape attempt; and a burgeoning homosexual menage—one of the most empathetically vivid and touching descriptions of such a scene I have ever read.

Braly is not one of those artists of the highest rank, who, as it were, infect experience, taking possession of it as demons. But he surely occupies that second rank—and not much lower, when one brings to it his resiliencies of precision and sympathy, the double toughness of man and artist—the occupants of which testify to experience; not through the fallacy of "impersonal" journalism, but as true and excellent journalists; their minds and hearts as filters for observed life. Braly accomplishes this continually, and continually, too, he avoids, as Rumaker in *Gringoes* or the Algren who wrote *Man With the Golden Arm* learned to avoid, that worst emotional parasitism: that sentimental pity that makes emotional property of its subject. Braly has an eye for his men's secrets; but he leaves them their mysteriousness, every time.

DOING TIME(II)

The double protagonist of Mack Thomas's *The Total Beast* is Frank Barnes; sentenced (like Thomas himself, before a providential parole to New York) to life imprisonment for narcotics possession; and the Texas prison that the reader enters with Barnes's eyes and mind is not only as an agglomeration of lives in various stages of atrophy but is a structure, an architecture. The altertype of Frank Barnes's fiercely husbanded, monolithically defiant ego is the physical mass of Birdville prison, and the structures of its daily ceremonies, etiquettes, taboos.

In another excellent American novel of prison life I have just been rereading—Malcolm Braly's *On the Yard*—one is no sooner within the walls of the West Coast big house than the narrative goes scurrying, like a ferret through a rat-warren, into every cell and through every corridor of the prison's intrigues, its politickings. One feels a coral-skeleton of divergent, fragmented lives, trying to justify or aggrandize themselves, or narcoticize themselves with fantasy, against the inevitable downward pressures of the prison system. In Mack Thomas's novel, the reader locksteps into Birdville prison, a bare two feet behind the central ego of Barnes/Thomas. From then on, through the books's 347 pages, we are imprisoned by the weight and rhythm of his obsessively deliberate account: a tabulation that, in its cold, ferocious explicitness, makes the eye of the narrator—and his chief subject—seem to merge with what is being described: the monolithic ego

seems almost one with the inanimate structure which it is dedicated to resist. To this point, we must presently return.

Nor does the ferocious explicitness I mention pertain only to the highlights of brutality and chicanery and perversion. Rather, Mack Thomas is chiefly concerned with, and brilliantly chronicles (in the strictest, yet also richest, sense of that word) the everyday inertness of prison existence. Where Malcolm Braly uses the heightening and simplification of melodrama—usually with much invention, shrewdness, and backhanded irony—to portray the men's contraband fantasies, Mack Thomas uses the dryest of undertones—yet with no sacrifice of flexibility, grace or, occasionally, eloquence and wit—to show us the most elementary passages and transactions: eating (and managing to make the food edible) in the messhall; showers and medical examinations; assembling in the "bullring" or exercise yard; with an all-but-unshaded clarity, and with what, perversely, suggests a child's wondering openness to detail. Thomas presents these objects and tableaux as archetypes: knowing full well, obviously, that the archetypal is birthed by the specific; so that a view of a guard-captain at his desk, or a prisoner flushing a toilet, are both typical and unswervingly particular. For each of these views and scenes is encountered by Barnes/Thomas, and by us, from the precise distance decided by the hero's furiously self-protective ego.

More to the point: the prison remembered and/or envisioned by Thomas (who can separate vision from recall, in this singular performance?) seems to have been as it is, for all eternity; and as we consider him, so, almost, does Frank Barnes.

On the Yard specifies the hardening or wounding or maddening—the *changes* wrought upon a number of prison inmates by an institution whose foremost power is psychologically and spiritually destructive. It is a chronicle of vulnerability, even in those men—like Chilly Willy—who seem, at least, to have gained emotional impermeability. Frank Barnes, however, on his entrance into Birdville, seems to have tensed himself against any permeation, against the elementary routines of his life, in a way that Braly does not examine. Braly delights in the dodges and operations devised and shared in by his cons; Thomas's hero resists in only short-fuse terms—refusing to shave or get a haircut, declining the services of psychiatrist and clergyman—nor, for all his evident tough acumen, is he a professional con. Except for one act of wholly self-defensive violence, Barnes is

altogether passive: one feels a closing of his pores against the very texture of life behind bars; an abhorrence which, indeed, seems borne of some need beyond principle. The precision with which he, eyes merging with Thomas's, sees every datum of the prison structure carries the frozen intensity of a self-protective compulsive pattern. The effect, all in all, is of a man at once engaged in holding off, withstanding a world; and simultaneously forcing himself to keep in mind its reality.

His devotion, as recorded by Thomas, is to an apparently negative, yet—in the context—mightily important goal: to reject, constantly and knowingly, the world in which he must live the major portion of his life; reject it without in reaction adopting its politics of violence or parasitism. And, at the same time, by the same effort, he must never let his renunciation glide into that deathly inner passivity which is, in effect, final surrender to the prison universe.

The hideous truth about prison life which Thomas here isolates and brings us—with the beautiful and heart-stopping consistency of original discovery—is its indifference, its irrelevance, to any presumed human need. This has been said, and said, and said again; so often, that we assume we have heard it. Yet, periodically, a play like *The Brig* or a novel like *The Total Beast* will force us to experience what we thought we knew. Thomas's freezing and enlarging of the most elusive commonplaces results in the retardation and thickening of time itself, into the monstrous density of cancerous tissue.

Yet, the mythic continuity and compactness that Thomas's writing provides us leaves somewhat vague and ambiguous the emotional core of his hero. The central emotional event of this novel is Frank Barnes's reconciliation with, and severance from, his tough and inaccessible Texas father. Barnes's fantasy of his father's death is probably the most convincing image of his emotions, or earnest of their existence, that Thomas gives us. Yet, again, *mythic:* the emotional situation as given, rather than as process. Obviously, his quarrel with his father is intended as the orb of his quarrel with Birdville Prison—and triumph over it—and of his impacted reserve. Yet so almost-inhumanly lucid has been the eye of Mack Thomas, guiding the eye of Frank Barnes, and so hermetically attentive his consciousness, that the *operation* of what should be the book's emotional climax—the father's actual death, the visit to his family, the final return to prison—this complex of events goes rather faint and vague. Barnes simply

does not seem bound to the event as do Braly's protagonists of *On the Yard* because, among other reasons, Barnes has been our sole consciousness throughout the universe of Birdville. He seems to have entered that universe substantially intact, capable, unassailable. As I have already mentioned, the facts of his character, and his attitudes, and those of the prison, are delivered to us as *a priori* truth. Again, the mythic illusion of self-completeness; so that Barnes and Birdville seem, on occasion, almost halves of one organism.

Which, again, is definitely no part of Mack Thomas's intention: his crucial argument being the marginal humanity that a man may salvage against a horribly extra-human situation, which purports to serve the good of society. This, he has surely accomplished: the same basic premise, indeed, as *On the Yard;* without Braly's volatility and inventiveness, yet with an implicit romanticism of his own; plus, also, a dedicated meticulousness, a voracious energy, which make that romanticism its own corrective.

The Rabbit Man: The Art of Harrison Cady

A minor-key tragedy of American artists, it seems to me, is that which visits, at times, the most proteanly dexterous, the most joyously volatile—those who find themselves somehow diverted, or discouraged, or lulled into some particular cove or inlet of their art, with which their audiences often identify them, exclusively, forevermore. Such becalming, I think, befell one of American art's trimmest and most adroitly navigated vessels: the talent of Harrison Cady, who, for close to five decades, until his death on December 10, 1970, was crowned by generations of readers with the floppy ears and pink-nosed countenance—beaming or winsomely staring—of Peter Rabbit; who, to triply seal the charm, was the transatlantic conversion, sea-changed but recognizable, of Beatrix Potter's cabbage-pillaging picaro—a suburban cousin of the more footloose and dreamily sententious Peter of Thornton W. Burgess's Mother Nature volumes. This

third Peter, Cady's whimsical avatar, was, of course, the Peter Rabbit of the *New York Tribune's* (later, the *Herald Tribune's*) Sunday comic pages, from August 15, 1920, until July 25, 1948: a tenure that seemed, indeed, to harden even as the initial comic brio and adventurous friskiness drained way into the kind of inane, half-desultory mechanics that can nevertheless delight small children (as shrewdly economical as sparrows in finding their pleasures) but that, for Cady admirers, was the rather saddening sunset streak lingering from his early career's lusty radiance. It was a career, not of the most copiously imaginative, the most originally perceptive or charm-laden of artists, but of a richly articulate and jovially inventive artist, the kind who, as he needs the oxygen he breathes, needs to circulate and traffic in the widest of worlds possible because his converse with such a world, the tapestry of his daily notations, is *the* content of his art, and its savour.

Harrison Cady, during the career that from 1903 until the early twenties was largely channeled by *Life* Magazine, presents us with the work and persona of a stylist: with the definition of that word that the intervening decades have alienated from us: almost, indeed, with the word itself. For the sense of "stylist" that Cady's work offers to us—the bug chronicles of Beetleburgh, the topical panoramas, the sometimes exultantly brutal diatribe cartoons and broadsides—is of style as a register and an agent of pleasure: the extreme pleasure of both possessing and prevailing over the world's goods through a certain imprimatur of language. Cady's work of this period, and most directly the Beetleburgh cartoons, twinkles with the amiable rime of his various pleasures: in the vagaries of fashion and also in the available elegances which it could represent; in the popular mythologies of slogans and of holidays, and of hand-me-down Biblical legends; in the shimmering diversity of activities, personalities, and accidents at public celebrations and spectacles of all kinds: horse-races, parades, boating parties. He renders all of these with a vivacious aptitude and a virtually erotic zest, which in turn reawakens one's imagination to one of its long-abandoned stations—those days of childhood, when the discovery of the world was so incessant, so tinglingly immediate, that the world was, indeed, the imagination's major engine and could well seem the imagination's product.

It is difficult to say exactly why the insect microcosm of Beetleburgh should have triumphed among its readers as it did, over that of Cady's contemporaries in what was, after all, a preferred sort of imaginative

coinage, derived in equal parts from Aesop and LaFontaine. The convention of humanized animals, engaged in human-accented gags and peccadilloes, combined in near-equal proportions the cultural patina, the diaphanously-veiled scorn for the common folk (the veil consisting, as usual, of affection) and the safely-indulged, doctor-approved dose of fantasy likely to commend such a tradition to turn-of-the-century American readers. Yet Harrison Cady, who incorporated many of these traits, added to them another personal and catalytic one, which may have at last given him sovereignty over such of his contemporaries as Gus Dirks and that impressario of athletic frogs, Kemble. This secret ingredient resided, I think, in the combined affection and hedonistic zest with which Cady revelled in chronicling the sports, the business enterprises, the more-than-vaguely pagan holidays and fetes, of a community that lay among the mosses, the creepers and the wildflowers of his native Massachusetts.

The zest of which I speak was largely fostered by Cady's history as a basically self-educated New England villager. He was born in Gardner, Massachusetts, June 17, 1877, and, according to one interview in the April, 1945, issue of *The American Artist*, his education was enforced and gained its peculiar tone through the 1500 or so books that held privileged place in the village store owned by his father—a gentle workaday Thoreauvean who, by Cady's account, provided his son, through local rambles and nature-viewing, with that first apprehension of strange, alternate identities of caterpillars, grasshoppers and mice, an apprehension that takes hold in some children in early years but in Cady's case remained and flourished.

The delectation that scintillates from those Beetleburgh drawings, like granite in bright sunlight, is that of the diversely and even eclectically ranging appetites of the educated provincial: commingling unsentimental affection for nature with a good sort of crassness, a lust to imprint nature with his appreciation of things, which finds expression in his comic inventiveness, and an appetite for decoration nurtured and confirmed by his studies of Chinese and Flemish art. The ultimate result is a delight in possession of nature as of art, of nature as shaped and stamped by art, or by art in Harrison Cady's pragmatic, stylish and vigorously eclectic interpretation of it. A devotion to the emotions evoked by *puppetry*—by its spectacle in miniature, by its prospects of magic and mystery in the very representation of the actual, by the pagan sentience and zest which its carven antics

embody—informs the Beetleburgh panoramas, especially like the one in the August 24, 1905 *Life*, "The Lily Pad Rowing Association Holds Its Annual Carnival." Puppets are far more hermetic and incunabulistic than are ventriloquists' dummies, in their (the puppets') ability to invoke a total sensuous, Id-directed universe, such as, indeed, the Bugs served Cady in evoking. His delight in personification recalls an age that may not have been displaced, but that is perhaps permanently mutated—in great part through the sense of "person" that has evolved over the past several decades, and that seems, at least by current surveillance, to snub, if not utterly exclude, those arts that rely upon and manipulate stereotypes and personae.

Cady's fantasy is laced with a kind of frontier hyperbole, which is embodied by his beloved caterpillars and centipedes: beings preposterously and dazzlingly endowed, their outlandishness being curbed by the kind of humorous domestication which Harrison Cady, their folklorist, brings to bear upon these diminutive Paul Bunyans or Mike Finks. They are as outsized in their versatility as they are in their proportions.

Everywhere throughout his productions at *Life* Cady nips the potential over-richness of his contents' imagery and sentiment, with an acerbic down-scaling sense of counterpoint. He is not, could never be, an artist-dandy, because his primary yearning is for the small-scale actual—for the notations of comic anomaly and mischance. His drawings are not exemplars of grace: one receives from them no sense of a certain rhythm seized in flight, against apparent odds of the drawing's economy, or of (seeming) stylistic limitations, or of the mere laws of probability. Cady's studies of horse races, summer dances, Christmas or Thanksgiving galas do offer a Hogarthian reek of sweatingly ingested, lovingly assessed detail, over which a hard sunlight, or frostlight, seems vivaciously to dance. Indeed, Cady takes his main cues from a far older, more congenial master than Hogarth: from Brueghel the Elder, whose cataloguing avidity, puppetlike depictions of the habitual and instinctual, and, most particularly, myth-capsizing skepticism, lend Cady's tapestrylike studies their wild-raspberry tang. Especially beloved of Cady, and used with versatile Massachusetts canniness, is the remote, diminuendo comic *coup-de-grace* of Brueghel's mighty satire, *The Fall of Icarus*. In a thousand varieties of trousers, those tiny legs can be seen gull-diving over the horizons of

Cady's drawings. His sense of economy differed essentially from Brueghel's of course, as did much of his comic philosophy; and so, whereas the minute plummeting Icarus is the tiny hook that snags the Leviathan of mythology, Cady's throwaway details, his minor-key out-of-grace-notes, give witness to the roiling diversity of his scenes. "GET BUSY" mutters a sign, located far, far back among the pious injunctions of its fellows, in the stalag-like foundry of Cady's anti-child-labor cartoon of *Life*'s 1910 Labor-Day issue. One of his jovially ferocious Fairs of Folly—the April 1, 1904 proposal to make All Fool's Day a national holiday—lets us glimpse, far back among the ranks of gigolos, cuckolds and tobacco addicts, the tiny banner, "FOOLS WHO DON'T SUBSCRIBE TO LIFE." And, at the Lily Pad festival mentioned above, beyond the tree-trunk pavilion in the left-hand distance, against the single blackness of sky and lake, a tiny ivory-white boat is seen capsizing.

Cady was a receiver and a reproducer of America's large-scale mythical experiences—its holidays—and of popular Biblical legends. (So in "The Day Jonah Moved Out" [*Life*, October 24, 1907] Jonah is a cherry-nosed New England skipper, departing his quarters in the whale with a full appointment of golf clubs, potted plant and ormolu clock, having hung an "Apartment to Let" sign on the whale's upper jaw. The curious magic of the details' verisimilitude prevails even over the humor, with an effect as close to that of the medieval Mystery Plays as is readily reconstructable in our time.) He was, moreover, a prototypical artist-as-consumer, the artist to whom art itself represented a sort of process of consumption—a factotum *par excellence* whose personal joy and love were intertwined with a performance which constituted an act of faith. He brought to his work that sense of play, that unstrenuous inventiveness which is so easy and endearing to its observers because it does not seek innovation. His qualities might well be likened to those of a supreme theatrical producer: Cady was a master of orchestrated action and vivid supplementary imagery, all making their respective contributions to a mythic spectacle. His Biblical fantasies and recreations of holidays (like the marvelous rendition in the July 4, 1907 *Life*, of the "Original July 4th," as a wig-yanking, throat-grappling melee of dissident Fathers) refresh us and, if our memories and/or sympathies be accessible, exhilarate us, not only with the felicities of a particularly adroit craftsmanship, but with an age in which the potentialities of such craftsmanship sighted farther

horizons than at any time since; and, by that very fact, seemed to engender a singular élan profuse in observation and device, even among its most self-effacing practitioners.

Cady was always too much the apt, complaisant instrument, both of his craft and of the occasions proffered it, to usher any secret self of his own into the fortress-pavilion of his art. Even his crassness, even the kind of flinty-smiling New England cruelty that sometimes figured in his slapstick or polemical episodes (and that became so dreary a staple of the later-year *Peter Rabbit* strips) bespeaks his lodging in a tradition. His broadside onslaughts may sometimes present a wonderfully urbane brutality—like his acid-spray of the Hohenzollerns in the February 1, 1917 *Life,* called "A Family in Germany That Hasn't Lost a Member," which portrays the Kaiser and Crown Prince as goose-stepping, sinister-fatuous weasels, filing in white uniforms past ranks of their maimed and starving subjects.

Yet, even the most stertorously eloquent of his polemics, especially of World War I, lack in some measure the mythic suggestiveness, and the hortatory boldness, of, say, the cartoons being produced at the same time by Charles Dana Gibson, with their stirring repertory company of Columbia (as goddess of civilization), the Hun, and the Harlot War. Cady was always a little too much the stage manager—a little too alert for spectacle—for that smear of private animus which is the deciding ingredient of great broadside and satire. That is partly why the anti-Semitic diatribes that mottle his career for *Life*—of which "Father Knickerbocker and the Lilliputians" (September 10, 1912) is a more ingenious and whimsical example than most—not only sadden and sicken us, but chill us as well. They were done, obviously, at the instigation of Cady's editor, John Ames Mitchell, whose preoccupation with Jews as the scourge of New York culture, and in particular the theater, was a *leit-motif* of his tenure at *Life.* Cady obviously warmed to his employer's evangelism; yet (in this case) the evil alacrity of his craft was still kept well intact from any personalizing sort of choler. He dehumanizes the Jews, who appear as Lilliputians, marauding vermin, patent medicine pills, out of the same zest for acquired culture—which he here felt threatened—that enabled him to humanize insects, frogs and mice. And the sorrow of a Cady admirer is deepened by the sense that his hard, intricately gleaming craft was made for the anti-Semitic cartoon.

The most potent image of his latter-day career at *Life*—extending

approximately from 1913 until the early twenties—is of that secure and protective and graciously-appointed world being menaced by a clamoring yet phantasmal mob. This mob, in such drawings as those pleading the cause of women's suffrage, represents the world at large, which, from the jolly turbulence of the Beetleburgh cartoons, had obviously impressed Cady more and more harassingly with its afflictions. That fine drawing of October 23, 1913—titled "Is Woman's Sphere the Home When Man Has Surrounded Her Children With Evil?"—surrounds the woman herself, seated in the arena of her hearth-light, with the images, evilly glimmering like swamp-lights, of "Cheap Theatre," "White Slavery," "Child Labor Factory": the villager's immemorial vision of the City at its most scabrously malignant. Platitudinous as is their content, we can smile only very reluctantly, if ever, at these women's suffrage cartoons of Cady's. For they are among his most warmly felt: the platitudes themselves bolting and buttressing a universe of sentiment—the sense of woman as the protectress of civilization and the caretaker of Cady's sweetest memories of it.

That intimation of the world's own shapeless, thunderous diversity—which was simply too vast to be either digested or turned into a Bettleburgh fantasia—may have been what, at last, urged Cady back into another sort of village: the provinciality of a narrower craftsmanship—though still, in its earlier years, wonderful in its way—over which Peter Rabbit presided. In any case, let the following exhibit reassure us: Cady's own world, if never really fulfilled, was itself vast and many-imaged and bustling with event. And with room in it for far more than rabbits.

Quotes and Inferences

"What perhaps was most pathetic about the Morrison and LaPorte suicides was the futility of such attempts at martyrdom . . . within the ample means and methods of U.S. democracy, a human voice means more than a human torch . . . 'The mark of the immature man is that he wants to die nobly for a cause, while the mark of a mature man is that he wants to live humbly for one.' "

Time, Religion Department, mark you;
November 19, 1965

Well, it's always nice to know, courtesy of *Time* magazine, how not to be a successful martyr; not to mention (courtesy of *Time* plus Wilhelm Stekel) the difference between maturity and immaturity. At that, I might observe, it was pretty daring of *Time*'s Religion Page to select its bit of terminal wisdom from one of the age's leading heretics; especially when substantially the same wisdom was available from the dialogue of the average TV drama.

I have read a number of pronouncements, steeped in that peculiarly retrospective maturity which *Time* so admires, on the deaths of Morrison and LaPorte: the Quaker and the Catholic Worker who burned themselves to death in protest against our conduct of the Vietnamese war. Intermingled with it is large measure of that compassion which, in its all-encompassing scope, does not balk at acknowledging that men like Morrison and LaPorte were moral cowards; so long as the compassionate ones can thereby forgive—i.e., overlook—the disturbing implications of Morrison's and LaPorte's common fanaticism. *Newsweek,* writing about LaPorte's death, even put in a good word for the Catholic Workers; while in *Life,* a few issues back (I wish I had the copy before me; but the words aren't that easy to forget) a Mr. Loudon Wainright, who is somewhat the house expert on suicide over at *Life* (having written a previous article on the subject, a month before) declared that the issues of Vietnam had to be "chewed over"; whereas the unobliging Morrison "chose to die." This unaccented conclusion by Mr. Wainright suggested, somehow, a tactful shrug, a murmured, "If that's how you want it—".

The tenor of such—what to call them? reactions, arguments—seems to be merely that Morrison and LaPorte were suicides, like many others. Mr. Wainright's philosophic consolation was commended, in the next issue of *Life,* by a psychiatrist in charge of an organization devoted to rescuing prospective suicides from their actions. I do not mean by this observation to disparage suicides, although the few with which I have been familiar have seemed to me dreadfully mistaken; the silly popular reaction that they take the "easy way out," is refuted, for me, by the several attempts I can recall having made, earlier in my life: anything but easy, as my survival may indicate. At any rate, for whatever my opinion may count, I think that most suicides are probably mistaken: mistaken in that the unhappy people believe they can somehow possess, somehow absorb, the violence with which they are striving to rend the texture of a life they feel they despise. They hold to the hope that they can cling to their actions; but the characteristic of any violence is, that it detaches itself from the man committing it. This is why the term "impersonal violence" is a redundancy. A violent act, once done, cannot be drawn back as on a line, cannot be controlled; it can be controlled only while it remains a contemplated act.

Yet, the essential fallacy—and the essential nobility—of Morrison's and LaPorte's actions were not those of the average suicide, I think. I can

only hope that I do them no injustice—and that I am not being merely portentous and pseudo-mystical—when I say that I think death, as such, was only a secondary consideration in their terrible gestures of protest. And the irony of statements like those I have cited, or the *Herald Tribune* editorial which Nat Hentoff has dealt with in *The Village Voice,* is that these people do what they charge Morrison and LaPorte with having done: they pretend that death is only a separate compartment from life; that death does not permeate life, as we know it does; that death exists, indeed, only to be forgotten by the living for as long as they can manage to forget it. And, believing thus, the people of whom I speak commit the grave error of regarding Morrison's and LaPorte's deaths as *someone else's* death: thereby assuming that the manner of dying makes irrelevant the purposes, the structure of actions, which culminated in suicide; presupposing, in effect, that the suicides were *never* conscious and responsible and living men. So that—blaming Morrison and LaPorte for disavowing their share in other people's lives—the accusers disavow their share in the lives which Morrison and LaPorte have left them.

For, as ultimately mistaken as I believe them to have been, I also believe that Morrison and LaPorte's deaths were perpetrated as acts of faith in life, and faith in the people who would carry on life, and carry on, too, some of the most hideous aspects of current life, i.e., the events of modern warfare about which we read daily. No matter how much one can sympathize with the original motives of America's participation in the Vietnamese war, no one, I think, can conscientiously deny that, against the horrible, willful and often gratuitous violence performed by both sides—the Vietcong, and the South Vietnamese and the United States—such motives could have been fully redeemed only by a near miracle of clear-sightedness and charity and honesty, surely unheard of in most contemporary warfare. At best, we can only hope, immediately, fractionally to redeem the professed reasons for our entry into the Vietnam war against the Communists. And even such fractional redemption can only result from a far more positive decency and intelligence—a far more vigorous determination that the worthy purpose of anti-Communism will *not* result in our playing ducks and drakes with the lives of helpless people—than, many of us feel, our administration has so far begun to demonstrate.

I do not mean, indeed, to comment extensively on the politics of the Vietnam war, since I am in no wise qualified to nor, indeed, were the

deaths of Morrison and LaPorte especially relevant to the political behavior of America and the Vietcong. As dreadful and, in a very important sense, as presumptuous as they were, their actions were as humble as anything I have heard or read pertaining to Vietnam. For they, I believe, were trying, agonizedly, to make intelligible—not bearable, not at all; but *intelligible;* and that, by no means in terms of the intelligence alone—the unspeakable, barbarous and insensate violence in which all parties have engaged since, I presume, the war's beginning; often, as though expecting such violence in itself to coalesce into a policy, or give rise to one. Reading in daily newspapers about the bestialities committed by muggers, thieves, rapists, racist fanatics or brutalized police—I have felt, from time to time, like doing the same thing that Morrison and LaPorte did; feeling at that moment of oneness as I have not often felt, before or since, with those people who were simple bystanders, onlookers; yet were touched by even relatively mean, rat-vicious violence, *as* violence. I cannot say, even now—nor would I care to guess—how much of sanity, of selfishness, of cowardice, of sheer inertia, or of some atrophied faith, combined to stop my hand. Yet how much more of this must Morrison and LaPorte have felt? Quakers and Catholics, men whose work as pacifists, whose temperaments, whose vocations, made them *recipients* of the world in which they lived: who found themselves, like bladders distended out and out by scalding water, filled with the unfocussed violence from which they could not for an instant disallow themselves.

So, it really seems to me, they tried to make metaphors of themselves; to force upon their countrymen a vivid awareness of how arbitrary, how hagged, was the reality which morally impinged upon them. Vanity, surely, to feel this way, and to place such faith in their fellow-Americans' response to a single, desperate action. Yet, we draw, it seems to me, very glib distinctions between Morrison and LaPorte and the Christian martyrs, say; who, we are quick to point out, sacrificed their lives only when they knew that no other action was possible, or only when they knew that the faith would not otherwise survive. Were they really so (by present standards) clear-sighted? Has the future of *any* faith so depended upon the life of a single man as to satisfy Herr Neitzche's requirements for martyrdom (standards by which, at any rate, he exonerated himself)? How many authentic war heroes would survive the strictures we apply to Morrison and LaPorte, if we knew about their motives and instincts all that was to be known?

But the difference, of course, between war heroes and the kind of madmen with whom we deal here is that, for those who have not fought beside them at any rate, the heroes often provide a reassurance: that death flows seamlessly into life; their lives being swallowed up in our own. We go on for a little while about the high example of their sacrifice, and how we must all live better; while actually, even at the time, congratulating ourselves on being worthy, even in our unworthiness; and persuading ourselves with no excessive delay that all "they" want is for us to go on as we have been.

The deaths of Morrison and LaPorte were not heroes' deaths; yet neither may we easily swallow them; and perhaps that is all we can ask. That, and a reminder, and warning: that burning one's self to death may not, to be sure, be the worst form of self-destruction. Compared with the piece-meal death of the soul, the slow daily murder of the heart—in the name of calculated indifference, apathy or even noble stoicism—reducing one's self to ashes may seem an act of grace.

The Body of Our Death

Frank Norris is one of the great American writers, the predecessor of Dreiser as Dreiser was predecessor to a new continent of writing and attitude toward writing: Dreiser was chronicler, but Norris was epic-maker, even to his style: flat, bare, repetitive yet unpermutative, without Dreiser's gnarled power, but with a mural-like reach and plainness and boldness that exactly figures his intentions. Not only a progenitor, but an original—his hide armor-plated rather than feathered, less easily borrowed from. He died at thirty-two; had he lived to forty-five, Dreiser's task would have been vastly changed. Nay, Eugene O'Neill and possibly D.H. Lawrence would have been left on different cliffs, surveying other oceans.

Norris is often written about as though he, not Dreiser, were the disciple, and a laggard one at that: good enough on his own terms, due credit, etc., etc., but lacking that extra dimension of seriousness which

beguiles—and repeatedly eludes—the likes of Alfred Kazin and Edmund Wilson. From such, you may learn that Norris was infatuated with Darwinian determinism; that McTeague, of *McTeague,* is obsessed with money (Van Wyck Brooks' contribution); that Norris can be pretty good, but lapses into crude melodrama, like Steinbeck (Bunny's donation).

What such stuff chiefly means to me is that Norris was of that insular originality which camouflages itself in art contemporary with it, and art which precedes it. By "camouflages," I do not mean, of course, merely as a tactic; but as a by-product of the artists's single, plumb concern with doing what he is doing: discharging his power, rather than displaying it. Because he is so directly, even sexually, concerned with his performance, rather than with conspicuous dominion of the countryside, such an artist will, if fortunate, be ignored; if unfortunate, interpreted. And classified. More people, by modest estimate, now display bits of Norris on their walls and in glass cases (marked: *Interesting Relic, Origin Uncertain*) than formerly claimed St. John's tibula.

Norris, I say, was one of the great epic-makers: his epic starting with the microcosm of man's body, and extending through the macrocosm of western America. His project was to have been the "wheat trilogy": *The Octopus,* dealing with the farmlands of California; *The Pit,* about the Chicago stock exchange and its contests; and (never written) *The Wolf,* to portray a starving European village which receives the wheat. Instead of *The Wolf,* Norris wrote *Vandover and the Brute,* about an intellectual's relapse into infant bestiality.

Norris, I think, did write his trilogy, though not the one projected, or professed. I believe that Norris shifted the emphasis of his trilogy long before its completion or noncompletion: shifted it from the socio-geographical (though of course geography persists throughout his work, with the singular *weight* that it carries in America) to the psychological and spiritual. Unlike Dreiser's novels, in which one character, desperately contesting his society, takes the foreground, Norris presents what amounts to a living frieze of contending massive figures, who are at once archetypes of the social landscape and individuals as darkly singular as living mesas. The components of his trilogy are: *McTeague, The Octopus* and *The Pit.* Its theme: the repression, curbing and perversion of American strength by the industrial age and its armors: economic, mechanical, psychic. Norris's gradual and, to me,

undeniable discovery of his real epic is that triumph of the artist over the false romantic within himself, which lays one of the paths of American writing.

Toyland

McTeague begins with its dentist-hero lumbering to Sunday dinner at the street-car conductors' diner on San Francisco's Polk Street. From then on, the mouths of its principals are constantly engaged: in eating, drinking, making love and doing battle; above all, in talking. The centerpiece of Norris's Polk Street tapestry—like a huge drain—is McTeague's formidable maw, capable of accomodating a billiard ball. From this, it might be surmised that *McTeague* is, in fact, about greed: the title given its film adaptation, by Erich von Stroheim. It *is* about greed, but by no means the money-grabbing featured by Count von Stroheim's film. I don't mean that the portion of *Greed* bequeathed us by the scissors of Irving Thalberg seems to me an insincere treatment of the novel; it could even be called accurate; could be, that is, by those people who believe that about two-hundred-or-whatever-more feet of the same tableau vivant depiction would have represented a *complete* version of *Greed,* or *McTeague.*

For Norris, sex and money form a single, twirling cord of inaccessibility to his Polk Streeters. They are, in fact, greedy for neither sex nor money; but for their fantasies of these. Polk Street, as portrayed by Norris, is a limbo of largely lower middle-class, "shabby genteel" people, their lives afloat in small activities and pseudo-activities: retired persons, white-collar types, small professionals (though, as witness Maria and Zarkov, their ineffectualities extend to their poorer neighbors). Eating, drinking and talking constitute the material center of their world, from which—at the book's opening—overt violence has been drained, as has power of any sort. Its very background—the ocean-breasting West Coast—is mocked by Polk Street, as is the notion of the frontier, (The worst people for the job turn ranchers in *McTeague*.) For all Norris's stern sympathy, the Polk Streeters resemble atrophied troglodytes, or giants mutilated into dwarf status. At the outer, least material edges of their world lie those small skills, like Mac's dentistry or Trina's toy-painting, that engage some sort of love and dedicated patience.

But the Mouth predominates. For all those who have not read *McTeague,* I cheerfully risk appearing ridiculous, by declaring that Norris, here and in *The Octopus,* did not anticipate, but surely discovered on his own and settled a great deal of, Freud's symbol-country. On second thought, let me not deprecate people who haven't read *McTeague;* these remarks will, I think, seem preposterous mainly to those for whom symbols are siphoned down to us from Cloud-Cuckooland; whereas a Norris—or Lawrence—recalls to us that symbols of any weight must emerge from a concrete, verifiable world. And such is the veracity of Norris's world—a veracity physical and social and psychological, no lines drawn between those areas—that we feel the symbols—those I speak of here; but also the more famous, more widely sneered-at ones: the Sieppes' grayhound, the sawing during the wedding (compare with the prayer sequence in Bunuel's *Viridiana*) etc.—as facts of the landscape, too real to be murmured at, too real (seemingly) not simply to be noted and passed by.

Moreover, a seemingly placid, polyglot community like McTeague's acre of San Francisco is a breeding ground of symbols, simply because it represents the removal of values, prizes, powers, etc., *from their natural contexts.* Nor do such symbols arbitrarily sprout, like mushrooms; they are elected, however indirectly. See Veblen's passage on the evolution of the walking-stick, in his *Theory of the Leisure Class;* the parallels between Veblen and Norris would seem to be more than casual.

The archetypes of such a community are the Sieppes, with their tiny German-Swiss household, mock-heroically commanded by Papa; their diminutively grandiose picnics and excursions. Norris writes of these with unmistakable nostalgic pleasure, but no less mistakable irony; as when he writes about the stunts, the nut-cracking, etc., with which McTeague "proves" his strength. Everything is diminution; and in such diminution, one feels Norris looking anew at his own romantic nostalgia for the frontier, which was to have been a premise of his trilogy. Norris lacks Dreiser's sensuous resonance, the peculiar dramatic excitement with which he builds the most massive scenes; but he, Norris, brings to the Sieppe sequences and other major sections of his work, a painterly sense of composition and texture, whereby a scene is enlarged—and typified in the best sense—beyond its specific situation, to become a kind of mural of grossness or violence or heroism.

The symbols of Polk Street—the tiny jobs, the banal yet meaningful rituals—are the alembics of its sex-money fantasies. Possession without growth and with a minimum of responsibility: the smallest, simplest state of ownership is the norm. Small wonder that everyone in *McTeague* is a child, wishing to maintain the childlike state of simplest consumption, and speeches that can accomplish anything, a state in which those possessions that are not immediately consumed will last forever. The sequence in which Mac and Trina sell their possessions is one of the most grimly touching of its kind; Norris, seemingly a membrane's thickness away from sentimentality, keeping that distance with furious precision. Here, in miniature, are all the chimeras of status and possession: the finest feelings of Norris's Polk Streeters.

The worst that can happen, obviously, is for them to be confronted with realizations of their fantasies; at least, the conditions in which those fantasies might be realized. The instrument of the shattering gift is, significantly, a madwoman: Maria, the schizoid cleaning girl of McTeague's boarding house, who sells the prize-winning lottery ticket that he casually purchased. With their consoling fantasies detonated, flung back upon the feebleness of their strengths, visited with the terrible actualities of sex-money, they go as mad, each in his fashion, as Maria.

And, indeed, Maria's dreadful romance with Zarkov, the rubbish dealer, is the story of *McTeague* in puppet-stage dimensions. Maria has regaled the junkman with stories of the splendid red-gold service owned by the wealthy Latin Americans for whom she claims to have once worked. Her inventively eloquent descriptions ("thick, fat gold... shining, pure gold, orange-red...no church bell ever rang sweeter or clearer...you could bite into it, and leave the dent of your teeth") are, it soon becomes clear, her fantasy of maidenhead. And to this image of virginity Zarkov duly subscribes, demanding more detail, further repetition of his favorite fairy tale; and finally, as the ultimate corroboration of his oral virginity-dream, asks her to marry him. The result is cataclysm; for the twin onslaught of sexual experience and childbirth shocks Maria out of her obsession; which could not be further from her husband's desires. For to him—a man who has made his living out of filth and refuse—the fantasy of purity has become everything; and for its loss, copulation and the still-born child that it produces can scarcely compensate. He literally runs amok.

It is in the union of Mac and Trina that the hell that has disguised itself as limbo breaks loose, fully and finally. McTeague is the great baby of this Toyland: all the others' superstitions and fetishisms about property and consumption and love are block-lettered in Mac's phlegmatic personality. An un-innocent baby; for Mac, transplanted from the candid violences of the mining-town where he was born, has learned, better than he at first shows, the small violences of his Polk Street home: chief among them the violences of despoiling, rape and castration.

This is most important to bear in mind, I think, against the common critical misrepresentations of McTeague as *merely* docile, solid, passive, etc. It is easy, too, to be misled by Norris himself, who relentlessly tags poor Mac with some such epithet as stupid, clumsy, thick-fingered, like a nagging parent. The point is that the epithets tell only part of the tale, nor are they intended to tell more. His chosen profession—dentist—could not, under the circumstances, have been bettered by a day-and-night employment service. He can ravish and mutilate—symbolically, of course. He can thereby display his power—he delights in his ability to pull teeth manually. And the gentleness which *is* part of his nature, as is a pride of craftmanship, only builds the pressure.

His confrontation with sexual love, when he meets Trina, is the beginning of the dangerous McTeague. This thunderclap—in the very scene of his dental profession—is beyond McTeague's understanding or control; he is restrained from rape only by long custom: and later, at the B Street station, his proposal of marriage is a token rape—followed by his cry of: "I got her, by God! I got her, by God!"

Which is the sadness of McTeague: even desire, in this world, has been foreshortened to the triviality of "getting" and "having"; which is to say that, having obtained through violation, Mac loses desire. Yet, having given in to it, recognized it, he finds that the threats to his manhood, which his neighborhood status has withstood before, no longer can be staved off: they crowd in like demons, through a broken protective circle.

Trina, of course, is the largely unaware instrument of Mac's final mutilation, and her own destruction. Frail and touching, she is nonetheless an owner of his sort: they are better matched than they can ever realize. As he holds his dentist's position, she holds her pitiful little domestic security, represented by the cache of money,

which—unlike Maria's—is real, but which—like Maria's—she will only surrender with her death. More than that: she becomes the holder of his manhood, his yearning for it. It is she who presents him with the huge gold tooth that is his dream-trophy. In the absence of children—even still-born, like Maria's—she becomes mother to him: a motherhood for which she, in her terror of sex and her own dependencies, is poignantly ill-armed; and which he, uncomprehending but increasingly greedy with the loss of *his* last security, his work—abuses with a terrible vengeance.

Marcus—McTeague's former friend, Trina's former suitor—is the evil catalyst of their relationship, the device whereby love becomes the means of castration. Mac could scarcely have chosen his friend better: Marcus is a talker as McTeague is not, but he, Marcus, is also a spoiler: demolishing language with his hodge-podge political harangues. Just as Mac loses interest in Trina's love when it has become accessible, Marcus retrieves interest—to the point of mania—when it is lost to him, and when it becomes intertwined with money. Which is not to say that money is "more important" than love, to Marcus; only that the two fantasies need the support of each other, in this almost-middle-class community.

Marcus externalizes Mac's own violent impulses, through Marcus's resentments and bullyings. And when Marcus finds his genitals supposedly robbed by Mac, he turns open castrator; first, symbolically, by smashing Mac's pipe; then by attacking him at the picnic. In turn, Marcus awakens the castrator in McTeague; whose clumsy forthrightness, however, is no match for Marcus. Marcus has a gutter instinct for the balls; and his final counterblow aims at Mac's manhood indeed; causing the loss of his work, and turning him finally against Trina.

I can't say too often: the symbols I refer to here are anything but the slapped-on decals that critical accounts of *McTeague* might lead you to expect. They are symbols *in that they are evidence:* emanations of the society in which they emerge, thereby of the psychology in which they breed. Such, I believe, is the climactic scene of the novel—often attacked as melodramatic—in which McTeague and Marcus—now the outlaw and his hunter—find themselves handcuffed to each other in Death Valley. The scene, of course, *is* melodramatic, by most valid definitions of that word; it can only seem excessively so, I think, to those who have totally misunderstood what had preceded. Like the highest melodrama, to which it belongs—which cannot be said of all

Norris's scenes, in other of his books—the Death Valley scene is a highly concentrated visualization, a codification of important themes that we heretofore encountered in more diffuse form. The handcuffs are the final summary of the castration imagery that has gone before; nor do they emerge from anywhere but the logic of events and setting, and the natures of the two men. The scene, too, is Norris's final mockery of those frontier memories that occur in *McTeague* as trinkets and trophies: the sterile womb of the great desert itself, and the blackening lips of her two inhabitants.

I don't wish to deny that in this account of doom, determinism, scientific or not, has its place. I can't deny strenuously enough that Darwinism or any ideology was binding on Norris's imagination. For that imagination was as vulnerable to particulars as is the imagination of any great artist; and particulars refute all dogma. The doom of McTeague's story exerts itself through a variety of pressures: human, environmental, economic, psychic. If it is frequently seen as a single force, that is because Norris lets us see it from a distance, as rendered by a style both massive and intent; never graceful, seldom evocative, as is Crane's, through its fiercely-focused alertness. Norris's writing can bring you this side of exasperation at times, what with his mercilessly repeated character tags—sometimes varied, never evolving—and unsmiling rigor. *But* these faults (they will be somewhat refined throughout his next books; never entirely disappear) are the twin forks of his greatest operas, ballads or murals; plus the psychological vision that O'Neill tried—so often less successfully—to fuse with the above-cited qualities. *McTeague* will re-emerge—has already begun to, I think—as the masterwork it is; a drama of American myth and its destruction, and of the myths that Americans breed within themselves.

The Guts

McTeague is the maw and craw; *The Octopus,* the belly and bowels. Norris's first novel of the projected wheat trilogy is of California's belly-land, the wheat fields; and of the vast intestinal track, the railroad: conveyor of abundance and of waste. The landscape of *The Octopus* can fairly be called the *guts* of the land; in the slangiest, most hortatory and most deeply symbolic—which is to say, most

literal—senses. *McTeague* was about the waste products of America; *The Octopus* is about the waste itself; its kinship with abundance, glorious then fetid; the wastes of both productivity and violence, and *their* kinship; the wastes of American industry and warfare, versus—and in collaboration with—the wastes of nature.

At the center of *The Octopus,* munching dried prunes, is Buck Annixter, whose thoughts, when not with his ranch, are very much with his belly and bowels. More than the patriarchal Magnus Derrick, more even than Norris's partial spokesman, the poet Presley, Annixter embodies the theme of the book: the terrible self-replenishing magnitude of nature, and its counterforce; the hard retentiveness of the men who exploit it. Annixter has wrecked his digestive system through his angry, anxious, anal drive for achievement. A fellow-rancher and supporter of Magnus Derrick, he is one of the men who will bring about Derrick's collapse, and drive out all the others like him: the old guard of colonial owners, whose real treasure is their power—and of that, the symbols more precious than the realities.

Annixter's function in life is discharging: his work, his ranch produce, his life—all in hard, compact pellets. So does he discharge his anger; so his language. "Well, in a way it is, then again in a way it isn't." Almost his first speech is a blast against Magnus Derrick for "working the guts" out of the land. Annixter's resentful ambition makes of him what fear makes of Trina, in *McTeague:* a holder, a user, a dispatcher. Indeed, his own labor in the earth is to work the guts out of it; with a minimum of old Derrick's lordly possessiveness, a minimum of love, a maximum of furious efficiency and dry economy. He detests what is liquid, intangible, seeping: his fixation nearly blows his association with the ranchers' co-operative against the railroad. Why, then, should he not fall in love with the girl who tends his dairy, who is as adept at making butter and cheese as he is at growing wheat, or firing inefficient hands?

The consistency of Norris's psychological insight sends its roots beyond the apparent scene: nothing could be more plausible than Annixter falling in love with Hilma Tree, his dairywoman, or his "conversion" thereupon. I am not belittling Annixter's evident change of character, or the meaning that Norris intends for it. This is Annixter's discovery of that growth and change that have always surrounded him as part of the scene in which he thrived, but that he was too busy exploiting to recognize. But his passion for Hilma Tree, a maternal

ikon with her swelling hips and generous arms, and her occupation in the dairy—is perfectly consistent with the character of a man obsessed as he is. After reacting in terms of that character—trying to take her by force, then proposing that she become his mistress—Annixter is all but flattened when Hilma leaves him, and reverts to childhood, laughing and crying, when she returns. Also, his first generous act is toward a mother—an elderly one, whose son—an unsuccessful farmer turned outlaw against the railroad—has been killed. But he keeps enough of his insularity to identify with the clique of ranchers who have declared war against the railroad. I don't say that this diminishes him at all; nor that it was at all avoidable; indeed, the tragedy of Annixter's heroism and final destruction is in large part the tragedy of sheer geographic weight, which intervenes between men and between societies; which gives the railroads their power and value and ruinous capacity; which induces that violence whereby men try to free themselves from cruel distances.

McTeague can be taken as the prelude in the trilogy that Norris has left us: the Polk Streeters are the foreground, the troglodyte lower middle-class; the ranchers of *The Octopus* are the epic counterparts of the Polk Streeters; their sense of property, of the wheat, are, however more noble, based on the same fears as the possessiveness of Mac and Trina, and their waste. Old Magnus Derrick, the patriarch, clings to the fantasy of power as Mac does to the fantasy of his strength. Even as the novel begins, the vestiges of that power are being eroded by the very men who seek Magnus's patronage for their ranchers' commission. The most important legacy of his power—his personal authority—will be shattered, before the book is over, by his yearning for more.

Even in its authentic setting, the Old West has begun to recede into fantasy; and with that recession, the psychic, social and economic anxieties of the twentieth century throng the entrance. Presley, the poet, and Annixter's best friend, cherishes the fantasy, even as does Magnus; although disenchantment speeds apace. Presley is closest to Norris's persona among the characters; but—despite his appetite for reality—his struggle with fantasy will not be done before the novel's end. He is Annixter's friend in a profounder sense than either recognizes; for Presley's insular self-centeredness, at the book's opening, mirrors Annixter's sexual repressions. The epiphanic vision of the sheep slaughtered by a train is his preliminary to awakening; yet, so strong is his infatuation with history that his speech to the workers, in

the novel's last quarter, becomes a self-obsessed harangue, loaded with allusions to pharaohs and caesars.

The crucial imagery of the novel—the wheat—symbolizes the virility which, even as it is circulated and flung farther, is increasingly drained and perverted, always flowing *away* from its original possessors. The wheat, the grain, the semen, is the manhod of which Old Derrick clutches the symbols; of which Annixter is so fearfully jealous; which Presley tries to evoke through history. Once more, I emphasize: this symbolism is *not* a lid or armor for reality; it *is* reality, imprinted with the mind's perspective. It is no less real wheat, its economic significance no smaller, for the sexual significance that is its core. It encompasses both the progenitive force and the violence of seed. The need to dispatch it is intolerable; but to retain it is death. S. Behrman, the particular figure of retention, the broker, is suffocated by the wheat. Yet it *is* wheat, and its implications are intact; and only thus does it achieve surety as symbol.

I have mentioned the importance of space to Norris's America. It is, indeed, the true protagonist of *The Octopus:* emblematic of both despair and stoic faith. In that regard, *The Octopus* is Norris's most hopeful book; for that space, which desperately isolates its characters and their interests, also consolidates what strength is theirs: a strength of forebearance, compassion and, at last, the acknowledgement—the affirmation—of one's boundaries, whatever they may be. Thus, Vanamee—the shepherd-mystic, friend of Presley—emerges as the novel's only figure who is unequivocally free: free not only of the other characters' crass scramblings for power, but, at last, of obsession: of the very obsession that, throughout most of the book, propels his mysticism. His search for a psychic contact with the murdered girl whom he had loved gives place at last to a more genuine vision, of regeneration: the overwhelming and always self-justifying strength of nature.

This final discovery by Vanamee proposes no "solution" to the agonies that Norris has expounded throughout the novel. Vanamee's reconcilliation is presented as poetic coda; as much so as S. Behrman's hideous death beneath the wheat. It can provide little for the German woman whom Norris has shown us starving to death, with her child, in the streets of San Francisco. Nor can it offer much, immediately, to the ranchers and railroad men whose unmetaphysical lives are threatened by each others' interests. Yet: Vanamee's coda is indis-

pensable to that multipaneled scene which Norris presents. More: the coda, Norris makes irresistibly clear, is indispensable to anyone who, in the America of *The Octopus,* hopes to retain his sanity, much less his usefulness.

The Pit

The last book of the existing trilogy is, in many ways, the most difficult to appreciate. *The Pit* lacks the overt violence that, for many readers, will redeem *McTeague* and *The Octopus* from their remoteness in time and absence of technical grace. *The Pit* plummets the reader into the business and domestic worlds of grain speculator Curtis Jadwin; thus committing Norris to the conversations, intrigues and mores of late nineteenth-century Chicago, with all the attendant risks of "datedness"; for Norris's rendition absorbs the style as much as the content of this grandfather civilization; and—to the impatient or imperceptive reader—he, Norris, will seem to have absorbed and to reflect the point of view. More particularly since Norris, along with the ingratiations of violence, has left aside much of the psycho-sexual symbolism which must arrest even the careless reader of the two earlier books. The dominant, the all-subsuming emblem of *The Pit* is The Pit itself—the wheat market of the stock exchange; here seen as gladiatorial arena, as vagina, as the pit of eternal fire and something more: the truly bottomless pit of unfulfilled strength, falsely diverted and sustained.

Norris is here dealing with the most self-contained, even hermetic world he has ever confronted: far less dependent on any larger prospect than even the Polk Street world. So—alone among his last three books—we never see the frontier, even in the blasted aspect of *McTeague.* Nor are we met with that drama of location, that near-personification of space, which offers the mural-like range of *McTeague* and *The Octopus.* The scope, the ominousness of Chicago's reach, are left implicit in the background, in the conversations of Jadwin and his wife, Laura. *The Pit* is a world of interiors—also, the most deceptively self-satisfied world of the trilogy. I think it is Norris's most quietly discerned, most authentically sophisticated achievement.

Norris's vision of Chicago is more gauntly pessimistic than Dreiser's; Dreiser could take joy in the imperial zest of Frank Cowperwood; and Dreiser's Lucullan appetite for business-political machinations gives *The Financier* and *The Titan* their coarse, hearty opulence. By contrast, Norris's city is an embolism of American power: everything genuine about its vigor and optimism only underwrites the irony of their perversion in this theater of struggle.

It is a city of reflection and spectacle: Norris's key scenes are of the theater, opera, painting—and, of course, the continuous tournament of the market. The initial panorama of the exchange—one of Norris's finest set-pieces—shows a typical day with the rhythmic concision—rising and falling action, the postlude of the clerks conducting their inventory—of a stage presentation, yet with hardly any straining of the metaphor.

Western art, as the middle and upper classes understand it, occupies the center of *The Pit* in a way unexampled by the previous novels. The characters are more occupied with contemplating, even savoring, spectacle that provides an alembic for their emotions than anyone in *McTeague* or *The Octopus*, possibly excepting Presley and Vanamee. Norris's own perplexity about art and its, for him, duality—as an instrument to forward truth, and as a decorative "property"—here becomes inseparable from *The Pit*'s main theme: the Inca-like seclusion of these men and women from the fetid, frenzied, wrangling life that works the stage-machinery of the stock market: the collective life of the wheat's growers and consumers.

The Pit's personages are at the opposite pole from McTeague's society. Jadwin and Laura and their set are capitalists of their emotions. Norris's own near-puritanical distrust of the luxurious and gratuitous (near-puritanical indeed, because his own appetites, as suggested in the party and picnic scenes, seem vigorously demanding) becomes exacerbated with *The Pit*, yoking together his best and his worst writing. The latter occurs almost invariably when Norris, departing his observer's function, tries to render overwhelming emotion. Even with *McTeague*, I find something wrackingly false—not false, exactly, but strained and compulsive—in Norris's descriptions of Mac's sexual frenzies. The dreariest passages of *The Octopus* have to do with Vanamee's mystical moonings about his dead sweetheart. Norris seems at once to have appreciated such emotions—at least, amply understood them—and distrusted them so intensely that his own efforts to convey

them carry the *obbligato* of grinding teeth. One misses even the enjoyment of foamy rhetoric that very bad writers sometimes offer.

In *The Pit,* the implied bleak aversion to strong emotion fuses with the book's grim lesson—for such it is, and Norris is as didactic as some of our finest writers have been—to create his most fiercely and doggedly ironic novel. For Curtis Jadwin, at the full of his strength, at last cannot meet the suicidal consequences of such strength. For him, the Dionysian glory of brandishing his courage and acumen, as the Unknown Bull of the market, is enough. But strength, in this mastodon-theater of Chicago, has no direction save conversion into power, the pornography of strength: strength converted into property, even as art has become property. Jadwin is a more genuine artist than his wife's lover, who paints stained-glass windows; but the cut-and-dried masculinity of Jadwin's society will permit no recognition of artistic vitality. Jadwin is nearly destroyed by the freight of reality which tumbles in upon his theater; indeed, at the novel's end—his and Laura's retreat from Chicago—we feel that destruction has only been temporarily curtailed.

As I may have managed to indicate, Frank Norris is often an easy writer to enjoy and a hard one to appreciate; because the entertaining factors of his work, its melodrama and grand-operatic panache, are disarmingly easy to separate from the real body of his work: the sense of history, which uses the melodrama, comments on it and not infrequently turns it inside out. Norris's history moves through our bowels with the motion of a group set-piece in one of O'Neill's plays, of an Aaron Copeland ballet, of Edward Hopper's paintings. His very weaknesses—self-consciousness, the stiff determination to "do something big"—stoked his energy, his discipline and, finally, that self-discovery that provided his universe and, through it, our discovery of America.

Many Forms, No Form: William S. Poster

In the scarce forty-two years that he lived, William S. Poster wrote about films, the dance, his boyhood in Brownsville, painting and poetry—seeming, in each essay, to wind himself into the content of the piece with that dodging, skeining, darting sinuosity which seemed to make of him what he once called Mickey Rooney in *Killer McCoy*—a flat stone on water. But against the finely-colored gravel of his essays, he is nearly invisible. When one has summarized his craftsmanship with "brilliant dexterity," he is harder to write about than any of his fellow-critics and fellow-artists—Manny Farber, Isaac Rosenfeld, Weldon Kees, Robert Warshow, David Bazelon, Otis Ferguson. Like all those men of the forties and fifties, Poster wrote about films: which, with their cohabiting of formal technique and crepuscular shapelessness, were not merely a subject, but an integument and, almost, perspective for his art and criticism. Unlike the others, he seems to have

had no fulcrum in any single art, though he painted and wrote poetry with distinguished ability. His contemporaries seem to merge with their subject, its texture and movement, in an uninterrupted flux, so that reviews of particular films readily join with reviews of others, and with general essays on the film, with the paintings or poems.

In Poster, I feel no such extensions, no such webs of connection. Whether he is writing about MGM films or James Agee or Preston Sturges or John Hersey's latest novel, he is caught up with the immediate presence of the *particular* subject. No afflatus, no superfluity, no sense of some extra Willie Poster overlapping the bounds of the essay and the content that determines those bounds. This is especially true of his pieces in William Bradford Huie's vigorous *American Mercury* of the early fifties. Poster, for about two years, was an associate editor on the *Mercury*, writing an occasional movie column and, frequently, unsigned editorials (one of which later appeared in Chandler Brossard's engaging anthology, *The Scene Before You*). I have an idea that he felt challenged to equal Huie's crisp imperturbability. But the movie writing—especially in contrast with his *Commentary* and *Hudson Review* pieces—seems, now, more constrained, even boyishly so, like the speech of a bright graduate student before his orals committee. Yet the constraint was always somewhat there, so that the core of his personality—which writers like Farber and Warshow fling first into their work—seems hard to detect in Poster's writing, where one finds not so many questions as speculations—fingerings of ideas or phrases into blue-white-glinting necklaces of comment. The phrase "occasional pieces" comes home in force to one reading those pieces: he sought occasions, he made occasions, he not infrequently turned content into occasion; then, having examined and teased and extrapolated the occasion, was done with it, for the time being.

The genuine unity of William Poster's writing was a sense of craftsmanship in which he appeared to submerge himself, so that the movement of his prose suggests (as I have tried to say before) the movement of his body. I think that dance, acting, painting—certainly the cartooning in which he was interested, occasionally doing captions for *New Yorker* drawings—form the trinity of arts which exerted the fullest attraction upon his writing—not the absorption of Farber in painting, or Warshow in editing, but a near-transaction with his mind and spirit. Rhythm is urgently important to his writing, as it was to his conversation—I remember how he used his odd, engaging syncopated

laugh to tempo his speech; and, in his writing, he will throw out, on occasion, flat banalities—flat stones, again!—which skin the reader from one mineral-bright perception to another. He uses flagrant hyperboles—like the one that "the average New Yorker is fairly free of prejudice against people of another color"—which should pole-axe any reader for the rest of the evening, yet, in the context, do not—because the whole of the passage is so geared to *hearing* rather than sight that we ellide the troublesome phrases, as we would in conversation, in order to get to what we feel will be the important point.

Poster's *enactment* of craftsmanship, vital to his criticism, was, I am sure, a token of his friendship, which included sometime collaboration, with Manny Farber (as in the *City Lights* essay, "Preston Sturges: Success in Hollywood"). He was more sophistical and more playful than Farber; yet, pre-eminent in Poster's writing, the more one reads of it, is a sense kindred with Manny Farber's best writing, of art as a way of doing things, a way of getting on with things, as a sort of behavior. He seems, at a careless reading of one or two pieces, more conventional than that: espousing MGM movies and various good, familiar works; also, through the well-ordered paces of his *Commentary* or *Hudson Review* essays. Yet, he he was every bit as alert as Manny Farber, or Robert Warshow, to the protean ubiquitous shapelessness of popular art; hold though he did to the worth of more traditionally individual art-works. He never declares any definition of art as Farber does; often enough, his boldest remarks are lost in the quick fandango scuttle of his prose rhythm, so that we take him for a much blander writer than he is. Even his most conventional remarks mostly occur as flags, staked out to attract the enemy's guns, so that Willie Poster can be about the work of reconnoitering the shape of his subjects.

He was a more conscious intellectual than Farber, and an intellectual of a different sort—amorphously roving and volatile—from the formal Warshow. Because of his intellectuality, subjects and themes seem more dispensable to the furious energies of his mind. In the *Commentary* piece on Agee's film criticism and the *New Leader* essay on Richard Wright, phrases and even premises are constantly oxidized by that disarmingly modest-seeming scurry of the sentences' rhythms. Constantly—it was evident in his conversation for any ten-minute stretch, also throughout his writing—a kind of near-hysterical fury, not competitiveness but savagely combative *jealousy* of his pow-

ers—rams his ideas forward. He is impelled to make every form do its damnedest for him, to somehow get the better, in what at times seems like a stop-watched contest, of every subject he writes about. I have said that Willie Poster's fury was not competitiveness, but in a grave sense it was—competition with his own material, with his own thought.

This sounds like a hyperbolization of mere mechanical journalism, but such was never the case—though he prided himself in the craftsmanlike beauties which hacks have vandalized. His qualities, indeed, *are* hyperbolizations, but of a quite different nature: for the whippet litheness of his prose disguises a very old and very Jewish puritanism of *work,* to which Willie's sense of form is very relevant. This sense of form is different from any of his immediate contemporaries; to whom form is, quite directly, the interworkings of the artist's character with experience, the clear rendering of these workings. In Willie's writing, form seems to equal *forms,* i.e., containers, shells, media, those miniature orders which exist to be applied by the artist. This feeling was no mere dilute classicism in his case, but a very Jewish sense of the world's impermanence and the impermanence, too, of the forms that man erects or is called on to erect, against nihilism. But the impermanence of forms does not discredit them: the other, important half of a message, only half of which has been retained by many of today's artists. Willie Poster's dual-sense of the impermanent but useful form—which must be worked! must be wrested!—and the lowering chaos against which form is our defense, is a Jewish feeling to be traced from the Old Testament prophets through I.B. Singer, through such writers as Harold Rosenberg, Edward Dahlberg and Paul Goodman. It finds its most personal expression in this most articulate, most seemingly-glib, of American fifties writers.

That impounded sense of age in Poster's writing floats up, again and again, in his return to tribal forms and modes of expression; so that the very flatness of his throwaway phrases can assume, at times, an ascetic purity of self-diminution. His lovely, richly funny tale in *Commentary,* "The Day the Bronx Invader Came," is the simplest presentation of a Brownsville boys' gang as a tribe standing fast against the invasion of a smugly imperturbable Bronx boy. Willie communicates precisely his personal resentment of the boy's bland obtuse serenity, against the Brooklyn boys' fierce alertness to their world; and at the end, when the invader triumphs at last, Willie regrets, as a man, the Bronx youth's

acceptance by the gang, compromising and poisoning its tribal character. The arts that he loved were dance and song and drawing and story-telling: he praises Richard Wright—even while putting down *The Outsider*—for retaining the storyteller's properties. His black, writhing handwriting is not facile, but like something wrought and carven.

Everything vital to Poster in his art was vital as *grace.* It was a sort of grace not pre-eminently religious, surely; a kind of grace incorporating lean resilience—address for the alarms and assaults on that shapelessness which lay outside one's sense of form; a grace insular as armor, yet accommodating of every change, and, withall, admitting continuous need for distance from experience, from one's audience, from one's performance.

Most important to such grace was husbandry: the body's plastic economy, which must include one's tools and materials. Found things—conventions, bits of junk, memories—are preferrable to things invented. He knew better than anyone how any creation is essentially temporary: that which one can wrest or inveigle from the ferocious twin pressure of time and experience. One's only constant, self-renewing artistic material is motion. His criticisms never explain process: they illustrate and codify. He saw such explanation as a kind of vanity, i.e., *wasted motion:* an attempt to account for a process which has already changed, is still changing, a thousand times over by the half-second. The arts he wrote best about—even above film—were dance and painting, in which one can view process as explicated in the work, without the need for excessive splicing. By such a definition of grace, waste is chaos.

The presence, the awareness of waste and its horrors are inseparable from grace such as Willie's, if only because such grace creates and multiplies waste. His playfulness was a way of dealing with waste, its imminence, within himself as everywhere. His humor was primarily verbal, full of *allegro* word play (he would make both funny and arrestingly perceptive puns on his friends' names); also, funky, vulgar—usually with the small-scale vulgarity of Jewish humor, its alertness to everyday dirt and necessary stink—and heavily though hilariously cruel. And often, with some threnody of hysteria overriding.

The instrument of such grace, for him, was language; which in his use attains the invocatory and playful intensity of children's songs. Some of the shortest, most apparently routine pieces—the reviews of *Intruder in the Dust* and *Samson and Delilah,* which he did for the

1949-50 *Nation,* are beautiful for the skeins of small discovery that the pattering language seems to draw from Poster's eye; following only the movement of the film's particulars. He scarcely appears to generalize at all, nor—as Farber, Warshow or Ferguson did—to convert the film to a new shape of his own reactions; yet, months after reading him, one finds the memory afloat with those bright filings of observation.

Within the grace of language lies the mysticism of language, its cabalistic fire. His love of word-play and puns belongs to this feeling, as does the very real extravagance, which has nothing in common with that facile hyperbole he used as decoy. In the piece on Preston Sturges, when Poster pyramids examples and aphorisms and poetry about the themes of success and obsolescence, his hyperbole has a heavier intentness than Farber's self-deriding extravagances, and the tribal intensity fuses with daredevil wager of his powers against those of the language, and both of theirs against the fell non-power of dissolution.

Weldon Kees wrote poems in which the casual-looking detritus of ancient houses and beaches and small-town sidewalks becomes the sign and texture of a dully menacing infinity. The ubiquity of *waste*—not merely his dear time's waste, but that waste which time, dear or not, insists upon—repeatedly evokes a double response from Kees of furious depression and sensuous longing—and the double feeling would seem to have found response in Poster, throughout everything he wrote. That grace which quickened itself with found things—observations, given forms, various traditions—had as its other side, the foundness of detritus and the awful caress of shapelessness. The success and failure that he wrote about repeatedly—in the Sturges article, in his *Mercury* piece on the Hollywood heroes of the fifties—were actually, in his usual slangy camouflage, the duality of grace and dissolution. Form—beginning with "form" in the athletic sense, proceeding to the multiplicity of man-made "forms"—against everything which form is not.

The Simple Ecology of the Soul

How hard it seems to praise Joel Oppenheimer properly, without seeming to patronize him! Say that his best poems (on view in his new collection *In Time*, his work from 1962-68) are provincial, with his province (the body of Joel Oppenheimer, surrounded by a narrow and portable track of the Bronx, which I imagine him wearing like a barrel) as his universe. Say further that his mixture of rough address and canny patience, voluptuousness and vital crudity, has most to do with his approach to every poem from somewhere outside; or, put another way, his use of the poem as his walking stick, counting off his marching paces. Yes, it sounds like patronage; yet with the imminent understanding that no genuine praise is patronizing; that it involves the reader's or spectator's particular ransom to the work. And beware

especially of patronizing Oppenheimer's work; because the patronage, that act of *pointing,* involves one in Oppenheimer's territory: the miles which he has yet to walk.

I have known Joel for some six years, with, I think, no compromise at all of my regard for his poetry; the opposite. Because, I would say, the man's universe is a walking universe, and a good means to understand and honor it is to walk with him. W.D. Snodgrass *told* us that Snodgrass is walking through his universe; how different Oppenheimer—whose universe *is* the march—renders the maps to be drawn for it. (One of the loveliest poems in his earlier pamphlet, *The Dutiful Son,* shows us Oppenheimer following out a map from traceries on his ceiling.)

Three previous small poetry collections—*The Dutiful Son, The Love Bit,* and *Friends and Lovers*—as well as his dream-play, *The Great American West,* make up the body of his published work prior to this first hard-cover anthology. He is very much a provincial's provincial, Oppenheimer: an associate and friend of numerous Black Mountain alumni—although he was never a student there, he is a self-acknowledged beneficiary of Charles Olson's presence in American letters; most clearly, to this reader, in Oppenheimer's sense of space, always to be measured off, and of the imagination's and emotions' resources vested against this space; yet, with a more pliant, more gentle, less fiercely angular competitiveness than some of Olson's boys.

The motion of his poetry, whether playful, elegiac or erotically yearning, is always of the same ruminative tempo, like the bobbing of an elephant's head: heavy, delicate, tentative:

> what/s gray and comes in quarts
> is an elephant or my brain;
> what loves or walks slowly in
> the land is an elephant gray
> and old, they have waited a long
> time for her to give birth.
> what i am saying is the age
> we live in, we grow old in.

Oppenheimer is one of our outstanding monologuists; and here, as elsewhere, the very color of his voice—husky, musing, gently sensuous, prematurely sage as his beard—is not to be mistaken. His best poems bob with exemplary wisdom—that a single person's tempo is

his own, his history and future his own, and to be learned from no one else.

This becomes increasingly important with the darkening of Oppenheimer's later poems, as the body's defections, the closing-in of perishability, make the air heavy. The movement is away from the adventurous nostalgia and erotic daydreaming of the younger poems; to the swelling consciousness that, as one moves along, other kinds of movement are proceeding: the startling gradients of time, once almost compact with the motion of the body, or at least utterly permissive to it, one's own given element:

> we were all incapable
> it seems of living in that
> environment we were created
> for. we are sea turtles
> who don't really like
> salt water, or condors
> afraid of heights.

And, too, we are oppressed by the inchoate churn of history, ever more a buffeting laundromat:

> in the grey mist that
> early dawn what else to
> discover, man, you lover—

But the increased somberness of such poems provides only an overlay for that sweet and rueful hopefulness of Oppenheimer's voice. A hopefulness heard more truly, perhaps, in the latterday poems; when his very thickened pessimism bodies forth his faith in the primary creative actions: loving and writing, felt as one. He beautifully incorporates, in his very best writing, the propulsion of creativity, fluidly, through the most humble conduits of daily life. He constantly seems to be not even seeking out, but piecing out a poem, which he knows will emerge, as surely as he will progress from one city block to the next by using his feet.

A common tenderness, that very special tactile sense emerging in the musing rhythms and the small, often-handled words, informs most of Oppenheimer's poetry, but particularly that which celebrates the sport and devotions of love. His erotic poetry is as forthright and warmly demonstrative as any now being produced in America; for every one of these poems sets forward his firm awareness that sexual

love is an epiphany and metaphor for all the experience which surrounds it and culminates in it. Amazing that such irrefutably masculine poetry, so at ease with every word relevant to talking its needs and embraces, should be so free of swaggering and flailing and mailering. The love of touching, the assumption of it as that which furthers all experience, is as immediate, in his work, as in a child with a crayon in his fist. So, in an important sense, each of Oppenheimer's best poems, is, *in excelsis,* a love poem.

His one, possibly crucial, lack, it seems to me, is of that filament of destructiveness which, indeed, only the most original and driven artists ever display; not, of course, consistently. The destructiveness is directed against one's own art; that every poem, every painting or prose page, be an act of scorched earth, aimed at laying waste poetry itself, or painting itself, at abolishing art. Such destructiveness is alien, obviously, to the art of Joel Oppenheimer, and to its mellow, sagacious virtues. I am not saying, of course, that he is incapable of anger: this has become notable in his more recent, increasingly polemical political poems. Most of these that I have read I don't much care for; because, while the anger is unquestionably straightforward, its expression seems overly forced and declamatory, with the emotion—which yet lacks the ruthless focus of passion—being bundled into platitudes. (An important exception to what I have just said comprises the poems of children: "The Children," "Poem In Defense of Children," in which his compassion is given free field and full priority over his anger; or the beautiful poem, "The Excuses," in which anxious self-speculation, sharpening his compassion, is the real content. In the best of such poems, Oppenheimer lays aside obligatory reactions, which are also attempts to force the situation as it exists; and turns instead to his proper and more demanding concern: his own shifting orientation.)

I have said that he lacks the destructiveness of the most fervent, compactly original artists. His work, however, discloses its own, covert destructiveness: that of wastefulness, which is implicit in the slack which Oppenheimer must constantly give himself in order to get on with his poems.

To be sure, a more quiet, more implicit, more instantly tolerable kind of destructiveness than the creative violences of others; this, the negative side of his spacious sweetness, has produced a quantity of sentimentality; of cliché-petting, of bathetic catch phrases which at

times suggest TV dialogue. It, the wastefulness, also has fostered a great many "poems" which are scarcely poems at all: many of which are on view in the section of the current book entitled "Jokes." Jokes they are, and two or three of them funny; but their inclusion here—which, to be sure, aids us in getting a comprehensive picture—also suggests the poet's uneasiness about the boundaries of his serious work, and the inroads which such gentle self-indulgence not infrequently makes into it.

Yet one is hard put to imagine Joel Oppenheimer's work as it is, without such occurrences of idleness, of time-killing, of mere trudging. *As it is,* Oppenheimer's best work is that of a genuine bard: a man who, with a lack of pretense and with lyric clarity and humor truly impressive in one of his calling, lightens up our present for us, and urges us to keep on moving.

Some Notes on a Misplaced Art Form

It seems to me to be demonstrated increasingly, and despite frequent withdrawals and dispersals, that small literary magazines in America show signs of coalescing into a signally American art form, quite apart from the individual magazine's function as warehouse or storehouse or Welcome Wagon of other persons' art. This observation, I realize, is dizzyingly precarious, if not untenable; first of all, simply because the term "art form" has become the darling of chic view-hallooers like *New York* magazine: signifying almost anything (a) which is appreciably entertaining or (b) cutely bizarre, *and* (c) momentarily popular. A paper-carnation industry, in other words, with the carnation winding up in the critic-journalist's lapel. And this circumstance highlights the other difficulty of my generalization: i.e., distinguishing between what the small literary magazine is and has been, and what it may become, or what I hopefully project it may become.

And the difficulty of composing a perspective, of separating the here's-how-it-is from the what-might-be, is the little magazine's—the magazine's, of whatever dimensions—traffic with the current history of actuality. The very laws that shape and charge the best American literary magazines—the laws of arrangement, of succession, of emphasis given to this item or section of material, this or that overall theme—are, so to speak, laws of accommodation, a kind of rhythmically suppliant dialogue with—answering and directing, both—the currents, not of those trends and tropes that so often dictate to the pretentiously bustling news magazines, but of taste and, in relation to their audiences, response. In this regard, the small literary magazine as even a *potential* art form urges on us a sense of circumstances different from those directing our most popular art forms—the theater, the dance, the novel; all of which depict the imagination's consolidation through form, which is itself a kind of bid against mortality, an out-distancer of current preoccupations. Form is the purveyor of identity, not of history. To justify the small literary magazine as art form, then, must involve articulating an American utterance of "art form," an American readaptation of form itself, which is not quite like any European classical model.

It seems to me that the rhythms of American experience, the sometimes colliding, sometimes collaborating purposes of much American art—to catalogue, to observe on the way, to mark with outflung arm, as it were, rather than deliver from one's vest pocket in a presentably-wrapped jewel case—that these are the purposes, and tempo, through which the American small literary magazine describes and fulfills itself. Summoned to court, my little parade of witnesses would include Leroi Jones's and Marc Schleffer's *Kulchur;* Margaret Anderson's *Little Review;* Albert Jay Nock's *The American Freeman;* the Mencken-Nathan *American Mercury;* Randolph Bourne's *The Seven Lively Arts;* Samuel Pitts Edwards' *The Second Coming;* Carol Berge's *Center;* and my own publication *For Now,* the Bunky-like superannuated baby of the older publications that introduced this list. God (Author of all authors, Editor of all editors, whom I would trust to find on the bench of such a tribunal) knows how many more. Nor may I scout the recent procession out of Canada, of publications like *Open Letter* and *The Unmuzzled Ox.*

The traits that I have cited above, and that all the previous roll call of magazines displays in various degrees—the picaresque meanderings,

the cataloguings, the unreelings of sample and illustration—have nothing at all to do, necessarily, I sheepishly concede, with art forms past or future; but there emerges another element, cohering all the others. I refer to the manifest will of not merely the editor alone, but the constellation he, she assembled, the corporate identity, surpassing and at the same time crowning the many diverse identities that it comprises: even as in the arts of the stage, of ballet or of large-scale architecture. The implicit principle of such arts, to me, in their contemporary mutations especially, is of a range of identities that are controlled by a single identity, yet not truly, at best, subordinate to it; the awareness of alternate identities not as occupying a wardrobe, awaiting blue day or polka-dot day, but as the present vital supplements of the central identity. Reading any several issues of Carol Berge's *Center* or, I daresay, *For Now,* may lay straight the coils of this assertion. To a degree that I often feel intensely, yet for which I can not hope to offer a flyspeck of evidence, this magic of alternate identities—of diverse personalities each bearing, like a secret medallion, his or her own feeling of relationship to a richer sovereign identity, not merely the personality of a commune—seems to me an important energumen of American art. And in the small literary magazine at its best, one repeatedly comes flush with the editorial ego projecting itself through the particular poem or essay or story; not in the cannibalistic manner to which Mencken's knotty, sportily mock-pompous style occasionally yielded; but, as it were, by being able to project, to extrapolate the possibilities of this personality or that one by the juxtaposition in which a work of poetry or prose is found: an intimation of the work's and the author's potential protean mutability, as conveyed by the shaded, shifting waters of editorial style.

It is style, that small inscription of history, that marks for me, at present, the sometimes lurching, sometimes clambering approach of current small literary magazines in America—and the beginnings of such approach in other countries—not to becoming, but to declaring themselves as an autonomous art form. Style: i.e., one's assertion of one's title to prevail over experience. The carved, "I saw, I walked, I knew," on the oak or elm-bark of some wilderness. Style that, together with form, bespeaks one's apprehension of a destiny, that is, an envisioned wholeness of experience, not mechanically decreed, but transcribed from personal nature. Style, in the sense that I am here addressing, has moved quietly to a major place in the small American

literary magazine. This distinguishes it from the sense of style projected, and promoted, by the editorial engineers and tacticians of, for example, the news or political publications. And, no matter how gauche, blatant or self-indulgent—and one has to count ten many times in observance of such traits—the best of the small magazines have forwarded, through such regard for style, the intelligence of identity—apart from the identity of messenger, or seer, or pander—which, when brought to a certain point, strikes me as the central unique premise of any art form. It is the constant testing of a sensed identity among the widest imaginable range of situations that repeatedly commends and endears—and, not seldom, exculpates, to me—the Schleffer-Jones *Kulchur,* Jones's *Yugen* and, most volatile, most electrically chatty, most vivaciously vocal of recent publications, Berge's *Center.* The virtues and virtuosities of such publications certainly should not lull one's awareness of various indulgences—of overly private sentiment or prejudice, of unbeguiling fripperies, of times when style is abusively treated as a kind of armor (that is, when style yields up its responsiveness to possible occasions and congeals into, by Irving Feldman's excellent definition, manner). And such moments mark, in my view, the freezingly vertiginous moments of either-or choice between the issue of the editor's ego and that of his or her potential egos, the contributors; moments that represent the possibilities of rebirth, in present literary America, to an extent surely not more real or genuine than, but at least as engagingly vivid as, the possibilities of the novel.

I can remember that sort of imaginative tingle, like the signal of a gentle but swift-spreading inflammation, with which I first read in Van Wyck Brooks's *Days of the Phoenix* about the conception and establishment of the *Phoenix,* and—at what I would infer to be the mock-idling, hands-in-pockets-and-pants-cuffs-dragging gait of its editor's own prose—of Albert Jay Nock's *The American Freeman;* according to which Nock, from the central cabin of a good, self-regarding yet informal literary orthodoxy, admitted his contributors to the most capacious possible latitude of viewpoint and terrain of interest. That cabin of Nock's editorial role bore the cresting inscription of Rabelais' Abbé de Thélème; but—and this, I think, cinched its appeal to me as a future magazine editor—the flag above this crest was Nock's own sensibly strict stylistic standard, a standard of lucidity and grammatical correctness that now, some twenty years later, still strikes me as inher-

ently generous and plausible and apposite and potentially (in the perspective of our often free-for-all present) gallant; yet perhaps also a little too placid, a little too unventuresome (although Nock's own political courage was to be scorned by no one); and, in all, perhaps, a little too prone to misidentifying good style and good manners: the remote, yet also rather warming civilities that even that fervid, fractious period —the twenties-through-thirties—could leave intact.

Yet that basic paradox of Nock's *Freeman*—the self-effacing integrity of a "decent norm," offering its hospitality to a carousing and expostulating public square full of opinion and concerns—embodied for me then, and helps me better identify now, that curious and very distinctly American image of heroism which, through Brooks's codifying description, the small American literary magazine came to realize for me, and, I strongly suspect, now defines for many an editor-entrepreneur. The kind of hero that is *Kulchur* or *The Second Coming* or *The Dial* probably most strongly recalls the picaresque wayfarers of Fielding or Smollet, or Mark Twain or Milton Caniff, or Raymond Chandler: the heroes, I mean, who are constantly testing their resource and resiliency, their adaptability and boldness and general understanding of—and readiness to assert—their own style, against the vicissitudes, perplexities and sometimes threats of foreign or very often native landscapes. I do not mean here to propose that any small lit-mag editor must needs be a crusading editor of the old Edward G. Robinson genus; although, I don't hesitate to add, it seems to me that the spiritual condition, the weather of the crusader, the ripeness to crusade, even if only by simple declaration, must sooner or later become the weather of any such editor whose career has any value. Primarily, for me, however, such an image of the hero enlists those discontinuities, those notations and salutes, those instant representations and samplings, that have so long marked the styles of very much in American life, and, not least, in American culture—the arts, or languages at any rate, of films and of comic strips and of radio or television serials: forms of expression and/or diversion that thrive on incompletion, and even on nonfulfillment, rich in hints of "more to come," constantly echoing and invoking realities, resonances of current history, which lie beyond, not necessarily the capacity of their creators, but the needs and dictates of their own rhythms, to articulate and transmute, as do the art works with which tradition acquaints us. These American activities, and what I think is the authentically origi-

nal sense of form which they herald, are especially affianced to illustration and to representation: to the principle of gaining a working relationship, a good line of conversation, with experience, by encompassing as many token identities as possible. Through the episodes of Billy DeBeck's *Barney Google*, for example, there parade not only characters who pompously or raffishly or piteously speak for many social strata, but also DeBeck's acquisitions from the art conventions of his education in Chicago: accommodating the cindery darkness of Glackens as well as the feather-swift background evocations of Chinese art.

The United States is a country of journeys and of markets, as well as of blank checks, subway tokens and one of the most symbolism-encumbered congressional bodies of any nation in the world. The major novels of Faulkner and of Melville, as of Chandler and Mark Twain, are of a picaresqueness beyond that of their English or Spanish forebears in unmoored, loosely-fortuned scope and range, because so often there is no homecoming to codify the wanderings, and the heroes' catalytic drive or mission is never entirely consummated, except perhaps in death. It is such a rhythm of eternal sampling and review and catalytic filtering that seems to me to direct the little literary magazine's colloquy with history.

This rhythm is the little magazine's basic covenant with its times, which is to say, with its audience, its commitment to an elected identity that is also organic. Within the bounds established by this rhythm—which comprises the rate of appearance and the physical format, as well as the succession of contents—it seems to me that the particular form of the magazine can and perhaps should be as mutable as possible: as varied as the forms of colloquy themselves: letters, broadsides, journals. I see no reason why any magazine not indentured to the retailing of current news, or of political commentary, should have its flanks ridged by the worn-out corset of "policy." I know it will not deter the Gadarene stampede, to which some editors have been lending themselves with such pell-mell rapture over the years, to say that I do not mean by this any abandonment of taste: rather, it seems to me, taste should be promoted to its proper seat of authority: that is, in its authentic and still only meagerly recognized or honored sense: as the means by which, out of our human empathy, our remembered experience and our sheer reverence for the great principle of human pleasure, we formulate certain means of identification, and certain laws to station those means. A little magazine, far from repre-

senting a mere pavilion or bamboo birdcage of taste, should, it seems to me, be the chief agent of taste's invigoration and deliverance into actuality. The little magazine presides over that identification, through empathy and sensibility, which is the dynamic spirit of taste. What I find recurrently winning and admirable, even among my occasional spasms of dissent from *their* taste or editorial attitudes, about Berge's *Center* and Harry Smith's *The Smith* is how, Libran-guided undertakings that they are, they not only countenance but maintain great galleries or buffets of artistic enterprise; the Libran love of representation, as counselled not by any mere budget-lacing C.P.A.'s sense of fairness; but by a positive appetite for illustration, by a sense of qualifications being ubiquitous and self-regenerating. Carol Berge's voice is elegant, fervid, journalistically (or, sometimes, lyrically) crisp and sententious; ardent in the telling or retelling of a good story. Harry Smith's voice is elegant, provincial, ruminative, urbanely hedonistic. Each voice (I can scarcely imagine them together in any harmony imaginable to the most reckless Stravinsky) celebrates the promise that the true function of a distinctive voice, in the editorship of a small literary magazine, is not to prevail over, or even, necessarily, set the pitch for the material it musters, but to introduce and conduct in their harmonic best as many and various voices as possible.

Speaking from the podium of my own itinerant band, I should like to see the entire notion of "magazine" give increased and sharper-defined place to that of "journal": not a fair or flea-market only; but what, as I indicated at this essay's beginning, I feel the American small literary magazine is growing into: an agent for consideration and contemplation, at a tempo other than the compulsively charging one of the news weeklies; an agent for the informing of its audience by selecting and noting experience, so as to suggest the variety of forms available to such, or to anyone's, experience. Above all, in my own tower of priorities, an agent of connection and association, for suggesting the continuities of experience and the recombinations of experience possible; given only the eyes that taste, propagated, defined and redefined as often as necessary, has opened for us and continually bathes for us.

Shut Up, He Explained

We do well to remind ourselves—pursuant to reminding ourselves what an extraordinary writer he was—that Ring Lardner's fundamental writing, which defines the darting wake of his art, was not about baseball or golf or boxing but about writing. I say it is no less than the definitive difference between Lardner and those succeeding generations of Marvelous Ears in American fiction who, flapping to the winds of fashion, have monitored the uh's and ah's, the latest improvisations of Walgreen's and the corner newsstand: Lardner bestowed upon his feckless, vainglorious, lurchingly predatory heroes and heroines the grace of becoming, for a given season, *storytellers like himself.* Not only through conventional monologue, like that of the talkative bridge player in "Who Dealt?" or the barber-narrator of "Haircut," or the highly and impeccably theatrical aria of the alcoholic wife in "The Love Nest"; but through their writings; through Jack Keefe's letters to Al, or those

of the fledgling composer in "Some Like Them Cold"; or diaries like the fickle teenager's in "I Can't Breathe," and the young boy's in "A Caddy's Diary."

Here is a wonder, this commitment to the performance of writing, which obviously absorbed and charged the resources of one of our most intensely, if narrowly, knowledgeable students and demonstrators of American style. Each character, from the barely literate baseball whiz of "You Know Me, Al" to the procession of stoically sarcastic, sun-parched midwestern voices informing us about Alibi Ike or Hurry Kane, is writing, not as public entertainer (like the Man from Long Island, whom Lardner produced for Hearst's *New York American* in the twenties), but as petitioner of an audience, one ear cocked, as it were, to his or her own flat echoes. "You Know Me, Al," which seems to invite radio or film adaptation, might be imperilled by sacrificing that *numbness* of tone essential to Lardner's counterpoint: Jack's earnest, ungrammatically glib voice reading his words over to himself, in his head.

Lardner issues none of them a jot beyond his or her customary eloquence, but he does permit them all the resources at the command of their hand-me-down, eclectically makeshift culture, their crass ingenuity. Above all, in a way not essentially different from that of Robert Browning, he allows each one sufficient space to be at his or her best; attaining that point at which the private self becomes public to the broadest and deepest degree of which it is capable. In fact, Lardner was no more a reporter of "common speech," in the sense to which the fiction of William Carlos Williams and Hubert Selby has accustomed us, than was Browning. Most of his people are professionals of some attainment or other, involved with a society more articulate than the ones with which Williams and Selby deal. His rhythms are the downright, brisk processions of efficient narrative: a variation of the "well-made story," which is, indeed, not quite sufficient unto itself, but sufficient for marking the parameters of his characters' universes. The stories are the very kind we would expect his characters to tell, in barrooms or between innings; whereas, in the later journalistic realists, we get an openwork rhythm, closer to speech than even to colloquial written narrative, and accessible to the fluent unpredictabilities of our common world.

Lardner was patently fascinated by the way even the most ignorant and fractured viewpoint could, in effect, create its own world, as man-

ifested in its style, which, in turn, defines the narrator's microcosm as we see it. Almost nowhere in that fiction of Lardner with which I am familiar does he invite, exhort, or nudge the reader's perspective of the world beyond his narrators' own perspectives; reminding me, in this, of that other autocratic, tight-lipped American artist, Dashiell Hammett. Nor ("Of course!" we now say, knowing of him what we know) are there any sensuous contours or colorations; even among contemporaries like Sherwood Anderson or James T. Farrell, Lardner's style stands out as a non-erotic American style. When he writes in the third person, as in "Old Folks' Christmas," "Champion" or "A Day in the Life of Conrad Green," the effect is arid and hermetic, for he will presume on his own imagination as little as would Hammett, and on his invention even less.

What I sense from Lardner's art, as from Hammett's, is a puritanical provincialism far, far deeper than that prudishness that makes us smile when he inveighs in his radio column against certain popular song lyrics. (My own smiles, I admit, are just a little wistful at this stage in our cultural liberation.) A strictly defined awareness of what he deems properly inaccessible to the imagination in human personality; yet—the other side of his puritanism—infinitely tempted to it; so that his best fiction, like "You Know Me, Al," "My Roomie," "Mr. and Mrs. Fixit," "The Big Town," are contemplations of human personality at its most perversely enigmatic; whereas the lesser stories—"Conrad Green," "Haircut," "Champion"—boil down to melodramatic homilies. Lardner in these instances, it seems to me, has rejected his main artistic tool: drily accurate first-person identification. "Haircut," which is narrated by a local citizen, displays what is rare for Lardner, a deprecating ironic bias.

The common domain of his stories lies outside the traditional morality that he embraced, just as it lies outside conventional sentiment—like the mystique of innocence—toward which Lardner took the shortest of views. (Jack Keefe, touchingly naive as he can sometimes be, does his damnedest to double-cross for his own benefit not only his employers, but his treasured buddy, Al; the melodramatic payoff of "Haircut" pivots on the uncertain motives of the retarded youth who kills the sadistic practical joker.) Nor is that Yooouuumaan Diiignitee, which so many liberal sponsors have attempted to promote as a kind of no-fault insurance against getting one's feelings hurt, ever at issue. What did deeply concern Lardner, perhaps just short of

obsession, was the capacity for, and the surge of impulse toward, survival: survival of the only kind to which many of us have access, i.e., the worst kind imaginable, with the full baggage of vanity and viciousness intact. I cannot say whether, or how much, "love," as it is commonly understood, entered into his compassionate, austere watchfulness; and I somehow doubt that his recent biographers could enlighten me. Yet, beyond argument I should think, is that first-class surgeon's hard curiosity and delusion-proof receptiveness, with which Lardner studies a speech that is both his characters' armor and their nakedness; the quick-gauging ear he trains on it, not merely for the fallabilities of pretension and error, but for those twitchings and starts of sensibility that even the vanity of a Jack Keefe or the pillaging restlessness of a man-hungry nurse may, in an off moment, disclose. When the patient in "Zone of Quiet" notes, from his hospital bed, that his nurse has been crying, the tiny bell that the observation rings is caught—nor yet exaggerated—by Lardner's perfect sense of pitch. Nonsentimentalist that he is, he can, like James T. Farrell, give each telltale of human vulnerability its just resonance; and, like Farrell, let us know, as by a tacit shrug, that he is not the man to say where sensibility leaves off and sensitivity begins. Admitting, also, the twin to this question: How much is feeling expressed by the style that expresses it, and how much created?

It is this very sense of just resonance, of the actual proportions of his people's feelings (against their own distortions) *and* their authenticity, never scouted, that counts toward the élan vital to Lardner's comedy. It is a comedy of marginal triumphs and escapes, ledge-clinging salvation. He had as much to say as any American writer—easily as much as Hemingway—on the crucialness of *performance*—particularly of the rituals of performance, to much of American life—and on the incredible dinky stages on which most such rituals are enacted. The wisecracking and "signifying" dialogues of "Alibi Ike" and "Horseshoes" often seem to be taking place within the crisply controlled, diminutive foreground of comic-strip panels. (I am reminded, indeed, that during the twenties the *New York American* ran—love-child of Lardner's column and the runaway success *Barney Google*—a comic-strip treatment of "You Know Me, Al," written by Lardner and drawn by the brother of the gifted sports cartoonist Tad Dorgan: a blightingly listless, mopey-looking creation, which, however, registered one obvious point: Jack's voice *was*, in toto, "what was happening.") We may perceive through-

out Lardner's fiction a conglomerate of closed-circuit, basically futile activities; emblematized in the Dadaist theater-pieces "Water Lilies" and "The Triget of Greva" (championed by George Jean Nathan), the latter of which opens with two men rowing a boat on a living-room floor. Or, in possibly the most ominously ambiguous scene Lardner ever wrote, the manic-depressive convulsions of a self-service elevator manned by "My Roomie," outfielder Elliot. Or in his most ambitiously amplified and, I think, strongest achievement, "The Big Town," the doom-infected mission of an Indiana couple, seeking a rich husband for the wife's simperish sister.

In keeping with this recurrent futility, it is startling (although, if one has read Lardner with any absorption, not surprising) to discover how unfunny in summary are many of his plots: how lacking, for all the bubbly allegretto of their dialogue-surfaces, in that inventive *esprit*, typical of Mark Twain's situations: the sense of the comic spirit proclaiming and obtaining its sovereignty. For a closer-to-hand example than Clemens, consider "You Could Look It Up," James Thurber's loving pastiche of Lardner; the premise of which rates at least one bark of joyous outrage per remembrance from me. (Thurber's affection for Lardner may also be pondered in "The Greatest Man in the World," about a depraved, swaggering, consummately Midge Kellyish aviation ace.) Nor do I mean merely that Lardner's stories in summary sound not-*obviously*-funny, as do the comic plots of Chekhov or, today, of J.F. Powers: plausibly-facaded sequences in which the comedy, temporarily interred, bides its time. Lardner's stories do not, I mean, seem like *anybody's* fiction: stripped of his dialogue and monologue, they recede, like abandoned houses, into the quarried landscape of "popular art." Synopsized, many of his stories suggest that he never regarded the world itself as sufficiently under his control, even momentarily, for him to put out any comic flags; or, said another way, as though, with prudent deliberateness, he had planted himself as sentinel between a boding, inchoate actuality and the armed, girded troops of his imagination. A holding action—in defense of both?

Here, I must resummon Dashiell Hammett; who, like Lardner, seems in much of his work to have acted as a translator, an intermediary, not only between his readers and his art; both men acted as intermediaries among their readers, their art and that totality over which their clever, unflinching, stringently-braked imaginations could not, they were manifestly aware, prevail. And in both instances

the awareness of *profession*—its service in assuring whatever of the cosmos is assurable—extends, membranelike, over their protectorates: a strengthening and, perhaps, consoling authority.

What Lardner realized for us was the everyday semi-awareness of people whose lives, and very language, are governed by a variety of forms; none of which they have originated, but which are immensely, comically and fairly often touchingly important to them. A considerable amount of his satire and burlesque distills out as comedy of manners: people like his eccentric baseball tigers, trying to find accommodation for their appetites, vanities and mulish bridlings amid the social codes through which they more or less blunder. The chief difference—a major one, to be sure—between the ballplayers and, say, the victimized wife in "The Love Nest" or the aging, marriage-locked couple in "The Golden Honeymoon," is the players' redeeming common professional skill; skill that Lardner admired obviously and ungrudgingly, but also too precisely and profoundly to romanticize it. He celeberated that twinkling vein of grace, humorously, wryly and impeccably, by demonstrating how it permeated the men's language.

Their rhetoric is limber, swivel-eyed, uncaring of conspicuously intense effects; the narrator always marginally, i.e., correctly, conscious of his bearing toward the untoward; dashes of Mark Twain hyperbole, well-grounded by a stoic resignation that, indeed, sets the base tone—and not only for the athletes among Lardner's protagonists. But it is the ballplayers' style, beautiful in its rallying of aptitudes, its eye for every degree of gravity in even the most incongruous, most outlandish occurrences, that must have enlisted Lardner's deep-abiding fealty: the grace that he relays to us, often piecemeal to be sure, the self-command of these men in situations admitting only the most limited and ex-tempore and shifting power. Even when he does not describe a game or a play directly, Lardner encompasses the lithe decorum of the game in every sentence that even the most ungainly or distraught of his players utters. Small wonder—although that connoisseur of marvels, F. Scott Fitzgerald, both wondered and grieved thereat—that Lardner should have found the baseball diamond a proper theatre for the American professional personality: always at least partly trapped, usually crankily combative.

The golf course, on which nonprofessionals usually tread, affords another sort of theatre in stories like "Mr. Frisbie" and "A Caddie's Diary": that of Moliérean social lampoon, the golf links becoming a

miniature court, with the taut guy-wires of its ceremonies illicitly stroked or nudged for private gain or social manipulation. The narrative voices (they belong to wary subordinates, the caddie and the chauffeur) are egg-steppingly watchful, constrainedly precise.

Yet whatever their flurries of deliverance, Lardner's ballplayers, along with his film people and small-town gallants, remain largely embroiled, if never quite impounded—language, feelings, attitudes—in that often baffling shantytown of inherited American manners and mores. Virtually never does he attempt to dislodge them, romantically, from their contexts, as does Anderson of *Winesburg, Ohio.* Anderson shows us the psychic contortions of Wing Biddlebaum or Windy McPherson, the supposed misshapen fruits of a small town's vicious pressures and ignorant presumptions, but almost never shows us the community itself in any halfway plausible perspective; how on earth did people spend their days, aside from hazing and harassing local eccentrics? By contrast (a point Edmund Wilson struck out on in comparing the two men, in his 1920s essay on Lardner) Alibi Ike, Hurry Kane and Elliot are coddled and cradled in the quasi-monastic sphere that Lardner depicts as their common world. Though never achieving or, I should suppose, trying for that gauntly beautiful, catatonic ballet which is Anderson's at his best, Lardner excels at tracing, like ultraviolet light on scorpions, the secret tempi of these people's lives, as against the hectic, spastic or insanely loping rhythms of their social settings. Those very rare instances when he violates his method's principles are among Lardner's failures; and I am thinking particularly of "Champion," in which his naked, despairing abhorrence for Midge Kelly makes Lardner depict the man as a permanent outsider, an enemy alien to the human universe.

He portrays his figures-in-their-landscapes only once or twice (e.g., "Haircut") with any encouragement for that snicker-behind-the-hand that often passes for literary irony; and with no time at all for the cause-effect traceries of social realism. Nor, for all his unwavering equanimity of eye, is his the more recognizable kind of literary-scientific detachment; for he recognizes himself in the same boat with his characters, though not going out of his way to rock it. The mind, eye and heart emerging from stories like "The Golden Honeymoon," "My Roomie," "Mr. and Mrs. Fixit" are very simply those of a lay anthropologist; in no way less astute or sensitive or reverent of his subject's mystery, in his total and principled unpretentiousness.

By watching them long and steadfastly and sympathetically enough—with that irreplaceable sharpness of a concerned cohabitant, which no mere field researcher can match—Lardner is able at length to catch those shiftings, displacements, hairline faults that enter into the stolid-looking norms of certain everyday lives, and themselves may ultimately prove to set those norms. It is this counterpoint of incessant displacement, against the formal punctilio of the ground rules, that furnishes the elastic dramatics of baseball. And when Lardner pursues such counterpoint beyond the bleachers, he can give us some very remote and startling tribal reverberations, as in his "Bridge" sketch, which orchestrates the hummings, cluckings, and incantatory murmurs with which the players bespell themselves. Or on a plane closer at hand, he can offer "The Golden Honeymoon"—a miniature history, impeccable and mum as a fossilized maple leaf.

After some ten years' more-or-less sympathetic bemusement, and with, I am sure, no little diplomatic prodding from Ring Lardner's ghost, I have decided that this story—an elderly couple's rediscovery of certain basic mating rites in St. Petersburgh, where they are visiting their married children—is *not* about the glacial enormity of nonrecognition that has obviously gone into their life together. Nor is it about the, to me, manifest horror that Lardner, a still-young writer, is registering at the prospect of such old age: horror not merely of their lives' content, or lack of content; but of that helpless dependence from which they are not now far, which is portended in the managerial solitude of the hotel, with its staged events and services; and, many centuries before, in the freezing verses of *Ecclesiastes.* These considerations provide, at best, the black background for the sparse but fine-stitched embroidery that is Lardner's story: the energy-spasms, fretful or intently chipper: Father's lodge-address, his insult-bouts with Mother's ex-boyfriend, his and Mother's dutiful, though soured, badinage. All conveyed through the grey thread of Father's self-congratulatory, wisecrack-prone, tone-weary voice.

Thus to describe "The Golden Honeymoon" seems to steer it within at least hat-tipping distance of, say, Sinclair Lewis's midwestern stand-up routine, *The Man Who Knew Coolidge;* or a split-level hop from Carol Burnett's thuddingly malign caricatures of the elderly. In fact, it comes much closer to—though hauntingly distant from—Ozu's lovely film, *The Tokyo Story.* The real distance from the caricaturists lies, not in any impressive riffs through which Lardner conducts the clichés I

have noted, but the way in which, having planted them, he keeps his hands off them; animating his characters by, simply, sharing with them his own ruefulness and toughness, his own volleying crispness of expression—only in ant-village miniature. Lardner is not so much deflating, as, far more devastatingly to sentimental interests, bringing into scale, a Satevepost subscriber's lifetime of myths about old age. All this, by seismographing the effects of a tiny displacement—the trip to Florida—on the old couple's life, and noting the rickety, yet most significant, threshhold of self-disclosure which it dislodges. And the comedy, clichés and all, we come to realize, hangs as a scrim, never so much as tweaked by Lardner, before a true Sacred Mystery: the value to themselves of these old people's existence; which, silly and awful as it may be to anyone else, abides no one's question in this world. And in such portraiture, Lardner performs a border-runner's dance between the keenest-eyed, frigid justice, and the very outermost edges of uncomplicated compassion.

"The Golden Honeymoon" and, indeed, the greater number of Lardner's stories with which I am acquainted, are encased, as within a negative space, by the sense of that *territory* beyond the story's immediate limits, which Lardner seems, not, perhaps, to reject, but to withdraw from—"strategically" would be my word. The stories of Grace Paley, a present-day writer—like Lardner, of certain brilliantly-converted journalism—fairly radiate into the teeming historical tidewaters around them, from the refracted Mediterranean sun of Paley's ego. In contrast, Lardner devised a zipperlike tale, which seems repeatedly to zig-zag back, self-eradicatingly, into the limitations of its protagonist's viewpoint. I miss chiefly from his stories—or rather, note the absence of; for such absence belongs to their total identity—that sovereign sense of form, which involves both the writer's control over observed and psychic terrain and, within or sometimes against such control, the ability to keep the variables of existence variable, and fluid. I further sense—in his own bent toward manners, toward genteel distances—Lardner's nostalgia for such form, and for the only condition likely to make it possible: a style of civilization which, his wit and instinct surely joined in assuring him, was (a) no longer available in his time and (b) if it were, would have resulted in a radically different, although most likely no radically more contented, comic style in his writing: something possibly closer to Jane Austen, some of whose dry-sherry piquancy emerges, almost eerily, here and there in "The

Golden Honeymoon." A classicist in search of his moorings, Henry James abandoned by his furniture.

So he becomes a scavanger, a salvager of consolations, the condition of his own comic style; which has all to do with plucking at the adrift, the fortuitous in one's native language, in order to get by with the generally heavy and, as a rule, monotonous work of articulation. Thus the undercurrent of resignation even in the most gingery speech of his athletes. Thus, too, the overall persistent sense, amid all the gagging and hyperbole, of language as onus, like template borne by them: much bony pleasure in "getting it right"—this intonation, that slang phrase—but next to none in expressive adventure. One misses that peculiar imaginative verve, that regal presumption upon language and intense regard for its self-renewing jism, which we find in the styles of Nelson Algren or of Grace Paley; who, to be sure, call upon the voices of people in more frenetically mobile circumstances, outlaws, underworld figures and people who find their families and communities in runaway dissolution. Algren and Paley also write from a more volatile period, when cultural differences have become less stratified, the spheres of culture and class occupied by the various professions, say, less remote from each other. So that the language comes to implement a territory-grabbing energy, darting across the lines of class and cultural distinction; rather than, as with Lardner, contenting itself with small adjustments and bursts of energy within those distinctions. When Lardner makes an imaginative bound, it is out of the realistic context altogether, into Dada, with the uncontrol of nonsense phrases and nonsequiturs replacing the limited control of day-by-day expression. No new powers, or potentialities. Or parody, as in the exquisitely funny "The Young Immigrunts"; supposedly narrated by the five-year-old Ring Jr., and a magically accurate rendering of the polymorphous glamour of language for a precocious little boy, especially the language he has read and not quite assimilated, or assimilated for his good and proper uses. Lardner even digs at his own prudery, in young Ring's eagerly inapposite strewings of the phrase "a coarse gesture." But in order to do all this, he needs must resort to parodying a nineteenth-century work, itself a parody: "The Young Visitors," allegedly by the twelve-year-old Daisy Ashford, protegé of the book's "discoverer," widely presumed to be its true author, Sir James M. Barrie.

The true source of Lardner's reluctance, it seems to me, precedes

the shiftings of both fashion and social circumstance. A salient clue, I think, is the almost total absence of imagery from his general prose fiction: not the mere paucity of symbols, rhetorical figures, but that of the peculiar thrust that these generally embody, as figures of *mating* between the energy of the author's creative will and the apposite energy that it finds in the observed and sense-enkindled life. Above all, images joyously confirm the imagination's *creative exploitation of experience,* its wresting of the gratuitous additional in pleasure and insight; its triumphant seal upon experience which is never that of insensate conquest, but that of a basic act of union and of self-deliverance.

Now what seems to me inescapable throughout Lardner's fiction is, precisely, that, as glumly amused as he often was by people's limited control over their own lives, he was smitten with a spiritual misgiving, occasionally galvanized into outrage, by the ease with which people invite the manipulation of their lives by others; not to mention the aplomb with which this invitation, tacit or explicit, is seized upon. A misgiving that went beyond the bourne of Lardner's moral imagination (as evident in "Haircut" and "Champion," the morality of which is nineteenth-century chivalrous in a narrow, though valid, sense). For it was cued by a reverence for the actual that assumed priority over Lardner's intersecting conventions of morality and manners. It corresponds to Hammett's distrust of creative engineering, voiced in his portrayal (see *The Dain Curse* and *The Thin Man*) of those who fictionize as malignant liars. In Lardner's instance, his somber distrust of manipulation surely ran afoul more than once of the paternalism that was roof-beam to his inherited religious tradition. And we are offered, recurrently, the amiable, weather-worn paternalismn of various managers and coaches in the baseball yarns. But he never loses sight, or permits us to lose ours, of the ultimate pragmatic factor in their protectiveness toward players who enjoy equivalent rank to that of prize trotters or greyhounds and are bartered, or duped, in equivalent ways. The benign hoaxers in "Alibi Ike" or "Hurry Kane," whose maneuverings bring their skittish fellow-players to terms with the system, are not all that remote from the evil practical jokers of "Haircut" and "The Maysville Minstrel." In "The Young Immigrunts," Lardner depicts himself as a baffled, peevish father. " 'Shut up,' he explained."

The ultimate comic horror of massive intervention in people's lives

is enacted by the Stevenses—"Mr. and Mrs. Fixit"—who tramp like affable Attillas through the rubble of their neighbors' privacy—buying them theater tickets and cancelling train reservations for "better" ones; pressing their favorite hairstylists and restaurants upon them; even instructing them in where to spend their vacations, until the benevolence-bludgeoned couple is literally driven to flight.

What merits special consideration about "Mr. and Mrs. Fixit" is first, of course, the way this social *petit guignol* has been englobed by Lardner in that twenties comedy-of-manners mode, which also engaged humorists like Robert Benchley and cartoonists like Gluyas Williams and H.T. Webster. The perennial distances that social politeness both presumed and imposed in like situations are as indispensable to the story and its era as phrases like "That's the team that wins the Olympics" (of the same horrendous Stevenses). With scant imaginative effort, we can envision the robustly macabre scaffolding which, say, Bernard Malamud today would supply such a story.

But the comic mode of "Mr. and Mrs. Fixit" is boilerplated by the rueful, jibing, half-incredulous voice that Lardner has interposed between the Stevenses and us; whose whimsically dour chattiness keeps us from realizing how essentially static, how untouched by invention, the story is; and, in fact, how remote are the Stevenses, even as comic types, at the end as at the beginning. Their predations have escalated, but we've seen them in no supplementary detail; as, by the end of Meredith's *The Egoist,* we have seen in horrendous splendor the Stevenses' transatlantic forebear, Sir Willoughby Patterne. *The Egoist,* for sure, is a novel, and "Mr. and Mrs. Fixit" a short story; yet at issue here, I think, is not formal space, but Lardner's way of letting his humor become a protective intercessor among him and us and *the perilous energy that the Stevenses embody.*

I have characterized the writer's image-making faculty as a marriage of energies: the imagination with the energies of experience. But in precisely this respect, Lardner's scruple, which I've been describing, seems to me universal throughout most of his available work; for, easily as deep as his distrust of manipulation was a distrust (read "horror") of a bulldozing, potentially annihilating energy, beyond appeal because it is implacably innocent. The barbarian from beyond those gates that Lardner's chivalry and imagination manned together.

"Champion" is the too-obvious example; a failure because Lardner passed up the challenge of Midge's awful innocence; because the

blatancy of the character made it too easy for him, Lardner (a temptation he would have spurned on other occasions, when it was not fortified by his anger and disgust), to respond with his battery of moral conventions; because the story's end left Lardner with no more to say about Midge's and the sports-scene's evil than he had to say at the outset: There they are.

But another, far less well-know tale, "My Roomie," gives us access to the frontier of Lardner's somber vigilance. This brilliantly disturbing story begins as another bit of comic portraiture, another whimsical maverick. Yet even Elliot's initial eccentricities—taking a shower in the middle of the night, etc.—refer, unlike Alibi Ike's inverse bragging, to a world outside the borders of the baseball world in which the narrator's viewpoint is cabined; and his coldly serene arrogance seems hardly assimilable to the loose democracy of team brotherhood. Nor is it; we are brought to realize that, in Elliot, Lardner has introduced a man, embodying an irrational, tragically willful force, whose very presence puts to question the usual reassuring formulations of the other baseball fictions; yet which, we realize, Lardner has never excluded as a possibility; he has always implicitly left room for Elliot, even if he has only now invited him.

But "My Roomie" 's most insidiously disconcerting shock comes, I think, from the realization of how deeply Lardner has opened himself, and his readers as well, to the darker kinds of artistic possibility, by quietly relinquishing his role as paternal interpreter; whisking back the protective curtain of "popular art." Elliot reminds me of Bugsy, the implacable, mother-obsessed Marine in Preston Sturges's *Hail the Conquering Hero:* a chill, authentic presence amid all the windy *bonhomie* of that Mr. Fixit of a film. Like Bugsy, Elliot makes us do a double-take at his creator's work, only to realize what a constantly imperilled, desperately tactful equilibrium Lardner maintained between the idiom of popular art and his own lonely authority. Contrast the fetching fake manufactured throughout *his* life and career by Damon Runyon; a manner guaranteed to dilute the seriousness, and dilate the sentimentality, of every pimp and murderer who strode across his Shubert Theatre version of Broadway.

What Lardner achieved, from story to story, was a kind of *ad hoc* reconciliation of form and formula: formula in a sense superficially familiar to us all ("formula writing" being Dummy One on the target range of American criticism) yet understood and practised by him

with a precision that one wishes might, for a moment, roost on the sights of those doughty hunters, critics and practitioners both. For Lardner understood and observed formula in the sense that brings it closest to ritual and focusing of myth: an imposed order, well defined, yet always admitting improvisation, which is used to keep the momentary (e.g., one's daily observations) in suspension; divining, thereby creating, the little terrain of a fixed present tense (represented by Lardner with the voice of popular journalism); a miniature, a kind of scale-model order, which, yes, inevitably must exclude many of experience's more turbulent and giantly demanding aspects; but which (as he deployed it) not only never denies these, but, as any good scale model must, provides us with a perspective, in small, of where our powers (i.e., of perception and adjustment, when needed) lie, and affords us some precious breathing space.

The majority of Lardner's output was bent toward reconciling formula with form—which, of course, as I have tried to discuss it apropos of his work, involves no less than the artist's incessant discovery and identification of his boundaries: the boundaries of his present strengths, as signified by the boundaries of his present performance. It is for form in any authentic sense to comprehend both these visible limits and the terrain of aspiration immediately beyond them; which, I think, is what has, not disappointed perhaps, but sometimes perplexed and frustrated me, reading Lardner's work; in which he repeatedly seems *detained* by the story-telling function itself from an exploration of his own capacities, a decision about his final authority: both to declare *his* artistic order and to explore, not merely accept, *his* domain.

And yet, his longest, probably darkest, certainly most ambitious work gives us heartening earnest that Lardner was by way of assuming his writer's full vocation before he died. *The Big Town*—it is novella-length, but displays much of a novel's copiousness and reflective march—follows the rambling but fateful career of an Indiana family group—the husband and narrator, a World War I veteran, his wife, the wife's adored, lint-brained sister—to Manhattan (thence, with astute quick-march, to that millionaires' grazing-ground of the twenties, Long Island), in search of a well-moneyed husband for the sister. The book comprises a series of encounters between this little scouting party and a succession of potential husbands and/or sources of security: a Wall Street broker, a stable-owner, a test pilot; with, in each

instance, the main chance detonated, through the avidity, double-dealing, or sheer gauche overreaching of one side or the other. The Wall Street broker proves to be a gallivanter and is thrashed by the brother-in-law; the test-pilot, the girl's most truly romantic interest, unfortunately tries out a craft of his own design and, in the brother-in-law's light-hearted phrase, "spread himself over Long Island"; the horseman is undone by the finagling of the brother-in-law and an amiably corruptible, drunken jockey. At last, the girl, abandoning the family's dream-boats in mid-ocean, elopes with an aging, fourth-rate actor, whose long-nurtured bid for prosperity and posterity is his haphazard refurbishing of *Enoch Arden.*

The Big Town does not so much resolve as bring a kind of armature, a virile consideration, to the melancholy and anxiety that glide and skitter through Lardner's lesser writings. Although in the loping tempo of his more anecdotal tales, episode pattering after episode in recognized comic-strip succession, it conveys that exciting gravity of a writer inventorying and mustering his resources to give good account for a store of experience: a feeling I cannot help recalling as slightly more common in the novel's bad old days of parochial convention.

The novella does not in any wise represent an extension of Lardner's strength, but—what can be as creatively fulfilling and, in this context, almost more invigorating—a declaration of his limitations, and an affirmation of them, even as he has affirmed those of his characters; as *his* natural and honorable and defining boundaries. He has pooled his viewpoint with that of his saturnine, ever-appraising narrator, and with a forcefulness not found in much of his other fiction. The brother-in-law not only takes a hand in the match-making pilgrimage from the start, but he blunders (the arrangement with the jockey), takes chances (beating up the Wall Street two-timer) and exposes his fallabilities. (The drinking, presented elsewhere in Lardner's sketches as a cozy social trope, is slightly but significantly more emphatic, more overtly melancholy and more dramatically and rhythmically relevant to the narrative, than in the shorter pieces.) The guarded detachment, the implicit suspension of Lardner's patented ironic drawl in other stories, here becomes more localized and assailable.

And in truth, the entire collison-course Pilgrims' Progress could fairly be labelled "an epic of vulnerability." From the title on out, it amounts to a punchinello-spirited inversion of the Balzacian premise:

the rustic's conquest of the big city. The title is a triple-layered reference: at its most obvious, to the Hoosier Hotshots's eager downscaling of Manhattan to fit their own provincial lens (e.g., by nesting in Long Island); second, to their village-instinctive bee-lining, with the sister as queen, to any succulent marital prospect or to anyone adequately disposed, and endowed, to aid them in their course; third, and potentially bleakest of all, to the village dimensions of the opulent people whom they court; the gopher-hole range of those peoples' self-seeking; the lack in those people of any impressive astuteness or even genuine power and authority, apart from that implicit in their wealth; above all—beneath all—the tackily romantic sentimentality that pilots them toward the kid sister, and leaves them open to mortal discomfiture, or actual ruin.

The Big Town offers a white blackbird of antiromantic satire, which resists enfolding the weapons—and luxuries—of its opponent. It is not an attack at all; indeed, it is a wearily smiling, slouching rejection of, not merely the vaultings, the flailing projections of romantic attitude, but the basic presumptions, the initial stances, such as are to be found even in the later, presumedly antiromantic works of initially romantic American writers like Stephen Crane and Frank Norris. Lardner seems to me one of the infrequent American authors to have sliced through the Laocöon entanglement of the romantic and the antiromantic, which bedevilled Melville and his legatees, greater and lesser; and which seems to me to involve no lapse or inadequacy at all on their parts, but rather the salients of the terrain, social, geographical and psychic, in which they discover themselves, and for which they must account, however monolithic, or haphazardly free, their construction. The brute space of the territory, versus the imperative to observe and to assess, empirically, all of its footage, represent in tandem the goad and the peremptory censor of the American writer's imagination.

After our delight in the story's progress is through, *The Big Town* offers not a soup-bone of comfort to our yearning for some tug of intensity, for some earnest of those absolutes that we can fairly see, like reassuring mesas, beyond the little caravan's last stop. Lardner, to be sure, has left our viewing space open, but he has yielded not a square inch more. The girl, at the story's end, has opted for freedom, against the negotiations, well intended and generally well aimed, of her own Mr. and Mrs. Fixit; but she is not a penny's-worth wiser than she has shown herself to be throughout the expedition; And the qual-

ity of the happiness impending for her, material and spiritual, is as doubtful, surely, as any of her available prospects along the way. Human freedom owes us none of those reassurances, any more than does the freedom with which any animal is born. Such is the leafless branch that Lardner hands us.

We need expect from Lardner no Great Theme, mounted and paraded for us like a trophy Behemoth on Founders' Day; but *The Big Town* will yield up, twirling like a shadowy eel in the aquarium case he has provided, the *motif* of human mortality, which his very wakeful scrutiny, and minimal artistic interference, have coaxed out of hiding. The narrator, with his Ph.D. from the War to End All Wars, sounds the key at the outset. When his war profiteering father-in-law invites him to join the old man's tanning company, baiting the invitation with, "Who knows?" the son-in-law retorts, "My nose knows," not referring only, we may be sure, to the stench of the tanneries. The concern is resumed *a fortiori* with the off-stage death of the test pilot; again, mutedly, by the semi-invalid dowager who engages the sister as companion; finally, resolved with a brassy flair of burlesque by the actor's courtship offering: a play about a man apparently restored from death, a World War I aviation ace. The resolution itself, the most flagrant fantasy and mask.

Lardner's situation as author keeps him this side of the veil that separates, for each author, everything present and negotiable in experience from everything potential, projected. Here, however, he has declared, not merely settled into, his situation; the outlines of this work, confirmed by his decision about what is accessible—observable, transmittable—to him, and what is not; to him, hence to us. In the case of an American writer like Lardner, no veritable representation of the world, the utter world, even as he can intuit it beyond the boundary-markers of his craft, is possible: such is the message of the actor-suitor's dreadful *chef d'oeuvre.* For Lardner was *detained,* like generations of other American writers and artists, Melville being one of the most renowned, from the pre-emption of Eternity by the weaving nonfixity of the story two inches from his eyes. And Lardner, for his part, lacked, nor would cultivate, the antirational will to override; to have, through metaphor, through epiphany, through wish-fulfillment fantasy, that immemorial birthright and prize of artists: the cake that he had eaten, was eating, would eat, *in perpetuum.* Instead, he gives over his imagination, the farthest possible attainments of his artist's

will, and, instead, makes an affirmation of his reserve, his detention in the present, that shaky *status quo,* to which, however, his eyes are now opened forever more. He comes closer, in *The Big Town,* to Nathanael West of *A Cool Million* and *Miss Lonelyhearts* than he ever came before. May we wonder—is there any point in wondering, now—given another five, six years of life to Lardner—what common waterways those two antic, self-reliant, flint-eyed ferrymen might have found?

Harry Smith

Smith's Cosmology
or
The Simple-Mindedness of Albert Einstein
or
The Poet, God & the Physicists
or
Modern Creation Myths

1.

Ein + *stein* = 1 stone

Einstein saw the kosmos as one stone:

finite spacetime

How many of us really believe in "Einstein's universe"? Oh, we may parrot jargon about "spherical spacetime continuum, limited but..."

But we intuit Infinity. We conceive Eternity.

Define→Confine.

Did Einstein confine the kosmos in order to endow it with neat, synthetic geometry?

Did his borrowed geometry determine the shape of his universe?

Kierkegaard: "They do not care that they are in delusion as long as they can complete the System—by means of the delusion."

Or, if we believe our spacetime is truly one finite thing, what shall we believe is Beyond? Other *uni*verses...*Infiniverse*...infinite numbers of continuums...which must remain forever isolate?...which may sometimes interact?

Shall we believe the physicists who say *ein stein* contains all time & space?

If so, through what does the expanding universe move?

If old Big Bang began our spacetime, shall we invoke Abraham's God?

Let there be light = Primordial Fireball.

One version of the Bang myth gives us YoYo universe, a finitude which expands to a certain limit, then coalesces by gravity into a Black Hole that finally compresses everything to a single point which ejaculates universe again. Shall we read Kabala, seeing the Zohar's "black light" as "black hole" and the tiny primal spark as the Einsteinian point to which a prior universe had shrunk?

Yet the most fashionable myth of modern physicists depicts a system which seems to have too little mass for gravity ever to put it together again—poor little Humpty-Dumpty universe, flying apart until Entropy is complete, leaving only inert vast-scattered bits in the Void where time itself will die. If Creation was a stacked one-shot deal, should we look around for Yahweh?

For what Before? What Beyond? How could things just pop into being from Notime Nothing?

It would be simpler to believe

Things always were
Creation always is
Time never began

Our new creation myths pose old problems.

And poets must not be afraid to ask the eternal naïve questions in primordial awe at mere being.

2.

The Superhero Syndrome and the Cult of Novelty interfere with our understanding of Einstein's contribution to the universe and his relative position in the history of ideas.

As transmitted to the public, the Einstein Story stars a lumpish

young man, not expected to amount to very much, who laboured alone and miraculously brought forth an amazing new universe.

Amid the media hype of the centenary of Einstein's birth came a popbook called, of course, *Einstein's Universe,* which never mentions his math mentor Hermann Minkowski, collaborator on Special Relativity theory and author of its elegant mathematics making time the fourth dimension. Although Einstein initially was unaware of the full significance of the abstract mathematics, the space-time symmetry proved essential to the construction of General Relativity theory. The ballyhooed volume likewise does not tell of Ernst Mach, a nineteenth-century Austrian physicist, whose theories of relative motion inspired Einstein. Nor would one ever learn from the presentation that *Einstein was engaged in extending Newton's work.* (In keeping with our society's appetite for novelty and emphasis on our divergences from the past, with an attendant devaluation of history, most interpreters stress the new features in Einstein's cosmic package, as if he had invented "a better way.") Actually he began with Newton's laws of mechanics, which demonstrate that the rules of motion are the same within all different inertial frames of reference. Formulating Special Relativity principles, Einstein theorized that the other physical laws must also remain the same.

$e = mc^2$ works: A great & simple synthesis. The realization of the perfectly general equivalence of mass & energy was genius, yet its conceptual ancestry may be seen in the kinetic & potential energy precepts of classical mechanics. Likewise, in evolving General Relativity theory, Einstein intuited that the equality of gravitational mass and inertial mass revealed by Newton is fundamental, constant within accelerated systems even as gravitational forces and time are altered. During years of trial & error in searching for the mathematics which would give his theories predictive reality, Einstein remained unsatisfied until he had found field equations which fit Newton's laws of momentum and conservation of energy.

Such historical frames are absent in the ballyhooed book billed as "Relativity Made Plain—The Amazing Achievement of Albert Einstein and What It Means Today."

Author Nigel Calder believes "all subsequent investigation has shown that we actually live in a universe very like that which he described, and has confirmed and developed many of the ideas latent in his equation." But Newton's description of the universe was con-

firmed for three hundred years. Does the workability of an equation mean that we should accept the metaphysical implications of its structure?

Einstein: "...no matter how we may single out a complex from nature, its theoretical treatment will never prove to be conclusive, ultimately...the process of deepening theory has no limits.

"As far as the mathematical theorems refer to reality, they are not sure, and as far as they are sure, they do not refer to reality."

Einstein realized the importance of "clean-cut separation between the logical form and the realistic & intuitive contents" of the mathematics. But cosmic caveats usually get lost among the atomic clocks, lasers, pulsars and quasars. "The bastardization of language by the scientists" also skews our perspective, according to poet and science writer Stanley Nelson: "Anti-matter, for instance, is really matter—real particles discovered after the original classification system had been established." Misuse of language is one cause of the schism between science and popular understanding.

Einstein's own exposition is easier to understand than the efforts of his interpreters. His lectures on Relativity are lucid, providing simple Euclidean equivalents where recondite geometry is involved, and the fundamental concepts are accessible to any intelligent person willing to make the effort. Selections from his letters and lectures should be available in a well-edited edition for a general audience.

The science writers count the ways that $e = mc^2$ and then fail to invoke it when we may wonder about it most. If m is always interchangable with e, matter & energy being different forms & phases of the same essence, how could there *not* be enough mass in a bigbanged universe to bring it back together? We do learn from the Made Easy book, however, that astronomers seem to be finding more of the "missing" mass all the time. Cosmological fashion lines may be about to change again.

Since Einstein, Time has been transferred to the department of the physicist, not the philosopher, the centenary author contends. The idea is insidious. For as physical time is the motion of things in space, human time is measured by the flux of events in mind. A human moment is far more complex than the physics of a star.

The scientification of culture produces brainwashing effects: Render unto Science what is Science's. The philosopher and the poet have

been intimidated into abandoning vast territories of their former range.

The abdication to science must be reversed.

The poet still has a thing to two to say about the nature of being—and the meaning of science, for that matter.

A Letter to My Son

The letter, written when my firstborn was a baby, is of my art and its perils. It emerged from despair, yet through it, I emerged from despair, by finding a liberating perspective on my life.

I had been compromising. I wanted to be a poet, but earned a living as a journalist. I had gained some early, conventional success, then had cast it away, embarking on a Candide-like quest for the ideal job. One by one, I had rejected many opportunities and possibilities and finally even the assumptions behind them, therefore losing appetite for the world's prospects, a process Sartre (I later realized) charted in *Nausea.* Thus I despaired, lamenting my failures and doubting my sanity.

In the following letter, however, I came to the image of myself as the smith, and made it stand for all art. Soon afterward I began the magazine called The Smith.

I am afraid, my son, alone and in a distant land. I have begun as I began in a letter to you when I was seventeen, years before your birth. I

did not know how I would love you, but I told you of my love; I was not in peril, but I dreamed I was a reluctant hero, and I saw myself in a silence before the sound of planes and trumpets. I wrote of my love, my ideals and the horror—an eloquent and noble letter. Should I have fought and died and left a son? I would have won grammar school immortality.

I sought to impress you. I avowed my hatred of war, and I longed for war, seduced by ecstatic visions of my apotheosis. Such is the way of man and the way of war.

I seek to impress you now. I try to be honest, but there is artifice in my honesty; I try to impart ideas I cherish, but there is assonance, alliteration and incremental repetition in my ardor. Such is the way of art: In the greatest truth there is deceit.

I write to you because my dream of war came true. I do not rejoice, yet I laugh uproariously—at how unromantic and ugly it is. It is a struggle of the spirit, you see, and I (at least the I that I cherish) may perish. It is no laughing matter, yet I have trouble taking myself seriously now; it is often better that way.

I am a lover who wars with lethargy, and I wonder if I can love enough to win. I am a poet who strives against the loss of childhood sight and the loss of purpose, and I wonder if I can keep power to impose order on the world. How long shall I remain a smith of dreams?

O yes (I cannot refrain), I seek to make this strife sound monumental, and I smile. (You should mock yourself a little, my son.) After all, it is not epic. The admission is unpleasant for me—I who seek to make my life an epic for all men to sing. Still, I console myself with the thought that true tragedy lies in paying for wisdom without becoming wise. Perhaps I am becoming wise.

I have my hopes, but you know my fears. If I cease to be a smith in spirit, what shall I be, and shall I wish to be at all?

It is a distressing question. Now, my son, beware, do not offer sympathy whenever you suspect that it is wished for. Be as a suspicious peasant, searching for the mould behind the displayed fruits. Explore the depths of mind, expose the masked emotions. Find cowardice in courage and ice in every passion. And find yourself.

My words ring strangely to me as I recall that you are only two. Of course, what I say is for a distant day, perhaps just before you are a man. You know, I have high hopes for you, no matter how hard I try not

to. It is not good to be ambitious for another. Yet I hope that you will emulate my art and be a smith, a smith stronger and more daring.

The life is not easy. You work upon a perilous pinnacle. The air is ice clear, and yet you sweat, with heavy hammer at furious forge. Your materials are explosive, your stance unstable. One slip, and you with hammer singing, so near the eden that you hoped to forge, may fall to fire.

Always, battle, and your assailants are to most men ineluctable: sometimes the terror of a vatic vision that threatens to consume you, sometimes the anguish of supernal vision that you lack the strength to shape, and, always, the struggle with yourself, the war against the world—all for art's order, for love, for loveliness and truth. My love for you is large, but if I so wish this lonely quest for you it must be enlarged impurely, with love that should have gone to others, with energy best expended elsewhere.

I falter at the forge. I turn my hopes. It is wrong, my son, I know, but o my dreams are flying with you, and with your sister.

—1963

Accidental Education vs. the Wordshop

Name three great poets who had Ph.D.'s in English.

Name a great novelist with an M.F.A. from a creative writing program.

Name two great essayists who are academic literary critics.

You can't, of course.

There's no correlation between literary achievement and advanced degrees—no positive correlation, at least.

No great writers have emerged from writing school and probably none ever will.

And the median level of learned literary commentary is duller and more awkward than average talk.

An overpopulation of universities is turning out thousands and thousands of Ph.D.'s with literary pretensions, and every diddlyshit college has a writing program spawning eager literateers who claw for

wordshop assistantships and whine for grants and hang around the fringes of the universities with the other old kids who try to sell buttonless goathair jackets for $200, or perpetrate bad quiche in cute restaurants, or produce miscreant pottery vastly inferior to that of the most unartistic primitive tribe. Many of them intend to infest the campuses for all their lives. They tell me it's comfortable. Others conspiratorially whisper dreams of cozy grantdom and adventure on the art-farm circuit.

What do the wordshopsters write? They produce pastiches of Kafka and tweedledees of Alienation. They echo eliotian dolour of cultural malaise or call diaristic jottings art, and with their shoplifted sensibilities, they will forever find Serious Thought in giggly wordgames. What else could be written from such lives?

Shelley, who was expelled from Oxford for free thinking (as I was expelled from Brown), knew the importance of *"accidental education"* for a writer, "without which genius and sensibility can hardly fill the circle of their capacities." On the favorable circumstances of his own creative liberation, Shelley reflected: "I have been familiar from boyhood with mountains and lakes and the sea, and the solitude of forests: Danger, which sports upon the brink of precipices, has been my playmate. I have been a wanderer in distant fields...sailed down mighty rivers...I have seen populous cities, and have watched the passions which rise and spread, and sink and change, amongst assembled multitudes of men. I have seen the theatre of tyranny and war...I have conversed with living men of genius." The campus literati has beheld, like poor John Ciardi, "the sad cubicles of the English department."

The best literary education is experience of life. Yet by dint of grants, fellowships, professorships, colonies, the wordshop writers do not dirty their hands with journalism like Defoe, Whitman, Twain or Hemingway: nor do they swab decks like Jack London, Conrad or Melville; nor must they suffer clerkdom like Kafka or Dante, nor Mad Avenue like Weldon Kees or Hart Crane. If they experience government, it will be to sit on arts councils, not to participate in statecraft like St.-John Perse or Chaucer.

The narrow samenesses of the wordshops lead to the same kind of writing: fashionable imitation or self-analysis. (Clarence Webster, my teacher of Donne, was fond of saying, "The trouble with twentieth

century literature is that the innermost thoughts of most people are not worth expressing.")

Why, then, do some resplendent literary figures take jobs in wordshops? Well, the task is easy to rationalize and offers easy hours—and easy young sex, for that matter—as well as new devotees. Fortunately for us, Melville and Hawthorne had to work in the Customs House.

The wordshop scribes do not care if you and I find them dull, because they write for their colleagues, the literary critics. Nothing new—Shelley complained of that, too—the distinguished deadheads "who write with the fear of reviews before their eyes...exquisitely sensible to temporary praise or blame."

In the current order of things, the academic critic is only responsive to the writer with academic credentials and connections.

The university is in a new relationship to literature. The place where literature is taught has a heavy corporate investment in the production of literature and the manufacture of literary reputations. Its influence extends to other sectors of the literary world, greasing the channels of publication for the writer with academic credentials and endorsements.

A writer without wordshop certificate may soon be in the same boat as a seaman without seamen's papers, while only a few fearless and grantless small presses carry on guerrilla warfare against totalitarian Dullness.

—1980

The Psychonauts

While Tim Leary and Dick Alpert extended their "interior journey," time and again proving man's boundless ability for self-deception, I too was drug-crazed and far from mundane cares. Unlike the happy psychonauts, I neither sought hallucinations nor knew I was to have them; I was ill, and my "expanded consciousness" was caused by massive doses of endocrine drugs to save me from violent allergic reaction to an antibiotic wonderdrug. (As you probably do not know, powerful hormone stimulants such as adrenalin, ACTH and cortisone are chemically similar to fashionable hallucinogens such as mescalin, LSD and psilocybin and, in large amounts, exert the same influence on the mind.) Anyhow, because of the innocence and inadvertence of my entrance to the mysteries, I have an enviable judgmentstance, and I shall show you the realities of the experience, against which you will

see the exaggerated claims of the cultists in severe (yet often comic) relief.

I am aided in my endeavor by the hallucinogen issue of The Harvard Review, which boasts (besides several informative if unremarkable essays) what may be the most stupendous compendium of nonsense on a single subject since Esquire's big special on sophistication. In a nearly incoherent essay there, Leary and Alpert defend and (I assume) attempt to elucidate what they call psychedelics, and they passionately debate "The Politics of Consciousness Expansion." I offer you a stunning example of their learned disputation: "One is led naively to exclaim: Will man never learn the lesson of cyclical process? Must we continue to jail, execute, exile our ecstatic visionaries, and then enshrine them as tomorrow's heroes? Naive question which fails to appreciate the necessary tension of the expansion-contraction play. Membrane contracts (etc)." The would-be heroes of tomorrow clearly see (in themselves, no doubt) "the next stage of human evolution."

Obviously in the classic state of wonky felicity characterized by the delusion of supermind, the psychonauts proclaim that the evolutionary advance will come "within the human cortex": the drugs "dramatically altering and expanding human awareness and potentialities. The charted realm lies behind your own forehead. Internal geography. Internal politics. Internal freedom. Internal control." Groping for parallels to their situation, Leary and Alpert understandably omit the story of the heroin enthusiasts who thought they had discovered a miraculous cure for opium addiction. They prefer to compare social resistance to "consciousness expanders" to animosity to the automobile—a form of reasoning belonging to the same genus as Lincoln M. Zonn's comparison (reported in another essay, "The Truth Business") of the cash register and the lie detector as beneficial tools of business.

Beware: before you venture deeper into such morasses of the mind, you must learn more about hallucinations, lest you lose your way. I must tell you of the mysteries and, unlike the cultists, give you earthy interpretations.

The mind drugs often create an inclusive feeling of well-being—exquisite delight in all seeing, even the smallest of perceptions; a feeling of animal power, perhaps well founded, for adrenal activity is high; and Learyish delusions of supermind as well. There may be

ecstatic times when grand design of all the universe seems manifest in splendor, but there may be times of anguish when all the universe seems hideous and oppressive.

My first hallucinations were distinguished by intuitions of the absurd. I was playing Chinese Checkers, a game I do not ordinarily enjoy, to take my thoughts away from my pain, and soon, even though my pain did not diminish, I found I was enjoying myself very much. The very pointlessness of the pastime became a gigantic joke to me, and I chuckled heartily every time someone moved a marble, for I deemed the activity a sardonic precis of man's cosmic condition. The geometry absorbed me, and I ceased to see beyond the gameboard; there was no normal perspective, only huge hands and splendid spheres in intricate and dizzying flights within an arcane star. Just before the contest ended, I spied a package of King Kool cigarettes, and I began to laugh uncontrollably. The package was the incarnation of human ridiculousness—the idiotic interlocking O's, the K for klass, the petty and pretentious flourishes of the "Filter Kings," the subtly magnificent asymmetry in green and white and gold, all so far from any ideal of beauty. The experience was quite like Huxley's roaring at the comedy of Detroit automobiles rolling down the highway.

The pageantry of the absurd continued, of course, when I at last regarded humans, whom I saw as some extraworldly being might seem them. I marvelled at how much they resemble toads and slugs and snakes and lizards and all the other forms of life on earth, and I told them so at considerable length. I began to be struck by the recurrence of basic forms in nature—how much human skin (which I sometimes saw as through a microscope) resembles scales or feathers, how much a hand resembles paw or talon, the repetition of certain arcs and angles (etc.), and I laughed at myself and all the strange small creatures chattering and huddling together, pretending to be the lords of creation. Someone turned on the TV for the late-night news, and when the thematic music came in dootdoots, I was oppressed by its ugliness; indeed, I envisioned a universe of pure ideas with every form for beauty balanced by a corresponding ugliness, and I felt the music as a close reflection of such ugliness, so close I thought the antiart would kill me if it lasted a moment longer. I was amused.

My vision underwent chimerical changes. Forms at first were flattened and elongated, and I do not remember any appreciable depth perception. For a time, I saw garishly, in black and white and

red only, and then, in a progression, different colors became foremost: I would wonder, for instance, at the brownness of a person, then at his redness, whiteness, blueness, etc. I later revelled in color—how each color is many and every texture infinite, and then, yes, how vital and vibrant the colors are. I progressed to emphasis on lines; I saw uncountable irregularities in every curve and angle, and my concern was with the skeleton. From the beginning, I was aware I was hallucinating, and whatever my emotional convictions, as with the music I thought might kill me, I was aware of what rational reaction should be. Always, I was impressed with universal unities and the infinity of all things.

I was persuaded to retire, and as I passed my children's rooms, I snickered at the thought of them and the very idea of human reproduction, yet I was filled with carefree benevolence as well, in contrast, I remember thinking, to the LSD-taker, who wrote a Saturday Review article mentioning his murderous impulses toward his progeny, and I concluded it is fortunate I am what William James would call "healthy-minded." Entering my room, I experienced difficulty in finding my way, the region was so strange. I saw cubistically, often an object at a time, first two-dimensionally, with only flat hues and basic plane geometry, then in manifold masses, innumerable luminous transparencies and infinite perspective. As you might expect, considerable time would elapse before I could identify what I saw. In bed, at last, with lights out, I thought that I began to make significant discoveries in physics. Into the darkness came dancing lights, bright points that pulsed and throbbed in waves. Until I realized I was hallucinating, I thought that I had become endowed with the ability to see the basic design of light, and I reasoned that such must be possible under favorable atmospheric and mental conditions. Eventually, the waves of dancing lights receded, and darkness came again, and into the darkness came great flashes of light that would for moments turn the room noonsun bright, and in the light I saw delights and splendors —marvelous geometrical forms in stasis, three-dimensional, burnt-sienna structures against amazing celestial blue.

If I closed my eyes, I encountered kaleidoscopic reds and purples and blues and greens, flowing always. Sleep was unimaginable. Outside, in the unknown night, I heard eternal drums, but eventually I realized that I was hearing my own heartbeats, which I had somehow placed beyond me. Thereupon I attempted my first and last creation

in six and thirty days of hallucinations, one line of what was to be a poem: Beware, the drums you hear may be your beating heart ...

I became fascinated by the rhythms of my body, and my position, too, seemed fascinating, so much so that I could not bear to change it. I dwelled upon how much I moved without moving visibly at all. After a time, I believed my breathing and heartbeat had become incredibly slow. I experimented. It seemed as though I could control respiration and heartbeat, and I thought I reduced them to a point near suspended animation. Even now, I cannot be positive that I could not exert some such control, though I doubt it, for I had no usual awareness of time. (On another occasion, for instance, I spent hours lost in savage admiration of the bathroom plumbing, though I thought I was only there for minutes.) During my yogalike activity, I knew a compelling, lovely vision of the universe as living order and cold geometry, austere ideas and warm radiance, with no separation of animate and inanimate, with everything the all and the all in everything, manifest in majesty in my very mind and body, even the smooth muscle working in my small intestine (etc.).

The next day when I related my experiences to my physicians, they jovially confirmed my diagnosis that their drugs were responsible but explained that massive doses were necessary to my treatment. In the following thirty-six days of steroids, I hallucinated strongly for hours every day, and my mental states were always unusual. I could relate many stories: my breakfast of fragile-green flowerstems, my friend the bee, the afternoons of moving houses with my mind, the careless insult that wounded beyond description, the sexual experiences of dreamlike poignancy. Perhaps some other time.

Generally I was happy, despite pain. When earthbound, I often fancied I was capable of mental telepathy, and moreover, I believed I was conscious of phenomena usually perceived subliminally if at all—perhaps intricacies of a swallow's flight or some involuntary motions of the lips. Erotically, I knew moments of dreamlike intensity; I was easily aroused, yet I could be content with sensual vision or the exquisite details of a caress. I knew music of touch but never symphonies of spirit, too, for I was in servitude to my sensations. Sometimes, astounding fantasies of murder and mutilation could drift through my lazy consciousness without making me at all uneasy, and yet at other times, anything could inspire dread. The absurdity of the Kool, for instance, could evoke horror, and the apparent senselessness

of the universe could create a hell. As Carlyle has written, "The Universe was all void of Life, of Purpose, of Volition, even of Hostility; it was one huge, Dead, unmeasurable Steam Engine rolling on in its dead indifference ..." Such a hell is founded on the enslavement to events and the absence of inner purpose.

True, most men do not live under the tyranny of their own perceptions; they live under the tyranny of social rules and scarcely perceive at all. Their vision is mostly on the level of identification and response, with rapidity of response being greatly valued by society. They seek the obvious distinguishing characteristics; they shun universals and full awareness of the specific. When drugs break down their conditioning for mundane efficiency, the greater richness of vision may seem like divine revelation: the less the ability to see past names, the more allure the hallucinogens tend to possess.

When the mystic believes he is apprehending the basic design of the universe, it is probably the nature of his own mind that he is experiencing: mind's tendency to impose order on the universe is explanation enough for all the apparent revelations. The belief that hallucinatory states can powerfully aid artistic creation is less easy to evaluate, however, for after all, any intense experience can be the stuff of art. The best challenge to the claim is the work of the artists who claim to derive most benefit. The Harvard Review again provides excellent evidence—four illustrations by Arthur Hoener published in sets tagged "before" and "after" (psilocybin), along with his little essay, which is distinguished by a reference to "friendly" physical space. After earnest effort, I am unable to determine which is less lacking in merit, but I see the psilocybic set reflects a far more joyous attitude. If nothing else, the psychonauts enjoy themselves.

Radiant in the morning glory of renown, Leary and Alpert cry: "Make no mistake: the effect of consciousness expanders will be to transform our concepts of human nature, of human potentialities, of existence... Head for the hills, or prepare your intellectual craft to flow with the current." Their influence is mushrooming. I do not doubt that many will be eager to emulate them despite the dangers, nor do I doubt that discoveries will come from experimentation with hallucinogens, but I doubt that the wonky psychonauts will make them.

1964

Defictionalizing James T. Farrell

James T. Farrell lived 75 years, which sounds like enough. He loved life and found love, and was acknowledged as one of the best writers of his time, a literary skyscraper with 52 published books and many works yet to be published, which sounds like enough, too. Publishers couldn't keep up with him; neither could readers. But it wasn't enough, because Farrell couldn't keep up with himself. His fiction in-series was indeed *A Universe of Time,* an objective equivalent to Balzac's Human Comedy merging with a Proust-scale rendering of subjective time, a universe expanding at the speed of Farrell's insuperable energy.

I felt cheated when he died. I'd expected him to live till 90, as he'd promised, and it had been easy to believe. I'd often seen him fake, leap and sprint in imaginary football. When he said he couldn't play on The Smith softball team last spring, I knew something was wrong—angina.

But he'd taken care of himself and gotten an okay cardiogram, making him optimistic about living long enough to finish his immense continuous narrative. Then he died in bed with Cleo Paturis, watching a Yankee game.

Seymour Krim was irked by Farrell's showoff "kid stuff," but I agree with Cleo that it was "part of his purity." Going out for an ice-cream cone was a big event. He had a bright kid's curiosity about everything. His enthusiasms were gargantuan, his knowledge encyclopedic. He was a disciplined intellectual who cherished a childlike wonder at life.

He hugely enjoyed parading his mental conquests, discoursing with near-total recall on Robespierre or Trotsky, Hegel or Dewey. I'd be a lot smarter if I'd listened better. I wasn't nearly well enough prepared in history, politics and sociology to keep up with him. Though my study of philosophy was spotty by comparison, we had more to talk about there. When I saw him last, he lent me George Herbert Mead's *The Philosophy of the Present* toward an understanding of the relation of physics and metaphysics. (I think I'll keep it because he permanently borrowed a few books of mine, and my wife's French editions of Balzac.) He'd recently written an essay on Einstein (for *The Smith/21*), and he spoke of the lucidity of Einstein's lectures, which he'd reread, and the relationship of Einstein to Newton, and the misapplications of relativity theory to human affairs.

I urged him to make selections for a comprehensive book of his essays, which are always unpedantic, economical and clear, and often humorous as well. He was too busy writing, so he wanted someone else to shape the collection.

He worked every day. "Write something every day," he told young writers. For himself, he'd a longstanding quota of a page a day, and of course many days that page began many others. When writing fiction, his idea of a recreational break was to write an essay or poem. He chuckled over literary critics such as Phillip Rahv and William Phillips, "who carried on like they were having babies when they wrote a little essay." He wrote more poems than some professional poets, and a few short poems were fine; he composed a long prose poem, *When Time Was Born,* which was his version of Genesis, a book originally intended as a prelude to the novel called *What Time Collects.* With his talent for cadences and wordplay, he might have become a successful epic poet in a different age.

The poems, essays and multi-voluminous letters and diaries were

mere by-products of Farrell's fiction. Like Napoleon, whose working habits he identified with, he was immersed in his purposes, often just briefly sleeping, immediately resuming the labor. His creation of *Universe* was not linear; he was always working at many points of his continuum. (For instance, *The Vast Present,* intended as the last volume in the series, was begun several novels before.) He saw the writer as "an active agent of change"; he saw himself as destined to convey the most momentous experience of his time. His words rivering, he knew literature as the reservoir of human experience, inexhaustable resource: "Naked power rules the moment: ideas rule the ages." He was an important source.

He made many other writers possible. After Farrell's death, Norman Mailer wrote, "I read *Studs Lonigan* my freshman year at Harvard, and it changed my life...Now I realized you could write books about people who were something like the people you grew up with. I couldn't get over the discovery." Farrell showed how everyday life could be high drama (*sans* adventuresome plots or heroic protagonists), the struggles of ordinary people made as compelling as the fate of Oedipus. Though some of his rivals found a bigger audience, he might have had the most powerful effect reader for reader. Oh, Hemingway influenced the poses of a few generations of college students, but you can find many people who say that Farrell changed their thinking about themselves and the world. Look back to Jack London and H.G. Wells for writers who had a comparably profound popular relevance. As I've been telling people that the achievements of many writers such as Mailer, James Jones, Calder Willingham and Saul Bellow derive from Farrell, I was pleased to find a more scholarly version of this observation in an old Signet edition of *Studs* where professor Phillip Allan Friedman noted that it had become "a model for other naturalistic writers," and that "it is difficult to conceive of such powerful works as Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead* and Jones's *From Here to Eternity* and such mere facsimiles as Levin's *Citizens* and Motley's *Knock on Any Door* being published or becoming bestsellers had not the trilogy paved the way." Add the word *written* before "published," and remove the label *naturalistic,* which always irked Farrell—who said he had been far more inspired by James Joyce, Proust and Balzac than by Zola, Norris or Dreiser.

Dreiser, particularly, has been cited by literary historians as a primary influence on Farrell, who admired his novels as a student and

came to know him later, when Farrell was fresh in early success and Dreiser fading. Farrell couldn't detect the alleged influence, saying, "I gave Dreiser advice; I didn't get any from him." He affectionately called Dreiser "a crank," a great writer fettered with absurd fixed ideas and a stereotypical approach to character. When Dreiser fell from fashion, Farrell championed his work in essays and was instrumental in bringing his books back into print and into historical perspective.

In his own creative direction, Farrell was at once reacting to, extending and departing from Dreiser. Contrary to what you learned in school, Farrell was not the last great exponent of American Naturalism. Rather, he achieved the first great synthesis of realist tradition and the newer subjectivist fiction, bringing psychological exploration to social forces and the facts of ordinary life. Farrell was more concerned with consciousness, attitudes, personality, subjective time, dream and the irrational than was any "realist" or "naturalist." (See the dream sequences of *Judgment Day* or *The Vast Present* time-travel in *The Smith/21.*)

The success of *Studs* became galling to Farrell. *Young Lonigan* was hailed as the greatest novel of adolescence since *Huck Finn* —and it is—and became the sort of touchstone for a generation that Salinger's *A Catcher in the Rye* became for another. Farrell was world-famous at the age of 27. The trilogy was soon enshrined as a classic. It loomed so large that it obscured his later work.

"Many who praised and hailed my work, most especially *Studs Lonigan,* have been obstacles as great as those who attacked me," Farrell complained. The trilogy, however significant and aesthetically successful in itself, is only the first and most readily available major unit of his giant series, its volumes all interrelated by character and story. As Farrell's ambition clarified and widened into a continuous narrative, "a succession of stories and stories within stories," eventually departing from chronological sequence altogether, various works were criticized as being individually incomplete. As he continued his prodigious pace, it became fashionable to say that he'd "run out of gas" with Studs and always wrote about Chicago anyhow. That wasn't true, but it was easier to stereotype Farrell than to read him.

In the censorship controversies caused by Farrell's taboo-breaking in sex and religion, he was popularly branded a life-in-the-raw writer. He was charged with obscenity, blasphemy, contributing to the delinquency of minors. He was the first to use the word *fuck* in a novel.

Pioneer in opening the way for the Sexual Revolution, he was repelled by the excesses of the Sexy Sixties. He had led in establishing the artistic justification of describing the role of sex, but it never took an overriding role in his novels; he simply accommodated it as an important part of life. He once told me, as if imparting a great secret, "You know, it isn't the *most* important thing in life."

Farrell was likewise called "a proletarian novelist." His best-known characters were of the working class; he was active on the Left, and the Marxists embraced his writing. He depicted the forces of social upheaval, and his novels were full of intellectual currents including Marxism; yet he never set theory before experience, nor ideology before art. When Edward Dahlberg exhorted him to put a storm trooper type in *Judgment Day,* Farrell simply laughed.

Many of the critics were doctrinaire, of course, tending to ignore what they saw as "atypical" works, such as *Ellen Rogers,* which Thomas Mann called the greatest love story of the 20th century. It, *Boarding House Blues* and *New Year's Eve/1929* constitute a neglected trilogy that Farrell regarded as one of his principal achievements. Likewise, *This Man and That Woman,* another work of which Farrell was especially proud, may be one of the best short novels ever written. Although Farrell isn't usually praised as a stylist, I could find only one sentence that might be improved (whereas it would be easy to improve almost any page of Updike). The story is taut to the point of poetry, a study of marital tragedy that objectifies the uncertainties of our responses to our immediate world, even to our closest partners in life.

Thus Farrell wrote with "purposes, not *a* purpose." Nonetheless he was usually interpreted according to sociopolitical considerations. And I believe that changes in the political situation often determined the responses of reviewers. Farrell lost various admirers when he condemned Stalin's purges and the assassination of Trotsky. He lost the Trotskyists soon enough, too. After World War II, he was a UN-minded supporter of the Marshall Plan, an Adlai Stevenson democrat. (Stevenson, by the way, once nominated Farrell for the Nobel Prize.) Critics such as the *Partisan Review* crowd, who had published him and sung his praises, began to use his name as a ritualistic putdown, belittling other writers for Farrell-type naturalism.

He never joined the Literary Club: "The world of literary success is groggy with its own emptiness." His was an independent, conscientious personality, which could be abrasive in his abiding impatience

with pretense, pomposity, ignorance. Norman Mailer once remarked, with rueful affection, "I love his books, but I can't talk to him." Farrell, telling of his first meeting with Mailer, said Mailer had smugly confessed ignorance on various matters Farrell viewed as vital, and Farrell had railed at him for willfully remaining ignorant. Given Farrell's intellectual pugnaciousness, he probably accelerated his alienation in the literary world during those middle years when he had a drinking problem. Farrell said he overcame it "because I had to; I couldn't let it interfere with my work." His work probably had suffered over a short span—marital problems, financial problems, the worsening drinking problem and worst, the loss of all his manuscripts in a fire. He persevered. He worked fanatically.

All the years I knew him, he was always sober, drinking only a glass or two of champagne on ceremonial occasions. His literary enemies persisted in saying he was a hopeless alcoholic. When I met him in 1965, his literary reputation was at low ebb. And he'd recently made the biggest blunder of his literary life, an error that now must be corrected if future readers are to understand his work as a whole.

He'd left his steadfast publisher, Vanguard, lured by a lucrative four-book contract dangled by Doubleday. With *The Silence of History*, Doubleday was ballyhooing the beginning of an important new series, *A Universe of Time*. The hero of the monumental novel, named Eddie Ryan, is really Danny O'Neill of the earlier novels. Farrell had changed the names of all the characters in his continuous narrative!

That tactic to promote the idea of a brand new Farrell had been the idea of a literary agent, he once told me. Another time he said he'd thought of it himself. Anyhow he'd been persuaded that his novels would attract wider notice if uniformly seen as a major new project, a departure. It was, in fact, a new phase, as Farrell was replacing chronological sequence with a more complex interweaving of stories. Also, *A Universe of Time* was new as organizing concept for his fiction. But *The Silence of History* wasn't a departure from Danny. And *A Universe of Time*, Farrell later said, includes the earlier novels as well.

The Silence of History met with mixed, somewhat muted reaction and sold modestly. It wasn't generally seen in right perspective to his life's work. Farrell himself had created an obstacle even as the critics continued to be "obstacles." Some even managed to say that his next novel, *What Time Collects*, was about Chicago and the Irish-Americans, which it wasn't. "They fictionalize me," he protested. When

he realized the critics were set in their clichés, he regretted the renaming but felt stuck with the confusion during his lifetime. He hoped that literary scholars would straighten things out after his death. The task is extensive but relatively easy (for instance, George Raymond of the later novels is Ed Lanson of *Ellen Rogers* and the Danny O'Neill novels); I expect that Edgar Branch, his biographer and chief bibliographer, will address himself to the problem. Ideally, Farrell's huge series would be published in a set with the names changed back and the volumes in proper sequence (many closely related works, such as the trilogy beginning with *Ellen Rogers,* were published at widely different times). Farrell envisioned such a solution, but that might be difficult in these times when one finds more literature at a rummage sale than in a bookstore.

Another mistake was leaving Vanguard, which had kept his books in print and been supportive. But Doubleday's dollars had seemed the cure for his financial woes in face of two ex-wives and a son who wanted to be a doctor. And Doubleday (a firm called Triplenight appears in some of his humorous sketches) had promised promotional clout. However, when the publisher saw the first book failing to pay off, commitment waned. The editors declined his smaller "atypical" novels, notably *New Year's Eve* and *Judith,* and were at first dubious about publishing his short stories and his big novel, *Invisible Swords,* which delineates New York and its suburbia and the intellectual middle class. And Farrell called the editors "obstacles" too, seeing their resistance to the "atypical" as reinforcing his "typecasting." Moreover, there was the editing itself. With one novel, all the vernacular of the dialogue was changed into grammatically correct English! Of course the right lingo was restored, and Farrell laughed, uncomfortably. *Lonely for the Future,* the third novel with Doubleday, was much truncated by poor cutting, to which he had acquiesced out of fearfulness about the fate of future books. His position was at its weakest, and he was ashamed.

The vicissitude was complete when he began to publish his work in little magazines again—*The Smith, Triquarterly, Southern Review.* My small press published *When Time was Born* and *New Year's Eve.* The former had the distinction of being viciously mocked in *Time;* the latter was favorably received almost everywhere. A *New York Times* reviewer even suggested that Farrell might deserve the Nobel Prize after all. A new generation of writers was discovering Farrell through

the little magazines and finding kinship with his stance. His comeback had begun.

After The Smith had agreed to publish a book of his stories and, if necessary, *Invisible Swords* as well, Doubleday decided it wanted them. Invitations to lecture gradually increased. By the last year of his life, about a dozen years later, he was deemed ready-for-prime-time again, as TV reintroduced Studs.

During the period of relative neglect some of his writing indirectly benefitted. *New Year's Eve, Judith* and assorted short stories had been on the shelf for years, and he'd periodically dusted them off and polished them. Farrell mainly needed an editor to slow him down at times, to ask him to look backward at his work long enough to refine fully. He was a master of his craft (I wonder if any fiction writer has read his best writing without learning something about pace, for instance). His lapses perhaps most often were due to personal exigencies. He'd hurried with his early novel, *Gas House McGinty,* for example, and he said, "I wish I'd had another six months; it should have been a great book." He explained that he'd "needed to publish a book then." Another flawed but remarkable book is *Invisible Swords,* containing serious sections that are overly explicit about what was implicit in the situation, or momentum-slowing restatements of ideas powerfully presented earlier. Farrell had agonized over the story of a couple with a retarded child and a failing marriage. (One of his own sons was an idiot, the other became a doctor.) He thought of it as one of his most ambitious books, one of his more important books, and knew he might have done more with it. It might have become a great book. The distance between good and great is not quantitatively large—as little as a few words in a lyric and, who knows, as little as, say, 5 percent in a big novel. But Farrell had no Max Perkins handy.

A pity, for Farrell was easier to work with than most writers. He was a good critic, and a good critic of himself, and unlike writers who never develop, he could not only accept valid criticism but act on it. Once he had been made aware of a problem, he'd try to solve it and would usually succeed. If questioned on the necessity of a line or passage, he'd often just think for a moment and then say, "You're right. Take it out." It was as simple as that.

He was open to change elsewhere in his life. He had ideas, ideas, ideas, but no fixed ideas. He was opinionated in a sense, but always willing to review his opinions. I recall mentioning Saroyan, whom

Farrell cheerily dismissed, saying, "The poor fellow is *genuinely* affected." As soon as I began a defense of Saroyan, Farrell said, "I should read him again." Skilled at polemics, he could defend a judgment fiercely; but months, or even years after a few of our disputes he returned to the discussion to say, "I was wrong about that." His motto was: "Never defend an error."

His world-view thus evolving continually, he escaped biases, broke many conventions. He sought ways to convey experience and to attain grand perspective on humanity. He edited reality. With humor and compassion, he revealed people as they are—the sadness in most lives, the disparity between dreams and the world. Rendering their thoughts, he frequently used clichés. The critics said he wrote in clichés, but they shortchanged him. He used clichés powerfully to show how most people rely on them to interpret experience, how they act according to powerful stereotypes.

Many of his protagonists are women. He was a sort of feminist, an admirer of Willa Cather and a partisan of the neglected H.M. Richardson, whom he deemed a great novelist. He was long concerned with the problems later spotlighted by the Women's Movement. He was capable of entirely convincing description of the minds of women. Of course he was a careful observer, but his methods were at times extraordinary. Cleo Paturis, his companion and lover, said he'd frequently pretend to be asleep when she was doing something by herself or talking to others. He did that to me a few times, too. Other times he asked questions like an investigative reporter, or psychiatrist, or scientist. When my wife was critically ill, shortly after an operation for a brain tumor, he was much worried but asked her questions as clinical as any doctor's about the degree and location of her pain and the precise mental effects of the surgical insult. He was, like Zola in the whorehouse, taking notes.

This odd coexistence of the clinical and the compassionate resulted in what I think of as supreme empathy. He created many characters far removed from himself in personality and situation, and he became them.

That completion of empathy is a prime source of his artistic power. Many of his characters are drab, stultified, sometimes loutish or pretentious, yet we become more concerned with them in his writing than we do in life. Behind the all-too-real absurdities and pettiness of

people's attitudes, Farrell imparts clear sight of the ideal, of the unfulfilled human potential.

He was a great writer.

My 17-year-old daughter recently started reading a drugstore-bought copy of *Studs*. Amazed and delighted at how he depicts the thoughts and talk of children, she exclaimed, "I never knew he was such a *good* writer."

I'm optimistic. As Farrell helped to "rehabilitate" Dreiser, the time has come for Farrell.

This is a beginning.

Can Poets Conquer the World?

Consider what poetry was and what it has become. From Genesis to Robert Creeley. In the beginning, it was everything; now, it is as nothing.

For the poets of Genesis, poetry was the whole world and all mysteries of being. It was the history of a people, definition of humanity, and book of knowledge; law and government, philosophy and theology, nutrition and hygiene, and guide to love. Such was true of the primal poets everywhere. This earliest literature was not only the entire character of many peoples but one of their primary entertainments too.

Now Dr. Welby's in, poetry's out. The modern world has devalued poetry, and the poets have devalued themselves. Poetry is deemed irrelevant to the technocratic state. In a society of specialties, the poet has become an obscure practitioner of a curious specialty which itself

is fragmented into species and schools of such hyperspecialization as "alternate syntax" poetry, which includes one-word and no-word poetry, and diaristic verse, which includes whatever happens to be in front of you at the moment, and freudverse, which merely borrows from the psychologist, whom the primal poets made possible.

This process of the reduction of the provinces of poetry was abetted by the poets themselves gradually abdicating their original place, leaving psychology to the psychologist, history to the historian, ethics to whomever will have them, entertainment to the masters of new media.

As all the arts, poetry has collapsed about its esthetic center. Premier estheticians of the 20th century defined painting as but a genus of geometry, architecture as abject functionalism, music as a funky form of mathematics, dance as a blueprint for democratic self-expression, poem as word-scheme. In reality, these philosophers unwittingly were just reflecting the scientification of the culture. The arts were treated in terms of technology, and the technology of art was held supreme. Thus, means became ends, decreed the only proper purpose of art—"the poem should not mean" and whatnot.

Literature was contemplated as design, as certain formal esthetic relationships of verbal schemata, which could be seen geometrically or even perhaps algebraically, expressible as formula, vector field or equation. Many artists willingly accepted the assigned role.

The academies incorporated wordshops, institutionalizing the technology of literature. Concomitantly, it has become fashionable to criticize a poem in terms of design decision, how well it is engineered to fulfill *its* intention, if any. The intention does not matter, nor does the matter matter. For who looks to poetry for joy, knowledge or guidance?

This outline of poetry's social decline is an over-simplification that can convey more truth than highly classified complexity. Although the evolution of poetry arrived at valuable perspectives on alienation, poetry became further alienated and devalued in the process. So, too, in collapse about the esthetic core, the intense purity of Wallace Stevens was attained, a poetry for poets, most remarkable for what it does not contain. The big-scope poets like Ezra and St. Eliot were hopelessly intellectual and of narrow access. The easy prosy panoramists, chiefly William Carlos Williams, spawned jot-em-down schools of careless, trivializing journalists labeled poets. Likewise

imitators of e.e. cummings fabricated a bit of his idiosyncracy without his humor or intelligence. Meanwhile, Eliot led to reams of dull cerebration, and milligrams of Pound were reiterated, while other toilers found Stevens' narrowness sans his beauty. Though never winning immense audiences, the big daddies of modern poetry all did some things very well. Their immediate successors aspired to less and achieved it.

But the brief drum and howl of The Beats and the antiwar screeds of the 60s brought flickers of poetry into the big arena. Now vital young poets emerge, stressing access, contact, mass epiphany. They seek to regain the lost dominion.

The specialists have made a mess of things.
The people wake to the sterility of the technik dream.
They have seen the present, and it doesn't work.
This is the time for poets to reclaim the world.

— 1975

Breakthrough Fictioneers

Fictioneer: I invented the word but do not claim it. No great intelligence was required to conceive it. The label was inevitable, inventable many times independently.

Obviously I am entertained to see the term employed in the solemn title of an attempted avant garden (*Breakthrough Fictioneers*, edited by Richard Kostelanetz, Something Else Press, 1974), especially as I used *fictioneer* humorously and perjoratively in The Newsletter on the state of the culture, describing the technik mentality at work in literature. The word, of course, chiefly suggests engineer, but perhaps also marketeer and racketeer.

The technology of literature is assembled here—gimmicks, gambits, games, schemata, tricks with cameras, cutouts, graphs, computers, tapes—art with its analogs in Dirty Tricks, data processing, systems

analysis, game plans. The fictioneer is to esthetics as the nixon is to ethics.

I recommend this book. Nowhere can the symptoms of our malaise be seen more clearly than in these products of our ahumanization. These fictioneers and fictioneering are the facts of life, the styling of the future. Thingdom come.

Kostelanetz repeats Tzara: "No more words." The anthologizer announces that some of the "new fictions...depend on unfamiliar linguistic signs, while others eschew language completely." With impassioned dullness, he elucidates: "The point for now is this: How can anyone acknowledging the continuing metamorphosis of modern art dare dismiss or classify any radical work, such as those collected here, as 'not fiction'?" Awk. By similar reasoning, one may call Leonardo's "Madonna of the Rocks" fiction, along with the Unicorn Tapestries, the frieze on the Parthenon and the white papers from the White House, and that's okay with me.

Kostelanetz alternates between delusions of critical grandeur and literary hypochondria, as if to prove a venerable thesis of Freud. One of his complaints is that publishers are "currently proscribing pronounced artistic originality," whereas in some ways the opposite is true. Novelty is given precedence over substance. Instead of righteous rigidity a la French Academy, we have anxious arbiters, confused amid the changes, determined not to "miss out." Soon they will publish these fictioneers.

Of the writers chosen by "Mr. End of Intelligent Writing," only a few are much concerned with human beings. One finds, for instance, "Parallel Intervalic Sets" by Kostelanetz himself, an arrangement of numerals somewhat less fascinating than a register tape from Superdrugs. Voila! And now a concretinism by John Barth, "Help," a stereophonic narrative for authorial voice, a blah barf two-pager mainly consisting of serried incarnations of the word "help." Other stuff in this accumulation is Minimalist, neo-Gertrudian or neo-Dada, typically replete with the tedium inevitable in the relentless quest for cleverness. For instance, in "Incidents of Mirror Travel in Yucatan," which is a description of setting up a mirror in nine places of Yuc, Robert Smithson, who is also a minimalist sculptor, writes:

Chronos: How can we talk about what exists, when we hardly exist ourselves?

Coaticue: You don't have to have existence to exist.

Then, too, Dick Higgins has translated "Post Scriptum" by Jean-Francois Bory, which boringly "And after the subject, the verb, followed by an adjective agreeing in gender with the subject. The same subject, an adverbial pronoun, an auxiliary verb, an article, a noun, an object of the predicate, an indefinite pronoun and an infinite verb. An adverbial clause, a prefix, a verb in the third personal singular of the indicative," etc. With photographs. Want to play?

Carol Emshwiller at least writes rather well of herself in "Eohippus," which employs the antique artifice of story-within-story while displaying here monogramatic doodles cutely. Yet some real poetry and poignant moments, notably variations on the theme of "Oh I did think I would be loved by now, what with the nights so wet and warm (or famous)."

Irene Schram contributes two poems, each subtitled "Stage Direction for a Three Act Play in Three Verses (pantomime)." One is "Color," the other "Machine Family," which was published by d.a. levy in 1967. Hers are no mere products or by-products of dehumanization but provide some perspective on this phase of humanity—automation, animation by stereotypes, "Machine Family":

light flash "Sleep" flash "Sleep" Mother child yawn. Mother "Click" Father "Click" Mother "click Father" click child Bleep Blip Blip curtain.

Of course, Kostelanetz contends that fictional material need not be "primarily human" but "merely a certain linguistic style and/or formal device."

Many of these things look like modern poetry and usually would be classified as that, as they scan and even fulfill Kostelanetz's own description of poetry as a "concise, static, generally formalized statement," thus proving perhaps that poetry can be fiction. But Beowulf had more.

Solemnly the editor suggests "that 'fiction' can most generally be defined as a frame filled with a circumscribed world of cohesively self-relating activity." Like a playpen.

Pure play's the tickle, leap and dancing into art, sure. But this Something Else stuff is more like the antics of an international convention of spoiled brats.

— 1975

The Non-Rationalist

I, too, am a non-rationalist. The mind's infinite and less plottable than the star starhordes.

But can you find any true poet who would contend that poetry is a merely rational function?

Not only true believers in the reptile-mammal-blybrain embrace "magic, myth and intuition." Forsooth, this characterizes lyric poetry across the ages.

Snyder, Bly, Wright and co. are "anti-rationalist and anti-technological" and so am I. In this we have affinity. Without identifying with this group regarding particular approaches to poetry, I nonetheless feel a general sense of brotherhood. For this insistence on the whole mind with all its wilderness, this vision of the a-human nature of civilization, sense of the importance of life beyond man is characteristic of today's poets generally, not just one school of them.

Before Bly ever read Neruda, St. Eliot was writing of brown fog and unhealthy lungs. Certainly, Bly and Snyder eschew Eliotan tapestries of erudition, but did Eliot lack the sense of mystery and awe, the beauty of the inhuman?

Regarding the "associative leaps" Miller Williams associates with the Bly school, well, one can find grander leaps in Pound than in Greg Orr, whose grasshoppery Bly cites. Associative leaps are found in all indelible poetry.

So too Wallace Stevens—a different perspective on the primitive, but nonetheless he drew from it, for magic and myth. When Williams lists such qualities as being characteristic of a certain school, he indeed gives a correct picture of its collected attitudes, values and priorities. Yet the most important of these qualities exist in *a commons of poetry.*

Even Frost, who was not freudized, created symbols sinking far into the unknown, as poets did before Id was christened. His poetic means may be in disrepute with the current poets Williams surveys but show various common attributes in regard to intuition, nature and sincerity. There can be no proprietorship of poetry's primary functions.

Contemplating the school Williams profiles, his comparisons to the 19th century Romantics are enlightening, though not always in the intended ways, as the actual methods of the modern poets are sometimes inharmonious with their ideals.

Consider a few examples.

Comparing Snyder to Keats seems like comparing a starling to a nightingale, as the former's quoted wisdom can be fairly—and more aptly—stated as, "Well, here we are on a ship near the equator and WOWWOW dig that big fat Moooon in the middle of the sky." Williams says Snyder addresses, draws upon, answers, uses and depends on intuition. Really? Rather in this case Snyder seems to rely on clever design decision to conceal the lack of substance:

the full
moon
in the center of the sky

This is trivially ingenious and works in its little way. It isn't ingenuous and certainly not "anti-technological." Instead *such treatments are applications of a technomentality* with counterparts in minimalist art and advertising.

Likewise, David Wagoner, whom Williams cites in the same connec-

tion, doesn't seem spontaneous and intuitive; to the contrary, the quote about starry geometry and its axiom is predictably professorial, studied, formal. In the same context, Williams' quoted lines from Laurence Lieberman about owls dropping feathers in our heads are not so succinctly put, but maybe we can find some heavy freudstuff in those droppings.

Who wants to settle for such paltry fare? To place these poets in juxtaposition with great poets of the past is rather like comparing McDonalds to baked bean suppers or even the cuisine of kings.

Williams himself shows imaginative power. The modern poem becomes a do-it-yourself kit. The reader is given an associative set to play with, and Williams plays with it very well. The poetic elements are in weak linkage or free float. One can create one's own relationships. One can do one's own thing.

The technik world-frame is all too evident again in Michael Yates, "one of these new romantics," as he states: "This message is a map which shows my exact coordinates at this moment. Follow it. Try to find me." This game is somewhat less intriguing than Stackpole's Wilderness Survival.

Concerning the wilderness which the modern poet "prefers," Williams makes artificial distinction, for he compares them only to their 19th century English kin, not their American precursors. There was no true wilderness in England then. But what of Thoreau?

1975

Publishing and the Destruction of Values

"Will the commercialization of publishing destroy good writing?"
—James T. Farrell in *New Directions* # 9

"Barabbas was a publisher," said Robert Giroux, echoing Byron.

The Giroux of Farrar, Straus and Himself is a substantial, gray-haired gentleman who speaks slowly, precisely, earnestly.

"Wall Street money is said to be death to publishing for this reason: There isn't any known connection between good writing and commercial success."

Oscar Dystel, president of Bantam Books, speaks slowly and earnestly, too: "I find it offensive for one side of the publishing industry to question the businessman's influence." The chief of the biggest paperback company could play the part of Dutch Schultz. His competitors say he's fierce and tough, yet they envy and respect him more than any

other executive in the field. Some of his employees regard him with solicitous affection, fearful that his gruff manner might be misunderstood by outsiders. "Good business judgments applied to marketing, etc., are only going to help works of literature," Dystel believes. "The name of the game is to get books into the hands of as many people as possible."

Maurice Girodias, the courtly pornographer, observed: "The paperback publisher is trying to absorb the hardcover publisher, just as the primitive warrior will eat the heart of his enemy in order to acquire his spiritual qualities."

Trade publishing (the bookmen's term for general-interest hardcover publishing) is now almost completely dependent on the paperback industry. In today's literary marketplace, seven out of ten books lose money on the sales of their trade editions. Sale of the paperback reprint rights is the major source of profit. Increasingly, therefore, decisions on whether or not to publish a book are made by a determination of whether or not it is a candidate to be a mass-market paperback.

"We've seen the destruction of the book as a revered object; now it's a worthless object. This is an image of the world," Girodias said. His Olympia Press publishes mostly pure hardcore erotica, but it was also the first to publish Jean Genet, William Burroughs, Samuel Beckett, Vladimir Nabokov and Henry Miller—such novels as *Naked Lunch, The Ginger Man, Candy* and *Lolita.*

Robert Giroux, whose company Girodias calls "a good example of a good old-fashioned publishing house," is in fundamental agreement with the pornographer. "We traffic in *reading matter,* not books," the distinguished editor-in-chief complained. "This is an illiterate country.

"Book publishing is hardly related to literature, but the bloodstream of publishing is literature—the books that always stay in print.

"Most things published are *ooks.* Books without the B; almost-books. If you analyze the list of any big publisher, you find predominantly *ooks.*"

In 1946, in a New Directions article written before the era of the Big Money influx to publishing, James T. Farrell predicted: "If Wall Street becomes seriously interested in the book business, Money, Pure Money, will become the boss. And if the contradiction between the commodity and art does seriously intervene in writing, it is most likely

that it will come as a result of this kind of concentration. For when the book business becomes more intimately involved in the general structure of American capitalist economy, the general interests of the capitalists as a class will supercede the specific interests of the individual publishers. Then these interests will dictate to the big publishing companies." When Farrell prophesied, most publishing houses were still individual enterprises.

Dr. Mace wants to help you

Today book publishing has moved into the mainstream of American Big Business. More than thirty publishing companies are on The Big Board; most of the important firms have "gone public."

The movement toward economic centralization shifted into high gear in the sixties. Dozens on dozens of book publishers were acquired by other companies, communications and electronics companies buying leading houses—most notably, perhaps, RCA taking over Random House (which owned Knopf and Pantheon) and CBS absorbing Holt, Rinehart & Winston. The pattern of major acquisitions continued, with the New York Times adding Arno Press (reprint facsimiles) to an empire already including Quadrangle Books; Lord Thomson of Fleet purchasing Arno-competitor Kraus Reprint; Time-Life taking over Little, Brown; conglomerate National General Corporation (film production and exhibition) buying Grosset & Dunlap, which includes Bantam Books, for $49.2 million in cash; IN-TEXT (International Textbook Company) swallowing John Day and Ballantine; Dun & Bradstreet snaring Thomas Y. Crowell; Bobbs-Merrill owned by Howard W. Sams & Co., owned by ITT; Esquire purchasing Globe Book; Litton Industries, a giant electronics-anchored comglomerate, pulling in D. Van Nostrand and Chapman-Reinhold to merge them with American Book Company; etc., etc. Naturally firms such as Xerox (overlord of Publishers' Weekly), CBS and RCA have remained active company-buyers, and large publishing firms such as Crowell Collier & Macmillan, Harcourt, Brace & World and McKay are pursuing vigorous diversification programs, ingesting a sizeable menu of companies, from data-processing firms to bookstores. Even some of the smaller, very literary houses have got into the game—Viking buying Grossman,

and Farrar, Straus & Giroux buying Hill & Wang and Octagon Books, a scholarly reprinter.

The Conglomerate Style

Robert A. Gutwillig is the chief editor of World Publishing Company—which is owned by the Times-Mirror conglomerate, which, besides its newspapers, owns vast timberlands to manufacture the paper to supply its nine printing plants, which produce something like half the telephone books of the nation; and it also owns at least 11 book companies, most significantly New American Library and World.

Robert A. ("Affability's my middle name") Gutwillig is a deceptively droll fellow who resembles Woody Allen—a lean young man who is known for being able to lean hard on his colleagues. ("Do anything you want—I'm not trying to tell you what to do—Just Get That Book.") The fast mover talks of The American Growth Syndrome:

"This is an expansionistic country in every area, and no less so in book publishing. '*Grow and prosper*' is the motto. Publishing becomes *products*, not books and authors. This is not a danger brought on by the Paperback Revolution but by society—living in this mass society—operating a business which shouldn't be operated as a business."

William Targ was editor-in-chief at World when it was taken over by the Times-Mirror group. He soon departed, becoming top editor at Putnam.

A solid, gray-haired man with sunglasses and colorful shirts, Targ could be taken for a movie director.

"Book publishing thrives on the effort and imagination of creative people—not engineers or financial experts—though publishers do employ and are guided by professional controllers. Publishing houses frequently lose their character and personality when they merge with bigger firms or are taken over. The personal touch, the intimacy between the publisher and author, diminishes, and the character of the house is submerged and diminishes gradually. This is not always true—the house of Knopf is flourishing handsomely under the Random House-RCA umbrella, but that is a notable exception. In that case the editorial department has been allowed total autonomy, the fullest freedom," Targ said.

"But good editors very often leave when their firms are sold to the big complexes because confusion, desperation and misrepresentation become the order of the day. Monstrous and fiscally irresponsible behaviour often ensues because of the entrance on the scene of non-publishing executives with push-button minds concerned more with conformity and so-called good business practice than with the factors that produce good books. Conglomerates are stultifying and live by slide rule, and they place too many strictures on individuality. One of the evil practices perpetrated by some takeover people is to secure the services of industrial management consultants, who prepare dossiers with recommendations on how to streamline a publishing firm. Usually chaos results from these impressively prepared, thick reports. No one can know less about the problems of authors and publishers than these research people. I've seen some of their reports, and they are preposterous and almost comic—and they are fantastically expensive.

"A book publishing firm must be more than an asterisk on a balance sheet. It must be respected for what it is, and the peculiar morés of the business must not be tampered with," Targ asserts. He hastens to say, "I'm all for free enterprise and the profit system, not to mention good regular dividends for the stockholders, but book publishers should not be confused with, say, TV-set, canning or nuts-and-bolts manufacturers."

But Paul Rodman, as a young publishing executive of the newbreed, believed otherwise, viewing "books as products to be marketed in the same way as nuts and bolts or tomatoes."

Only two years later, looking backward from the vantage point of an upstate New York farm where he is devoting himself to woodworking, Rodman regarded his former self with some chagrin. The matters that had seemed important to him as the quick-shooting sales manager of Johnson Reprint (Harcourt, Brace & Jovanovitch) had become difficult to remember: "Perhaps these things evaporated so quickly because their place was a tenuous one to begin with, although the situation generated positive vibes to those in it"—the publishing whirl.

Yet his former self had proclaimed: "The age of the conglomerate is here."

Many editors agree with Bill Targ's appraisal of Knopf as the happiest house under conglomerate rule.

Alfred A. Knopf, in his twilight, sold his distinguished firm to Random House, before the RCA takeover of Random. He sold it because there would be no family continuity. His son, Pat, had gone out on his own, founding Atheneum.

Bennett Cerf gave Knopf assurances of editorial autonomy; these assurances have been kept. Yet the character of the firm probably will be changed, little by little, as old editors depart and others are hired. As the editorial turnover is very slow and low, however, compared to other firms, Knopf has retained much of its Knopf character.

When Knopf stepped down, though, he was not even consulted about the choice of his successor.

His replacement as editor-in-chief is Bob Gottlieb, almost unanimously considered "a very nice guy and a good editor," despite a certain reputation for being "a Lynn Nesbit fashion conduit" (a reference to his professional relationship with the literary agent known as "The Fairy Princess").

"If anyone tried to tell the people in charge here what to publish, they'd simply walk out and form their own company," said managing editor Ashbel Green, a tall, fair man who is sedate and vaguely feline. "In fact, until CBS took over Holt, I would have generalized that it was better to be taken over by an electronics company than another publisher."

Even at Knopf, many books are published "primarily because of commercial considerations," Green admits—books such as *Defending The America's Cup.* Some are hobbyist, some are for "sheer entertainment." Even Knopf is influenced by what the subsidiary rights might sell for. "I guess we're schizophrenic about that," the editor mused. "It certainly would be a principal factor with any Commercial Novel or Non-Fiction Entertainment. These, after all, are the books which enable us to do the more serious ones. It's hard to generalize about how many such books we publish, for some books are potentially both cultural successes and commercial successes, and in a list of our size, I can't guess what goes on in the mind of each of the editors.

"At many publishing houses, the textbook departments carry the trade department," Ashbel Green continued. "Trade publishing doesn't have a very high profit margin, and I see no reason to doubt what is so often said among publishers: The sale of the subsidiary rights is the primary source of profit."

A Gentleman's Profession

There was a time when book publishing was the occupation of a man of good family who was of a literary inclination. For him, it was a profession first and a business second. It might or might not have been important to make a profit, but the percentage of profit was unimportant. Therefore, he could quite freely indulge his enthusiasms, regardless of the promotability of the manuscripts.

—This is the myth, and there is great truth in it.

A Gentleman's Profession by Fred Warburg, who was an English publisher, is the book that exemplifies the idea.

"It's still thought of that way in England," said Robert Giroux "—the concept of a Privileged Relationship between publisher and author. And there is a belief that, in the old days, at firms such as Henry Holt and Little, Brown, publishing was not a business but a profession."

Giroux recalled Margaret Anderson, who edited *The Little Review,* having chided a group of writers: "In my day, we talked about Writing, not Money."

"It was in the 1950's," Giroux said, "that perhaps for the first time we saw Big Business—Big Money—dominant in publishing. Yet I think money interests have always been there. In the 19th century, Marie Corelli was the equivalent of Jacqueline Susann," with such suggestive novels as *A Romance of Two Worlds.*

Indeed, publishers in the United States have acknowledged kinship to Barabbas. George Doran (Doubleday, Doran) called his memoirs *Chronicles of Barabbas.* William Jovanovich, president of Harcourt, Brace & World called his book *Now Barabbas,* without acknowledging Doran. "It goes back to Byron, of course, who was referring to The House of Murray when he said, *'Barabbas was a publisher.'* "

In England, where there are quite a few gentlemen, many publishers can trace their lineage in literature for generations, Giroux observed. "Mark Longman's great great grandfather rejected Byron." Looking far off, he lectured on the history of publishing: "The publisher, as such, didn't exist until the 18th century. Bookstores originally published books. There was no distinction between store and publisher. Then *Johnson's Dictionary* was such a costly project that a combine of booksellers organized to publish it. (Sam Johnson, by the way, was a *professional* writer—one of the first notable men of letters who *worked.*) Within the next ten years, firms recognizable by name emerged.

"Before that, there was another way. Alexander Pope was financially one of the most successful authors of all time. He sold *subscriptions* to his translation of Homer's *Iliad*—and raised the equivalent of one million dollars, with one of the most successful books in history. He was his own publisher."

Giroux believes in keeping books in print, an old-fashioned practice. Today most books of most trade publishers are "remaindered" (sold in bulk at a fraction of list price to such dealers as Marboro) within a relatively short time, frequently less than a year after publication. In a sense, many are remaindered before they are published. It has become increasingly common practice for informal but firm agreements on the remainder price to be made before the books appear. "Our proportion of keeping books in print is high—as high as allowed by fate, life and circumstances. This is almost a barometer of successful publishing," said Giroux.

"More and more, in the past ten years, publishers have taken books because of their subsidiary rights possibilities. This doesn't fit in with my philosophy of publishing. As a business principle, it's sounder to get a book you can keep in print."

At Harcourt, where Giroux was once editor, C.K. Ogden's *The Meaning of Meaning* initially sold only 500 copies, he recalled. Eventually it sold 50,000 copies. "If you're a good publisher, you're slightly ahead of taste. People have resisted new ideas. This is still true. Works now classics—Genet, Marcuse—were in print before they were talked about—and sold poorly."

A young editor at Farrar, Straus, Michael di Capua, said, "Farrar, Straus & Giroux is like a family. There is a small staff of editors, rapport, hard work and teamwork—a feeling that individual strengths complement each other."

The sense of pride characterizes the house. "We looked at last spring's (1969's) list, and we felt very proud of ourselves," di Capua said. "It included books by Malamud, Susan Sontag, Lowell, Hesse, Jean Stafford, Flannery O'Connor, Edmund Wilson, Isaac Babel, Solzhenitsyn, the complete poems of Elizabeth Bishop and Randall Jarrell, and the first books of fiction by Leonard Michaels and Larry Woiwode."

Di Capua conceded, "Of course, we have to show a profit, and a small portion of our books are published primarily to pay the rent

—but even then *we never publish a book we are ashamed of.* We would not publish a Jacqueline Susann."

A friend of Roger Straus, the founder and moneyman, gave his opinion of why Roger is in publishing: "Roger is a snob, and he simply loves to impress his fashionable friends with the wonderful writers whom he publishes. He'd never sell. And there have been many offers." Moreover, his son, Robert, is in the firm, well-regarded and apparently devoted. It seems as though the firm will stand as an independent for a fair time to come.

—A vanishing type. James T. Farrell warned: "Book publishing, if it is to play any progressive cultural role at all, constantly demands new figures. It needs men with disinterestedness, sympathy for new currents in writing, liberality of view, cultivation and love of books. But such types now usually become employees, rather than publishers, and they are likely to exert a decreasing editorial influence in the future."

Speaking intensely, Bob Gutwillig amplified: "Today the editor is an employee who knows he's never going to own part of the publishing house he works for, knows it's unlikely he'll ever have a share of the theoretical fruits of labor (although there might or might not be stock option incentives), knows he's being bought for a period of time. What will happen in his company is way beyond his ability to determine—whether it is bought out, liquidated, changed, merged with some other kind of publishing house. The past situation was security but at best only a reasonable amount of money. Now salaries are higher. It's more exciting, in a spurious way—wheeling and dealing with editors and authors—a lot of action which is circular, not forward. More money. Extreme pressures. Editorial staff in constant transition. *This damn success syndrome is a contagion of our society."*

The Paperback Makers

"I'm not a gentleman, and I don't pretend to be one," said Jerry Gross, chief editor of Paperback Library. He is a dark, intense man who is said to be hated and feared by his employees and competitors.

"In paperback publishing, there's no pretense," Gross said. "Every-

thing is raw and in the open. Competition is fierce, and we still use clubs in trading.

"We never had an old boys' club, as they do in trade publishing. Paperback editors are judged by their acuity. Most of them have lower middle class origins. Most of them didn't go to fashionable schools. It never was a condition of employment to have an East Side residence or to be a graduate of a certain college."

Gross said paperbacking is a business of tremendous pressure —"tremendous pressure to meet a monthly quota of titles, tremendous pressure on an editor who has two bad years in a row."

Paperback Library was founded by Hy Steirman, a smooth, hearty, mustached man who looks like a pirate. After building it into an aggressive firm where sales soared in geometric progression, it was merged into the Kinney conglomerate. Less than two years later Steirman left as publisher, in a typical individual vs. conglomerate situation, after once having defined the difference between individual enterprise and conglomerate rule as "the right to make your own mistakes" or "the ability to swing." Steirman said he's in publishing because he loves it ("The money isn't that important in itself; to me it's a game").

The man whom Steirman respects most in the paperback industry is Bantam's Oscar Dystel—"he gets nearly every very big book; he's still the best man in the field."

At Bantam, a National General Company, Dystel says paperback publishing has influenced the character of trade publishing. "Trade publishing *is* dependent on subsidiary rights income—reprints, book clubs, movies, translations—but I wouldn't say a trade publisher *has to be* dependent on this income. The average buries the successful trade publisher."

As to the Big Money impact, Dystel concedes, "There is a danger that if a publishing company becomes primarily profit-oriented, the process of developing new talent can be damaged. I do not believe this happens today. The large financial companies are aware of the danger. It depends on how enlightened the top men are; it depends on the strength of management. Of course, once a company goes public, its responsibilities might change. Still, I don't believe they'd stop publishing books they'd take a chance on. In publishing, you never know what will succeed. You never know when you are coming forth with an embryonic force in letters or a source of tremendous profit."

Hy Steirman says, "The paperback industry saved hardcover publishing."

Bill Targ of Putnam's regards it as a generally beneficent influence too: "The effect of the Paperback Revolution has been the greatest single blessing for publisher and author of our time. And of course it has done much to increase the literacy of Americans.

"In the majority of cases, a publisher will lose money on the sale of his general books. He makes up his loss, when lucky, from subsidiary income—which is mainly from leasing paperback rights and from book clubs. The manufacturing costs and overhead and other expenses including promotion, advertising and publicity and royalty make it almost impossible to earn a profit from the sale of the physical book alone. There are very few businesses where such an odd situation prevails," Targ commented, while lunching at the Algonquin.

"I don't mean to be facetious," observed Kyrill Schabert, at the American Book Publishers Council, "but whether there is a profit or loss on the book may depend on whether or not you include all the lunches at the Algonquin."

The Literary Marketplace

The legendary editor Arthur Cohen once said that there is no other product in which so much tender loving care is lavished as in a book.

But what happens to it when it is sent forth to the marketplace? It goes into competition with more than 30,000 other titles published that year. It is likely to survive in the bookstores only for a season. No matter how good it is, it may never come to wide public attention.

Editors and publishers are agreed that the typical book remains in the store only as long as the original order lasts. For this marketplace has shifted to the *rapid-turnover supermarket principle.* Unless a book comes into strong demand, it will not be reordered when the initial supply of, say, ten copies is gone. It has to make way for the new titles coming in—and the titles that are moving quickly.

At the American Book Publishers Council, Kyrill Schabert said, "There is an accelerated tendency for a book either to become a bestseller or to do nothing at all."

All publishers complain that it becomes progressively difficult to sell books in, say, editions of 8,000 to 25,000 copies—profitable but not

bestsellers. As to the bestseller lists themselves, editors and publishers generally consider them an abomination that should be abolished. Putnam's Targ, whose Mafia novel *The Godfather* by Mario Puzo was high on the bestseller lists as he spoke, complained: "I should guess that sixty percent of the listed titles are not true bestsellers and do not reflect actual sales and popularity. I'm for forgetting the bestseller numbers game. More books will profit from the elimination of these spurious charts."

Editors are also disturbed because review space has not kept pace with expanded publishing, even while publications such as the Times Book Review have become swollen with book advertising.

It is axiomatic in the publishing world that the books supported by major national advertising are the ones that receive prime exposure in the review media. In the Times Book Review and other important media there is a direct relationship between advertising and reviews. The large firms, which are the largest advertisers, have the least difficulty in winning the attention of reviewers; the small independent publishers and all but the largest university presses such as Harvard's are virtually shut out of the Times Book Review. (By contrast, the New York Review of Books gives very considerable space at least to the offerings of academe, but this is one of the secrets of its success, for more than half its advertising comes from the universities.)

The principal determinant of whether or not a book will be reviewed in, say, The Times is the size of the publisher's original investment, and the books that receive major backing comprise only a very small percentage of the publisher's list. The important variables in the equation are the subject, the reputation of the author—and the reputation of the publisher. Nonetheless, the economic factor is primary. The books predictably previewed and otherwise publicized in Publishers' Weekly are the big investment books. This is true because PW is, foremost, a bookseller's guide—a guide to books that will sell well, a tool for profits. Even the asterisks in its very *listings* (meaning "major national advertising") influence the orders of the profit-minded bookstore managers and command the attention of reviewers. These are the books likely to be bestsellers, the books that will be talked about.

Bright-young-charming Christopher Lehmann-Haupt, daily book critic for The Times, says he is guided by the PW forecasts in deciding which books to review. PW's short advance reviews are typically favorable, bland and enthusiastic on small provocation. No doubt this ten-

dency is not the result of conscious intention: PW simply serves the book industry. (But some publishers say PW's previews do not give much attention to the smaller firms that do not advertise very much. One said: "Let's put it this way: If I don't advertise, I might or might not get publicity, but when I advertise, I know I'll get it.") Whit Burnett, the venerable editor who founded *Story* magazine, believes the PW forecasts are undependable—"not all that reliable"; and World editor Gutwillig says the practice of reviewers earnestly following the PW puffery is "ridiculous."

Yet the problem remains: poor Lehmann-Haupt has 300 books on his desk, and which will he review? He takes his responsibility very seriously and is pleased if he chances on a worthy book by an unheralded writer. *Chance* rules the process. Lehmann-Haupt found *The Book of Numbers* when he was just rooting around in the pile. He was intrigued by the title (which he says is one way unpromoted books may come to his notice), and the jacket told him that it was about the numbers racket and written by a poorly educated Negro waiter. "It was a Doubleday book that I had heard nothing about—which with Doubleday may be a good sign. It was poorly packaged (this generally means that the publisher does not regard it highly), but in the case of Doubleday, it's another good sign." Thus Lehmann-Haupt found a book. But how many good books went unnoticed?

Lehmann-Haupt said that he is also guided by what his literary friends tell him. Who are his literary friends? Two editors complained that one of his literary friends is Lynn Nesbit, the fashionable agent, and they deemed him to be in her orbit, reviewing "too many" books by her writers. One editor said, "This is typical of Times reviewing. In the Sunday Book Review, they've been incredible in this respect: they've never seemed to know if they're assigning a review to a man's wife, his best friend, or his worst enemy. This is a fact of life beyond irritation."

All editors say and many reviewers admit that the imprint of the publishing house is another signal factor in reviewing. Jerry Gross of Paperback Library gave this illustration: Sol Yurick's *The Bag* was published by Trident, a Simon & Schuster-owned company which does not have a particularly high literary reputation. It sold about 20,000 copies, for it was helped by a rave review by Thomas Lask in the Times, and Times daily book critic John Leonard profiled Yurick. However, Gross said, the book went unreviewed in many places —for a complex of reasons due to its controversial nature; but he is convinced that it

would have received notice by publications such as Harper's and The Atlantic had it been published by a house such as Viking. He believes *The Bag* could have found a much wider audience.

Hy Cohen, senior editor at Grosset & Dunlap, is saddened by the books that get lost. He remembers a book called *Progress, U.S.A.* by young novelist Guy Daniels: "It was wonderful, spontaneous, joyful, exuberant." It received no major reviews. Cohen tried to interest John Leonard in reviewing it, but Leonard apparently never caught up with it.

At Knopf, Ashbel Green smiled, thinking that he is lucky to be working for such a distinguished company. "Almost every book we publish is at least glanced at by the more important reviewers. After that, the book is on its own. It's a tribute to Alfred A. Knopf. The imprint doesn't mean much to sales, but it means a great deal to reviewers."

With new titles proliferating, *"everything is signals,"* Times Book Review editor John Leonard said "—the kind of signals we get about a book. If Knopf, for instance, is the publisher of a first novel, we approach it with a certain expectation . . . because of what they've done in the past. The *imprint* is certainly an important factor. We're influenced by it." What if Grove, Not E.P. Dutton, had published Ed Sanders' new book, *The Family* (Charlie Manson's)? Leonard said, "It's possible that an editor might look at it and make a quick decision, the wrong decision—that it was just another counterculture ripoff."

Christopher Lehmann-Haupt was pleasant in pensiveness, as he searched his soul: "I don't believe I was influenced by my wife (Natalie Robbins) being a Random House editor. I wouldn't review a book just because it was published by Random House." Nor does the well-dressed critic believe that New York Review gives preference to Random House books just because NYR editor Barbara Epstein is the wife of Jason Epstein, a top editor at Random House—even though the Random House-Knopf-Pantheon combine accounts for more reviews (and reviewers) in NYR than do many other substantial publishers added together.

The next most favored company is Farrar, Straus & Giroux, publisher of NYR executive editor Elizabeth Hardwick. The simplest and most generous explanation of such pheneomena is that the literary world of the editors is limited, and they are merely acting according to what comes to their attention through their relationships. In any event, NYR editor Robert Silvers would not say that his publication

reviewed so many of the books of these companies simply because they publish so many more good books than other firms.

Under these conditions of competition, where so many books fail to come to attention, where most have a very limited selling time in the stores, where so many general interest books are not kept in print, a writer is under nearly constant economic pressure. If he can Make It Big, the rewards will be great, but it's one New Ballgame after another if his book is here this year and gone the next. Under different publishing conditions, a generation ago, his book might have been kept by many retailers for two years, and eventually it might have produced a reasonable income for both author and publisher. If he further gained some literary recognition, he would gradually be able to build up a backlist of his works that would produce income year after year. Instead, he is now under almost constant economic pressure to *produce.*

While Putnam's Bill Targ said the Paperback Revolution has contributed more to the average author's income than any other factor in history, which is true, the situation on the paperback market has sick aspects, too.

If he is fortunate enough to have his book picked up for reprint, a first novelist might receive $1,500 or $2,000 and would be lucky to receive $3,000 (after the publisher takes his share). The going price on novels that have not sold very impressively in their trade editions is not very high. But are his royalties likely to exceed the amount of the advance some day?

Unfortunately, his book is likely to be dead the month after it appears. Competition for display space is incredibly formidible in the paperback outlets. The typical paperback remains on the racks for a month or less; Paperback Library's Jerry Gross estimates three weeks; Bantam's Oscar Dystel said his company could keep some titles on sale for two weeks.

Speaking from his experience at New American Library, Bob Gutwillig said: "You're competing with yourself, driving your own titles off the racks each month." Other publishers agreed. Ideally, some might like to retrench, publish fewer titles. But who would be first to make such a move? It could not be negotiated because that would be against the anti-trust laws, and as Gutwillig said, "It would be against the American growth syndrome."

Hy Steirman said, "The industry is characterized by overproduction and over-distribution." *Books are produced like steers to be slaughtered monthly.*

Making It

"This bit about being a fine writer, a dedicated actor, a movie-maker with Modern Museum notions of heaven, a musician because you truly love it, a painter because you die when you smell the color? Don't make me laugh—it's not good for the stitches, dad. This world (nuts, this rutting universe!) is a Mt. Everest, kiddo, and you've got to start climbing now or the dumbwaiter of this age will slam you down into the black basement."

Thus, Seymour Krim Put It Where It's At in a much talked about essay called "Making It," published a decade before Norman Podhoretz's book of the same name.

Sol Yurick posed the problem for a serious writer today: *"How can he Make It without perverting or being perverted so that he fits into the things which most people understand?"*

Talking over coffee in the Automat, Yurick said, "If you want to Make It, do what The Establishment needs."—That's the message young writers are getting from the lit market.

"Podhoretz-type cliques exist to make the product safe." Yurick is an unorthodox Marxist who has a full rabbinical brown beard. He's finally Made It (though not by his definition) at the age of 42. At least his third published novel, *The Bag,* sold moderately well, and his reputation as a strong, young writer has been critically established. The paperback version of the title is being published by Pocket Books, which, like Trident, is owned by Simon & Schuster. (At S&S, as at Dell/Delacorte-Dial and NAL/World, the paperback subsidiary can get the trade edition by topping by ten percent the highest bid made by another firm, although Bantam does not do this with Grosset & Dunlap.) Anyhow, for Yurick, these factors add up to a decent living now from his writing. He still hasn't made the big score, and he thinks it took him a long time to get where he is.

Many promising writers drop out, Yurick says, maybe ten years after their best efforts in the hope and vigor of youth go unrecognized, after their gifts to the world are spurned.

"I tell young writers, if they're talented, that they're bound to Make It if they keep at it long enough. But the social pressures are antithetical to their work. People ask, 'What do you do? Where do you get published?' And they ask your wife. It's all right when you're twenty-one, but when you're thirty-one...and thirty-five..."

Hy Cohen, a book editor who worries about the fate of young writers, wonders what will happen to Guy Daniels, whose novel went unnoticed last year. It's unlikely that Daniels will be able to get a good advance for work on his next novel; he probably won't be seen as a good financial investment. He'll have to take on a multiplicity of other projects, such as translations, to get bread, and will he have enough time to write his next novel?

Most trade editors like to think that few good manuscripts go unpublished. "The process of discovery is so expert," Robert Giroux said. He recalled that *Billy Budd* was not published until long after Melville's death and that *Moby Dick* was a financial failure while he lived. Giroux admits the possibility that such things can still happen, but he thinks it's unlikely.

Is the process of discovery truly expert?

Most writers don't think so. Hy Cohen is a book editor who doesn't think so.

Cohen believes that the editors reading incoming manuscripts should be well-paid senior editors. Instead, at most firms, it is the lowest editorial job, where the least qualified editorial assistants (the stereotype is of Smith or Vassar girls) try to cope with a staggering volume of manuscripts.

At Harcourt, Brace & Jovanovich, for instance, there are two girls who do this work full time and a third who has this duty about half time. Even so, sometimes the pile-up gets so bad that everyone pitches in—even the secretaries; even deputy editor-in-chief Edwin Barber. With good intentions but less than ideal conditions of receptivity, it is easy to imagine how good work might get lost.

Nearly all the manuscripts that succeed at Harcourt, as at most other firms, come via established agents. And most top editors read mostly what comes from the top agents.

At Knopf, the editors believe they have had fairly good luck plucking gems from the slush pile. There is an atypical system. There are no first readers. Unlike many managing editors who are exclusively copy chiefs, Ashbel Green is also traffic director for incoming unsolicited

manuscripts. He evaluates many himself; he makes all reading assignments, routing each manuscript to the editor who specializes in that area. "We do bend over backwards to give anything a chance, and there's a glow of delight around here when something is discovered." He is the direct link between the editorial and production departments; he supervises copy, maintains schedules and is responsible for the list a year ahead. Moreover, in the current Knopf catalog, there are 18 books that he edited. "We also do quite a bit of scouting," he said, "and I do some myself."

Most top editors believe their firms are publishing all the outstanding manuscripts received by their houses, but they never see much of what comes in, for as Gutwillig said, "The agents are the controlling factor in this business."

It would seem that an aspiring writer should try to get with one of the leading agents, but most of the agents find their writers through recommendations from those who already are their clients or through recommendations from editors. Thus the design is circular. If a writer is not in New York, if he does not have influential literary friends ...

Of course, many of the good agents do a fair amount of reading, although they tend to delegate the reading of unrecommended manuscripts just as the top editors do.

Bob Lescher, who is currently "a very hot agent," said: "It's conceivable that an unpublished writer with a good novel could locate the right publisher even before an agent could, but not likely; moreover, a manuscript submitted by an agent probably would be read first. When a work has finally aroused the interest of an editor—of course, that's the point when the agent can be of even greater help, since no single writer can ever be that knowledgeable about the terms and practices of the trade."

Editor Hy Cohen at Grosset & Dunlap said, "I hope I never reach the point when I deal only with the top ten agents."

The agents who have direct access to top editors form a small elite. Besides Bob Lescher, the agents whom editors most often talk about are Sterling Lord, often called the single most successful agent in New York (Helen Brann is associated with his agency); Monica McCall and Lynn Nesbit (wife of literary critic Richard Gilman), both under the Marvin Josephson Associates agency (now both at ICM); Candida Donadio (with Robert Lantz); Cyrilly Abels; John Schaffner; Georges

Borchardt; John Cushman; Harold Ober; William Morris (with Don Gold); Julian Bach, Jr. (with Mary Clemmey): Harold Matson; Ronald Hobbs; James F. Seligman and Oscar Collier; and Carl Brandt (Brandt & Brandt). Of the big agencies, the Ashley Famous People (Kay Brown, Phyllis Jackson, Roberta Pryor, Audrey Wood), McIntosh & Otis, and Collins-Knowlton-Wing (Perry Knowlton) are important. Lesser known independent agents who are widely respected include Theron Raines, Marie Rodell, Mary Yost and Shirley Burke. Hy Cohen said a young writer would do well to get with a lady like Cyrilly Abels, who agents the Ramparts writers.

The top editors are agreed that mediocrity rules the day in publishing, and writers should act accordingly. A manuscript rejected by a firm when it comes unsolicited might well be accepted if it is sent by an established agent. Publisher Hy Steirman said, "Most editors are not qualified to be editors. I'll tell you about the journey of a mediocrity: He comes with a presentable background, and I hire him. He turns out to be inefficient and unimaginative, and just when I'm thinking about firing him, he parlays his experience here into a more respectable job at another firm. Once I asked an editor-in-chief why he hired a certain mediocre editor. He replied that he's on top of the situation anyhow and doesn't need anyone very good. The real reason is that he doesn't want anyone too creative, too strong. *Mediocrity breeds mediocrity.*

"Most editors have no confidence in their own opinions, and the editors are highly imitative. If a book on a certain subject succeeds, there's soon a ridiculous spate of books in that area."

Gutwillig said, "Publishing is a small world and desperately needs new blood. Openings are limited. It's nearly impossible to get in, nearly impossible to get out. Once you're in, you can bounce around from one company to another for the rest of your life. *Nothing succeeds so much in publishing as failure.*"

The Literary Establishment

New York is the literary capital of the Western World, and the editors and writers at the literary center are predominantly Jewish.

Thus there is much discussion not only of the New York Establishment but of the Jewish Establishment. In print, the Jewish Establishment is usually more politely and inclusively referred to as the Liberal

Establishment; in conversation, the term *Jewish Establishment* keeps occurring.

Much of the talk comes from Jewish writers and editors who do not consider themselves part of the Jewish Establishment. Indeed, as they define it, it includes only a small fraction of the writers and editors who are Jewish. Often it is described as having the "twin centers" of Commentary and Dissent, with its intellectual authority dominating the New York Review of Books and Partisan Review. Indeed, young critic Richard Kostelanetz asserts that this "lit mob controls book reviewing...and anything remotely resembling serious thought."

Is William Phillips, editor of Partisan Review, a tool of the Jewish Establishment?

This is a question humorously posed by Phillips himself.

"Hannah Arendt said we were part of the Jewish Establishment," said Phillips, whose 1930s name was Warren Phelps. He laughed. "She said that because of the review in Partisan criticizing her Eichmann book."

Phillips told her, "You're crazy."

Stroking his chin, he said, "She said that the Jewish Establishment was attacking her book. She meant that people played the game of the Jewish movement—Jewish power."

He moved across the room to evade a large, fierce potted plant. He pointed at it accusingly: "It keeps scratching me." Pushing sixty, he has stark-white hair, but otherwise he is almost a model of eternal youth—his face almost unlined and his skin clear and fresh, his body slim and in good tone. He was about to leave for a Swedish summer.

"The term 'Jewish Establishment' is dangerous unless we define it carefully. It sounds conspiritorial, as if it is in control of our cultural destiny. That isn't true."

Phillips asked, "How powerful is Norman Podhoretz?—His power is less than is commonly supposed. What does he control? Many non-Jewish writers have more influence. Dwight Macdonald has more influence ...so does Robert Lowell...Elizabeth Hardwick..."

"You're running out of names, William." Startled, Phillips turned to gaze wonderingly at Caroline Rand Herron, Partisan's managing editor. "I was only teasing, William," she said. She is a tall, dark young woman with a reputation for efficiency.

Phillips resumed: "When someone is called a Jewish writer, I ask myself, which part of the brain is Jewish? Which part is literary?" He

grinned and shrugged. "Is Norman Mailer a Jewish writer? Norman Mailer is not a Jewish writer.

"If you want to be high fallutin: insofar as literary activity is centered in New York, Jews have been active far out of proportion to their actual numbers (just as blacks *haven't*). But to what extent are Jews acting as Jews?

"The effects of the Jewish intellectual have been: interest in European literature, international-mindedness, a radical political influence. But all this is more ideological than ethnic. It does not amount to *Jewish Power* in the same way that Black Power is Black Power.

"I don't know of any critic acting as a Jew, except perhaps in deep, subtle, ultimate spiritual terms.

"Until recently, literary criticism was an activity of people who were not Jewish. The New Critics didn't include a single Jew. And no one is doing literary criticism from a *Jewish* point of view. Lionel Trilling is not a Jewish writer. You might as well call Allen Ginsberg part of the Jewish Establishment." He giggled.

"Or Nixon part of the Quaker Establishment," Caroline Herron volunteered.

"People talk of the Literary Establishment—which is misleading," she said. "But the people who say the New York Establishment is Jewish are making even more of a distortion."

Phillips amplified: "*The New York Establishment* has no meaning. Who do you mean, the New York Review people? But Partisan is sometimes said to be part of the New York Establishment, too, and I don't even particularly like the New York Review. And so to the idea that it's dominated by Jews—why, Elizabeth Hardwick (its executive editor) has a great deal of influence there."

"It's sometimes called the Hardwick Review," Caroline said.

"Or the New York Review of Each Other's Books," Phillips said.

"People sometimes put Partisan at the literary center," Phillips said, "but what does Partisan control? My power is very limited. George Plimpton's power is very limited. Of course, a publishing house which has an interest in what it publishes as literature is influenced by what appears in Partisan. In this sense, it has Intellectual Authority."

"Especially to people who don't know any better," Caroline Rand Herron offered—"I mean, most publishing people aren't familiar with many other literary magazines."

"Even this Intellectual Authority is limited," Phillips said: "Susan Sontag's camp piece didn't create much of a fuss in Partisan, but Time magazine picked it up and the rage was on. When she'd told me that she wanted to do the article, I agreed because I thought it would be rather interesting, but I had no idea of the furor it would create. Time magazine, though, has a sense of what's promotable —they're hungry for something new, and they watch us."

Richard Kostelanetz sees Partisan as virtually *closed* and unresponsive to new writing: "Entry to Partisan or Paris is through personal contact in the literary society, personal recommendation."

The young critic, dining at one of his favorite spots in Chinatown, fondles his bit of a beard thoughtfully: "The Establishment establishes trails leading to itself." He views it as a chain of in-groups, whose members always are mentioning each other in print. "This is what literary friendships are all about."

At Knopf, Ashbel Green said, "The Establishment is used as an excuse by people who are not successful. It exists as a loose arrangement of people who know each other and primarily deals with fiction and literary criticism. (I'm not part of it; my interests lie elsewhere.) But I think they have influence—maybe not on a specific book but on a man's reputation."

Kostelanetz believes "the Jewish Establishment" has acted to molest and inhibit his reputation. It is common gossip in the literary world that he incurred the indignation of leading critics, such as Podhoretz and Irving Howe, when he wrote an essay in Hudson Review several years ago on the dominance of Jewish writers and critics. He catalogued instances of books by Jews being reviewed favorably by Jewish critics and of books by non-Jews being reviewed unfavorably by the same critics. After the essay was published, the many anthologies edited by Kostelanetz were little-reviewed and he enountered increasing difficulty in placing his articles. For instance, he commented, "I was in the Times Book Review ten times between 1963 and 1965, and I haven't appeared there since."

The talk is that the members of "the leftwing lit mob" used their influence to "keep Kostelanetz out" of many publications. Renata Adler, The New Yorker writer who became Times movie critic, is another writer reputed to have provoked their wrath. In a piece called "Polemic and the New Reviewers" (included in a Kostelanetz anthology), she analyzed the homogeneity of the New York Review crowd

—the "reciprocity along the reviewing circuit," the continual printed avowals of mutual admiration.

Thus the tale is told that they "wanted to get rid of Renata Adler." When she became a Times critic there were indeed omnipresent rumors that she was about to be fired—a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy. Kostelanetz recalls: "Robert Silvers (New York Review editor) said she would be fired. As it happened, she'd received tenure one hundred days before." Renata Adler is nc longer a Times movie critic. Yet, despite the rumors, there is no evidence to dispute her contention that she left of her own choice.

Similar charges against the Jewish critics were made by Barry Callaghan, Toronto Telegram book editor and son of the 30's novelist: "While this fashionable enthusiasm for Jewish writing goes on, while third-rate Jewish writers are boosted in New York, many writers of talent and integrity are ignored."

Novelist Sol Yurick also believes that a Jewish Establishment exists and is dominant in American letters today. He speaks of the "old schoolboy syndrome"—the Chicago enclave of Saul Bellow, Theodore Solotaroff (New American Review editor), book editors Aaron Asher and Hal Scharlatt, and he draws lines of interrelationship between them and "Robert Silvers and the New York Review people and the Partisan Review people and the Podhoretz clique." A lot of them began as leftist-socialist writers on the outside and entered the Big World by "getting on the I Am an American Bandwagon," this being reflected in "the whole Jewish humor stik," he said, "and such styles as liking baseball" (begun by Lionel Trilling). In forming a literary club, with rites of passage and rituals of homage, they imitated the manners of the Anglo-Saxon-lineage establishment that they displaced. And they became more Anglophile than the preceding Eastern Establishment had been. Note, for instance in the New York Review, their deferrence to the interminable dissertations of the Cambridge dons.

Brooklyn poet Menke Katz, born in Lithuania, laughs and says: "Well, they aren't really Jews."

Paperback Library editor Jerry Gross, also speaks of "the Jewish Establishment" and says it was deliberately unresponsive to Yurick's *The Bag*, which contains a comic character said to be modeled upon Podhoretz. "It never was reviewed in the publications of the Liberal Left. It was too strong for them. It was *the* Proletarian Novel, but it never reached its true readership."

Gross concurs that "the Jewish Establishment has taken over the game of the Old Boys' Club" and become Anglophile. He is contemptuous: "I'm a Jew-identifying Jew."

Yet Jews are no longer deliberately hiring each other in publishing, Gross said, "although at one time this was true. In fact, it's quite the opposite, now that publishing is predominantly Jewish. Whereas at some companies there used to be a House Jew, now there's a House WASP."

Yet anti-Semitism is not quite dead in the publishing world, some editors contend. One editor asked: "Can you show me a Jew in a high editorial position at Doubleday, Scribner's, T.Y. Crowell, Dodd Mead or Little, Brown? The firms are still predominantly non-Semitic. But even good, gray E.P. Dutton finally decided to get with it, now that Jews are in, and they hired Hal Scharlatt—their first Jewish editor-in-chief, while the rest of the house is still WASPish."

How is the Jewish Establishment related to the rest of the Establishment? Well, for instance, NYR editor Robert Silvers is an editor of George Plimpton's Paris Review. "They exchange power," Kostelanetz observed.

Yet although the Establishment tends to be unresponsive to writers on the outside, there is some openness. Knopf's Ashbel Green said, "After all, there are some new faces every year."

William Phillips said, "I'll tell you how Susan Sontag came to write for Partisan. I met a pretty girl at a party." Of course, she was Susan Sontag.

"How does one get to write for Partisan?" she asked him.

Phillips was annoyed. He thought for a moment. "I don't know," he said, "You could try asking."

So she asked. She wanted to write a review, and Phillips told her to give it a try. When she turned it in, it "wasn't the greatest" review he'd ever seen, but it was edited considerably, then published. Thus Susan Sontag got a start.

"You see, it happens through parties—the literary society," Kostelanetz said.

"The trouble with Kostelanetz is that he's frustrated," Phillips said.

"The Establishment is not monolithic. Philip Rahv left Partisan in an editorial fight, and Richard Poirier entered. Jason Epstein and Norman Podhoretz do not speak this year because they are on opposite sides of the school decentralization controversy." Plimpton does not particu-

larly like Podhoretz, and the Partisan Review people don't particularly like either Podhoretz or Plimpton.

The Establishment is simply the interrelatedness of the world of literary success.

James T. Farrell said: "The world of literary success is groggy with its own emptiness."

Is Robert Silvers in orbit about George Plimpton, or is George Plimpton in orbit about Robert Silvers? Does Podhoretz go round the New York Review, and does the New York Review go round Podhoretz? One must look to modern science for the answer.

Astronomers no longer say that the moon goes round the earth (it does, but the earth also goes round the moon): they orbit about each other. It is not like the Solar System, where there is one center. It is like a galaxy, with revolution about a center that is the greatest concentration of stars—the Milky Way of Making It.

Relative positions change, and the stars dim and die. Beyond, there are galaxies in creation.

Another Way

Girodias—the very name sounds like an exotic and sinister flower.

Slim, graying, handsome Girodias could be envisioned as a marquis in one of his sophisticated bondage tales.

"Before I came here, I was simply existing in Paris publishing forbidden books. I was forced to leave—not officially, but I was kicked out not too gently."

With an ironic sense of righteousness, Girodias explained his actions: "I think pornography was valid in *Lolita* and *The Ginger Man*—pornography against the rigidity of the Establishment.

"From the days in the early fifties when books with four-letter words were first published openly, something profound has happened. I'm reasonably proud of my role in that. The Sexual Revolution is more valid than any other phenomenon in the Western world since the Industrial Revolution."

Now that Olympia Press has moved to New York, Girodias has discovered two writers, Barry Malzburg (*Screen* and *Oracle*) and Ronald Tavel (*Street of Stairs*) whom he believes are potentially as important

as Henry Miller or Burroughs. While he describes his operation as "very individualistic—never a big corporation," he has a conflict. Looking quizzical, as he often does—an urbanely comic *Who knows?* expression, he mused: "I'm divided between my love of money and my own ideas." He may be moving toward bigness—"Olympia's getting to be a vast pornographic international multilingual operation," he says lightly and sardonically. He now has subsidiaries in Germany, Holland, Japan, England, France, Italy, Sweden and Denmark, and as others have done before him, he's fondly contemplating the invasion of Russia.

Maurice Girodias believes that his publishing of *Lolita* may have been his single most socially influential act as a publisher. "Lolita was officially admitted through U.S. Customs in 1957. It was the first case of a book whose contents were so explosive in its time being published in America, and it proved to be a big break with tradition. *Lady Chatterly* and *Tropic of Cancer* were to follow."

The strange and beautiful Girodias believes there will always be room for the small publisher: "The active creative individual who can put out a book of cultural importance in three months or even three weeks can find ways to coexist with the giant combines."

Today pornography is pouring into the literary mainstream. Girodias said: "The Sexual Revolution has entered Normal Literature once and for all. There is no possible retreat. *Couples* and *Portnoy* are comparatively devious and hypocritical examples of our evolution."

Ah, but now that Random House and Knopf are exploiting the Sexual Revolution, will Girodias be able to compete?

"I was getting a bit tired of publishing dirty books anyhow."

In any event, there seems to be no immediate threat to his financial success because he has his foreign subsidiaries. "In each of these countries (except in Scandinavia, where they need good erotica, not stupid pornography), the situation is the same as it was in the United States five years ago." Furthermore, in each nation, Girodias has made cooperative arrangements with vigorous publishers. By the time Girodias' erotica might be confronted by homegrown competition, he said, "there will be strong feedback from foreign literature to here."

Girodias is a thoughtful man with a sense of wonder:

"How fast things have evolved! And from now we are going into things quite different! Because of the immensity of the break we have seen, it is possible to imagine an immensity of change in coming years.

There is a succession of generation gaps—of distances in geometric progression."

Into the Future

"It all makes sense—this destruction of values, this chaos. Before any new society comes, it must dispose of the previous culture. We see catastrophic, brutal change."

—Maurice Girodias, conversation

The influence of the current Literary Establishment is fading, sputtering in the face of "catastrophic, brutal change." Irving Howe may philosophize about the state of the world, but who reads another essay by Irving Howe?

The discourses of the Established Ones are irrelevant to the kids—and the Establishment just something to destroy.

"Just as the old political liasons are breaking up, so is the New York Literary Establishment," said World editor Bob Gutwillig.

"First, the literary scene was dominated by Anglo-Saxons—Northeast America; then came the Midwest writers such as Anderson, Sinclair Lewis and Hemingway; next, the Southern writers. Now the urban Jewish writers are at the center.

"But the seventies will feature the blacks, the Spanish-Americans, Indians and even Anglo-Saxons. This is a pluralistic nation, and literature is not going to be dominated by any one geographic or ethnic group. I can't see that ever happening again. New York will no longer be *the* literary center. This is a nation of two hundred million people—a nation of little countries; and regional publishing is beginning to flourish. Inevitably, major publishers will arise on the West Coast, perhaps first in San Francisco."

Yet the literary center will probably remain in New York for years to come, at least through the 70's. This is where the action is concentrated—all of the top agents, the headquarters of the top publishers—it is verily the literary capital of the known universe.

"Look at the buildings—the skyscrapers—the big publishing companies are building. You can see they've made a lot of money from writers," James T. Farrell said. It looks as though the giants mean to keep New York as their home for a while. The process of geographical

decentralization probably will not be completed until beyond the 70's.

The accelerated concentration of economic power in publishing will continue. Perhaps the centralization will be virtually accomplished within the decade—the book business controlled by a few enormous combines.

Yet from the anguished anarchy of civilization—from the despair of the flower children, the terrible anger of the blacks—vast and unpredictable forces of change are whelming. There will be deep transformation not only in literature but in the very structure of society.

The writers are the *active agents* of this change. This is why James T. Farrell can still be hopeful about the future, even though he believes his worst fears of nearly a quarter century ago on the fate of writing have become today's facts of life in the literary world.

In their urgency, the young writers are turning away from fiction, working in more immediately expressive forms—film, drama and poetry. Perhaps the greatest achievements of the blacks will be in drama—*"close to the momentum of actuality,* with a sense of physical commitment," says avant garde little mag editor Don Phelps (*For Now,* which has a Krimian East Village following), and he talks of young black writers such as Ishmael Reed and Ed Bullins. On the campuses, young people are not very much attracted to fiction, but they are committed to film and the drama, and they listen to poetry. Film will grow to its first profound flowering. A renaissance in drama and poetry is opening.

The New Technology will create a metamorphosis of literature. "The form and content of books will have radically changed by 1980," Gutwillig predicts: "In the past fifteen years, we have already seen rapid change; we're moving quickly to other forms."

Today a card half the size of a credit card records the individual pages of a 1248-page Bible on microfilm. All that remains to be done is to work out the optics of a miniaturized, transitorized, portable viewer the size of a book.

We are on the verge of the greatest revolution in literature since the invention of the printing press. This is why the communications and electronics companies are rushing to take over the publishers.

By the twenty-first century, books as we know them will be obsolete.

—1969

The Naïve Manifesto

Sophistication kills art. Art is naive.

Great art ranges the entire wilderness of mind. Small art follows the narrow-gauge tracks of intellect.

Great art confounds civilization, but civilization also confounds art.

Technocracy mass produces tame artists who are increasingly intellectual, technik-minded, specialized. Art needs savagery and generalism; art is the antidote to rigid-frame rationality and trivial specialty.

The barrier-blasting vision of the artist can alter the social order, for civilization depends on repression. Society's defense is to condition artists into safely limited functions which have no relevance to common life. The stupendous production of art that is esoteric or utterly irrelevant even to its creators illustrates this reductive process—Modernist movement abstracting art away from ordinary significance.

The meager art of the Neantherthal is more than all the synthetic art of massman.

All the arts have degeneratively collapsed about their formal center of mere artifice—design and technics. Artists have been brainwashed by the techniks.

The scientified artsters say they are doing "something different" with their mini-games. They are really doing only something less. Likewise brainrinsed estheticians prattle about blueprint, design decision dynamics & mechanics, cubistic masses in space, pure geometry, etc., looking for the source of artistic value in the technical approach. *The leading esthetic theorists of the 20th century are wrong, dead & wrong.* Artistic value is a matter of spirit, the energizing spirit.

Other specialists, the innumerable species and subspecies of critics, inevitably exalt the duped artists whose output is regulated according to standard critical criteria.

Standard critical criteria encourage absurd intellectuality which in turn requires infinitely absurd critical intervention. Thus has been established a huge and growing quasi-bureaucracy of credentialed experts on the arts, a flock of middlemen whose gellid collective mediocrity is difficult to penetrate. They arbitrate against the prophets; they protect the social order against the wild and wonderful and all things and forces beyond mundane rationality and convention.

To speak of a great critic is sillier than to speak of a great flea.

The people turn away from poetry, for it has been poisoned by ashbery and become a mocked cripple. They consume canned picasso like no-cal, drawing no spiritual energy from it; glance at experimental music in its cage. They seek kafka and its derivatives and find illness and deadend.

Modernism is defunct. The proclaimed Post Modernism cannot be.

Third generation repetitions of Dada and acrobatic variations on abstract schemes gyrate weakly in the near-vacuum of the spirit. The critics explicate their perplexity about what is to come.

The Promethean artists are beings who, by accident and weirdness, have escaped becoming civilized. They learn voraciously but stay neanderthally naive.

The Naive Movement is reactionary, savage, intuitive—instinct and infinite imagination against the mechanized legions of mad rationalization and repression. We invoke the primal power of art's begin-

nings. We smash the empty shells of techart.

Poetry must be one with song. We sympathetically scorn the small talk verse, the cultivated genteel mumbling, the musicless ranters.

Story must be entertainment—experience-expanding: we want total empathy.

The novel is updiked and doctorowed to death, but on the frontiers, fiction merges with epic from whence it came.

We play always. We transform language but play no technogames because we know that art which does not engage the emotions is inert non-art.

Our images are alchemy to transmute consciousness.

Our dreams shall be the werewishes shaping the future.

Our words and symbols are magic that determines reality.

New spells and ritual masks for chanting and dancing, ballads and totems will come again.

1981