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MELVILLE'S REALISM

"There are those who falter in the common tongue, because they think in another; and these are accounted stutterers and stammerers."
—Mardi, *Chapter 126*

"I but fight against the armed and crested Lies of Mardi, that like a host, assail me. I am stuck full of darts; but, tearing them from out me, gasping, I discharge them whence they come."
—Mardi, *Chapter 135*

In Chapter Fourteen of *The Confidence Man*, Melville digresses to comment on the issue of realism. Readers expect characters to be both self-consistent and yet at the same time consistent with "fact." But given the "fact" that "in real life, a consistent character is a *rara avis*," their demands are obviously self-contradictory. Nevertheless, he notes, "most novelists" reinforce their readers' self-contradictory "prejudices" by representing human nature as consistent, so that their fictional characters emerge "not in obscurity, but transparency." The only deviation allowed in this contract between author and reader is a character who emerges *from* obscurity into a reassuring, if false, transparency: "The great masters excel in nothing so much as in this very particular. They challenge astonishment at the tangled web of some character and then raise admiration still greater at their satisfactory unravelling of it."[1]

Melville's critical views on the practice of "most novelists" accords strikingly with those of the late Roland Barthes, who argued that "what we call 'real' (in the theory of the realistic text) is never more than a code of representation . . . ."[2] Indeed, what Barthes labelled the hermeneutic code in particular is precisely what Melville is describing when he discusses the reader's delighted satisfaction at the unravelling of obscure webs into transparent clarity. Melville goes on to remark ironically on the absurdity of such literary realism when he says that if fiction were true to life in the sense readers commonly take it to be, it would provide a map on which the reader could rely in real life, much as he can rely on a map of Boston in making his way through the real Boston, a procedure whose shortcomings Melville had once revealed in *Redburn*.[3] Barthes, one might put it, analyzes the confidence game inscribed in the codes as just such inevitably false and deceptive maps. Melville and Barthes, then, share a belief that realist novels lie. Such lies are naturalized as 'truth' within and by means of the narrative conventions of a realism orchestrated by codes of representation to produce a 'reality-effect,' or what before Barthes we used to call verisimilitude, what Melville's contemporaries called *vraisemblance*.[4] The more powerfully such codes operate, the more verisimilitude they produce, so that for a Melville, the more problematic becomes the task of a novelist who wants to "strike through the mask."[5]

By the time he wrote *The Confidence Man*, Melville was perforce dealing exclusively in masks; no more clear-cut example of the decentered subject could be wished for in nineteenth-century

[1]Herman Melville, *The Confidence Man: His Masquerade* (New York: NAL, 1964), pp. 75-6.

[2]Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), p. 80.

[3]See *Redburn: His First Voyage* (Evanston: Northwestern/Newberry, 1969), chapters 30-31. "Guide-books . . . are the least reliable books in all literature," Redburn concludes, after discovering that his father's guide to Liverpool is hopelessly out-of-date. Yet "nearly all literature, in one sense, is made up of guide-books" (p. 157).

[4]See Perry Miller, *The Raven and the Whale: The War of Words and Wit in the Era of Poe and Melville* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1956), p. 65.

[5]Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick or, The Whale* (New York: Hendricks House, 1952), pp. 161-2. (Hereafter referred to by page number in text.) Nina Baym has made the definitive case for the claim that Melville's career is crucially marked by the contradictions he faced between truth telling and fiction writing. While accepting her argument, I am suggesting that these contradictions led Melville into radical experiments with discursive practices in *Moby-Dick*, practices which not only display the generic heterogeneity Baym describes, but also exploit it. See Nina Baym, "Melville's Quarrel with Fiction," *PMLA* (October 1979), pp. 909-923.

prose than the confidence man, whose masquerade constitutes a serial ordeal for the reader who expects consistency. In *Pierre*, furthermore, Melville had already produced a modernist text. As Charles Feidelson pointed out almost thirty years ago, Melville's *Pierre* constitutes the clearest case in this period of the modernism toward which *Moby-Dick* was already driving, and toward which the American Renaissance writers were all to some degree drawn — that modernism which is marked by its production of the autotelic, self-referential text, a text whose "characteristic subject is its own equivocal method."[6] Not only was Melville on Barthes' side as a critic of realism, it seems, but his career as a novelist from *Moby-Dick* through *The Confidence Man* seems to be one in which the writerly overtakes and subsumes the readerly. He becomes, that is, more and more distinctly a modernist.

Melville's deviation from bourgeois realism has long been recognized from several critical perspectives — from Northrop Frye's system in which *Moby-Dick* is classified as a romance-anatomy, through the discourse of American literary exceptionalism as well as that of modernism. I want to suggest a different view of *Moby-Dick*, as a kind of rule rather than an exception. Its violation of the conventions of bourgeois realism operates in accord, I will suggest, not with a precocious modernism, but rather with a dialogical realism which Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of language and the novel situates at the center of the novel's genesis and development as a genre. I want first to sketch a route by which we might arrive at this Bakhtinian concept of realism, and then to indicate briefly how such a concept would enable us to understand a literary practice like Melville's as realist rather than modernist. Such an approach would allow us to recognize what the current binary opposition between modernism and realism not only obscures, but seems to have a stake in obscuring — that a novelist can be a realist and still produce works which are radically oppositional in the terms Barthes appropriates exclusively for the modernist text.[7]

If fully developed, as it cannot be here, this Bakhtinian approach might enable us to see how narrowly conceived is this debate itself, for Bakhtin's novelistic tradition covers a terrain in which the modern genre of the novel — understood as the site of bourgeois realism and commonly opposed to the romance by Americans since the days of Hawthorne — amounts to little more than a sandlot on the face of a continent. One way of characterizing Bakhtin's tracing of the novel in this larger sense is to say that he grounds it historically in the Menippean satire from which Frye derives the anatomy. But whereas Frye lines up the anatomy as one of four forms of fiction from which hybrids are repeatedly formed, Bakhtin calls such hybrids "border violations" in a "lengthy battle for the novelization of the other genres."[8] Another way to put it is simply to say that Bakhtin historicizes a tradition which Frye anatomizes. Like Lukács, Bakhtin opposes the novel to the epic, but unlike Lukács, Bakhtin regards the novel's displacement of the epic as a boon for both literature and life. Closest to Auerbach in his approach, Bakhtin charts the growth of realism by reference to

[6]Charles Feidelson, *Symbolism and American Literature* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1953), p. 73.

[7]In addition to Barthes' classic statement in *S/Z*, representative expressions of this opposition and its consequences can be found in Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language*, trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine & Louis S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1980), and Leo Bersani, *A Future for Astynax* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1976). See also Walter Michaels, "Sister Carrie's Popular Economy," *Critical Inquiry* 7 (Winter 1980), pp. 373-90, and his ensuing interchange with Leo Bersani, *Critical Inquiry* 8 (Autumn 1981), pp. 158-71, in which Michaels and Bersani dispute the relation of desire to capitalist society. With varying purposes, all these critical texts reveal the extent to which the modernist (and/or post-modernist) break with realism has been invested with the ideology of desire. However one assesses this newly libidinized opposition between modernism and realism, it is clear that it both requires and reveals the theoretical impoverishment of bourgeois realism itself. Recent efforts to rehabilitate such realism only make this clearer. George Levine's *The Realistic Imagination* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1981), for instance, approaches nineteenth-century British realism as, in effect, already appreciably modernist in its self-conscious epistemological skepticism about referentiality. Charles Rosen and Henri Zerner, in their articles on nineteenth-century French painting (*The New York Review of Books*, Feb. 18, 1982, pp. 21-26; March 4, 1982, pp. 29-33), work hard to pin the label 'avant-garde realism' on Flaubert and Courbet, partially redeeming the term realism from its contaminated association with the academic realist paintings in the Cleveland Museum's exhibition. Such arguments blur the boundaries between modernism and realism in the service of an apparent need to rescue realism from its bad press. But in both of these cases, at least, realism is redeemed finally by showing itself to be a kind of modernism. That is, realism is being propped up by modernist categories. It may be that the term realism is so moribund as to be irrecoverable, but I retain it in this argument out of a need to underscore the extent to which Melville believed that the artist could and should tell the truth of his experience.

[8]Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), pp. 33, 39. Hereafter referred to by *DI* followed by page number in text.

the collapsing distance between high and low cultures. But the realism which gradually comes to the fore in *Mimesis* corresponds to the essentially middle-class character of what Auerbach regarded as ordinary everyday reality, while Bakhtin's realism has a good deal more reference to peasants than to middle-class citizens. The two most obviously differ in their treatment of comedy. For Auerbach, realism was by definition serious, while for Bakhtin it was almost by definition the opposite; Rabelais comes near playing for Bakhtin the kind of role Dante played for Auerbach in literary history. But the most important difference between the two approaches lies in their opposed conceptions of how language works. For Auerbach, language develops, from Dante on, the capacity to represent with increasing precision a social reality already fixed by its designation as ordinary and everyday. For Bakhtin, language represents a social reality not directly, through a gradual approximation to identity (i.e., parallel lines which never quite meet, but come so close as to seem to), but rather indirectly, by representing the social languages which forever construct and reconstruct social life through their interchanges. For our purposes, what is relevant is that this novelistic tradition grows from and fosters a realism defined by its opposition to the fixed, hierarchical distances of official cultures in the name of an "eternally living element of unofficial language and unofficial thought" (*DI*, p. 20). A relatively simple version of this opposition can be found in what Bakhtin calls grotesque realism.

In *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin describes grotesque realism as a literary tradition based on the folk culture of the middle ages and assuming genuine literary form in Rabelais in particular and the Renaissance in general. Notably, grotesque realism was never mimetic. On the contrary, it produced images of the sort which subsequent eras described as monstrous deviations from nature, images in which the borderlines between plant, animal, and human forms, for instance, were freely infringed upon. What renders such grotesque images realist is not that they refer to things as given by either nature or culture, but rather that they represent a world which is actively changing instead of static, a world multiple and contradictory instead of unitary and self-consistent. It is a world, in short, where phantasmal figures abound, but they represent the very opposite of any idealized or romanticized transcendence of materiality; rather, it is precisely the materiality of that world in its infinite variety which they *do* represent. Grotesque realism, furthermore, produces such images in what we might call a dialogical matrix; that is, it functions in opposition to the fixed, hierarchical, and authorized voice of the hegemonic culture and its language. The grotesque realism of Rabelais de-authorizes official culture, and its chief means for accomplishing this task is to marshal laughter, a laughter which re-materializes the world.[9]

Now obviously, major features of grotesque realism are historically specific to the Renaissance, a period in which folk humor could still make itself felt in the carnivalized literature of Rabelais. Although Bakhtin does see such grotesque realism at work in Swift and Sterne (the latter he calls a purveyor of "the subjective grotesque"), as well as exerting its influences on Stendhal, Balzac, Hugo, and Dickens, he makes no claim that laughter continues to re-materialize the world's body in nineteenth-century fiction.[10] Nor am I making such a claim, even though it is true that we can see evidence of grotesque realism even in twentieth-century fiction; one thinks, for example, of Faulkner's *The Hamlet*. *Moby-Dick* itself, of course, abounds with residual features of the same grotesque realism, features Melville may have had in mind when he later commented in *The Confidence Man* on the resemblance of his bourgeois readers to those European naturalists who refused to believe in the reality of the duck-billed platypus brought from Australia. When such scientists insist that the beaver's bill must have been "artificially stuck on," it is hardly surprising that "duck-billed characters" leave readers perplexed.[11] Rabelais' grotesque realism, according to Bakhtin, grows out of a need Melville could readily have felt, a need to reveal "the authentic nature of things . . . no matter how monstrous these unions might seem from the point of view of ordinary, traditional associations" (*DI*, p. 169). The case of the duck-billed platypus was the more telling for Melville in view of the fact that the skeptical scientists in question refused the evidence of their own senses. In the face of *Typee*'s reception, Melville apparently felt that the evidence of *his* own senses was being doubted. "How indescribably

[9]Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1968), pp. 18-53.

[10]*Rabelais and His World*, pp. 36, 52.

[11]*The Confidence Man*, pp. 75, 76.

vexatious," he wrote Murray, "when one really feels in his very bones that he has been there, to have a parcel of blockheads question it!"[12]

Melville's incredulous response to his readers' incredulity has a long, not to say tortured, career, beginning with *Typee*. We will have occasion to return to this issue shortly. For now, we need to understand that Melville's Rabelaisian tendencies, once they took hold, extended further than those taken up under a self-congratulatory label by the Duyckinck circle in the New York of the 1840's. Nature, that much vaunted if infinitely plastic standard by which New York critics measured literature during this period, was for Melville neither the Niagara Falls of the romantics, nor the familial warmth of Dickens' human nature so much applauded by the conservatives, but a world infinitely larger, deeper, more contradictory and mysterious than either of these.[13] As Melville told Murray, "men who go straight from their cradles to their graves, and never dream of the queer things going on at the Antipodes" are "blockheads."[14] Such blockheads were later to be fused in Melville's imagination to form the "marble-hearted world" which will charge Redburn with padding as well as plagiarism if he quotes a "chapter of antiquarian researches" from his father's guidebook. His only alternative is to "mince" a "substantial baron-of-beef of information into a flimsy ragout," an alternative Redburn here ostensibly rejects, but one which Melville pursues avidly in *Moby-Dick*.[15] In short, Melville's project in *Moby-Dick* entails more than a residual grotesque realism; it entails a radical recipe for "ragout," and Bakhtin's analysis of the novel as dialogical can enable us to comprehend that project as a case of what I am calling dialogical realism.

In the four essays recently translated and published under the title *The Dialogical Imagination*, Bakhtin develops a theory of the novel itself as peculiarly equipped to carry out the vital functions once performed by the grotesque realism of carnivalized literature. Because the novel is endowed with a special capacity to represent the speech of another, i.e., because novelistic discourse is double-voiced and double-languaged, it can perform the same kind of de-authorizing role once played by grotesque realism.

Bakhtin's theory of novelistic, double-voiced discourse derives from his theory of language itself, a theory Michael Holquist has labelled dialogism. Holquist distinguishes dialogism from the two other major conceptions of language current today, and he does so, usefully, by reference to the question of the "ownership of meaning." The Personalist conception of language, associated with Croce and Husserl, and implicit in the liberal academy's study of English, holds that "I own meaning." The Deconstructionist view of language, on the contrary, says, "No one owns meaning." Dialogism says, "We own meaning," or, "if we do not own it, we may at least rent meaning."[16] This collective ownership of meaning derives from a theory of language as thoroughly and constitutively social. I have discussed this theory elsewhere.[17] What is pertinent here is that this theory of language entails a view of the word as a "two-sided act . . . determined equally by whose word it is and for whom it is meant."[18] That is, no word, no utterance, no discourse, can be understood as monologic, since it always emerges out of a complex dialogue, a dialogue constituted by and situated in the multi-languaged world of speech diversity which Bakhtin labels 'heteroglossia.'

At the heart of this view of language is its focus on the speech of another, a speech whose force is at work all the time and everywhere in language, whether in everyday spoken discourse, or in the production of written discourse. Because this is true in a social and historical sense, "any concrete discourse . . . finds the object at which it was directed already as it were overlain with

[12]Jay Leyda, *The Melville Log* (New York: Gordian Press, 1969), I, p. 226.

[13]See *The Raven and the Whale*, p. 28 & following.

[14]*Melville Log*, I, p. 226.

[15]Actually, by the time he decides against it, Redburn has already concocted such a "ragout." See *Redburn*, p. 149. On the extensive imagery of stone in Melville's work, and his eventual sense of being transfixed by and trapped within it, see Michael P. Rogin, *Subversive Genealogy: The Politics and Art of Herman Melville* (New York: Knopf, 1983), pp. 155-56, 163, 261-2, & *passim*. Rogin's is the most insightful and provocative treatment we have yet had of the politics inscribed in Melville's work.

[16]Michael Holquist, "The Politics of Representation," in *Allegory and Representation*, ed. Stephen J. Greenblatt (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1981), pp. 163-4.

[17]See Carolyn Porter, *Seeing and Being* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1981), pp. 293-300.

[18]V. N. Volosinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, trans. Ladislav Matejka and I. R. Titunik (New York: Seminar Press, 1973), p. 86.

qualifications, open to dispute, charged with value," in short, "entangled" in "words that have already been spoken about it," i.e., in the heteroglot and contradictory speech of countless historical others (*DI*, p. 276). "The word, directed toward its object, enters a dialogically agitated and tension-filled environment of alien words, value judgments and accents" (*DI*, p. 276). Only the mythical Adam, Bakhtin remarks, could escape the "dialogic inter-orientation with the alien word that occurs in the object (*DI*, p. 279). Yet poetic speech, as narrowly conceived by formalist theory, tries to emulate Adam on the basis of the "artificial and preconditioned status of . . . a word excised from dialogue" (*DI*, p. 279). By according this "autotelic word" normative status, Bakhtin argues, formalist theories of language privilege what is really a deviation, i.e., a word that deliberately "forgets" that its object is the locus of a dialogic interaction among "contradictory acts of verbal recognition" (*DI*, pp. 277, 278). But what the poetic image represses, the novelistic image foregrounds. For the novelist, that is, the object becomes a "focal point for heteroglot voices among which his own voice must also sound," and without which indeed, it cannot sound (*DI*, p. 278). In other words, what the novelist represents, and as novelist cannot help but represent, is the speech of another.

Such an approach to the novel recalls Harry Levin's well-known thesis in *The Gates of Horn* about parody, but in a far more profound frame of reference. It is readily clear that artistic representation in language of another language, indeed of many other languages, becomes the basis on which the novel's complex devices for irony and parody are produced. But further, the representation of language in language produces "the perception of one language by another language" (*DI*, p. 359). One can get a sense of this dialogization on a microcosmic level when two social languages are "set against each other dialogically," fused, that is, within a "novelistic hybrid" (*DI*, p. 360). The goal of this hybridization is to illuminate one language by means of another, to carve out a living image of another language. Readers of Norman Mailer's *The Executioner's Song* will find this hybridization operating with unusual clarity on every page of the book's first half. Its effect is also unusually clear. By hybridizing the language of Gary, Nicole, and Brenda with the authorial, and authorized, language of the 'literary,' Mailer produces two effects. First, the authorial, literary language becomes itself an image of a language. That is, "the language being used to illuminate the other language (this is usually accomplished using the contemporary literary language system) is reified to the point where it itself becomes an image of a language" (*DI*, p. 361). Secondly, the extraliterary language of the marginal world of Gary, Brenda, Nicole, and Mormon Utah generally, is effectively inserted in the novel.[19] Such extraliterary languages are incorporated into the novel, Bakhtin notes, not in order to "'ennoble' them, to 'literarize' them, but for the sake of their very extraliterariness," since it is the novel's nature and aim to be a "microcosm of heteroglossia" (*DI*, p. 411). By virtue of its dialogic operation, then, the novel represents the "social and ideological voices of its era," foregrounding and parodying official and authoritative languages, while incorporating unofficial and extraliterary ones (*DI*, p. 411).

Understood in this way, the novel operates with the same de-authorizing effect that Rabelaisian grotesque realism did, and does so in accord with a now historicized materialism. It is not surprising, then, that Bakhtin describes heteroglossia in terms similar to those he used to describe the materialist conception of the world's body: "A dialogue of languages is a dialogue of social forces perceived not only in their static co-existence, but also as a dialogue of different times, epochs, and days, a dialogue that is forever dying, living, being born," a dialogue that is "contradictory, multi-speeched and heterogeneous" (*DI*, p. 365).

Whether or not one wants to call the novel thus defined realist, one must at least admit that the novel thus defined is *Moby-Dick*. *Moby-Dick*'s radical mixture of literary genres (dramatic, lyric, epic) together with extraliterary genres (rhetorical persuasion, scientific classification, philosophical meditation, etc.) produces a microcosm of heteroglossia in which all of these images of language dialogize and interilluminate each other.[20] Take, for example, Chapter Forty-Five,

[19]I would argue, in fact, that it is finally because of Mailer's insertion of extraliterary language, and not because of his journalistic subject, that this book can be called a "real life novel." The difference made by his dialogized language might be spelled out in a comparison of *The Executioner's Song* with James Agee's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, where Agee traps himself in a literary language which he can only rail against but can never escape.

[20]For a different and provocative assessment of *Moby-Dick*'s mixed discourse, see "The Languages of *Moby-Dick*" in James Guetti's *The Limits of Metaphor* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell Univ. Press, 1967), pp. 12-45.

"The Affidavit," where Ishmael launches into one of his rhetorical digressions, this one focused on the need, as he puts it, "to take away any incredulity which a profound ignorance of the entire subject may induce in some minds, as to the natural verity of the main points of this affair." Notice the parodically charged language of the lawyer here. In fact, the entire chapter is couched in the framework and the language of a legal brief. Ishmael provides "separate citations of items" from which "the conclusion aimed at will naturally follow of itself" (pp. 200, 201). The first group of such items is divided into two categories, personal and general knowledge, and the "conclusion aimed at" is that specific, identifiable whales can be and have been sought out and killed. The second group demonstrates that the "Sperm Whale is in some cases sufficiently powerful, knowing, and judiciously malicious, as with direct aforethought to stave in, utterly destroy, and sink a large ship" (p. 204). The chapter is punctuated with "firstly's" and "secondly's" and replete with lengthy quotations from texts whose "testimony," Ishmael tells us, is "entirely independent of my own" (p. 204). Meanwhile, this legal language is itself internally dialogized. For example, Ishmael incorporates mini-narratives within his rhetorical framework, as when he relates the story of one "Commodore J—" who denied the Sperm Whale's capacity to stave in his boat, only to be met by "a portly Sperm Whale that begged a few moments' confidential business with him" (p. 205). Here the legal language of the chapter as a whole penetrates and ironizes the language of the mini-narrative.

A complex effect is produced by this dialogization. The legal language used in the rhetorical digression sanctions the "conclusion" toward which Ishmael wants to drive his reader in this chapter — that "the whole story of the White Whale" is "reasonable" (p. 203). Richard Brodhead has remarked on Melville's effort in *Moby-Dick* "to break down our sense of incredulity," but he regards this strategy as designed to encourage us "to enter a superstitious frame of mind."[21] What I am suggesting is that Melville's strategy invites us to occupy a frame of mind virtually the opposite of superstitious, one in which a critical skepticism is encouraged only to be exploited. Ishmael speaks his legalistic language in order to persuade us of the truth of his story. "Landsmen," he says, are "so ignorant" of the "plain facts . . . of the fishery," that they might mistake Moby-Dick for a "monstrous fable" or a "hideous and intolerable allegory" (p. 203). So Ishmael takes pains to persuade such ignorant landsmen of such plain facts. (In at least one instance, he apparently succeeded. The review attributed to William T. Porter in *The Spirit of the Times* singled out "The Affidavit" as having disarmed skepticism. After reading this chapter, Porter reported, "All improbability of incongruity disappears, and Moby Dick becomes a living fact, simply doubtful at first, because he was so new an idea.")[22] The legal language Ishmael deploys here, then, works to induce and to sanction the reader's acceptance of what are, in the Sperm Whale Fishery, simply plain facts. But what makes this rhetorical effect complex is that the legal language used to this end of inducing and sanctioning belief is itself parodied and de-authorized. That is, Ishmael's dialogized language functions, paradoxically, to authorize the reader's acceptance of certain ideas, while it simultaneously de-authorizes the conventional voices of authority in his society. The same double effect can be seen in Ishmael's use of scientific and philosophical languages. Such languages retain a semi-autonomy which allows them to work simultaneously in the interests of authorizing Ishmael's story and as parodies of the authorities whose power they invoke. In short, Melville incorporates extraliterary genres and languages whose authority is at once undermined and exploited, allowing him to wage an assault on the false and falsifying limits of bourgeois fiction, de-authorizing its verisimilitude in the name of a "realism of Grand Style" in which duck-billed characters abound.[23] Here, then, rather than cryptically criticizing the prejudices reinforced by bourgeois novels as he would later do in *The Confidence Man*, Melville is actively assaulting the limits of such novels, and doing so by means of dialogical devices.

If, as I think, such a strategy functions throughout *Moby-Dick*, its development is probably traceable to *Mardi*, where Melville began mixing genres. It is significant, however, that he cites as his motive for such a narrative experiment a wish to turn the tables on his skeptical readers, "to see whether," as he puts it, a "fic-

[21]Richard Brodhead, *Hawthorne, Melville, and the Novel* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1976), p. 139.

[22]Hershel Parker, ed., *The Recognition of Herman Melville* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1967), p. 47.

[23]*Rabelais and His World*, p. 52.

tion might not, possibly, be received for a verity: in some degree the reverse of my previous experience."[24] Melville's initiation as a travel writer whose report was greeted with widespread skepticism brought on the crisis of *Typee*'s reception, a crisis which was publicly resolved by Toby's appearance; Murray had solicited documentary evidence of Melville's report, and Toby had supplied it.[25] But the private resolution of the issues this episode raised for Melville as a writer was less immediately than eventually dramatic. He had appealed to extraliterary sources from the start, and he continued to use the evidence garnered from such sources, as Howard Vincent has amply demonstrated.[26] But not until *Moby-Dick* did he perfect a means of using such evidence against the very authorities who demanded it. For the strategy I've described here does precisely that: Ishmael's voice derives its authority from the very voices whose authority it undercuts. Melville not only "parodies his source at the same time that he plunders it for information," as Joseph Flibbert has rightly pointed out, but he plunders it for its authority as well.[27]

To appreciate the larger effects of Melville's strategy, we would need to move from individual cases to the continual and developing flexibility of Ishmael's voice through the course of the narrative, as well as to situate that voice's role in relation to the quite different one of Ahab. Such a task is obviously too large for these pages, but I will offer another example as a means of suggesting how such a demonstration might proceed.

In "The Advocate," Ishmael's voice assumes the haranguing tones of a political orator bent upon persuading his audience of the honor due "us whalemen." The speech — for that is clearly how it is structured — opens with an acknowledgement of the fact that the "business of whaling" has not been given the respect accorded the "liberal professions." A harpooner with a calling card like that of a naval officer "would be deemed pre-eminently presuming and ridiculous." Warming to his purpose, Ishmael develops an invidious analogy between soldiers and whalemen, both of whom are engaged in a "butchering sort of business," yet only one of whom "the world invariably delights to honor" (p. 106). The voice which proceeds to herald the glories of the Sperm Whale Fishery by reference to the size and monetary value of whaling fleets from the "Dutch in DeWitt's time" up to the present in America, and to assert that no "single peaceful influence . . . has operated upon the whole world" more powerfully than has whaling, since it is responsible for the fact that "American and European men-of-war now peacefully ride in once savage harbors" is a voice ventriloquizing the rhetoric of American Imperialism (pp. 107-8). Given Melville's well-known treatment of the missionaries in *Typee*, it is telling that Ishmael praises the whalemen who "cleared the way for the missionary and the merchant" in "the uncounted isles of Polynesia (p. 109). Whalemen are honorable, Ishmael is insisting, because the "whaleship" was the "pioneer" who opened up the world to such "peaceful influences" as these. When he contemplates the "flourish" that is made of "Exploring Expeditions," while the "virgin wonders and terrors" confronted by whalemen go "unrecorded," Ishmael publicly languishes, "Ah, the world! Oh, the world!" (p. 108). He moves toward his conclusion through a series of questions echoed from his skeptical audience, "The whale has no famous author, and whaling no famous chronicle, you will say," questions mimicked in rebuttal by the astonished orator: "*The whale no famous author, and whaling no famous chronicler*" (p. 109)? What about Job? What about Alfred the Great?

Ishmael exalts whaling in a language which unravels itself in the course of its performance, not only exposing honor and distinction as rooted in conquest and butchery, but also exposing how the language used to ascribe distinction itself degenerates into self-contradiction ("men-of-war now peacefully ride in once savage harbors") and finally into self-mockery. "But if . . . you still declare that whaling has no aesthetically noble associations," Ishmael cries, "then am I ready to shiver fifty lances with you there, and unhorse you with a split helmet every time" (p. 109). Don Quixote rides again.

All of which makes it the more remarkable

[24]*Mardi, and a Voyage Thither* (Evanston: Northwestern/Newberry, 1970), p. xvii.

[25]On Melville as a travel writer, see Janet Giltrow, "Speaking Out: Travel and Structure in Herman Melville's Early Narratives," *American Literature* 52:1 (March 1980), pp. 18-32. On the crisis of *Typee*'s reception, see *Melville Log* I, pp. 200-231; Leon Howard, *Herman Melville, A Biography* (Berkeley, Ca.: Univ. of California Press, 1967), pp. 95-101.

[26]Howard Vincent, *The Trying-Out of Moby-Dick* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1949), & *The Tailoring of Melville's White Jacket* (Evanston: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1970).

[27]Joseph Flibbert, *Melville and the Art of Burlesque*, in Robert Brainard Pearsall, ed., *Melville Studies in American Culture*, Vol. III (Amsterdam: Rodopi N.V., 1974), p. 65.

that, while undermining the languages in which honor and distinction are inscribed, Ishmael nonetheless succeeds at the same time in conferring honor and distinction on the whaleman. By ventriloquizing the voice of the orator, Ishmael does not so much drain off its authority as he absorbs and redirects it toward the whaleman, and finally, to all commoners. It is not that honor loses its meaning, in short, but that this meaning has been artificially constrained within the limits imposed by authorized languages. By voicing such languages, Ishmael momentarily frees the meaning of honor from such limits, allowing it to be absorbed by other languages.

We can begin to see this happen in the final paragraph of "The Advocate." Having concluded his series of echoed questions, Ishmael shifts his tone to one almost of prayer. "And as for me," he says, if there be "any as yet undiscovered prime thing in me; if I shall ever deserve any real repute in that small but high hushed world which I might not be unreasonably ambitious of," then "I . . . ascribe all the honor and glory to whaling, for a whale-ship was my Yale College and my Harvard" (p. 110). If "honor and glory" had been totally emptied of meaning, this testimonial would have no force. In other words, if Ishmael's argument could be reduced to saying, in effect, "Here's how the world thinks of honor and glory; but whaling can be thought of in the same terms, and so honor and glory are meaningless," we would be faced with a language itself reduced to sounds signifying nothing, and whaling itself would emerge as no more than a rhetorical foil. That Ishmael's testimonial does have force is the result, one might put it, of Ishmael's cleaning out of the stable of false meanings for honor and glory, in order to pay homage to an authentic, even if "as yet undiscovered" meaning for these terms. Most importantly, whatever honor may mean, the term has been attached momentarily to whaling by this testimonial, an attachment at once solemnized and undermined by the reference to Yale and Harvard. Ishmael's tribute to the whale-ship as his Yale College and his Harvard circumscribes the testimonial with an ironic mimicry of the loyal collegian's will. Fleshed out, this buried conceit implies that Ishmael's "executors, or more properly . . . creditors" would be left with a "precious MSS" rather than with any fortune (p. 110). His creditors would have to take the manuscript instead of money in payment of his debts, and Yale and Harvard, far from receiving any endowment money, would be left, merely, with honor and glory. The testimonial, in effect, ascribes honor and glory to a Yale and a Harvard no longer able to bestow them, since Yale and Harvard are allied with the conventional sources of honor which the chapter has discredited. The testimonial still operates within the framework of a speech, and yet undermines that framework in order to personalize honor around a possible "prime thing" in Ishmael deserving of the "real repute" to be earned by something better "done" than "left undone." But no sooner is this possibly authentic source of honor attached to the whale-ship than it is comically derided by the conceit of the collegian's will.

The multivalence of Melville's language has long been recognized. My point here is that such multivalence results from the kind of radically destabilized meaning we find here, and that his dialogical language is responsible for destabilizing both meaning and authority. This strategy of destabilization has political implications, as can be seen from the "Postscript" which follows immediately upon, and further unravels the language of, "The Advocate." Here, Ishmael burlesques his own identification of whaling with honor when he surmises that the oil used to anoint a king's head is sperm oil. As further evidence for the advocate's cause of proving whaling's dignity, this "not unreasonable surmise" is sheer buffoonery. The "king's head is solemnly oiled at his coronation," Ishmael notes, "even as a head of salad." Ishmael ruminates briefly on this matter, to hilarious effect, as well as to a point. What makes for the "essential dignity of this regal process," Ishmael asks, when "in common life" a "man who uses hair-oil . . . can't amount to much?" The concept of dignity is transferred here from whaling to the common man, as Ishmael invokes the time honored distinction between American democracy and the British monarchy. The voice of the folk opines, "in truth, a mature man who uses hair-oil, unless medicinally, that man has probably got a quoggy spot in him somewhere" (pp. 110-111). So much for the "essential dignity" of the "regal process," but "dignity" remains alive as a value, ready to be reinvested in "Knights and Squires." At the end of Chapter Twenty-Six, when Ishmael raises his epic invocation to the "abounding dignity which has no robed investiture," dignity as a term has shifted from one language to another, from the ironically treated dignity of royalty in "Postscript" to the "democratic dignity" of "divine equality" (p. 114).

How then, one might well ask, do we know

that Ishmael's invocation to Democracy is not itself a piece of ventriloquism? I would suggest that it is precisely that, but that this by no means empties it of its power or its meaning, for the same reasons we have seen in regard to the honor of whaling. In voicing the languages of lawyers, orators, and poets, Ishmael displaces meaning as well as authority from one language to another, a process in which the authority informing such monological discourses is at once invoked and dispersed. Because of the dialogical services it performs, Ishmael's voice never settles into an authoritative posture, unlike Ahab's, which rarely moves outside one. To the extent that Ahab's speeches mimic those of Lear and Hamlet, they too represent an "image of a language," a distinctively Shakespearean one (*DI*, p. 361). But Ahab's speeches never sound like Ishmael's speech as the advocate, because Ahab hears no languages but his own, and consequently cannot recognize that it is *not* his own which he speaks. This is not to say that Ahab's language is bereft of power. On the contrary, it is overpowering — which is the point. This language's job, like Ahab's on the Quarter Deck, is to draw all authority into itself, so as to aim it at the whale's white hump, while the languages voiced by Ishmael interact to plunder such authority so as to disperse its power.

Finally, if we consider that all the dialogized discourses which constitute the very body of the novel, never, as it were, definitively arrive at the object toward which they intend — to paraphrase Bakhtin — we can begin to see Ishmael's role as that of the novelist himself in Bakhtin's terms.[28] That is, we might thematize Ahab as the poet, intent upon gaining access to and possession of the fullness, the presence, of the object-as-whale, while Ishmael circles around it, maneuvering through all the "words that have already been spoken about it" (*DI*, p. 276). Ishmael's discourse, in short, constitutes the "dialogically agitated and tension-filled environment of alien words" which Bakhtin posits as the novelist's special province, while the whale-in-itself becomes a kind of red herring (*DI*, p. 276). But Ahab's quest for it, motivated by a will to power which requires the usurpation of the authority inscribed in a language whose sources he willfully forgets, serves to magnetize a field in which the novel's multi-languaged discourses sound against each other in all their contradictory heterogeneity. Caught up with Ahab in his mad quest, Ishmael is himself magnetically drawn toward the whale, but he never penetrates to its presence, so swept around and about is he in the currents of the endless and contradictory words already spoken about it.

If this approach to the novel makes sense, *Moby-Dick* might still, of course, be considered modernist, in that what it represents is still, after all, language. But this is not the formalist's monological prison-house of language, but rather what Bakhtin calls the "treasure-house of language," a house in which a "dialogue of languages is a dialogue of social forces" (*DI*, pp. 278, 365). If we were to explore this house at greater length, we would find there, along with *Moby-Dick*, I think, some well-known modernist monuments; *Ulysses* and *The Waste Land*, for instance, come immediately to mind.[29] Exploited fully, Bakhtin's theories might enable us to break free of the limited opposition between realism and modernism itself by recognizing that the signifier that plays does not play alone, but always has an opponent. But at the very least, the case of *Moby-Dick* suggests that Melville's aim in exploding the limits of such realism as he saw the reading public consuming was not to abandon realism itself, but rather to produce an authentic realism of the kind made possible, according to Bakhtin, by the novel's peculiar capacity to dialogize both the language it represents and the language doing the representing. When such dialogization operates as fully as it does in *Moby-Dick*, the cen-

[28] "If we imagine the *intention* of such a word, that is, its *directionality* toward the object, in the form of a ray of light . . ." (*DI*, p. 277).

[29] *The Waste Land* may readily present itself as a case of what Bakhtin called "the drastic 'prosification' of the lyric . . . in the 20th century." See *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. R. W. Rotsel (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Ardis, 1973), p. 165. Such prosification, however, does not necessarily imply full dialogization. *The Waste Land* might well provide a provocative case for examining how a radically mixed discourse can function *not* to disperse authority, but on the contrary, to usurp and re-invest it in the notoriously authoritative voice of T. S. Eliot. (Surely, by now, for several generations of undergraduate readers of *The Waste Land*, Spenser, Webster, and even Buddha, sound like T. S. Eliot.) While clearly moving in the opposite direction from that marked out by Mallarmé's dictum, "seeing is forgetting the name of the thing one sees," Eliot is not therefore voicing the voices that he meets as does an Ishmael. The monologic voice may want to forget the words already spoken about the object, in which case silence ultimately ensues, as Mallarmé demonstrates. On the other hand, it may want to repossess those words, appropriating their authority for itself, in a version of the kind of usurpation of power about which Stephen Greenblatt has done so much to enlighten us in recent years. See Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaisance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1980).

trifugal force of what Bakhtin calls the novelistic operates to disperse the power inscribed in hegemonic languages among a host of voices emblematized by Melville as an Anacharsis Cloots convention. When, on the other hand, the monological aim which Bakhtin ascribes to the poetic voice operates, it exerts a centripetal force, unifying, purifying, and repossessing heteroglossia within a centralizing discourse marked by its homogeneity.[30] I think one could analyze the remainder of Melville's career in terms of the gradual displacement of the dialogical resources he brilliantly exploited in *Moby-Dick* by the monological voice which emerges in *Billy Budd*. From this point of view, Melville did not become more and more modernist; he became more and more monological. The question — both a literary and a historical one — is why? □

[30]I have had to simplify Bakhtin's treatment of the monological vs. the dialogical, but it is crucial to understand that for Bakhtin *all* language is dialogical, while a monological language is always an artificial construct. To situate this point with real clarity within Bakhtin's theory as a whole, one would need to pursue the oppositions which Bakhtin establishes not only between poetry and the novel, but also between two lines in the novel's development, between authoritative and internally persuasive discourse, and between centripetal and centrifugal forces in the life of discourse.

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Michael Harper

MEN WITHOUT POLITICS? HEMINGWAY'S SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS

"What politics have you?" I asked.
"I am without politics," he said.
("Old Man At The Bridge")

They sat and talked a long time. Finally I heard her say, Hemingway, after all you are ninety percent Rotarian. Can't you, he said, make it eighty percent. No, said she regretfully, I can't.
(The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas)

I

The index to Carlos Baker's *Ernest Hemingway: A Life Story*, contains but one reference to "politics" and two to "economics," and this poverty of comment is symptomatic of criticism's transactions — in America, at least — with one of the most widely-studied writers of the twentieth century.[1] Reviewers of the early novels and stories found them resolutely "non-intellectual,"[2] concerned with emotions "almost to the exclusion of ideas" of any kind, including political ones.[3] *The Dial's* brief notice of *The Sun Also Rises* complained:

> If to report correctly and endlessly the vapid talk and indolent thinking of Montparnasse café idlers is to write a novel, Mr Hemingway has written a novel. His characters are as shallow as the saucers in which they stack their daily emotions, and instead of interpreting his material — or even challenging it — he has been content merely to make a carbon copy of a not particularly significant surface of life in Paris. "Mike was a bad drunk. Brett was a good drunk. Bill was a good drunk. Cohn was never drunk" . . . . There are acres of this, until the novel — aside from a few sprints of humour and now and then a "spill" of incident — begins to assume the rhythm, the monotony, and the absence of colour which one associates with a six-day bicycle race.[4]

Arnold Bennett in the London *Evening Standard* found the same verisimilitude the chief virtue of *A Farewell To Arms*:

> Its dialogue . . . is masterly in reproductive realism . . . . Whatever it may not do to you, it will convince you of its honesty and veracity. You will never be able to say as you read: "This isn't true. This is exaggerated. This is forced."[5]

Although they differed in their estimation of writing that shunned "interpretation" and ideas in order to trace the contours of "reality," contemporary estimates of the early work largely agreed that this was the essence of Hemingway's art. Subsequent criticism discovered "themes" — "themes as universal as courage, love, honor, endurance, suffering, death,"[6] and "life, love, death, brief joy, long wars"[7] — but the nearest approach to politics was a "lost generation flirta-

[1]New York: Scribner's, 1969. As a comparison, there are sixteen references to "suicide."

[2]Clifton Fadiman, *The Nation*, Oct. 30, 1929, p. 498.

[3]Malcolm Cowley, *New York Herald Tribune Books*, Oct. 6, 1929, p. 1.

[4]*The Dial*, 82 (1927), p. 73.

[5]Quoted in *Saturday Review*, July 29, 1961, p. 28.

[6]Carlos Baker, *Saturday Review*, July 29, 1961, p. 10.

[7]Ilya Ehrenburg, *Saturday Review*, July 29, 1961, p. 20.

tion with nihilism."[8] In 1973 Melvin J. Friedman noted that "Hemingway critics, if only obliquely, continue their assault on the unsparing dismissal of their writer by Wyndham Lewis and Aldous Huxley, in the 1930's, for his anti-intellectualism," but their efforts at rehabilitation, not surprisingly, focussed on concepts valorized by the New Criticism:

> Words like "irony," "paradox," and "ambiguity" appear with startling regularity, as critics try to relieve themselves of the clichés associated with a writer better known for unlettered primitivism than for finesse and refinement. (Occasionally we have the curious feeling that these critics are discussing the later Mallarmé instead of Hemingway.) "Irony," especially is mentioned at every turn . . . .[9]

In the Thirties, however, Hemingway embraced political engagement. Writers on the Left clamored to welcome this staunch antifascist and supporter of the Spanish Loyalists, but in 1939 they were sharply rebuked in *Partisan Review* by no less an authority than Lionel Trilling, who blamed them for corrupting Hemingway the artist by burdening him with a messianic responsibility which art "never has discharged and cannot discharge."[10] In a gesture characteristic of criticism in this century, Trilling made a sharp distinction between Hemingway "the artist" and Hemingway "the man," between aesthetics and politics. Liberal-radical critics, he maintained, had failed to make this necessary distinction; blind to the obvious fact "that Hemingway is a writer who, when he writes as an 'artist,' is passionately and aggressively concerned with truth and even with social truth" (pp. 64-5), they had demanded "earnestness and pity, social consciousness, as it was called, something 'positive' and 'constructive' and literal" (p. 62). To this pressure Hemingway had unfortunately responded, ruining his art by undertaking to show "that he, too, could muster the required 'social' feelings in the required social way" (p. 63). The results of Hemingway "the man's" accommodation to this demand were the "artistic" failures of *To Have and Have Not* and *The Fifth Column*, which "tempted" Trilling

> to reverse the whole liberal-radical assumption about literature. One almost wishes to say to an author like Hemingway, "You have no duty, no responsibility. Literature, in a political sense, is not in the least important. Wherever the sword is drawn it is mightier than the pen. Whatever you can do as a man, you can win no wars as an artist."
>
> (p. 64)

Trilling hastened to add that "very obviously" such a bald statement was not entirely accurate, but this reservation seems to me to be a minor one: his conception of art is founded upon a *de facto* if not *de jure* separation between literature and politics. For him the business of art is with "truth," and "truth" necessarily includes "ambivalence" and "complexity" which can only be expressed by "the whole process of art . . . style and tone, symbol and implication . . . obliqueness and complication with which the artist may criticize life" (p. 67). Politics, on the other hand, seems in Trilling's view necessarily to involve half-truths and oversimplifications because its business is with action-in-the-world. The artist qua artist must devote himself to rendering an inevitably complex and ambivalent "vision of the world" untainted by the political opinions and allegiances of the "man," and his readers must "learn not to expect a political, certainly not an immediately political, effect from a work of art" (pp. 66-7); the only connection between art and politics is that society, if it has learned to apprehend art correctly, can "use" it to refine its own vision of the world and consequently its politics. Hence the Hemingway that Trilling admired — the "artist" rather than the "man" — could of necessity have no "politics."

In 1968 Robert O. Stephens took issue with "such frequent assertions as those by Lionel Trilling and Alvah Bessie that Hemingway lacked politics," but since he constructed his portrait of the "mourner of lost revolutions" from Hemingway's journalism and essays and not from his

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[8]Joseph M. DeFalco, "Hemingway and Revolution: *Mankinde* Not Marx," *Renaissance and Modern: Essays in Honor of Edwin M. Moseley*, ed. Murray J. Levith (Saratoga Springs, N.Y.: Skidmore College, 1976), p. 144.

[9]*Sixteen Modern American Authors: A Survey of Research and Criticism*, ed. Jackson R. Bryer (revised edition; New York: Norton, 1973), p. 392.

[10]"Hemingway and His Critics," *Partisan Review*, 6 (Winter 1939), pp. 52-60; reprinted in Carlos Baker ed. *Hemingway and His Critics: An International Anthology* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1961), pp. 61-70. The passage about "messianic responsibility" occurs on p. 70 of Baker. Hereafter cited by page number in text.

fiction, he reinforced rather than challenged Trilling's distinction between art and rhetoric.[11] The distinction has persisted, as evidenced by John Unrue's account of Hemingway's speech to the Second Congress of American Writers in New York on June 4, 1937. "The Leftists and Marxists undoubtedly thought that they were witnessing the true beginning of Hemingway's conversion," Unrue smugly remarks:

> The tone was one of passion as Hemingway indicated his disgust with the fascists' murdering of civilians, as he revealed his high regard for the Spanish people, and as he voiced his admiration for the international brigade; the tone was controlled, however, as he concluded his speech by pointing to the need for truth. It was indeed a speech with two points of view — the "man's" and the "artist's" . . . . In the course of the speech when he heatedly discussed the fighting and the bravery, he was the "man." But when he talked about truth, he was the "artist" . . . .[12]

Unrue's crude attempt to employ the distinction between "artist" and "man" that Trilling had introduced thirty years earlier reveals its hollowness. On what authority is the distinction drawn? On what basis can a critic reliably assign some parts of a single speech to the "artist" and others to the "man"? Unrue's claim that "the radical Left . . . as critics evaluated [Hemingway's] work from an obvious political bias" gives the game away: in Unrue's perspective "politics" is a term to be applied to those opinions with which one disagrees (p. 131). It follows that the judgments of those on the Left are political, hence biased, hence necessarily false, while the judgments embodied in the art one likes (and perhaps in one's own kind of criticism) are a-political, hence impartial, hence almost certainly true. Judgments of the first kind are uttered by mere human beings, who are weak and fallible, while judgments of the second kind proceed mysteriously from the divine power of Art, which uses human beings as its media but somehow contrives to avoid contamination by social and individual interests.

How is this miracle brought about? Belief in the super-human "truth" of art is deeply-rooted in the Western tradition, but in an age of empiricism it anchors itself in the conventions of so-called "Realism," which convey the impression that Reality itself, and not a human author, is speaking. Overt argument is suppressed — to an extreme degree in Hemingway's fiction — and "meaning" appears to arise from events and objects registered in the neutral and transparent medium of language. This "meaning," because it is implicit in the selection and arrangement of materials, appears to have originated not in the "man," the socio-historical context in which he writes, or the language he writes in, but in an impartial Reality which is the guarantor of its truth. The strategies of realism are crucial to the "artistic" success of the fictions — but the "art" here is the art of the rhetorician. Like Keats, we resent that which has a palpable design upon us; but we accept a "vision of the world" in which the human agent is (in Stephen Dedalus' words) "invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails," leaving Reality to utter itself directly and immediately. Trilling subscribes to this illusion when he claims that "the 'artist' is disinterested, the 'man' has a dull personal axe to grind" (p. 61), and when he invokes Edmund Wilson's assertion that Hemingway's

> ideas about life, or rather his sense of what happens and the way it happens, is in his stories sunk deep below the surface and is not conveyed by argument or preaching but by directly transmitted emotion: it is turned into something as hard as crystal and as disturbing as a great lyric. When he expounds this sense of life, however, in his own character of Ernest Hemingway, the Old Master of Key West, he has a way of sounding silly.[13]

The presumption that "art" and "politics" are mutually exclusive discourses is fundamental to the theoretical positions that have commanded Anglo-American criticism unchallenged until comparatively recently, so it is hardly surprising to discover the most persuasive account of Hem-

[11] *Hemingway's Nonfiction: The Public Voice* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1968), p. 180.

[12] "Hemingway and the *New Masses*," *Fitzgerald/Hemingway Annual 1969*, ed. Matthew J. Bruccoli (Washington, D.C.: Microcard Editions, 1969), pp. 134-5.

[13] Quoted by Trilling (p. 63) from Wilson's "Letter to the Russians about Hemingway," *New Republic*, December 11, 1935, p. 135. The Wilson essay is reprinted in *The Shores of Light: A Literary Chronicle of the Twenties and Thirties* (New York: Farrar, Strauss & Young, 1952), pp. 616-29.

ingway's political significations in a few brief remarks in Fredric Jameson's *Marxism and Form*, a book inscribed in a very different tradition. Focusing on the famous Hemingway style, Jameson contends that

> what really happens in a Hemingway novel, the most essential event, the dominant category of experience for both writer and reader alike, is the process of writing . . . . From this central point in Hemingway's creation all the rest can be deduced: the experience of sentence-production is the form taken in Hemingway's world by non-alienated work. Writing, now conceived as a *skill*, is then assimilated to the other skills of hunting and bullfighting, of fishing and warfare, which project a total image of man's active and all-absorbing technical participation in the outside world. Such an ideology of technique clearly reflects the more general American work situation, where, in the context of the open frontier and the blurring of class structure, the American male is conventionally evaluated according to the number of different jobs he has had, and skills he possesses. The Hemingway cult of *machismo* is just this attempt to come to terms with the great industrial transformation of America after World War I: it satisfies the Protestant work ethic at the same time that it glorifies leisure; it reconciles the deepest and most life-giving impulses toward wholeness with a status quo in which only sports allow you to feel alive and undamaged.[14]

Although there is much more to be said about the ideology of Hemingway's fiction, Jameson's brief analysis establishes the terms in which it can be said. Both the reviewers who deplored or praised Hemingway's lack of "ideas" and the Thirties critics who demanded "social consciousness" were mistaken in believing that "politics" and "ideas" could exist only at the level of explicit commentary. Trilling, on the other hand, was right to maintain that Hemingway's earlier work was imbued with an implicit social consciousness, but his interpretation of it was limited by his own quasi-New-Critical assumptions concerning the necessary relations between "art," "ambivalence" and "truth." Jameson's analysis uncovers ambivalence in Hemingway's fiction but suggests that it serves directly political ends, finally reconciling the reader to the society whose dissatisfactions are so clearly exposed. Hemingway's art embodies an ideology which is at once oppositional to the status quo and complicit with it: it is oppositional in that it holds forth an ideal ("nonalienated work") denied realization in the industrial workplace, but it is effectively complicit because it defines the ideal in terms (painstaking craftsmanship, hard-won skill) which harmonize with the Protestant work ethic and because it embodies the ideal in sports, thereby observing society's division of activity into "work" and "leisure."

This double movement of opposition and recuperation is the essential structure of Hemingway's ideology, and in this essay I shall explore the political/ideological implications of some early novels and stories. Despite the reticence of the critical record on this subject, Hemingway's fiction provides a wealth of material, and his most important "ideas about life" prove not to be "sunk deep below the surface" but very close to it.

II

The opening paragraphs of "The Light of the World" constitute a sardonic economics lesson organized around the precept "There's no such thing as a free lunch:"

> When he saw us come in the door the bartender looked up and then reached over and put the glass covers on the two free-lunch bowls.
>
> "Give me a beer," I said. He drew it, cut the top off with the spatula and then held the glass in his hand. I put the nickel on the wood and he slid the beer toward me.
>
> "What's yours?" he said to Tom.
>
> "Beer."
>
> He drew that beer and cut it off and when he saw the money he pushed the beer across to Tom . . . . Tom reached over and took the glass off the free-lunch bowl.
>
> "No," said the bartender and put the glass cover back on the bowl. Tom held the wooden scissors fork in his hand. "Put it back," said the bartender.
>
> "You know where," said Tom.
>
> The bartender reached a hand forward under the bar, watching us both. I put fifty

[14] *Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1971), pp. 411-2.

cents on the wood and he straightened up.
"What was yours?" he said.
"Beer," I said, and before he drew the beer he uncovered both the bowls.[15]

This is an almost diagrammatic illustration of the fact that in America a "free" lunch is provided only for those who can pay for it. It is also an exercise in de-mystification, as Hemingway exposes the way in which the word "free," which lies at the heart of American political ideology, has been appropriated by commerce to conceal socio-economic realities [cf. "The Gambler, the Nun, the Radio," where Frazer reflects: "Liberty, what we believed in, now the name of a MacFadden publication" (*EH*, p. 486)].

Hemingway, however, is not interested in economics *per se*, but in how a socio-economic system corrupts human relationships and frustrates people's aspirations towards wholeness and integrity. The bartender's interaction with the two young men is determined entirely by his estimation of their economic power, giving the lie to the ideology of hospitality represented by the free-lunch bowls. Tom perceives the bartender's attitude as a denial of his humanity, and responds with verbal violence that rapidly threatens to turn into physical violence: "Your goddam pig's feet stink," Tom said, and spit what he had in his mouth on the floor . . ." (*EH*, p. 385). In a way, the bar is a house of prostitution, where paying customers can purchase the illusion of hospitality just as, in a brothel, they can purchase the pretence of love. In both places the sacred has been profaned, yet in this story the profanation seems not to be the inevitable result of the human condition but something imposed by a specific economic system on human beings whose potential for a different kind of life can occasionally be glimpsed, even in the most inauspicious contexts. When Tom and his friend leave the bar and go down to the station, they find Alice, "the biggest whore I ever saw in my life and the biggest woman" (*EH*, p. 386). Alice can still be moved to tears by her precious memory of Stan Ketchel, the boxer, and the quality of her emotion transforms this grotesque woman in the narrator's eyes: "Alice looked . . . at us and her face lost that hurt look and she smiled and she had about the prettiest face I ever saw. She had a pretty face and a nice smooth skin and a lovely voice and she was nice all right and really friendly" (*EH*, p. 391). Despite her ugly profession, her obscene size and her tawdry clothes, Alice embodies a principle that can appropriately be called "the light of the world," such that those who follow it "shall not walk in darkness but shall have the light of life" (John 8:12).

"The Light of the World" is structured by the opposition between the exploitative interaction in the bar and the capacity for love embodied in Alice and her memories — and it does not matter whether the "memories" are real or imagined — of Stan Ketchel. This opposition permeates Hemingway's work and explains to some extent his preoccupation with characters who exist on the fringes of society; for if that society has reduced human relationships to commodity transactions, then it is among the outcast and the despised, the incompletely or unsuccessfully "socialized," that an alternative has the best chance of flourishing. In "The Battler" Nick is viciously thrown off a moving freight train by the brakeman, to whom he is fair game because he has not purchased the right to be there; hurled into the darkness, he finds "light" both literally and figuratively at the campfire of two hoboes, one of whom, a negro, acts as friend and protector of the other, a "crazy" ex-boxer. Although the prizefighter's craziness makes it imperative that Nick leave, the negro's hospitality and gentleness are insisted upon:

> "I can wake him up any time now, Mister Adams. If you don't mind I wish you'd sort of pull out. I don't like to not be hospitable, but it might disturb him back again to see you . . . . I wish we could ask you to stay the night but it's just out of the question. Would you like to take some of that ham and some bread with you? No? You better take a sandwich," all this in a low, smooth, polite nigger voice.
>
> (*EH*, p. 138)

Hemingway's use of the word "nigger" here is not casual insensitivity but a sharp reminder that this generosity of spirit inheres in a man who is one of society's outcasts — doubly outcast, in fact, as a black and a vagrant — and that it is being extended to a white man with whom he has no obvious reason to feel kinship. Nick walks off into the darkness, a ham sandwich in his hand, but "looking back from the mounting grade

[15] *The Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway* (New York: Scribner Library edition), p. 384. Hereafter cited by *EH* followed by page number in text.

before the track curved into the hills he could see the firelight in the clearing" (*EH*, p. 138).

Part of the reason for Hemingway's much-noted preoccupation with food and drink is that "hospitality" is a synecdoche in his work, representing humane and decent social relations. In "Che Ti Dice La Patria?" Fascism seems to be a logical extension of capitalism, for Hemingway's critique focusses on the way in which Mussolini's Italy has substituted cash payment for the traditional courtesies and generosities of routine social interaction. Guy and the narrator give a ride to a young Fascist, who is suspicious and uncomprehending when they refuse his offer of money; he curtly utters "the lowest form of the word 'thanks'" and is "too dignified to reply" to the narrator's farewell wave (*EH*, p. 292). In such a society it is not surprising to find a restaurant that is in fact a brothel, with the whore/waitresses on display in the doorway like the "vegetables, fruit, steaks, and chops . . . arranged in a showcase:"

> The girl who took our order put her arm around Guy's neck while we were looking at the menu. There were three girls in all, and they all took turns going and standing in the doorway . . . .
>
> "What's the mechanics of this place?" Guy asked. "Do I have to let her put her arm around my neck?"
>
> "Certainly," I said. "Mussolini has abolished the brothels. This is a restaurant."
>
> (*EH*, pp. 293-4)

Once again a person's "worth" is equated with the amount of money that can be made out of him; when Guy and the narrator refuse the whores' blandishments, the manager repeatedly tells the women to desist on the grounds that "these two are worth nothing" (*EH*, pp. 295-6).

With social interaction reduced to cash transactions and people debased to commodities, Hemingway turns to sports to find scope for what Jameson appropriately calls his "deepest and most life-giving impulses towards wholeness." That wholeness can be achieved momentarily, as in the ski-ing experience rendered in "Cross-Country Snow," but sports are not immune to corruption by money. In "My Old Man" Butler is a jockey who has become involved in fixed races, and the consequence is the loss of the fulfillment that sport can provide: ". . . down in Milan even big races never seemed to make any difference to my old man, if he won he wasn't ever excited or anything . . ." (*EH*, p. 203). In contrast he remembers a sport uncontaminated by money, "during the war when they had regular races down in the south of France without any purses, or betting or crowd or anything just to keep the breed up. Regular races with the jocks riding hell out of the horses" (*EH*, p. 202). When Catherine Barkley, in *A Farewell To Arms*, discovers that the races at Milan's San Siro are crooked, she insists on backing a horse at random rather than betting on the inevitable winner; her choice comes in fourth in a field of five but she exclaims, "I feel so much cleaner."[16] Sport corrupted by money is further anatomized in "Fifty Grand" in which Jack Brennan, a champion boxer nearing the end of his career, agrees to throw a fight and bets fifty thousand dollars on his opponent. But even before the fight is fixed, financial considerations have destroyed Jack's "integrity" in a wider sense: he is "nervous and crabby," tortured by insomnia in which he lies awake worrying about his investments in property and in stocks (*EH*, p. 305). Hemingway makes it clear that boxing in this context is not sport: "It's business," said Jack . . . . "It's just business" (*EH*, p. 315).

Money corrupts, but it does not necessarily do so in Hemingway's world. In *The Sun Also Rises* it is perfectly possible for Jake Barnes to have a deep friendship with Montoya, the hotel-keeper, while engaged in a commercial transaction with him; and in "Wine of Wyoming" the narrator's relationship with the Fontans, a French couple who sell meals and bootleg liquor in their Wyoming home, is that of guest and hosts, not buyer and sellers. Fontan makes wine and beer in defiance of Prohibition, but not because he is after easy money; his motive is rather that "il est crazy pour le vin," which is a use-value rather than an exchange-value (*EH*, p. 459). As the narrator drives away from the Wyoming town where the Fontans live, he remarks that the countryside "looked like Spain, but it was Wyoming" and the mountains "looked more like Spain than ever" (*EH*, p. 466). The observation is significant, because the resemblance is based not simply upon topography but upon the Fontans' attitude to life, which recalls the passion and the decency that attracted Hemingway to rural Spain. There is a kind of moral geography in Hemingway: economic corruption is at its worst in modern

[16] *A Farewell To Arms* (New York: Scribner Library edition), p. 131. Hereafter cited by *FA* followed by page number in text.

capitalist societies (Switzerland, America, France), and at its weakest in a relatively pre-industrial society such as Spain. Within countries there are distinctions between town and countryside: cities, with their highly-organized economic structures, have usually killed the "impulse towards wholeness" that can still flourish in present societies with their less-developed market economies. There is a moral and political point behind Hemingway's much condemned "primitivism."

Switzerland's dominant values are briefly sketched in *A Farewell To Arms*, when Frederick and Catherine are given visas to enter the country not because they are in need of asylum but because they have money to spend (*FA*, p. 281). In the ironically-titled "Homage To Switzerland," published in 1933, Hemingway elaborates on this sketch and associates Switzerland with America in three separate but related episodes, all of which take place in station cafés. In the first Mr. Wheeler, an American, offers the waitress money to "go upstairs" with him, and her refusal is interestingly ambivalent. On the one hand she finds him "ugly and hateful" because he has offered "three hundred francs for a thing that is nothing to do. How many times have I done that for nothing" (*EH*, p. 424). On the other, it is clear that she would have accepted but for the fact that there is "no place to go here . . . no time and no place to go." Her contempt for prostitution is mitigated by her avarice, which makes her willing to sell herself; and her anger at Mr. Wheeler is at least partly fuelled by her frustration at the lack of opportunity to do so: "If he had sense he would know there was no place. No time and no place to go. Three hundred francs to do that. What people these Americans" (*EH*, p. 424). But the really corrupt character is Mr. Wheeler himself, who knew very well that "there was no upstairs to go to" and was simply amusing himself at her expense (*EH*, p. 425):

> Mr. Wheeler was thinking that it was very inexpensive sport. He had only spent, actually, aside from the dinner, seven francs for a bottle of wine and a franc for the tip. Seventy-five centimes would have been better. He would have felt better now if the tip had been seventy-five centimes. One franc Swiss is five francs French. Mr. Wheeler was headed for Paris. He was very careful about money and did not care for women. He had been in that station before and he knew there was no upstairs to go to. Mr. Wheeler never took chances.
>
> (*EH*, pp. 424-5)

"Meanness" is again associated with a meanness of spirit which treats other people as objects, in this case an object of "sport." But what kind of "sport" can there be for a man who "never took chances"?

"Homage To Switzerland"'s most poignant comment upon social relations in capitalist society is contained in Part III, "The Son of a Fellow Member at Territet." Mr. Harris, another American, is approached by an elderly Swiss gentleman who wants to know if he is a member of the National Geographic Society. The ensuing conversation reveals that the old man's identity is grounded in his own membership: his visiting card proclaims "Dr. Sigismund Wyer, Ph.D, Member of the National Geographic Society, Washington, D.C., U.S.A." (*EH*, p. 435). The poignancy here springs from the discrepancy between two ideas of a "Society." The old man clearly believes that the National Geographic Society is a community of scholars whose members are selected from interested students of appropriate fields, for he gravely tells Mr. Harris that "I have nominated a scientist from Vevey and a colleague of mine from Lauzanne and they were both elected. I believe they would be very pleased nominated Colonal [sic] Lawrence" ["Lawrence of Arabia"] (*EH*, p. 434). The story's irony depends upon the reader's appreciating the real nature of membership in the Society, which is open to anyone willing to pay and which confers no benefits other than *National Geographic Magazine*. Although the Society sponsors scientific expeditions, these activities do not directly involve most of its members, and "membership in the Society" is essentially a mystifying term for a magazine subscription. When the Society was founded in the late nineteenth century, there were indeed two classes of members: those resident in and around Washington paid higher dues and could attend lectures and other activities, while non-resident members paid less and received only the Society's magazine. But when it got into financial trouble, the Society's structure was quickly reorganized along the lines laid down by Gilbert Grosvenor, then the magazine's editor, in 1900:

> What we want is not subscribers to a magazine but members of a society . . . .

> A combination of membership and magazine will be a stronger attraction than a mere subscription to a magazine. Where many persons would not subscribe for the magazine alone, they will become members because they get two things, the distinction of membership in a well-known society and also a good monthly journal . . . .
> The Magazine . . . is the means, the tool by which we plan to build a society having thousands and thousands of members, and as few subscribers as possible, or, if we do get subscribers, to make them members as soon as possible. I hope my idea is clear: a great society and a great magazine is what we want and not a great magazine and a small society.[17]

The illusory "distinction" of membership in a well-known society (which had about a million members when Hemingway's story was published) is what Dr. Wyer received, along with the Magazine. And the scientific usefulness of the Magazine is surely somewhat limited by two of its "Guiding Principles" so proudly outlined by Grosvenor in 1936: "Nothing of a partisan or controversial character is printed," and "Only what is of a kindly nature is printed about any country or people, everything unpleasant or unduly critical being avoided."[18] Dr. Wyer's desire for a scholarly and scientific community has been rewarded with what is really a travesty of the idea of "community" or "society," and that travesty, like the "free lunch," is American through and through: it was "invented," appropriately, by Alexander Graham Bell, the Society's second President, better known for his creation of another device which has changed the nature of personal interaction.[19]

The Hemingway alternative to Switzerland/America is peasant Spain, where a healthier attitude to money allows fellowship and community to be forged out of the most casual encounters. In *The Sun Also Rises* Jake and Bill find themselves in a *posada* in which tipping is unknown and where they exchange hospitality with some Basque peasants they have just met on the bus:

> We each had an aguardiente and paid forty centimes for the two drinks. I gave the woman fifty centimes to make a tip, and she gave me back the copper piece, thinking I had misunderstood the price.
> Two of our Basques came in and insisted on buying a drink. So they bought us a drink and then we bought a drink, and then they slapped us on the back and bought another drink. Then we bought . . . .[20]

But this festivity is merely a foreshadowing of the generosity and hospitality that prevails at the fiesta in Pamplona. When Jake goes into a wine shop to fill his new wine-skins with seven litres of wine, "someone at the counter, that I had never seen before, tried to pay," and others offer him food:

> "I don't want to eat up your meal," I said when some one handed me a fork.
> "Eat," he said, "What do you think it's here for?"
>
> (*SA*, p. 157)

Hospitality is the essence of the fiesta, which creates a temporary community capable of absorbing the most heterogeneous elements into its wholeness:

> The fiesta was solid and unbroken, but the motor-cars and tourist-cars made little islands of onlookers. When the cars emptied, the onlookers were absorbed into the crowd. You did not see them again except as sports clothes, odd-looking at a table among the closely packed peasants in black smocks. The fiesta absorbed even the Biarritz English so that you did not see them unless you passed close to a table.
>
> (*SA*, p. 205)

Although the fiesta itself is indiscriminate in its hospitality and its willingness to accept and absorb, the lack of discrimination is entirely appropriate for an event given over to carnival, to the temporary suspension of the rules which organize normal existence. The fiesta is admittedly an anomaly, an extraordinary event, but it performs a vital and integral function by keeping

[17]Gilbert Grosvenor, *The National Geographic Society and Its Magazine* (Washington, D.C.: National Geographic Society, 1936), p. 23.

[18]Grosvenor, p. 27.

[19]Grosvenor, p. 13.

[20]New York: Scribner Library edition, 1967 (Scribner code 0-8.67), p. 106. Hereafter cited by *SA* followed by page number in text.

alive an ideal, an impractical but valuable conception of community and fellowship. Jake's relationship with Montoya shows that in Pamplona a more profound community, based upon shared ideals and values, can be achieved in spite of commercial transactions that might be expected to interfere with it:

> Montoya put his hand on my shoulder.
> "I'll see you there."
> He smiled again. He always smiled as though bull-fighting were a very special secret between the two of us; a rather shocking but very deep secret that we knew about. He always smiled as though there were something lewd about the secret to outsiders, but that it was something that we understood. It would not do to expose it to people who would not understand.
> "Your friend, is he aficionado, too?" Montoya smiled at Bill.
> "Yes. He came all the way from New York to see the San Fermines."
> "Yes?" Montoya politely disbelieved. "But he's not aficionado like you."
> He put his hand on my shoulder again embarrassedly.
> "Yes," I said. "He's a real aficionado."
> "But he's not aficionado like you are."
> Aficion means passion. An aficionado is one who is passionate about the bull-fights. All the good bull-fighters stayed at Montoya's hotel; that is, those with aficion stayed there. The commercial bull-fighters stayed once, perhaps, and then did not come back. The good ones came each year. In Montoya's room were their photographs. The photographs were dedicated to Juanito Montoya or to his sister. The photographs of bull-fighters Montoya had really believed in were framed. Photographs of bull-fighters who had been without aficion Montoya kept in the drawer of his desk. They often had the most flattering inscriptions. But they did not mean anything. One day Montoya took them all out and dropped them in the waste-basket. He did not want them around.
>
> (*SA*, pp. 131-2)

In a Spain far removed from the social relations of production which prevail in capitalist America and Switzerland, the concept of community is maintained as an ideal in the fiesta and realized by the aficionados. Their "society" is one for which "there was no password, no set questions" (*SA*, p. 132); unlike the National Geographic Society no one can buy his way into it, and its members subscribe not to a magazine but to a set of values which are profound because they spring from the mysteries of death and art that are at the root of bull-fighting. Election is based on attitude, not skill alone: the opposite of a "good" bull-fighter in the above passage is not a "bad one" but a "commercial" one, and Jake Barnes is welcomed into the community even though he does not fight bulls at all. The aficionado is one who apprehends the mystery and knows that the mysteries are not for sale.

III

For Hemingway true community is found in pre-Industrial society, where a market economy has not yet mystified the elemental "truths" and alienated people from themselves and from others; in the modern world it persists, fitfully, in areas which are the least "developed." This analysis is at the root of Hemingway's "primitivism;" it is not, strictly speaking, a Marxist analysis, but as a critique of capitalist society it moves along some of the same lines as Marxism. On the other hand it recalls the attitudes of other Modernists, such as Pound and Yeats, who shared Hemingway's dissatisfaction with liberal democracy, and for similar reasons. Yeats' contempt for "Paudeen's pence" and Pound's hatred of usury led them to similar yearnings for a romanticised rural past — in Pound's case for Jeffersonian agrarian democracy and in Yeats' for a mythical golden age in which peasant and landlord worked together in harmony undisturbed by middle-class values.

Both Yeats and — most notoriously — Pound looked to the Right for a cure for the disease they had diagnosed in modern society, but Hemingway was never tempted by Mussolini: as we have seen, in "Che Ti Dice La Patria" he identified Fascism as a simple extension of capitalism. Of all the great Modernists, he was the most likely candidate for the Left, for he recognized in the revolutionary movement the ideals of brotherhood and comradeship that he held so dear. In "The Revolutionist" he describes a young comrade, the victim of torture by Horthy's men in Budapest:

> In 1919 he was travelling on the railroads in Italy, carrying a square of oilcloth from

> the headquarters of the party written in indelible pencil and saying here was a comrade who had suffered very much under the Whites in Budapest and requesting comrades to aid him in any way. He used this instead of a ticket. He was very shy and quite young and the train men passed him on from one crew to another. He had no money, and they fed him behind the counter in railway eating houses.
>
> (*EH*, p. 157)

The behavior of the Italian train men contrasts sharply with that of the brakeman who throws Nick Adams off the moving freight train in "The Battler;" they form a community knit together by shared ideals, measuring a man's worth in terms of his humanity rather than his money and accepting sacrifices for the common cause in place of a "ticket" purchased by cash. Here, surely, is a viable alternative to social relations grounded in commerce, for the narrator points up the contrast in the story's final sentence: "The last I heard of [the revolutionist] the Swiss had him in jail near Sion" (*EH*, p. 158).

Yet despite the dynamic of Hemingway's social consciousness, with its clear impulse toward the Left, Hemingway ends up on the Right. Although he never embraces right-wing political movements — on the contrary, he staunchly opposes them — there is from the beginning another and better-known strand in Hemingway's philosophy which subtly undermines his left-wing sympathies and leaves him in a position which is effectively complicit with the status quo, even though it seems so uncompromisingly oppositional. This strand is his belief in "original sin," in a basic flaw in human nature which makes the ideal of community forever unattainable. The flawed nobility of humankind is at the heart of what has been called Hemingway's tragic vision: humanity is cursed with the capacity to imagine — and almost to attain — a utopian society which its essential weakness prevents it from ever realizing. The Hemingway hero is a man who knows and stoically accepts that weakness as part of himself; he rejects the struggle for social change as foredoomed to failure, while recoiling from bourgeois society in disgust at its inhumanity. He therefore has no place to go, except into the woods, the jungle or the bullring where he can attempt to contain if not to overcome the weakness within him by submitting himself to the strict code of the hunter and the matador. Insofar as he exists in society he must behave like a medieval monk, who is "in" the world but not "of" it, or like the tourist whose relationship to the society in which he finds himself is similarly limited.[21]

Since human nature makes effective social change impossible, the Hemingway hero renders unto Caesar that which is Caesar's, rejecting the role of Brutus as hopelessly naive and taking comfort in the profound knowledge of self and world which sets him apart from — and above — those he pities and despises. This knowledge means that the hero's fate is not bound up with that of others but something he must confront alone, as an individual. In "The Gambler, the Nun, the Radio" Frazer dismisses "a belief in any new form of government" as "an opium of the people" and maintains "what you wanted was the minimum of government, always less government" (*EH*, pp. 485-6). Revolution cannot bring about effective social change but is at best "a catharsis; an ecstasy which can only be prolonged by tyranny" (*EH*, p. 487).

This perspective is implicit in "The Revolutionist," where the narrator "did not say anything" in response to the young man's confident assertion that Italy would be the "starting point" of world revolution (*EH*, p. 157). It is worked out in detail in *The Sun Also Rises*, where Jake's essential weakness — his love for Brett — forces him to pander for her, even though he knows that procuring the bull-fighter Romero is a betrayal of his friend Mike, of Romero himself, of Montoya and of the ideals comprised in the concept of "aficion." Immediately after he has "introduced" Romero to Brett in the café, he is aware of the disapproval of the aficionados — "The hard-eyed people at the bull-fighter table watched me go. It was not pleasant" (*SA*, p. 187) — and Montoya's disapproval is evident in his refusal to smile at Jake when they meet on the hotel stairs later (*SA*, p. 209). But the most important betrayal is Jake's betrayal of himself, of the principles he tries to live by; if a man's sexuality — which is a part of the essence of his humanity — has the power to make him act contrary to his most deeply-held values, then human aspirations toward a better society are vain, as Hemingway proclaimed when he took the title for his novel from *Ecclesiastes*.

[21]See David Goldknopf, "Tourism in *The Sun Also Rises*," *The CEA Critic*, 41 (March 1979), pp. 2-8. Goldknopf says of the novel's characters: "They are the eternal tourists, aimlessly criss-crossing the landscape of their disenchantment. Who would want to live there? Yet it remains a nice place to visit" (p. 8).

Better, therefore, to accept the status quo, which is not fulfilling but is certainly workable: if one's only obligation to one's fellows is cash payment in return for services rendered, then at least that obligation can be fulfilled, unlike more profound ones. This is the theme of *The Sun Also Rises*, which opens in Paris where social relations are commercial transactions. Having picked up a *poule* at a café, Jake later abandons her but is scrupulous in honoring the precise financial obligation he has assumed:

> I took a fifty-franc note from my pocket, put in in the envelope, sealed it, and handed it to the patronne.
>
> "If the girl I came with asks for me, will you give her this?" I said. "If she goes out with one of those gentlemen, will you save this for me?"
>
> (*SA*, p. 23)

In France honorable behavior consists in honoring the debts one has contracted, and Jake follows this principle in constructing for himself an existence which is unfulfilling but viable.

The trip to Spain, however, opens up the prospect of a different kind of life, one in which relationships are based upon human rather than monetary values. In Spain a man can admit to a depth of feeling that would have to remain hidden in America: Bill tells Jake, "Listen. You're a hell of a good guy, and I'm fonder of you than anybody on earth. I couldn't tell you that in New York. It'd mean I was a faggot" (*SA*, p. 116). The fiesta and the profound sympathy of the aficionados appear to confirm the promise of wholeness and fulfillment, but human nature is inadequate, betrayal is inevitable, and the ideals which seem to have been realized in Spain turn out to be illusions. Even before the betrayal occurs, Jake acknowledges that the commercial transaction is an accurate metaphor — or more than metaphor — for life:

> I had been having Brett for a friend . . . . I had been getting something for nothing. That only delayed the presentation of the bill. The bill always came. That was one of the swell things you could count on.
>
> I thought I had paid for everything. Not like the woman pays and pays and pays. No idea of retribution or punishment. Just exchange of values. You gave up something and got something else. Or you worked for something. You paid some way for everything that was any good. I paid my way into enough things that I liked, so that I had a good time. Either you paid by learning about them, or by experience, or by taking chances, or by money. Enjoying living was learning to get your money's worth and knowing when you had it. You could get your money's worth. The world was a good place to buy in. It seemed like a fine philosophy. In five years, I thought, it will seem just as silly as all the other fine philosophies I've had.
>
> (*SA*, p. 148)

Despite the gesture of disavowal in the last sentence, this "philosophy" is the one confirmed by the novel: Jake's "friendship" with Brett has its price tag, and he has to pay when she asks him to introduce her to Romero. Jake's acceptance as an aficionado also has its price, for it demands that he not corrupt Romero by involving him with the foreigners who will spoil him. Clearly, Jake cannot pay both bills, but must default on one of them. Hence his relief to find himself back in a world in which payment is always in the form of money:

> The waiter seemed a little offended . . . so I overtipped him. That made him happy. It felt comfortable to be in a country where it is so simple to make people happy. You can never tell whether a Spanish waiter will thank you. Everything is on such a clear financial basis in France. It is the simplest country to live in. No one makes things complicated by becoming your friend for any obscure reason. If you want people to like you you have only to spend a little money. I spent a little money and the waiter liked me. He appreciated my valuable qualities. He would be glad to see me back. I would dine there again some time and he would be glad to see me, and would want me at his table. It would be a sincere liking because it would have a sound basis. I was back in France.
>
> (*SA*, p. 233)

Although the tone of this is bitter, the bitterness does not gainsay the message but, paradoxically, makes it acceptable. Hemingway is claiming that, however much we may dislike the fact, a "clear financial basis" is the only "sound basis" upon which social relations can be organized. We may aspire toward something better, but it is unat-

tainable because we will always betray it. This is the note upon which the novel ends, as Jake responds to Brett's "we could have had such a damned good time together" with the tragic recognition: "Yes . . . . Isn't it pretty to think so." The ideal of a whole, fulfilling relationship is indeed "pretty," but tragic wisdom consists in knowing that human weakness — in this case the sexual natures of Jake and Brett — renders it hollow. The tragic ending of *A Farewell To Arms*, in which Frederick and Catherine's idyllic love is destroyed by something as natural as the childbirth that kills her, reiterates the message.

Tragedy is a genre which functions ideologically to reconcile its audience to a state of affairs recognized as bitter and unpleasant. It offers us an image of true nobility and beauty, but convinces us that a "tragic flaw" will always destroy it, thus reconciling us to the inevitability of the imperfect conditions in which we live. Hemingway's tragic vision performed — and performs — such a function for twentieth-century America, drawing upon and articulating our feelings of alienation, offering us a vision of a community in which our desire for wholeness might be fulfilled, only to dash the cup from our lips at the last moment. His work leaves us feeling superior to bourgeois society but convinced that there is nothing to be done about it; the catharsis his tragedy provides de-fuses our dissatisfaction and robs us of any impulse that would generate political action. Only in this limited sense can Hemingway be said to have "no politics," for his work is profoundly political and serves the interests of the Right much more effectively than the misguided political activity of an Ezra Pound. Despite the efforts of Trilling to separate them, in Hemingway (as in all writers) the discourse of "art" and the discourse of "politics" are one and the same; Hemingway's "vision of the world" is not true *a priori* because it is enshrined in "art" but is an argument open to analysis and debate.

Pound, incarcerated in St. Elizabeth's Hospital after being found unfit to plead to a charge of treason, heard that Hemingway was appearing in full-page advertisements endorsing "—a beer, was it? Also a fountain pen." He commented: "Hem always believed that you should get yours *in*side the system."[22] For Hemingway, as for Jake Barnes, "the world was a good place to buy in." Isn't it a pity to think so? □

[22]Hugh Kenner, *The Pound Era* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1971), p. 527.

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Peter Kosenko

A MARXIST/FEMINIST READING OF SHIRLEY JACKSON'S "THE LOTTERY"

In her critical biography of Shirley Jackson, Lenemaja Friedman notes that when Jackson's story "The Lottery" was published in the June 28, 1948 issue of the *New Yorker* it received a response that "no *New Yorker* story had ever received": hundreds of letters poured in that were characterized by "bewilderment, speculation, and old-fashioned abuse."[1] It is not hard to account for this response: Jackson's story portrays an "average" New England village with "average" citizens engaged in a deadly rite, the annual selection of a sacrificial victim by means of a public lottery, and does so quite deviously: not until well along in the story do we suspect that the "winner" will be stoned to death by the rest of the villagers. One can imagine the average reader of Jackson's story protesting: but we engage in no such inhuman practices. Why are you accusing us of *this*?

Admittedly, this response was not exactly the one that Jackson had hoped for. In the July 22, 1948 issue of the *San Francisco Chronicle* she broke down and said the following in response to persistent queries from her readers about her intentions: "Explaining just what I had hoped the story to say is very difficult. I suppose, I hoped, by setting a particularly brutal ancient rite in the present and in my own village to shock the story's readers with a graphic dramatization of the pointless violence and general inhumanity in their own lives."[2] Shock them she did, but probably owing to the symbolic complexity of her tale, they responded defensively and were not enlightened.

The first part of Jackson's remark in the *Chronicle*, I suspect, was at once true and *coy*. Jackson's husband, Stanley Edgar Hyman, has written in his introduction to a posthumous anthology of her short stories that "she consistently refused to be interviewed, to explain or promote her work in any fashion, or to take public stands and be the pundit of the Sunday supplements."[3] Jackson did not say in the *Chronicle* that it was impossible for her to explain approximately what her story was about, only that it was "difficult." That she thought it meant something, and something subversive, moreover, she revealed in her response to the Union of South Africa's banning of "The Lottery": "She felt," Hyman says, "that *they* at least understood."[4]

A survey of what little has been written about "The Lottery" reveals two general critical attitudes: first, that it is about man's ineradicable primitive aggressivity, or what Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren call his "all-too-human tendency to seize upon a scapegoat"; second, that it describes man's victimization by, in Helen Nebeker's words, "unexamined and unchanging traditions which he could easily change if he only realized their implications."[5] Missing from both of these approaches, however, is a careful analysis of the abundance of social detail that links the lottery to the ordinary social practices of the village. No mere "irrational" tradition, the lottery is an *ideological mechanism*. It serves to reinforce the village's hierarchical social order by instilling the villagers with an unconscious fear that if they

[1]Lenemaja Friedman, *Shirley Jackson* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1975), p. 63.

[2]Friedman, p. 64.

[3]Stanley Edgar Hyman, ed., *The Magic of Shirley Jackson* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1966), p. viii.

[4]Hyman, p. ix.

[5]Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, eds., *Understanding Fiction* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1959; 2nd ed.), p. 74; Helen E. Nebeker, "'The Lottery': Symbolic Tour de Force," *American Literature*, 46 (1974), p. 103. Barring book reviews, dissertations and fugitive references in surveys of American writing, the following criticism should also be mentioned: 1) Skyamal Bagchee, "Design of Darkness in Shirley Jackson's 'The Lottery,'" *Notes on Contemporary Literature*, 9, iv, pp. 8-9; 2) Horst Brinkman, "Shirley Jackson, 'The Lottery' (1948)," in *Die Amerikanische Short Story der Gegenwart*, ed. Peter Freese (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 1976), pp. 101-09; 3) John V. Hogopian, *Insight I. Analyses of American Literature* (Frankfurt: Hirschgraben, 1971; 4th ed.), pp. 128-32; 4) Robert B. Heilman, ed., *Modern Short Stories, A Critical Anthology* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1950), pp. 384-85; 5) Seymour Lainoff, "Jackson's 'The Lottery,'" *The Explicator*, 12 (Mar. 1954), item 34; 6) Richard Williams, "A Critique of the Sampling Plan Used in Shirley Jackson's 'The Lottery,'" *Journal of Modern Literature*, 7 (1979), pp. 543-44. This bibliography may not be complete.

resist this order they might be selected in the next lottery. In the process of creating this fear, it also reproduces the ideology necessary for the smooth functioning of that social order, despite its inherent inequities. What is surprising in the work of an author who has never been identified as a Marxist is that this social order and ideology are essentially capitalist.

I think we need to take seriously Shirley Jackson's suggestion that the world of the lottery is her reader's world, however reduced in scale for the sake of economy. The village in which the lottery takes place has a bank, a post office, a grocery store, a coal business, a school system; its women are housewives rather than field workers or writers; and its men talk of "tractors and taxes."[6] More importantly, however, the village exhibits the same socio-economic stratification that most people take for granted in a modern, capitalist society.

Let me begin by describing the top of the social ladder and save the lower rungs for later. The village's most powerful man, Mr. Summers, owns the village's largest business (a coal concern) and is also its mayor, since he has, Jackson writes, more "time and energy [read money and leisure] to devote to civic activities" than others (p. 292). (Summers' very name suggests that he has become a man of leisure through his wealth.) Next in line in the social hierarchy is Mr. Graves, the village's second most powerful government official — its postmaster. (His name may suggest the gravity of officialism.) And beneath Mr. Graves is Mr. Martin, who has the economically advantageous position of being the grocer in a village of three hundred.

These three most powerful men who control the town, economically as well as politically, also happen to administer the lottery. Mr. Summers is its official, sworn in yearly by Mr. Graves (p. 294). Mr. Graves helps Mr. Summers make up the lottery slips (p. 293). And Mr. Martin steadies the lottery box as the slips are stirred (p. 292). In the off season, the lottery box is stored either at their places of business or their residences: "It had spent one year in Mr. Graves' barn and another year underfoot in the post-office, and sometimes it was set on a shelf in the Martin grocery and left there" (p. 293). Who controls the town, then, also controls the lottery. It is no coincidence that the lottery takes place in the village square "between the post-office and the bank" — two buildings which represent government and finance, the institutions from which Summers, Graves, and Martin derive their power.

However important Mr. Graves and Mr. Martin may be, Mr. Summers is still the most powerful man in town. Here we have to ask a Marxist question: what relationship is there between his interests as the town's wealthiest businessman and his officiating the lottery? That such a relationship does exist is suggested by one of the most revealing lines of the text. When Bill Hutchinson forces his wife, Tessie, to open her lottery slip to the crowd, Jackson writes, "It had a black spot on it, the black spot Mr. Summers had made the night before with [a] heavy pencil in [his] coal-company office" (p. 301). At the very moment when the lottery's victim is revealed, Jackson appends a subordinate clause in which we see the blackness (evil) of Mr. Summers' (coal) business being transferred to the black dot on the lottery slip. At one level at least, evil in Jackson's text is linked to a disorder, promoted by capitalism, in the material organization of modern society. But it still remains to be explained *how* the evil of the lottery is tied to this disorder of capitalist social organization.

Let me sketch the five major points of my answer to this question. First, the lottery's rules of participation reflect and *codify* a rigid social hierarchy based upon an inequitable social division of labor. Second, the fact that everyone participates in the lottery and understands *consciously* that its outcome is pure chance gives it a certain "democratic" aura that obscures its first codifying function. Third, the villagers believe *unconsciously* that their commitment to a work ethic will grant them some magical immunity from selection. Fourth, this work ethic prevents them from understanding that the lottery's actual function is not to encourage work *per se* but to reinforce an inequitable social *division* of labor. Finally, after working through these points, it will be easier to explain how Jackson's choice of Tessie Hutchinson as the lottery's victim/scapegoat reveals the lottery to be an ideological mechanism which serves to defuse the average villager's deep, inarticulate dissatisfaction with the social order in which he lives by channeling it into anger directed at the *victims* of that social order. It is reenacted year after year, then, not because it is a mere "tradition," as Helen Nebeker argues, but because it serves the repressive ideological function of purging the social body of

[6]Shirley Jackson, *The Lottery and Other Stories* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1982), p. 291. Further page references will occur in the body of the paper.

all resistance so that business (capitalism) can go on as usual and the Summers, the Graves and the Martins can remain in power.

Implicit in the first and second points above is a distinction between universal participation in the lottery and what I have called its *rules* of participation. The first of these rules I have already explained, of course: those who control the village economically and politically also administer the lottery. The remaining rules also tell us much about who has and who doesn't have power in the village's social hierarchy. These remaining rules determine who gets to choose slips in the lottery's first, second and third rounds. Before the lottery, lists are "[made] up of heads of families [who choose in the first round], heads of households [who choose in the second round], [and] members of each household in each family [who choose in the last round]" (p. 294). The second round is missing from the story because the family patriarch who selects the dot in the first round — Bill Huchinson — has no married male offspring. When her family is chosen in the first round, Tessie Hutchinson objects that her daughter and son-in-law didn't "take their chance." Mr. Summers has to remind her, "Daughters draw with their husbands' families" (p. 299). Power in the village, then, is exclusively consolidated into the hands of male heads of families and households. Women are disenfranchised.

Although patriarchy is not a product of capitalism *per se*, patriarchy in the village does have its capitalist dimension. (New social formations adapt old traditions to their own needs.) Women in the village seem to be disenfranchised because male heads of households, as men in the work force, provide the link between the broader economy of the village and the economy of the household. Some consideration of the other single household families in the first round of the lottery — the Dunbars and the Watsons — will help make this relationship between economics and family power clearer. Mr. Dunbar, unable to attend the lottery because he has a broken leg, has to choose by proxy. The rules of lottery participation take this situation into account: "Grown boy[s]" take precedence as proxies over wives (p. 295). Mrs. Dunbar's son Horace, however, is only sixteen, still presumably in school and not working; hence Mrs. Dunbar chooses for Mr. Dunbar. Jack Watson, on the other hand, whose father is dead, is clearly older than Horace and presumably already in the work force. Admittedly, such inferences cannot be supported with hard textual evidence, but they make sense when the text is referred to the norms of the society which it addresses.[7] Within these norms, "heads of households" are not simply the oldest males in their immediate families; they are the oldest *working* males and get their power from their insertion into a larger economy. Women, who have no direct link to the economy as defined by capitalism — the arena of activity in which labor is exchanged for wages and profits are made — choose in the lottery only in the absence of a "grown," working male.[8]

Women, then, have a distinctly subordinate position in the socio-economic hierarchy of the village. They make their first appearance "wearing faded house dresses . . . [and walking] shortly after their menfolk" (p. 292). Their dresses indicate that they do in fact work, but because they work in the home and not within a larger economy in which work is regulated by finance (money), they are treated by men and treat themselves as inferior. When Tessie Hutchinson appears late to the lottery, other men address her husband Bill, "Here comes your Missus, Hutchinson" (p. 295). None of the men, that is to say, thinks of addressing Tessie first, since she "belongs" to Bill. Most women in the village take this patriarchal definition of their role for granted, as Mrs. Dunbar's and Mrs. Delacroix's references to their husbands as their "old [men]" suggest (pp. 295 & 297). Tessie, as we shall see later, is the only one who rebels against male domination, although only unconsciously.

Having sketched some of the power relations within the families of the village, I can now shift my attention to the ways in which what I have called the democratic illusion of the lottery diverts their attention from the capitalist economic relations in which these relations of power are grounded. On its surface, the idea of a lottery in which everyone, as Mrs. Graves says, "[takes] the same chance" seems eminently democratic, even if its effect, the singling out of one person for privilege or attack, is not.

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[7]I propose this reading only as the most *plausible* way of accounting for the distinction between Horace Dunbar's exclusion from the lottery and Jack Watson's participation in it. To account for this distinction on the basis of age alone seems weak to me, given the value that the village places on work.

[8]Jackson's representation of women, of course, is exaggerated, even for her own time. But then the entire story is similarly exaggerated in order to highlight a theoretical framework which Jackson feels is necessary before we can even begin to understand the social world to which the story indirectly refers. Most allegory is similarly abstract.

One critic, noting an ambiguity at the story's beginning, has remarked that "the lottery . . . suggests 'election' rather than selection," since "the [villagers] assemble in the center of the place, in the village square."[9] I would like to push the analogy further. In capitalist dominated elections, business supports and promotes candidates who will be more or less atuned to its interests, multiplying its vote through campaign financing, while each individual businessman can continue to claim that he has but one vote. In the lottery, analogously, the village ruling class participates in order to convince others (and perhaps even themselves) that they are not in fact *above* everyone else during the remainder of the year, even though their exclusive control of the lottery suggests that they are. Yet just as the lottery's black (ballot?) box has grown shabby and reveals in places its "original wood color," moments in their official "democratic" conduct of the lottery — especially Mr. Summers' conduct as their representative — reveal the class interest that lies behind it. If Summers wears jeans, in order to convince the villagers that he is just another one of the common people, he also wears a "clean white shirt," a garment more appropriate to *his* class (p. 294). If he leans casually on the black box before the lottery selection begins, as a President, say, might put his feet up on the White House desk, while leaning he "talk[s] interminably to Mr. Graves and the Martins," the other members of his class, and "seem[s] very proper and important" (p. 294). (Jackson has placed these last details in emphatic position at the end of a paragraph.) Finally, however democratic his early appeal for help in conducting the lottery might appear — "some of you fellows want to give me a hand?" (p. 292) — Mr. Martin, who responds, is the third most powerful man in the village. Summers' question is essentially empty and formal, since the villagers seem to understand, probably unconsciously, the unspoken law of class that governs who administers the lottery; it is not just *anyone* who can help Summers.

The lottery's democratic illusion, then, is an ideological effect that prevents the villagers from criticizing the class structure of their society. But this illusion alone does not account for the full force of the lottery over the village. The lottery also reinforces a village work ethic which distracts the villagers' attention from the division of labor that keeps women powerless in their homes and Mr. Summers powerful in his coal company office.

In the story's middle, Old Man Warner emerges as an apologist for this work ethic when he recalls an old village adage, "Lottery in June, corn be heavy soon" (p. 297). At one level, the lottery seems to be a modern version of a planting ritual that might once have prepared the villagers for the collective work necessary to produce a harvest. (Such rituals do not necessarily involve human sacrifice.) As magical as Warner's proverb may seem, it establishes an unconscious (unspoken) connection between the lottery and work that is revealed by the entirety of his response when told that other villages are considering doing away with the lottery:

> "Pack of crazy fools . . . listening to the young folks, nothing's good enough for *them*. Next thing you know, they'll be wanting to go back to living in caves, nobody work any more, live *that* way for a while. Used to be a saying about 'Lottery in June, corn be heavy soon.' First thing you know, we'd all be eating stewed chickweed and acorns. There's *always* been a lottery." (p. 297)

But Warner does not explain *how* the lottery functions to motivate work. In order to do so, it would have to inspire the villagers with a magical fear that their lack of productivity would make them vulnerable to selection in the next lottery. The village women reveal such an unconscious fear in their ejaculatory questions after the last slip has been drawn in the first round: "Who is it?" "Who's got it?" "Is it the Dunbars?" "Is it the Watsons?" (p. 298). The Dunbars and the Watsons, it so happens, are the least "productive" families in the village: Mr. Dunbar has broken his leg, Mr. Watson is dead. Given this unconscious village fear that lack of productivity determines the lottery's victim, we might guess that Old Man Warner's pride that he is participating in the lottery for the "seventy-seventh time" stems from a magical belief — seventy-seven is a magical number — that his commitment to work and the village work ethic accounts for his survival. Wherever we find "magic," we are in the realm of the unconscious: the realm in which the unspoken of ideology resides.

Old Man Warner's commitment to a work ethic, however appropriate it might be in an egalitarian community trying collectively to carve an economy out of a wilderness, is not entirely

[9]Brinkman, p. 103; my translation.

innocent in the modern village, since it encourages villagers to work without pointing out to them that part of their labor goes to the support of the leisure and power of a business class. Warner, that is to say, is Summers' ideologist. At the end of his remarks about the lottery, Warner laments Summers' democratic conduct: "Bad enough to see young Joe Summers up there joking with everybody" (p. 297). Yet this criticism obscures the fact that Summers is not about to undermine the lottery, even if he does "modernize" it, since by running the lottery he also encourages a work ethic which serves his interest. Just before the first round drawing, Summers remarks casually, "Well, now . . . guess we better get started, get this over with, so's we can go back to work" (p. 295). The "we" in his remark is deceptive; what he means to say is "so that you can go back to work for me."

The final major point of my reading has to do with Jackson's selection of Tessie Hutchinson as the lottery's victim/scapegoat. She could have chosen Mr. Dunbar, of course, in order to show us the unconscious connection that the villagers draw between the lottery and their work ethic. But to do so would not have revealed that the lottery actually reinforces a *division* of labor. Tessie, after all, is a woman whose role as a housewife deprives her radically of her freedom by forcing her to submit to a husband who gains his power over her by virtue of his place in the work force. Tessie, however, rebels against her role, and such rebellion is just what the orderly functioning of her society cannot stand. Unfortunately, her rebellion is entirely unconscious.

Tessie's rebellion begins with her late arrival at the lottery, a *faux pas* that reveals her unconscious resistance to everything the lottery stands for. She explains to Mr. Summers that she was doing her dishes and forgot what day it was. The way in which she says this, however, involves her in another *faux pas*: the suggestion that she might have violated the village's work ethic and neglected her specific job within the village's social division of labor: "Wouldn't have me leave m'dishes in the sink, now, would you Joe?" (p. 295). The "soft laughter [that runs] through the crowd" after this remark is a nervous laughter that indicates, even more than the village women's singling out of the Dunbars and the Watsons, the extent of the village's unconscious commitment to its work ethic and power structure (p. 295). When Mr. Summers calls her family's name, Tessie goads her husband, "Get up there, Bill" (p. 297). In doing so, she inverts the power relation that holds in the village between husbands and wives. Again, her remark evokes nervous laughter from the crowd, which senses the taboo that she has violated. Her final *faux pas* is to question the rules of the lottery which relegate women to inferior status as the property of their husbands. When Mr. Summers asks Bill Hutchinson whether his family has any other households, Tessie yells, "There's Don and Eva . . . . Make them take their chance" (p. 299). Tessie's daughter Eva, however, *belongs* to Don and is consequently barred from participating with her parents' family.

All of these *faux pas* set Tessie up as the lottery's likeliest victim, even if they do not explicitly challenge the lottery. That Tessie's rebellion is entirely unconscious is revealed by her cry while being stoned, "It isn't fair" (p. 302). Tessie does not object to the lottery *per se*, only to her own selection as its scapegoat. It would have been fine with her if someone else had been selected.

In stoning Tessie, the villagers treat her as a scapegoat onto which they can project and through which they can "purge" — actually, the term *repress*" is better, since the impulse is conserved rather than eliminated — their own temptations to rebel. The only places we can see these rebellious impulses are in Tessie, in Mr. and Mrs. Adams' suggestion, squelched by Warner, that the lottery might be given up, and in the laughter of the crowd. (The crowd's nervous laughter is ambivalent: it expresses uncertainty about the validity of the taboos that Tessie breaks.) But ultimately these rebellious impulses are channeled by the lottery and its attendant ideology away from their proper objects — capitalism and capitalist patriarchs — into anger at the rebellious victims of capitalist social organization. Like Tessie, the villagers cannot articulate their rebellion because the massive force of ideology stands in the way.

The lottery functions, then, to terrorize the village into accepting, in the *name* of work and democracy, the inequitable social division of labor and power on which its social order depends. When Tessie is selected, and before she is stoned, Mr. Summers asks her husband to "show [people] her paper" (p. 301). By holding up the slip, Bill Hutchinson reasserts his dominance over his wayward wife and simultaneously transforms her into a symbol to others of the perils of disobedience.

Here I would like to point out a curious crux in Jackson's treatment of the theme of scapegoating

in "The Lottery": the conflict between the lottery's literal arbitrariness and the utter appropriateness of its victim. Admittedly, Tessie is a curious kind of scapegoat, since the village does not literally choose her, single her out. An act of scapegoating that is *unmotivated* is difficult to conceive. This crux disappears, however, once we realize that the lottery is a metaphor for the unconscious ideological mechanisms of scapegoating. In choosing Tessie through the lottery, Jackson has attempted to show us whom the village might have chosen if the lottery had been in fact an election. But by presenting this election as an arbitrary lottery, she gives us an image of the village's blindness to its own motives.

Possibly the most depressing thing about "The Lottery" is how early Jackson represents this blindness as beginning. Even the village children have been socialized into the ideology that victimizes Tessie. When they are introduced in the second paragraph of the story, they are anxious that summer has let them out of school: "The feeling of liberty sat uneasily on most of them" (p. 291). Like their parents, they have learned that leisure and play are suspect. As if to quell this anxiety, the village boys engage in the play/labor of collecting stones for the lottery. Moreover, they follow the lead of Bobby Martin, the one boy in the story whose father is a member of the village ruling class (Mr. Summers and Mr. Graves have no boys), in hoarding and fighting over these stones as if they were money. While the boys do this, the village girls stand off to the side and watch, just as they will be expected to remain outside of the work force and dependent on their working husbands when they grow up.

As dismal as this picture seems, the one thing we ought not do is make it into proof of the innate depravity of man. The first line of the second paragraph—"The children assembled first, of course" (p. 291) — does not imply that children take a "natural" and primitive joy in stoning people to death.[10] The closer we look at their behavior, the more we realize that they learned it from their parents, whom they imitate in their play. In order to facilitate her reader's grasp of this point, Jackson has included at least one genuinely innocent child in the story — Davy Hutchinson. When he has to choose his lottery ticket, the adults help him while he looks at them "wonderingly" (p. 300). And when Tessie is finally to be stoned, "someone" has to "[give] Davy Hutchinson a few pebbles" (p. 301). The village makes sure that Davy learns what he is supposed to do before he understands why he does it or the consequences. But this does not mean that he could not learn otherwise.

Even the village adults are not entirely hopeless. Before Old Man Warner cuts them off, Mr. and Mrs. Adams, whose last name suggests a humanity that has not been entirely effaced, briefly mention other villages that are either talking of giving up the lottery or have already done so. Probably out of deep-seated fear, they do not suggest that *their* village give it up; but that they hint at the possibility, however furtively, indicates a reservation — a vague, unconscious sense of guilt — about what they are about to do. The Adams's represent the village's best, humane impulses, impulses, however, which the lottery represses.

How do we take such a pessimistic vision of the possibility of social transformation? If anything can be said against "The Lottery," it is probably that it exaggerates the monolithic character of capitalist ideological hegemony. No doubt, capitalism has subtle ways of redirecting the frustrations it engenders away from a critique of capitalism itself. Yet if in order to promote itself it has to make promises of freedom, prosperity and fulfillment on which it cannot deliver, pockets of resistance grow up among the disillusioned. Perhaps it is not Jackson's intention to deny this, but to shock her complacent readers with an exaggerated image of the ideological *modus operandi* of capitalism: accusing those whom it cannot or will not employ of being lazy, promoting "the family" as the essential social unit in order to discourage broader associations and identifications, offering men power over their wives as a consolation for their powerlessness in the labor market, and pitting workers against each other and against the unemployed. It is our fault as readers if our own complacent pessimism makes us *read* Jackson's story pessimistically as a parable of man's innate depravity. □

[10]My reading makes Jackson's "of course" ironic: a phrase that appeals to her reader's possible assumption that children are innately depraved, an assumption which the story's other detail questions.

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Susan Willis

ALICE WALKER'S WOMEN

Be nobody's darling
Be an outcast.
Take the contradictions
Of your life
And wrap around
You like a shawl,
To parry stones
To keep you warm.
(*from* Revolutionary Petunias and Other Poems)

What the black Southern writer inherits as a natural right is a sense of community.
(*from* In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens)

The strength of Alice Walker's writing derives from the author's inexorable recognition of her place in history; the sensitivity of her work, from her profound sense of community; its beauty, from her commitment to the future. Many readers probably associate Alice Walker with her most recent novel, *The Color Purple*, for which she won the Pulitzer Prize. But the best place to begin to define the whole of her writing is with the semi-autobiographical novel, *Meridian*, and in that novel I suggest we first consider a very minor character: "Wile Chile." For "Wile Chile" is not gratuitous, not an aberrant whim on the part of the author, but an epigrammatic representation of all the women Walker brings to life. I think this is how Alice Walker intended it, precisely because she begins telling about Meridian by describing her confrontation with "Wile Chile," a thirteen-year-old ghetto urchin, who from the age of about five or six when she was first spotted, has fed and clothed herself out of garbage cans. More slippery than a "greased pig" and as wary as any stray, the Wild Child is virtually uncatchable. When it becomes obvious that the Wild Child is pregnant, Meridian takes it upon herself to bring her into the fold. Baiting her with glass beads and cigarettes, she eventually catches "Wile Chile," leads her back to the campus, bathes and feeds her, then sets about finding a home for her. However, Meridian's role as mother comes to an abrupt end when "Wile Chile" escapes and bolts into the street where she is struck by a speeding car.

If we consider the story of "Wile Chile" against the events which shape Meridian's development from childhood (the daughter of school teachers), through college, into the Civil Rights movement and finally to embark upon her own more radical commitment to revolutionary praxis, the two pages devoted to the Wild Child seem at most a colorful digression. Her only language comprised of obscenities and farts, "Wile Chile" is Meridian's social antithesis. Nevertheless, the story of "Wile Chile" is central to our understanding of *Meridian* and the woman whose name is the title of this book, for it includes certain basic features, present in different forms in all the anecdotal incidents which make up the novel and through which Meridian herself must struggle in the process of her self-affirmation.

When Meridian drags the stomach-heavy "Wile Chile" back to her room, she puts herself in the role of mother and enacts a mode of mothering which smacks of liberal bourgeois sentimentality. On the other hand, "Wile Chile's" own impending motherhood represents absolute abandonment to biological contingency. These are only two of the many versions of womanhood which the problem of mothering will provoke in the book. While Meridian and "Wile Chile" do not share a common social ground, they come together on one point, and that is the possibility of being made pregnant. For "Wile Chile" and Meridian both, conception articulates oppression, to which "Wile Chile" succumbs and against which Meridian struggles to discover whether it is possible for a black

woman to emerge as a self and at the same time fulfill the burdens of motherhood.

The story of "Wile Chile" also raises the question of Meridian's relationship to the academic institution and the black community which surrounds the university. Her outrageous behavior causes Meridian (and the reader) to reflect upon the function of the university as a social institution whose primary role is to assimilate bright young black women, who might otherwise be dangerously marginal, to dominant white culture. "Wile Chile's" unpermissible language draws attention to the tremendous pressures also placed upon Meridian to become a "lady" patterned after white European cultural norms. This is not a cosmetic transformation, but one that separates the individual from her class and community and forever inscribes her within the bourgeois world. That the university serves bourgeois class interests is dramatized when Saxon students and members of the local black community attempt to hold "Wile Chile's" funeral on the campus. Barred from entering the university, the funeral procession is isolated and defined as "other" in the same way that the local neighborhood, which ought to be the university's community of concern, is instead its ghetto.

In *Meridian*, childbearing is consistently linked to images of murder and suicide. In this, the figure of the Wild Child is as much a paradigm for the book's main characters, Meridian and Lynne, as it is for another minor anecdotal figure: Fast Mary. As the students at Saxon tell it, Fast Mary secretly gave birth in a tower room, chopped her newborn babe to bits and washed it down the toilet. When her attempt to conceal the birth fails, her parents lock her up in a room without windows where Fast Mary subsequently hangs herself. In posing the contradictory social constraints which demand simultaneously that a woman be both a virgin and sexually active, the parable of Fast Mary prefigures the emotional tension Meridian herself will experience as a mother, expressing it in fantasies of murder and suicide. The tales of "Wile Chile" and Fast Mary also pose the problem of the individual's relationship to the group. Fast Mary's inability to call upon her sister students and her final definitive isolation at the hands of her parents raise questions Meridian will also confront: namely, is there a community of support? And is communication possible between such a community and the individual who is seen as a social iconoclast?

The problem of communication, and specifically the question of language, is at the heart of another of *Meridian*'s anecdotal characters: Louvinie, a slave woman from West Africa whose parents excelled in a particular form of storytelling, designed to ensnare anyone guilty of having committed a crime. Louvinie's duties as a slave are to cook and mind the master's children. The latter includes her own superb mastery of the art of storytelling, which for Louvinie, as for all oppressed peoples, functions to keep traditional culture alive and to provide a context for radical social practice. The radical potential of language is abundantly clear when the master's weak-hearted young son dies of heart failure in the middle of one of Louvinie's gruesome tales.

At the level of overt content, the story of Louvinie focuses on the function of language while in its structure it reproduces the features associated in the book with motherhood. Louvinie, who does not have children of her own, nevertheless functions as a mother to the master's offspring. She, like "Wile Chile," Fast Mary — even Meridian and Lynne — kills the child defined structurally as her own. In more narrow terms, Louvinie provides a model closer to the way Meridian will resolve her life. Her actual childlessness suggests in asexual terms Meridian's choice not to be fertile and bear children. Moreover, when Louvinie murders the child in her charge it is clearly a politically contestatory act, which is not the case for either "Wile Chile" or Fast Mary — but is true for Meridian when she chooses to abort her child.

Louvinie's punishment rejoins the problem of language when the master cuts out her tongue. Louvinie's response is to bury her tongue under a small magnolia tree, which, generations later, grows to be the largest magnolia in the county and stands at the center of Saxon College. As a natural metaphor, the tree is in opposition to the two social institutions: the plantation and the university; it suggests an alternative to their definition of black history and language. Just as the university excludes women like "Wile Chile," so too does it seek to silence black folk culture typified by Louvinie's stories. The magnolia casts the university in stark relief, exposes its version of history as a lie, its use of language as collaborative with the forces of domination.

The magnolia also provides a figural bridge linking the struggle of black women from slavery to the present. In the past, it offered a hiding place for escaped slaves and in the present its enormous trunk and branches provide a platform for classes. Named The Sojourner, the magnolia

conjures up the presence of another leader of black women, who, like Louvinie, used language in the struggle for liberation. In this way, Walker builds a network of women, some mythic like Louvinie, some real like Sojourner Truth, as the context for Meridian's affirmation and radicalization.

The stories of "Wile Chile" and Fast Mary demonstrate that anecdotes are the basic narrative units in Walker's fiction. They reveal how Walker has managed to keep the storytelling tradition among black people alive in the era of the written narrative. The anecdotes are pedagogical. They allow the reader to experience the same structural features, recast with each telling, in a different historical and social setting. Each telling demands that the college students (and the reader) examine and define their relationship to the group in a more profound way than in the explicitly political gatherings where each is asked to state what she will do for the revolution. In this way, Walker defines story writing in the radical tradition that storytelling has had amongst black people.

It is not surprising that language is crucial to Meridian's process of becoming. From slavery to the present, black women have spoken out against their oppression, and when possible, written their version of history. However, their narratives have fared less well in the hands of publishers and the reading public than those written by black men. Only very recently, and with the growing interest in writers like Toni Morrison, Paule Marshall, and Walker herself, have black women enjoyed better access to recognized channels of communication outside those of home and church. As testament to the very long struggle for recognition waged by black women and the deep oppression out of which their struggle began, the literature is full of characters like Zora Neale Hurston's Janie Woods, whose husband sees and uses her like a "mule" and will not allow her to speak, to Walker's most recent female character, Celie, in *The Color Purple*, also denied a voice, who out of desperation for meaningful dialogue writes letters to God. For black women writers, the problem of finding a viable literary language — outside of the male canon defined predominantly by Richard Wright — has generated a variety of literary strategies. Toni Morrison's solution was to develop a highly metaphorical language, while for Alice Walker the solution has been the anecdotal narrative, which because of its relationship to storytelling and the family more closely approximates a woman's linguistic practice than does Morrison's very stylized discourse.[1]

The fact is no black woman has ever been without language, even the tongueless Louvinie who uses the magical preparation and planting of her tongue to speak louder and longer than with words. The question of language is not meaningful except in relation to the community. Louvinie's example affirms that the community of struggle will always exist and that the actions of a single black woman join the network of all. In contrast, "Wile Chile" represents a negation of the individual's need for community. With language reduced to farts and swears, hers is a one-way communication whose every enunciation denies integration with the group and proclaims her absolute marginality. Contrary to the Wild Child's self-destructive marginality, Meridian must define a form of oneness with herself which will allow her to speak and work with the community while at the same time prevent becoming submerged by it. Meridian's quest for a language and a praxis is analogous to Walker's work as a writer, which demands both distance from and integration with the people.

When in the book's first chapter Meridian is asked if she could kill for the Revolution, she finds herself unable to make the required revolutionary affirmation, and defines instead what will be her more difficult form of revolutionary praxis: "I'll go back to the people." People means the South, the small towns, the communities for whom the Civil Rights Movement passed by too quickly to transform embedded racist and sexist practices. In this, she is the antithesis of "Wile Chile," who never was a part of any community and hence can never return to it.

Meridian's decision is her way of defining the single most common feature in fiction by black women writers: that of return to the community. From Zora Neale Hurston's landmark text, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, to Toni Morrison's widely read novels, the trajectory of departure and return is the common means for describing a woman's development and structuring the novel. In every instance, return raises the fundamental question of whether a community of support exists and what will be the individual's relationship to it.

For Hurston's Janie Woods, the journey to

[1]For an historical analysis of Toni Morrison's use of metaphor, see my article: "Eruptions of Funk: Historicizing Toni Morrison," *Black American Literature Forum*, Spring 1982, pp. 34-42.

selfhood takes her through three husbands and just as many social strata. Yet return is as crucial to her development as her initial departure from her mother's traditional aspirations and town's inbred domination. Janie's three husbands define three modes of a woman's being with and for a man and they represent three stages which Janie must transcend for her affirmation of self. First, as the wife of a farmer, she is nothing more than a beast of burden; then, as wife to a small town mayor and storekeeper, she becomes a well-dressed commodity. Only later, as the wife of a migrant field worker, does she attain equal partnership with her man and the larger community of the migrant camp. This is the book's one utopian community, where women are not only allowed to speak but sing and dance as well. The camp gives the illusion of being separate from the world of white domination, which the black ghetto or small town cannot achieve. Then, too, the camp is so low on the economic scale that accumulation and property do not exist to define class relationships.

Janie's decision to leave the camp and return to the small town of her childhood represents a commitment akin to Meridian's determination to confront the struggle in the real world where black communities are strongly determined by their relationship to the white world. Janie's return begs the question of whether in the course of her own development the town might not have undergone some positive social change. The prognosis is at best mixed, although given the fact that Hurston is writing in the 1930's, the outlook is more favorable than might have been expected. Janie returns to find the same old gossipy pack of male-dominated women, but for one girlhood companion, Pheoby, who after hearing Janie's life story remarks, "Ah done growed ten feet higher jus' listenin' tuh you, Janie. Ah ain't satisfied wid mahself no mo'. Ah means tuh make Sam take me fishin' wid him after this. Nobody better not criticize yuh in mah hearin'."[2] In her refusal to be relegated to "women's work" and in her statement of solidarity with Janie, Pheoby demonstrates that she has taken a tremendous leap in consciousness. The two women's sisterhood suggests a nucleus out of which a women's community very different from that defined by male domination might grow.

The case is very different for Toni Morrison's *Sula*, written in the 1970's but about a woman growing up during Hurston's epoch. Here, return articulates the tragic plight of an extremely sensitive and perceptive black woman, in many ways ahead of her time, who goes to college, sees the world and a fair number of men, only to find herself dispossessed of place. While the community of her girlhood has undergone economic progress, neither the town's new golf course nor its convalescent hospital testify to deep social transformation. In contrast to Hurston's version, Sula returns home to find her girlhood friend deeply stigmatized by male sexual domination. Traumatized by his abandonment, she has become a sterile shell living out a life whose only excuse is her moral and economic enslavement to her children. There is no community of possibility for Sula, who dies, alone with her dreams and aspirations — a halycon symbol of a future womanhood which can never be the basis for a community in this society.

Alice Walker's rendering of return involves elements present in both Hurston's and Morrison's versions, but set in an entirely different context: the Civil Rights Movement, which historically was not a factor for Hurston and geographically does not significantly enter into Morrison's tales usually set in the Middle West. Only in Walker, a writer of the southern black experience, do we come to understand how important Civil Rights was. Not that it solved anything, but it definitely marks the moment after which nothing can ever be the same. Meridian's mission is to help discover the shape of the future.

Return is the developmental imperative in all of Walker's novels, where the journey over geographic space is a metaphor for personal growth and, in a larger sense, historical transformation. In her first novel, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, Walker's conception of geographic space embodies a dialectical understanding of history. When Grange Copeland abandons wife and child to seek his self and fortune in New York City, he leaves behind a rural community historically representative of the plantation system for the North and the industrial mode. The third moment of the dialectic is marked by Grange's return to the South, not as a penniless sharecropper, but with money in his pocket to buy his own land. The farm Grange brings into being suggests Walker's vision of a very different basis for black community, one which has experienced and transcended two forms of enslavement: first to the plantation, then to wage labor. In Walker's vision of the future, property ownership will not

[2]Hurston, Zora Neale, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978), p. 284.

be for the purpose of accumulation as it is under capitalism, but will provide for the satisfaction of basic human material and spiritual needs.

The epic of Grange Copeland is doubly transformational in that the character who will bear his experience into the future (both of the distant past which Grange passes along in the form of folk tales, and of the more recent past which Grange has directly known) is not a male heir, as more traditional literature might have it, but his granddaughter, whose coming of age is marked by sit-ins, voter registration and the speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr. His own life marred by his struggle against bigotry, his own acts of violence, and the terrible racism and sexism of which he has been both a victim and an agent, Grange cannot be the embodiment of the future. Rather some great moment of rupture from the past is needed, and this Walker achieves in the transition from the male to the female principle. The novel ends on a note of affirmation — but not without uncertainty over the shape of the future. Ruth, Grange's granddaughter, is an adolescent and her future as well as the post-Civil Rights black community in the South cannot yet be told, but is, like the sixteen-year-old Ruth, on the threshold of its becoming.[3]

In geographic strokes less broad, Walker's most recent novel, *The Color Purple*, also articulates personal and historical transition. In it, Celie is married as an adolescent to a man who makes her cook and keep house, tend the fields and look after his unruly children, and who pretty much conceives of her as a "mule." Celie's abuse is deepened by the fact that before marriage she had already been repeatedly raped by the man she calls "father" and made to bear his children only to have them taken from her soon after birth. If there is to be any transformation in this book, its starting point is the absolute rock bottom of a woman's economic and sexual enslavement in a male-dominated and racist society.

The possibility of Celie's transformation is brought about by her journey away from the rural backwater and to the big city: Memphis, where she comes to support herself — not by means of wage labor, and it is clear that Walker sees no hope for liberation in the transition to the industrial mode, but by means of learning a trade — which is both artistic and necessary. She designs and sews custom pants.

If Celie's transformation is to be thorough, it must not just be economic, but sexual as well. Celie's ability to question what would otherwise be her "lot in life" and to break with her passive acceptance of her husband's domination is made possible by her friendship and eventual lesbian relationship with a black Blues singer: Shug Avery. Unlike the monstrous inequality between husband and wife, theirs is a reciprocal relationship — Celie giving of herself to heal the sick and exhausted Shug (even though Celie's husband has for years been enamoured of the singer), and Shug giving of herself, patiently and lovingly teaching Celie to know the joys of her own body and to follow the intuition of her mind. Neither the economics of pants-making nor the sexuality of lesbianism represents modes of enslavement as do the economics of industrial capitalism and the sexuality of male-dominated heterosexual relationships. At book's end Celie is neither seen as a pants-maker in the way one might see an auto worker as a particular species of human, nor as a lesbian lover the way one sees a wife and mother.

Out of Walker's three novels, *The Color Purple* defines return in the most auspicious terms and offers — not a prescription for — but a suggestion of what a non-sexist, non-racist community might be. No longer a voiceless chattel to her man, Celie is able to converse with her husband. Having undergone liberation in both economic and sexual terms, she is for the first time perceived — not as a domestic slave or the means toward male sexual gratification — but as a whole woman: witty, resourceful, caring, wise, sensitive and sensual. And her home — the site of an open and extended family where family and friends merge — suggests the basis for a wholly new community. The Fourth of July picnic which concludes the book and reunites Celie with her sister and children redefines the traditional family group in the context of a radically transformed household.

Of the novels, *Meridian* offers the clearest view of the process of radicalization. For Meridian, the autobiographical embodiment of Walker herself, coming of age in the '60s does not offer a free ticket, but provides an atmosphere of confronta-

[3]As a negative qualification, I wish to add that the possibility for transformation in *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* is based upon the toil and abuse of three women, personally connected with Grange, who stand in something of a generational relationship to each other: Margaret, Grange's wife, whom he abandons; Mem, Grange's daughter-in-law, who is murdered by her husband (Grange's son); and Josie, Grange's mistress, whom he jilts and bilks. It is only by the accumulation of their labor and misery that Grange is able to break the chains that bind him to the enslavement of sharecropping. So Ruth's future will bear the burden of the women who toiled and died for her possibilities.

tion and the questioning of contradiction with which the individual must grapple. Early in the book it becomes clear that one of the most profound ideologies to be confronted and transcended is the acceptance of mystical explanations for political realities. Meridian's childhood is steeped in Indian lore, the walls of her room papered with photographs of the great Indian leaders from Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse to the romanticized Hiawatha. Moreover, her father's farm includes an ancient Indian burial mound, its crest shaped like a serpent, where, in the coil of its tail, Meridian achieves a state of "ecstasy." Absorbed in a dizzying spin, she feels herself lifted out of her body while all around her — family and countryside — are caught up in the spinning whirlpool of her consciousness. It is not odd that Walker focuses on mystical experience. After all, this is a book about the '60s whose counterculture opened the door to more than one form of mysticism. It is also not strange that Meridian's mystical experience derives from Native American culture given the long co-historical relationship between blacks and Indians (in the southeastern United States) whose radical union goes back to the time of cimarrons and Seminoles.

However, ecstasy is not the answer. While Meridian will learn from the mystical experience, it will not be sufficient to her life's work to rely upon the practice of retreat into the ecstatic trance. What, then, of the historic link between Indians and blacks? If, in the course of the book, Meridian learns to transcend ecstasy, is this a denial of her (and her people's) relationship to the Indian people?

Definitely not: the book's preface gives us another way of defining Meridian's relationship to Native Americans, which the great lesson taught by her radicalization will bring into reality. Taken from *Black Elk Speaks*, this is the book's preface:

> I did not know then how much was ended. When I look back now . . . I can still see the butchered women and children lying heaped and scattered all along the crooked gulch as plain as when I saw them with eyes still young. And I can see that something else died there in the bloody mud, and was buried in the blizzard. A people's dream died there. It was a beautiful dream . . . the nation's hoop is broken and scattered. There is no center any longer, and the sacred tree is dead.

Black Elk's words remember the massacre of Wounded Knee which for Indian people was the brutal cancellation of their way of life. The dream Black Elk refers to is the vision he, as a holy man, had of his people and their world: "The leaves on the trees, the grasses on the hills and in the valleys, the waters in the creeks and in the rivers and the lakes, the four-legged and the two-legged and the wings of the air — all danced together to the music of the stallion's song."[4]

This is a vision of a community of man and nature, which Black Elk, as a holy man, must bring into being — not individually, but through the collective practice of the group. As he sees it, the nation is a "hoop" and "Everything an Indian does is in a circle, and that is because the Power of the World always works in circles, and everything tries to be round." These are images of a community's wholeness, which Meridian takes as her political paradigm — not the particulars of Indian culture: not the beads which Hippies grafted on their white middle-class identities, not the swoons of ecstasy — but the Indian view of community, in which the holy man or seer is not marginal, but integral to the group. So when Meridian says she will "go back to the people," and when she leads them in demonstration against racist practices, she enacts Black Elk's formula for praxis. As an intellectual and a political activist, she understands that the individual's inspiration for social change can only be realized through the group's collective activity.

By far the greatest test of Meridian's radicalization is to overcome the social and sexual categories ascribed to all women, and black women in particular. Because she does not choose the lesbian alternative as does Celie in *The Color Purple*, Meridian's struggle is within and against heterosexual relationships. As Walker describes it, the two most fundamental categories of womanhood as defined under male-dominated heterosexuality are bitches and wives. The first category is composed of white women, while the second is made up of black women and is essentially the same as saying "mothers." The bitch in the book is Lynne, who in many ways is Meridian's antithetical parallel. A white woman, from the North, Jewish, a student and fellow Civil Rights worker, Lynne is the third factor in a triangular love relationship which includes Meridian and Truman, also a Civil Rights worker and the man both Lynne and Meridian love. The tension produced by love and jealousy is the

[4]Black Elk, Nickolaus, *Black Elk Speaks* (Bison Books, 1961), p. 42.

ground upon which Walker examines social categories and defines the process through which Meridian eventually liberates herself from male sexual domination.

She begins her adult life a high school dropout and teenage mother married to a restaurant bus boy. Motherhood for Meridian is fraught with contradictory impulses. Caressing her child's body, she imagines that her fingers have scratched his flesh to the bone. At other times she thinks of drowning her baby; and when not fantasizing her child's murder, she dreams of suicide. Murder and suicide are the emotional articulation of social realities. This is the experience of futility — the mother's purposelessness as an individual, whose only function is to add yet another little body to the massive black underclass, and the child's bankrupt future, another faceless menial laborer.

In contrast to the futility is the one moment — equally profound for its singularity — when Meridian beholds her child with loving wonderment and sees him as a spontaneous, unasked-for gift, absolutely unique and whole. In response to the possibility for her child's selfhood and in recognition of her own desperate need to redefine her life's course, Meridian chooses to give her child away when, as if by miracle, her high IQ makes her a college candidate. In relinquishing her child, Meridian recognizes her relationship to the history of black motherhood, which, under slavery, defined the black woman's struggle to keep her children as a radical act, making the mother liable for a beating or worse; to the time of freedom, which, in giving black women the right to keep their children, provided the fetters of enslavement to poverty and sexism. Meridian's mother is very much a part of this tradition. Although morally outraged at her daughter's decision to 'abandon' her child, the mother exemplifies the plight of black mothers, "buried alive, walled away from her own life, brick by brick" with the birth of each successive child.

In giving her child away, Meridian makes it clear that mothering as it has been defined by heterosexual relationships in racist society is the single most unsurmountable obstacle to a black woman's self-affirmation. Only by refusing ever to be a mother in the particular can she carve out a new social function, which includes a form of mothering, but in the larger sense of an individual's caring for her community. We get a sense of what this might involve when Meridian first appears in the novel leading a band of children in demonstration. But for the most part, Meridian's practice is less an indication of future possibilities and more a critique of the way heterosexual relationships have individualized a woman's relationship to *her* children, making them *her* property. This is the mother/child relationship which Meridian violently denies for herself when, becoming pregnant for a second time, she chooses to abort her lover's baby. Her decision is also a dramatic refutation of Truman's overtly male chauvinist invitation to "have [his] beautiful black babies" for the Revolution. For Meridian, the subsequent decision to have her tubes tied represents another step in the direction toward a new form of womanhood where heterosexuality will not be the means towards oppression but a mode within which sexual partners will one day set each other free. But for the time being, her espousal of a self-less, nun-like celibacy suggests that the day is a long way off.

For Lynne, however, heterosexuality, complicated by the pressures upon the biracial couple in a racist society, leads not to liberation and the affirmation of a new social mode, but rather the rock bottom debasement of self.[5] Notwithstanding her marriage to Truman, Lynne will always be the white bitch, and notwithstanding their child's African name, Camara, the mulatto does not represent a hope for a non-racist future. This is because American society — before, during and after Civil Rights — remains racist and sexist. Camara's brutal murder graphically puts an end to any liberal thoughts about a new, hybridized society of the future. The death of this child — and all the book's children, either by abortion or murder — dramatizes Walker's radical intuition that the future as something positive and new cannot be produced out of genetic or personal terms, but demands, as Black Elk saw it, the selfless involvement of the individual with the community. When Truman criticizes Meridian for never having loved him, she responds, "I set you free." Meridian has chosen to relinquish personal and sexual relationships, which in this

[5]The category of bitch is highly contradictory in that it articulates two widely divergent black male fantasies regarding white women. On the one hand, Lynne is perceived as a paragon of domestic virtue, cooking and sewing for the Civil Rights Workers; and on the other, as a wanton libertine who asks for and deserves to be raped. Because rape cannot be thought of in isolation, but in relation to the black male fear of lynching, the entire complex of meanings associated with the category bitch, would seem to derive, not from black male sexual fantasies alone, but from the way these have been conditioned by dominant white male sexuality and political oppression.

society cannot help but be the means and form of a woman's oppression, as a way of advancing her own struggle — and that of her loved ones — toward their liberation.

For the most part, Walker's writing is not figural, but there is in *Meridian* one very important metaphor, whose function is to synthesize the many levels of Meridian's struggle. This is the significance of Meridian's sickness, which goes by no medical name but is characterized by dizziness, temporary blindness, swooning faints, loss of hair, paralysis, and general bodily weakness. The illness strikes Meridian immediately after she first sees the Wild Child. Because many of the symptoms coincide with her childhood experience of mystical ecstasy, the illness is a link between her early confrontation with cultural ideology and her later struggle as an adult against social and sexual oppression, typified by the plight of the Wild Child. The illness allows the reader to perceive at the level of experience the absolute energy-draining work of political praxis, as with each demonstration Meridian must struggle to regain her vanquished strength, patiently forcing her paralyzed limbs to work again. Meridian's trademark, a visored cap to cover her baldness, articulates the contradictory notions attached to a black woman's hair — her crowning glory and sign of sexuality, for which the headrag was both a proclamation and refutation. With each confrontation with white male authority — be it under the abortionist's knife or facing down an army tank — Meridian's swoon and faint proclaim, not surrender, but absolute commitment to the struggle. Coming back to consciousness, Meridian awakens to find the struggle — an ongoing process — renewed upon a higher, more exacting level.

At the novel's conclusion, Walker gives us to understand that Meridian has mastered — not the whole struggle — but herself in that struggle. Rid of the sickness, her wooly head restored, she discards her cap and packs her bag to set out once again upon the road to confrontation. While one individual's coming to grips with self can be a lesson for others, it cannot be their solution. The novel closes upon Truman, dizzily crawling into Meridian's sleeping bag, pulling her cap upon his head, and accepting for himself the long process of her struggle. The transition from Meridian to Truman lifts the book out of its sexual polarization and suggests that everyone, regardless of social ascribed sex roles, must work to de-essentialize sex. Now it will be Truman who works for the community and in its care to bring the collective dream into being.

Although not by his choosing, Truman, at book's end, is no longer capable of being perceived either as a lover or a father. The course of Meridian's struggle to liberate herself from sexually prescribed categories has been the means for Truman's unwitting relinquishment of positions from which men have traditionally exerted domination. The transcendence of sexual domination undermines other forms of domination including racism, but this does not mean that race itself has been neutralized. Rather, blackness is affirmed. Meridian's new crop of wooly hair testifies directly to her renewal as a black woman. Nor has transcendence brought about her separation from the community, whose coherent presence is the novel's core. In contrast to the strength of the black presence, white people enter *Meridian* incidentally and are always perceived as individuals, bereft of any relationship with their own community. Almost freakish in their singularity and behavior, white people in general closely approximate their symbolic representation in the form of a mummified white woman, a side show attraction, whose husband carts her from town to town earning money off her exhibition.

Walker's affirmation of blackness uses racially specific traits — not to define a form of black racism — but to delineate the look of a class. Black is the color of the underclass. And all Walker's women are peasants, from Celie in *The Color Purple*, whose abusive treatment is the context of Ruth's childhood in *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* and Meridian's experience of her mother's and grandmother's history. Bound to the land and their husbands (or fathers), worn by toil in the fields and the demands of childbearing, these women are the underclass of the underclass. This is why literacy and education are so crucial to the way Walker depicts the process of liberation. Her radical understanding of education lies at the heart of literacy campaigns from revolutionary Angola to Grenada and Nicaragua. Clearly, the ability to raise questions, to objectify contradictions, is only possible when Celie begins writing her letters. Similarly, for Meridian, education (notwithstanding its inspiration in liberalism) and the academic institution (notwithstanding its foundation in elitism) offer the means for confronting social and sexual contradictions which she, as a black teenage mother, would not have been able to articulate — either for herself or anyone else.[6]

To understand the author's perception of class

and the role of women in class politics, I recall that in a workshop on black women writers held at Yale University (spring 1982), Walker stressed the importance of rediscovering Agnes Smedley, particularly the latter's highly perceptive descriptions of Chinese women during the years of the Revolution. Both Smedley and Walker would agree that the radical transformation of society can only be achieved when the bottom-most rung attains liberation; in fact, the wellspring of revolution is the rebellion of the peasant class. This is the great historical lesson of revolution in the twentieth century from China to Cuba and Central America. And it lies at the heart of all Smedley's "sketches" of women revolutionaries, who, when their class background and education more closely approximate Meridian's, must, like Walker's character, turn to the people and be one with their struggle. The individual who becomes separate from the peasantry is truly lost — like Walker's Lynne, who never outgrew her liberal background and the tendency to see black people as works of art; and Smedley's the "Living Dead," women reclaimed by the aristocracy and abandoned to opium dreams or so traumatized by the White Terror that they wander about dazed.

There is a great deal of similarity between the real life Agnes Smedley and the fictional Meridian — and her autobiographical inspiration, Alice Walker herself. Smedley, born in the South (Missouri), was also a peasant woman. Her childhood grounded in poverty, she, although white, knew a form of enslavement when, at the age of eleven, she was hired out as a domestic. Education and, later, left politics were her way up and out of poverty, just as writing was her way back to the people. Always an advocate of feminism, both in journalism and in fiction, Smedley, like Walker, depicts the contradictions of womanhood as they relate to abortion, birth control and mothering. Finally, while Smedley's community was the revolutionary Chinese, her relationship to that community as a foreigner and an intellectual bears striking similarity to Meridian's relationship to her community.

Perhaps the best way to characterize all three — Smedley, Meridian and Walker — is with the title of one of Walker's collections of poems: *Revolutionary Petunias*. It captures the spirit of revolutionary women both in beauty and struggle. Certainly, there was a great deal of flamboyance in Agnes Smedley as she donned a Red Army uniform and marched into Sian. Rather than a simplistic identification with the Communist forces, her act was intended to draw the attention of the world press (which it did) and to articulate a joyous celebration of struggle (which it does) in the linguistics of gesture and play acting often used by women in lieu of those modes of communication — like speech and writing — which have been traditionally defined by male discourse. This is a form of revolutionary praxis very like the moment when Meridian, at the head of a pack of kids, faces down the town militia and a World War II tank. Not to be confused with the flower children and the politics of counter-culture, "Revolutionary Petunias" are those women who with grace, strength and a fair amount of wit, have put their lives on the line. □

[6]Literacy has always been linked to liberation in the history of black writing. When Frederick Douglass's mistress begins to teach the alphabet to her young slave, she is roundly scolded by her husband, saying, "If you give a nigger an inch, he will take an ell"; "he should know nothing but the will of his master, and learn to obey it." "Learning will spoil the best nigger in the world"; "if you teach that nigger [speaking of Douglass] how to read the Bible, there will be no keeping him"; "it would forever unfit him for the duties of a slave"; . . . "if you learn him now to read, he'll want to know how to write; and this accomplished, he'll be running away with himself."

Douglass takes his master's words to heart, clearly seeing that his struggle for liberation must begin with the mastery of his master's written language:

> The effect of his words, on me, was neither slight or transitory. His iron sentences — cold and harsh — sunk deep into my heart, and stirred up not only my feelings into a sort of rebellion, but awakened within me a slumbering train of vital thought. It was a new and special revelation, dispelling a painful mystery, against which my youthful understanding had struggled, and struggled in vain, to wit: the white man's power to perpetuate the enslavement of the black man.

Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* (New York: 1964), pp. 145-146.

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Kim Bridgford

OUT OF THE DUST

Here, shyly, I collect things I am in common with—
Cattails with their bents of fur, bits of wood,
The pale flesh of gooseberries.
I step softly
Through stiff, dark weeds and tree brambles
To lift a feather, gray and small,
From its quilled place in the grass.

And in the house I arrange my findings
With small, measured gestures
As if it all mattered
In a larger scheme of move and place.
Carefully as the shadow of a child's profile
Is traced on black paper—
The pencilled lips, nose, and lashes—
I rearrange my rooms,
Turning the thick throats
Of my African violets
Toward other squares of light,
Changing the places of the faded photographs
Of tiny women in oval frames,
Surrendered now to the gray houses
They stand in front of,
Posing in a light rain of dust.

Afterward I peel, scrape, and wash,
Never wanting to bruise.
Stirring the soup, I think about
How I always refuse
To let the wishbones be broken.
I save them, too,
Like grim, tribal necklaces in a drawer.
I stand and look at them sometimes,
Touching the tips of a cluster of bones,
All determining fate,
All so easily lost or broken.

I cover the table with a thin white cloth
And, as I move with plate and cup,
Look out the north window;
And it seems as if I see
Those tiny women in their printed dresses,
Those women that throw back reflections of other women
Like box in box.
I'm standing, too, shyly, poised
As if I can see not only them
But their tiny collections—
The leaves like almonds,
The bottles too small for medicine or flowers,
The patterns behind rustles and small silences,
The patterns I see from.

And that is why in the bone-whiteness here
I touch you with those small, measured gestures,
To remember the pattern of your bones,
The shadow of your bones.
You must understand my collecting, my saving
The fern, the soft, gray feather,
The tiny women out of the dust.
You must understand
Why there is a reason
Out of the grim, abrupt darkness
To step softly.

Vilas Sarang

THE DEPARTURE

Translated by the Author and Breon Mitchell

A fuse was burning before my eyes. Emitting small sparks, it burned from right to left. It wasn't really a dream; it was one of those images that float in your mind's eye just before you wake up. I immediately realized that it was a scene from a movie I had seen the day before. In the movie it had been a burning dynamite fuse that a few moments later blew up a huge dam.

The fuse continued to burn before my closed eyes. I wondered when it would reach the sticks of dynamite. Although the fuse burned on and on, the burning point itself always remained in the center of my field of vision. Which meant that the image was being tracked as in a movie, from right to left. In the cinema, when you watch a close-up of a burning fuse, you automatically tense up a bit, knowing that in a few moments there's going to be a big explosion on the screen. But the fuse that now burned before my eyes seemed to be endless. Was it going to burn on for miles and miles like that? It held me spellbound. Leaving a black thread behind, the point of fire was speeding ahead. Was it all one fire — that which had burned out, and that which was burning on? Or was it a series of separate, temporary fires? The whole of the fuse wasn't burning all at once; at a given moment, it burned only at a particular point. On the other hand, the burning of the fuse at a particular point was part of a general burning, and it didn't seem right to regard it as a separate fire. I puzzled over the matter. Then I thought to myself, all one can say at any particular time is that the fire has, at this moment, burned up to this point. While I was saying this to myself, the fire had of course burned onwards.

After a while, the strain of concentrating upon the burning point became too great, and I opened my eyes. Even then, the fuse continued to burn before me for a few seconds. Without moving, I remained in bed staring at the ceiling. Then I got up, tossed the shirt and trousers that I had thrown over the back of the chair onto the bed, and sat in the chair. After resting in the chair for a few moments, I went into the kitchen and made myself a strong cup of tea. Then I went to the toilet. Coming back, I threw the shirt and trousers lying on the bed over the back of the chair, and leaned back in the bed. That's the way it is with my shirt and trousers — from the bed to the chair, and from the chair to the bed. Sure, there's a closet in my room, and there are clothes hangers in there. But I don't have the necessary enthusiasm to put my clothes on the hangers, and to hang them in the closet. Anyway, you always put the clothes that you take off on again, the next day if not on the same day. So what's the point in bothering to hang them up in the interval? Maybe clothes hate to be cooped up in a dark closet; perhaps they like it better out in the open. It's nice for the wearer, too. Lying in bed you can watch your shirt and trousers suspended over the back of the chair, or, sitting in the chair, you can watch the clothes lying on the bed. Why condemn them to hang in a dark closet like lonely ghosts?

As I lay back in the bed, I looked around my room. I had practically completed packing my things. I was going to leave most of them with my landlord Maganmal. It was from him I had borrowed the cardboard boxes for packing. I still hadn't put anything much in the suitcase that I was going to carry. For one thing, I didn't intend to take a lot of things along. And then, one can pack a suitcase in a matter of minutes. Besides, you can't pack things like your toothbrush until the day of your departure. If you're starting very early in the morning, you have to brush your teeth quickly and stuff the toothbrush into the suitcase in a hurry. Even if you dried the toothbrush carefully on a towel — in the rush of departing you don't usually have time for that, anyway — the bristles still remain damp at the roots.

This business of packing had made my room look bare, but it had also resulted in a large pile of things rising upon my desk. I had come across so many things that didn't seem worth taking along with me, but which, on the other hand, I didn't feel like tossing into the boxes I was going to

leave with Maganmal. I had been throwing such things onto the desk, as a result of which the desk now looked awfully cluttered. If I didn't want to leave these things with Maganmal, what was I going to do with them? That was a problem. I rose from the bed, walked over to the desk, and surveyed the heap. My bankbook, a few certificates, the passport that I had taken out years ago when I was planning to go to America. As a matter of fact, the passport had expired long ago. I opened it now, and scrutinized my photo inside, noting how different I looked then. I read the information about myself, then read the long list of countries one was permitted to visit that had been stamped inside. It was gratifying to read the long list of countries I was free to visit. But what was more interesting were the names that were missing from the list. I noted the absence of both Israel and the Republic of China. I shut the passport and tossed it back onto the heap on the desk. There were some old letters, and an album of photographs. I opened the album. Turning its black pages, it seemed to me that I was, for no good reason, disturbing the sleep of these images settled in the depths of an everlasting night. I laid the album down gently, then fussed about with a few more things. Then I just stood there, unable to make up my mind what to do about the heap upon the desk. Annoyed, I turned back towards the bed. Picking up the ashtray on the desk, I set it down beside me upon the bed. I noticed that the parings of nails that I had dropped into it the day before had already disappeared beneath a fresh layer of ashes.

And suddenly it struck me with unexpected force that, at last, I was going to leave my room, that I was going to leave the city. Tomorrow I would be traveling. After such a long time I was going to travel again! My last trip was when I had come down to Bombay. Since then, I hadn't gone away anywhere at all. I looked around my room again, examining each nook and corner. I had lived in this room for three years. Several others had lived in it before me, had slept in the bed that I slept in. On the mattress, beneath the bedcover, there was a hive of yellowish black stains at the level of the loins. The thought came into my mind that someone somewhere must be making a list of the persons that had lived in this room one after the other. But why would anyone make such a list?

Before I rented this room, a man called Jadeja had it. When he started bringing women to his room at night, Maganmal asked him to leave. I had visited the room once before Jadeja left. The walls were covered with pin-ups from hard-to-obtain foreign magazines like *Playboy*. Those pictures of nude bodies now floated up in my mind. Then I turned and looked at the clock, and noticed that it was past a quarter of eleven. Junnarkar was due to arrive at eleven. Hurriedly I went in for a bath. There was a knock on the door while I was still in the bathroom. "Jagtap, Mr. Jagtap—," Junnarkar shouted. I hate for anyone to call my name out loudly. Drying myself quickly, I came out of the bathroom and opened the door. Asking Junnarkar to sit down, I put on my shirt and trousers. Junnarkar surveyed the room. He was looking it over in the peculiar manner in which people survey a place they are planning to move into. People get quite engrossed in planning things — let's move the desk over there, put the bed on this side, let's shift the cupboard into that corner, and so on. It's strange.

Junnarkar worked in a solicitor's office on the floor beneath the office where I worked until a few days ago. I used to run into him on the stairs, or in the corridor. When I told him that I was leaving my room as well as my job, he asked me if he might rent it. He had visited my room once to look it over, but Maganmal hadn't been in his shop. I had spoken to Maganmal about him in the meantime. Now, on Sunday, I had asked him to come over again. I had told him that I was leaving on Monday.

I dressed, and sat on the bed. A spasm of dry coughing seized Junnarkar, and he kept on coughing for a minute or two. Then he stopped and said, "Looks like you haven't finished packing yet."

"I don't have much to pack, really," I said. "And I'm not taking all my things along. I'm leaving them downstairs with Maganmal for the time being. He has a large storeroom at the back of his shop, and has agreed to let me store my belongings there for a while. I'm just taking a suitcase."

"You're doing the right thing. There's no point in taking all your belongings right away. I assume you'll spend the first few days in a hotel, and the packages would only be a bother."

Then Junnarkar asked me what the new company I had told him I was joining was like, what my prospects were, and so on. I told him I had excellent prospects.

Another fit of coughing seized Junnarkar. When he had stopped I said, "That's a nasty cough."

"Yeah," Junnarkar puffed. "It's been like this

for over a week now. It just won't go away."

"Why don't you take some tetracycline tablets then?" I said. "That'll make you well in a couple of days. Tetracycline is the best thing for infections like that. It's really effective. If you like, you can buy some from the druggist round the corner here. He'll give it to you even without a prescription."

"Oh, no," Junnarkar shook his head. "I avoid taking medicines as a rule. Especially these newfangled antibiotics and what not. One should give one's body a chance to get well naturally, on its own strength. I'm sure the cough will go away in a week or two. The more you allow your body to fight germs, the stronger it becomes. Don't you agree, Mr. Jagtap?"

He looked at me. I remained silent. I thought to myself, he's the sort of guy who drinks a lot of milk and exercises daily, and that sort of thing. He'll keep on coughing determinedly and will get well through sheer tenacity. That'll give him the satisfaction of having proved something.

"I don't think I'll stay in this room for long," Junnarkar said. "I've invested some money in an apartment in a co-operative housing society at Andheri. The building will be completed within a year or so. Once I move into my apartment, I plan on getting married too."

"Ah, that would be nice," I said.

"I think you ought to do the same thing, Mr. Jagtap — I mean get married once you're settled in your new job. There's no point in living like this."

"I'll think about that," I said, looking out the window. When I asked Junnarkar if he'd care for a cup of tea, he said he'd prefer to go see Maganmal right away. Straightening his back as if to rise, he looked at me. Suddenly I said, "I meant to leave tomorrow, but it looks as though I'll have to be around another two or three days."

"No problem," Junnarkar said, "I've lived in a hotel for so long anyway. I can easily wait another three days."

As we walked down the stairs, I thought over what I had just said. I hadn't really been planning to postpone my departure by two or three days. I'd only said so on the spur of the moment. I'd said I'd keep the room for another three days, and Junnarkar paid Maganmal in advance for a period beginning after that. So what had been said quite unexpectedly became a definite thing.

I went out for a stroll that afternoon. In the last few days — the few days that I was to spend in the city before leaving it for good — I had taken to wandering around in different parts of the city, as though I wanted to have a last look at every part of it before I bade it goodbye. On this day I went to Malabar Hill by bus. Standing near the edge of the Hanging Gardens on the hill under the mid-day sun, I watched the sea and city spread below. In the distance beyond the bay, on the far side of Nariman Point, stood the jungle of new skyscrapers that had led some people to call that area the Manhattan of India. How cities change, I thought. And the city would continue changing after I was gone.

I descended from the hill, walked along the Chowpatty beach, then along Marine Drive, turned left at Churchgate Station and came to Flora Fountain. It was a long stroll, and I walked the streets peering at the surrounding buildings as though I were seeing them for the first time in my life. As it was a Sunday, the downtown area was more or less deserted. At this hour of the day, the heat was burning me, and it seemed as though the city too were burning. And it would go on burning, burning.

Passing by the Yellow Gate near the docks, a man accosted me, and, furtively opening a paper bag that he carried, said, "Have a look at this trouser-piece, sahib. Genuine English cloth, sahib. Smuggled out of the docks." I told him I didn't need new clothes any more.

I ate something on the way, then returned to my room. For an hour or two I sat in bed smoking cigarettes. As usual my mind turned to my impending departure. I was going to buy a ticket straight through to Delhi. Of course I had no intention of going to Delhi. I'd get off anywhere on the way at some small, unimportant station, go into town with my suitcase — a suitcase that carried no name or address — and rent a room at some out-of-the-way hotel. What would that room be like, I wondered vaguely.

Suddenly the light in my room went out. The darkness was total, for all the lights in the area had gone off. If my light alone had blown a fuse, the room wouldn't have been so dark, what with the lights from the other apartments and from the street. Now I'd just have to sit still, and wait for the lights to come back on. In this total darkness, only the burning point of the cigarette in my hand was visible. Then I realized that I had left the ashtray on the bed, but didn't remember exactly where it was. I could have groped around for it, but I was afraid that I might overturn it, or get my fingers covered with ashes. I didn't have any matches handy either. I sat still, flicking ash onto the floor. After a while I wondered if the cigarette had burned down close to the end. I

didn't know for sure, because, in the darkness, I didn't know how far the burning point was from my fingers. Maybe I was going to get burnt. Straining my eyes, I watched the burning point of the cigarette, and said to myself, the cigarette has burned up to here. But where was here? Since I didn't know, there was little point in saying 'here.'

After some time my fingers felt the warmth of the cigarette, and I knew that now I had to put it out. Should I extinguish it on the floor? I thought for a few seconds. Then holding the cigarette between my thumb and forefinger, I brought it close to the bed, and moved it around in the air. In the faint light of the cigarette, the round ashtray gleamed on the bed. It had shown up so quickly because it was made of thick, patterned cut glass. Some time ago, when Kamalakar had come over from America for a visit, he had presented me with this beautiful, expensive ashtray.

It had never occurred to me that a cigarette could be a source of light. It was as though the cigarette itself had discovered its ashtray. I held the cigarette close to the ashtray, and, bringing my head nearer observed the round ashtray in the dim light of the cigarette. The ashtray glowed in the faint light, appearing even more beautiful in the surrounding darkness. Twisted cigarette butts and burnt-out matches nested upon the ash in the hollow at the center. I moved the cigarette in a circle above the round ashtray as though I were making a gesture of benediction. It was a strange sight in the darkness, like watching a burnt-out city from the sky. After a few seconds, I plunged the burning end of the cigarette into the ashtray. For a moment, with small sparks flying up, the ashtray shone brighter in the darkness, and then was drowned in darkness like a cluster of stars dying out in the vastness of space. As I remained with my head lowered over the ashtray, a smell arose as though of burning flesh. The cigarette had burnt the nail parings resting beneath the ashes.

I picked up the ashtray, placed it on the bedside table, and sat in darkness. Then I stretched out and fell asleep. At some point late in the night the lights came back on and since I had forgotten to switch it off, the light in my room woke me up. I got out of bed and turned it off. I don't know if it was because my sleep had been interrupted, but I was unable to fall asleep again. I remained awake in bed for the rest of the night. □

Daniel Weissbort

RESOLUTION

Some might call it laziness,
this reluctance to close with nature.
But I shall call it —
a first step
in the direction of
my right place
in the natural order of things.
That is, instead of interposing myself,
I shall let the world go by.
A modest smile on my lips,
I'll leave to others the description of
sunsets, cloudbursts, and the like.

Sandra Cooper

BABY ROSE

Myra pushes against the rusty screen door as her Uncle Sam yells, "You hear 'bout that woman namin' 'er baby God?"

The warm April wind slams the sagging door back in Myra's face. Sam continues to tell Myra, his twelve-year-old great-grandniece about a rockin' roll floozy naming her baby God as he and Hattie, his wife for sixty-five years, follow Myra onto their front porch. Sam Tucker loves a thunderstorm more than a long nap in his favorite chair, and grumbling thunder rolling in from the west promises him a good one.

The century-old house appears ready to capsize with the next Mississippi storm. Sam and Hattie shuffle their feet along the rotting boards. Sam creeps toward the low side of the porch and Hattie moves cautiously toward the high side. Myra drags a creaky oak rocker to the center of the porch, climbs over the arm rest, sinks down in the cowhide-bottom chair and pulls her long bare legs up close to her thin body. Her father drives a truck and stops by occasionally to leave a little money and tell a big lie about how he'll be back soon to take her with him to live in Florida. The child's mother ran off to Nevada with an insurance salesman from Gulfport and left Myra at Sam and Hattie's over three years ago.

Thick black curls blow across her haunting blue eyes as she watches Sam grow more excited with each distant growl of thunder.

Myra searches the marbled grey skies like a hawk hunting for prey."Look, Uncle Sam. Look at that cloud over yonder. It's just full of rain. How old are you, Uncle Sam?"

"Your Aunt Hattie and me are the same age, born two days apart, and we both pray neither one of us will have to live more than twenty-four hours without the other."

Hattie points to the Mount Zion Baptist Church across the gravel road and in a jittery voice explains, "Honey, if the church folks find out how old we really are, they'll make us move up with the old people in Sunday School and Sam and me we're real happy right where we are with the sixty-five to seventy-year-olds. We been there twenty years and we ain't gonna promote up now. Are we, Sam Tucker?"

Sam shakes his head, no. His wide grin reveals an empty mouth except for three yellowish-brown teeth, jagged as a jack-o'-lantern. He sucks on a dangling tooth, runs his bony fingers through his thin white hair and moves farther down the low side of the porch to inspect the tumbling clouds.

By degrees Hattie gets to the high side of the porch, and she drops heavily into a worn-out rocker to admire her snow-colored azaleas with bleeding pink centers. Bright red geraniums, purple irises and yellow daisies surround the high end of the porch, along with six old tires, an old porcelain sink, a catawba vine hunting for something to run on, a few scattered calla lilies and Hattie's own hybrid of white satin rose bushes loaded with giant buds. Nothing grows at the low side of the porch because three large oak trees block the sun. Hattie's cloudy blue eyes delight at the beauty of her hard work. But the sight of a honeysuckle vine snaking through one of her treasured azalea bushes brings her to the edge of the rocker: she plots to get rid of the killer.

Minnie, the cat, is stretched out on the top step cleaning her ragged grey ear meticulously, while her young ebony son Scram plays with fluttering leaves.

Sam calls, "Myra, come on over to my side of the porch for a minute."

Myra leaves the comfort of the droopy-bottom chair to join him. With his finger and one good eye Sam points up the gravel road that runs in front of his house. His right eye is bad and stays in the same upward position all the time. He says he can see perfect out of it, but Hattie says he is a liar, that the eye is dead blind and been dead for more than twenty-five years.

They watch the sluggish green car sitting low to the ground stop in front of the cemetery. The Mount Zion Baptist Church, recently modernized with white vinyl siding, and a small decaying cemetery stare directly at Sam and Hattie's listing house.

A small whirlwind lifts dust and tiny pieces of gravel into the air, leaving grit to settle on the car and back on the rarely used road. A waving hand pops out from the driver's window of the car, but quick as a thought the hand disappears, and

three large people begin to emerge.

"They not good religious folks," Sam mumbles.

Hattie leans forward in her rocker, grabs hold of the weak railing and pulls herself to her unsteady feet and fusses. "Sam, why you sayin' that? Now don't go and be mean."

"Hattie, I own the land that church is sittin' on and I own that clangless bell hangin' in that steeple. That bell belonged to my daddy's church in Belzoni, only thing that survived the 1910 church fire. And I own the land them dead is buried in so I can say anything I want to. Willis is my best friend, and there ain't nothin' I wouldn' do for him or his wife Maudy, but they ain't good religious folks. Ya'll come on. I forgot I had promised Willis I'd help him do somethin'."

They step over Minnie who refuses to move even at Hattie's harsh scolding and walk into the front yard full of old egg-less hens. Sam stops in front of his faded, blue 1956 pickup sitting on four flat tires. Sam's son, Harold Dean, chained the truck to an oak tree near the low side of the porch over a year ago. Sam shakes his head, sucks his teeth and throws his arms in the air. His arms flail around as fiercely as the oak branches high above him.

In a loud strained voice he admits, "Now I did hit that fire hydrant in downtown Florence, but ya'll know I'm a good driver and hittin' one fire hydrant in forty years of drivin' ain't good 'nough reason to chain up a man's truck. Is it, youngun?" Myra shakes her head, no, and scrawls her name in the dust on the hood of the truck.

Sam's voice drops, but he is still angry. "The police and mayor completely overlooked the broken fire hydrant, but it was Miss Katie Neal Sojourner that got all upset just 'cause 'er yard was flooded for a couple days." Sam reaches out, pats his truck and sings in a nursery rhyme way, "Good ol' blue . . . . I love you . . . . Me and you . . . . What we gonna' do."

Hattie tugs at Myra's arm and whispers, "He ain't the same since Harold Dean went and chained up his truck."

Sam and Hattie are grunting and panting as they enter the cemetery. Myra slows down to admire the rows and rows of yellow buttercups nodding their heads in approval. Tiny, delicate wild flowers embrace the weeds that flow into the pasture beyond the barbed wire fence separating the church and cemetery from a neighbor's pasture. A diseased pecan tree stands in the middle of the graves. Moss covers the headstones; two have fallen over and broken. The three large people stand with their backs to Sam, Hattie, and Myra.

Sam turns to Hattie, "I don't know who them two fat women are. Do you?" And then he yells, "Warm day, ain't it."

Willis turns slowly towards them and replies, "Yep, real warm."

Myra stops. In the man's weathered arms is cradled a small white casket, no bigger than a man's shoe box. A shovel leans against his bulging stomach. Myra steps closer to Willis; she is amazed at the tiny box.

Sam and Hattie carry on a conversation about Willis's disfigured hand lying across the top of the tiny casket. Willis tells them the hand's about the same and continues with the whole gruesome story of how he got it hung in a disker. They have heard the story many times, but they enjoy it once again.

Willis ends the story by telling them, "I wish it would of chewed the damn thing clean off."

Hattie asks who the two women are. Each wear over-washed denim dresses with no belts. They are elephantine. Their black pump shoe tops are spread out over their soles. No stockings, but matching dingy slips fall two inches below their dress hems. Their orangey-red hair matches the cow's coat that ambles along the fence. The women stare at whatever their puffy owl eyes fix upon. Simultaneously, they fold their flabby arms under their massive bosoms and tromp soldier-like back to the car.

"They too heavy for their legs. Cain't stand more than five minutes. They my baby brother's youngest girls. They twins, identical twins," says Willis.

Myra continues to stare at the mauled hand and dwarf-like casket as Sam asks, "You want to bury it here?"

"Her name is Rose, Miz Hattie. They named her after Miz Maudy's favorite flowers, the lily and the rose, Lily Rose Van Zandt. Miz Maudy is staying with the baby's mama. Baby Rose would have been our very first great-grandchild."

"That's a real pretty name, Willis," says Hattie as she dabs at tears running down her face.

Hattie holds out her arms and tells Willis, "Let me hold Baby Rose while ya'll dig the grave. They'll be plenty of shade right here for her." She pats the coffin gently and a fine mist of rain begins to dampen their hair.

"Why ain't the baby's daddy down here diggin' instead of us two worn-out, half-dead mules?" laughs Sam.

"Well, the daddy done up and run off three

months ago. He don't know nothin' 'bout Baby Rose being born," says Willis.

At that Hattie lets out a pitiful cry and rocks Baby Rose from side to side as if she were rocking a baby taking a late afternoon nap. The wind blows a few dead limbs from the pecan tree while the dark clouds hanging above their heads threaten them with lightning. Sam and Willis argue over who is going to dig until raindrops begin to change the smell of the later afternoon air.

Myra reaches out for the shovel, "I'll dig, Mr. Willis."

Neither one likes the idea, but Willis hands her the shovel and sits down on the ground. Sam joins him. Myra hesitates for a moment. She draws a deep breath and jumps on the shovel breaking the soft ground. The broken earth releases a sweet wine smell as she digs deeper and deeper. Sam tells Willis he'll take over, but Willis argues he should be the one to finish so Myra continues to dig while they fuss.

Quarter-size raindrops begin to fall along with the thick mist. Hattie takes off her red-checked apron and spreads it over the casket. She uses the corner of the draped apron to wipe her eyes and nose.

Hattie whispers to Willis, "I'm goin' over to the church yard real quick to get some fresh flowers. You hold the baby."

As soon as Hattie leaves, Willis sets Baby Rose on the ground next to Sam and tells them both he'll be right back. He stands up, straightens his tight overalls, peers into the roughly dug hole and says, "That's a real good job you doin', Myra. What do you think, Sam?"

Sam crawls over on his hands and knees, peers in, and agrees with Willis. "Child, I couldn't do a better job myself."

Willis helps Sam to get up off the dank cold ground while Myra, excited by their praise, digs faster. Sam and Willis offer her suggestions and their help, but Myra turns a deaf ear and continues her frantic digging.

A few minutes later, Hattie returns panting and clutching a small bunch of buttercups, one large white satin rose bud and a long stem calla lily. She stops at a grave and disposes of some dead flowers sitting in a moss-covered jar, half-full of water. With flowers and jar she returns to Sam's side. Her eyes dash around searching their arms for the casket and when she sees Baby Rose sitting on the ground she explodes.

"Willis Van Zandt, get that baby girl off the ground this instant."

In a fluster she moves toward a sick-looking Willis and in a piercing voice scolds all of them. "Just 'cause there ain't no preacher here or Christian service here, ain't no reason to be disrespectful to God's greatest treasure. Sweet child. Give that baby to me this instant."

Willis grabs Baby Rose and hands her to Hattie with his head hanging on his chest and his lip stuck out like a five-year-old child.

Myra tops digging and asks, "Mr. Willis, I think I've dug deep enough, don't you?"

"Looks alright to me. What you think, Sam?"

"Looks good to me," sniffs Sam.

Thunder jolts them into action. "Let's at least say a prayer," says Hattie.

"Alright, Miz Hattie, I'll say one," responds Willis.

"Dear Lord, we sorry you didn't see fit to let this baby, Baby Lily Rose Van Zandt, live longer than seven hours, but I guess you got your reasons. Amen."

Hattie has something different in mind and gives Willis a long hard look right after he says, Amen. Sam's bad eye has been staring at Willis all through the prayer, but his good eye has been watching the storm moving in on top of them.

Willis nervously steps back, twists his mauled right hand with his left fingers and proclaims, "I cain't do it."

Sam complains, "My bad back and knee just ain't gonna let me get down that far, or I'd do it."

Hattie is busy mourning for everyone. Myra lays the shovel down, wipes her hands on her wet shorts and reaches out toward Hattie for Baby Rose. Myra shivers at the touch of the cold wet metal. Willis corrects her, "Turn the baby around so 'er head won't be at the foot."

Myra prays quietly to herself, "Please, please, Lord don't let me drop 'er. If I do Aunt Hattie will surely faint." Myra drops to her knees and begins to inch Baby Rose down into the dark shelter of the earth, but she realizes she will have to lie down on the muddy ground before she will be able to set Baby Rose on the bottom. She lies down on her stomach, still holding tight to Baby Rose. "I'm straining as hard as I can, but my hands are wet and she's slipping away from me. What am I gonna' do? I don't want to just let her drop."

At the next violent flash of lightning Sam warns, "Let 'er go or they'll have to bury all of us!"

A muted thud lets them know she has reached the bottom. Sam shovels the dirt in almost before Myra can get her arms out. The tiny white casket

is lost from sight. Hattie sets the moss-covered jar at the head of the grave and jams the flowers inside. Willis picks up his shovel and bellows a thank you as he runs toward the car holding the twins. The green car, leaving as reluctantly as it came, turns back up the gravel road.

All the way back to the house Sam admires the storm. Hattie shouts something about digging up one of her prize white satin rose bushes and setting it out next to Baby Rose, and Myra climbs the steps slowly letting the rain rinse away the layer of dirt covering her.

Hattie pats Sam on the shoulder, "Sam, you're a good man. I know you been savin' that plot in the shade for yourself. It's a fine thing you did givin' that spot to that lil ol' baby. Now, I'm going to get some strong chicory coffee goin'. We all got to get out of these wet clothes. Myra get out of the rain."

Sam sucks his teeth and grins as Hattie disappears into the unlit house. He and Myra stare at ol' blue shining in the rain.

"Uncle Sam, do you think ol' blue will start?"

"You bet ol' blue will start. She'll crank right up. I got the key to 'er. What I don't have is the key to that chain that's wrapped around 'er axle and that confounded tree."

He rubs his wet head and speaks in a pitiful childish voice, "I'm too old to drive. I know it. I might run into another fire hydrant and the chief and mayor might not overlook it next time. But I know one thing."

He stares off into the rolling clouds, and he does a little jig with the lightning. After a few minutes Myra interrupts his dance and asks, "What's that you know, Uncle Sam?"

"I know thems some bad folks buried in that cemetery. There's two men that kilt each other in a duel back in the 1800's. They so mean their grave markers won't stand up. There's a man that kilt his whole family back in 1929 and a feller that was murdered at Parchman 'bout twelve years ago. There's a outlaw sheriff from down in Jackson County and my ol' mule Dobby, meanest mule that ever lived. And every worthless Van Zandt that ever walked the face of the earth, 'ceptin that lil ol' baby."

Sam claps his hands rapidly as if to scare away the waning light. "You know, child, I think I'd rather be buried in Copiah County where my brother and his wife is buried; I'll have to talk to Miz Hattie 'bout that though."

He steals a look back at the cemetery as darkness creeps in among the graves. "I'm cold. Let's us get out of these wet clothes."

Minnie and Scram are curled up in a straight back chair sitting close to the wall. Sam reaches down and scratches each cat behind the ears and asks, "Minnie, what you think 'bout a mama namin' 'er baby God?"

Minnie replies with a wide yawn and a long stretch. The screen door slams behind Sam, and the smell of strong coffee pours out onto the porch. Myra improvises her own little lightning jig and sings softly, "Me and you . . . . What we gonna do," as the nodding daffodils disappear into the dark. □

Ron De Maris

SOMETHING DOMESTIC

It is hard to remember
that the light in small rooms
has come a long way to get there

when it ends on your hands
in the sink

while you wash a spoon or an infant's
ear. And the shadows that sulk
in cupboards

welcome your hands reaching
to open doors;

now they can take the shape
of their dreams, and saucers slip
into quiet flatness
on the floors of shelves;

even cups hang on their hooks
with an exact definition
of light and shade.
You turn to the window half expecting

your time has come,
an apotheosis
as good as the silverware,

but there is always the same
ghost reflection,

your face between here and there.
Part of the glass catches your smile
before you fade

into the bright bougainvillea,
the samba of butterflies.

Melissa Lentricchia

AN EYE FOR DETAIL

Liz did not immediately see the man who was wearing the elevator cowboy boots and the wig. She was too busy trying to look straight ahead, to move with careful indifference among the strangers who occupied the waiting area. She wanted to be unaware of the glances that flitted around her like gnats. But she couldn't keep her own eyes from landing on an unavoidable face or two, from flitting back and forth, measuring and revealing.

As she headed for a pair of empty seats near Gate 22, Liz glanced:

—at the overly muscled woman, forty-two, forty-three maybe, who should really avoid those big raglan sleeves, and her make-up, my gawd, all that white powder right under her eyebrows and rouge down to her chin, poor thing, why doesn't somebody tell her?

—and at the Caesar Romero look-alike, sleek and sixtyish, excellent leather carry-on bag, clearly gay, but you know, he shouldn't suck at his mustache like that, it spoils the whole look,

—and at the woman in her early fifties in the light-weight wool suit, mauve and gray, Saks label, perfect with her ash-blond hair and genuine tan, and Liz saw the beautifully kept house in Connecticut, the brand new deck shoes, the handsome adoring son who was both stockbroker and opera-lover, exactly the person this woman wanted to have married, to have slept with all these years.

Liz piled her jacket, her *New York Times*, and her purse into one of the seats and herself, Indian fashion, into the other. She didn't want any company. She wished she had thought to get some coffee and a sweet roll or something before she'd found this perfect place to settle. Now she'd have to risk losing her privacy.

She lit a cigarette and looked at her watch. She could do without the sweet roll. That's for sure. She had forty-five minutes before her mother's plane was supposed to get in from Denver. Time for at least four more cigarettes.

Liz took out a compact, picked a little at her bangs, and smirked at herself in the mirror. She found her weakness amusing, interesting: her need to pretend not to smoke, her need to smoke. She felt detached and ambiguous and comfortably well-dressed in her dry-cleaned jeans and red cardigan. And still slim, thank gawd, even though she was pretty damn certain there was a baby inside her this time.

She stared into her newspaper and imagined for herself an all-around unpleasant motherhood. She would no doubt quarrel with JR over who's responsible for what. She would repeat her parents' mistakes precisely because she would try so hard not to.

"It's a positively no-win situation," she had announced when they last discussed parenting.

"If we're lucky," she had said, "we may be *slightly* understood and appreciated by our children when they get to be thirty or so. *If* we're lucky. Meanwhile, I can just see all those nights we'll spend wishing that *we* had never been born."

Liz wanted to startle JR with the clarity of her despair. She hoped he would see how wise she was to defuse her fears by giving them the game in advance: hands in the air, you win, I give up.

Liz's husband, Jerry, was understanding-but-firm, as usual. First he had said, again, that he would no longer tolerate the cruel incongruities (*a la* "Dallas") that Liz intentionally exploited when she used his initials. "And furthermore," he continued, "what *you* take to be your mature tough-mindedness, *I* happen to *know* is just plain gutlessness."

Then they had argued loudly and inconclusively about what one person can really know about another.

Liz let her eyes scan the waiting-room crowd while she congratulated herself once more for being the magnanimous one, the one who was willing to embrace all sides. She had ended that last argument by declaring herself courageously gutless. Up yours, JR.

Her eyes came to rest on the Caesar Romero look-alike. He leaned, seductive, stylish, against one of the floor-to-ceiling windows on Liz's right, about twenty feet away. He, too, was scanning the crowd, noting a triumph of cosmetic art over here, an offensive failure over there. The two of them, Liz and Caesar, saw, at the same time, the

man who was wearing the elevator cowboy boots and the wig.

In a second Liz took in the man's crisp Levis, the pressed workshirt, the leather jacket (not the long, belted kind but the kind that zips up the front and has a potentially flattering waistband, if you've got a waist, and this guy, Liz saw, didn't really have one) as well as the boots which added about three-and-a-half inches to his five foot one.

She darted a look at Caesar to find out whether he'd seen the boots — *really* seen them, she meant: seen their surprising fineness, the sharp red alligator grace of the toe that was so unfortunately bound to that dull thick sole. But no, Caesar was apparently more interested in the tight Levis.

The wig is not too bad, Liz thought. She fluttered a page of her newspaper and lit another cigarette. If the color weren't so shiny, so brassy-looking, if it were just a more ordinary shade of blond, you probably wouldn't be able to tell that it *was* a wig.

He's a sick person, Liz said to herself.

She figured that for all his thirty-five or thirty-six years he'd been in a rage against his life, against the smallness of it, against the premature baldness, against the baby fat that had clung to his cheeks and his hands and his knees until he was well into his teens; against the good buddies he had along the way who always, in the end, joined up with the others who mocked and excluded him; and against his once handsome father who had been too tired to notice the humiliation, too dulled by his own meager life to hear the boy's mother say yet again, "And what does my little man want for dessert?" His father should have said that if she called his son "my little man" once more he'd give *her* a deluxe knuckle sandwich for dessert. That's what he should have done. But he didn't hear it. And then he died.

His mother would have insisted on calling him something like Dwayne. Yes, Dwayne, that's it, as in "dwain the bathtub, I'm dwowning." He must have heard that joke a million times. He could probably kill the next person who says it. And who could blame him? And almost as many times he'd heard the stories about his namesake, the Uncle Dwayne who had died at Normandy in '44. No one ever joked about the uncle. The stories they told about him no doubt made the boy wish that he could die that way, at twenty, a hero, tall.

It was obvious that his tan came out of a bottle or a tube, it was just so fake-looking. And the more Liz thought about it, the more certain she was that along with the bottled tan, the new hair, the boots, the jacket — along with all that, Dwayne had recently started to call himself Ted. Or Al, maybe. Or Matt. No.

It had to be Ted.

Liz watched him without staring. He stood, one foot slightly forward, near a square plaster pillar, about thirty feet away. He was directly in front of her and almost as directly across from Caesar. Liz watched him smoke. He flicked an ash over one of those tall cylindrical ashtrays, and missed. He's trying so hard to be cool, she thought, even though it's clear as hell that he's really about to explode. Gawd — just look at the way he clasps his hands in front of him, like a gawddamned altar boy if it weren't for that cigarette.

He shifted around and was now facing Caesar instead of Liz. She saw his cigarette turn to ash. He's not paying attention. Something's distracting him, obviously. Come on, Ted, Liz said to herself, turn more toward my way so I can see what you're thinking.

It was still easy for her to take in the expressionless magnetism of Caesar's face. But nothing now of Ted's. She wondered if Ted were meeting Caesar's confident stare, if the two of them were exchanging mute messages of temptation.

Of course, it might not be Caesar at all that's got his attention, Liz reminded herself. It's probably that little girl over there, yeah, the one sitting next to the raglan sleeves woman who's oblivious to everything but her *Cosmo*. The little girl was staring at Ted, right at him. She's going to make him feel too self-conscious, Liz thought.

But then the little girl was smiling. *He* must be smiling back, right? That's normal, isn't it? Liz wasn't afraid.

Caesar was also smiling at the child: looking over at Ted, then smiling down at the little girl. Liz was on the verge of leaving her seat. She wanted to stroll calmly over to the check-in counter. She needed a better view. She was missing "the best part," as she put it.

But Ted put his right hand into his jacket pocket, and something about that movement, especially seen from behind as Liz had seen it, made her hesitate, stop cold, gasp.

A rush of passengers poured into the lounge from one of those tunnels that attach to the planes: heavy hugging bodies, crammed shopping bags, and coats slung over arms suddenly dominated Liz's space. A fresh trio of flight at-

tendants huddled together in front of her seat with two others who had just deplaned.

"Oh, excuse me, ma'am. Sorry." One of the flight attendants had swung her make-up case into Liz's knee.

"That's okay."

Liz looked at her watch. Would this be her mother's plane already? She had forgotten to listen to the announcements.

"This just can't be it, so soon," she mumbled out loud to herself while she searched her purse for the flight information.

"Pardon me, ma'am?" It was the flight attendant again.

Liz looked up at her, flustered at being questioned by that singsongy voice. "Yes? What do you want?"

"Oh. I thought you'd said something to me, ma'am. That's all." The flight attendant smiled at Liz. Gawd, she just reeks of professional sincerity, Liz thought.

"I was talking to myself," Liz said.

"Oh."

Liz didn't like being called "ma'am." It made her feel dumpy, out of it. She was really put off by all of the flight attendants, all of them crowded there right in front of her, practically in her lap, with all their attractive hairdos and gleaming skin, completely blocking her view. She gathered up her things and weaved through the people, doing her best not to brush up against anyone.

Liz saw right away that the whole layout had changed. Caesar had taken a seat across from the raglan sleeves woman and the little girl. Ted was now leaning against the window, much as Caesar had done, minus the grace, of course. His right hand was still in his pocket.

Somebody's going to get hurt.

Liz was sure of it. The only thing she wasn't sure of was whether it would happen here, now, while she was watching.

Ted was making blinkies at the little girl, who giggled shyly and applauded each time his blue eyes reappeared, like magic. Eyes shut, he's gone away. Eyes open, he's here to stay.

The little girl edged toward him, pretending not to move but moving nonetheless. She trailed one small pink hand over the cushions in the empty seats, over the stiff armrests, over Caesar's crossed legs.

Caesar patted her head and held on gently for a moment to some of her light brown curls. He looked over at Liz while he touched the little girl. Liz met his gaze and tried to look polite without smiling.

She fumbled for another cigarette. This is uncomfortable as hell, she thought. I mean, I'm sure Ted saw the whole thing, even though he's looking the other way.

He was staring out the tinted window, or at himself in the gray glass, wondering whether he could ever throw himself through, out, down.

The little girl tiptoed up behind him. You can tell that by the time that girl is eleven or twelve, he'll have to bend his head back in order to talk to her face instead of her chest. Gawd. Can you imagine? Always at chest level. At breast level. No wonder he's just about to enter Berz-serk City. Who are you taking with you, Ted?

"Liz! Lizzy honey!" The perfumed arms of her mother came out of nowhere and hugged her. "You look pale, dear. And you're smoking again. Oh, Lizzy. Everything all right at home?"

"Everything's fine, Mom. Fine. You look wonderful. Let's go have a fabulous lunch somewhere. I'm starved." □

Peter Cooley

OLD COUPLE

Because it is early April in the blood
leaning together they appear this morning
to take the air within their tiny yard.
And then beneath their hands the music comes
in answer to the scattering crumb:
one sparrow, another, legion—
until the ground itself swells under their song.
How few springs now they will return
this tintinnabulation to the earth,
multiplying the loaves on little wings.
No matter. Even as I speak
the bread is breaking, leavened, on the air,
the music cups and floods,
and on the lawns my day is risen.

John Mosier

CANNES 1984

After the many debacles of last year's festival, substantial improvements were made both in the building and in the organization itself. When things go well they tend to be ignored, so it should be said that the Bunker was turned into a first-rate place to work in, while the technical quality of the screenings was improved enormously. But now that the different sections of the Festival are settled in their new quarters, the next problem that is shaping up is obvious. Now that the Directors Fortnight is ensconced in the old palais, it is increasingly difficult to escape making comparisons between it and the competition section. The result is that there is increasing confusion regarding the identity and purpose of the various sections of the festival. The competition section for this year was vastly improved, largely by the trimming of French films from competition and by the replacement of some of the festival standbys. But the Directors Fortnight led off with works that made one wonder what the difference between the two sections really is.

Originally the Fortnight was for films more congenial to the directors themselves while the competition section was for films with a somewhat broader audience appeal. Like all practical distinctions in the arts, it was deliberately fuzzy and commendably practical. But in the last five years the Critics Week, which used to be the prestige showcase for younger directors, has become so crippled by the selection committee that the best talent goes elsewhere. Some of those directors are being gobbled up by the competition, and some are going to the Fortnight. Those directors getting displaced from the competition section also end up in the Fortnight. So there is no real way to tell what film is in what section except by looking at the program. Although in some senses this competition is inevitable, it deprives the sections of their traditional identities.

Excepting Venice, the competition section at Cannes, or Berlin, the Fortnight is probably the best festival in Europe. The other three sections of the festival are of a decidedly lesser quality, but they too have strengths. 1984 was a year that illustrated the resulting problem perfectly. The curse of selecting films purely on the basis of their vintage condemns one to alternations of feast and famine. If last year was a famine, this year was a feast. Every year people go to Cannes and proclaim the death, eclipse, or collapse of the cinema, and this year was no exception. But the real problem of Cannes is that there are too many interesting films jostling each other for attention. What follows is therefore a discussion of films on a more arbitrary basis than in previous years.[1]

Where the Green Ants Dream is Werner Herzog's best film since *Every Man for Himself*, because it allows him to do all of those things that he does so well. *Green Ants* is a film about cultural contact between Australian bushmen and an Australian mining company. Hackett, the geologist who is in charge of the exploratory digging that the bushmen want stopped, tries to understand their objections; at the film's end he has understood well enough to decide that he wants to live in the outback himself. But the film is not really about his shift in viewpoint, any more than it is about the bushmen themselves. Rather it is a peculiarly German text which begins with an exploration of the opposition between the industrial and the pastoral. Herzog's bushmen are, despite their appearance and dress, archetypal German Romantics whose desires Herzog sees as unattain-

[1]Todd McCarthy, writing in *Variety*, 30 May 1984, found the festival "a dull affair artistically" (p. 5; hereafter referred to as McCarthy). On p. 20 of the same issue David Stratton, the director of the Sydney Film Festival, weighed in with "Standard of films seemed quite high, though many felt it a disappointing year. But . . . there seemed to be plenty worth seeing" (p. 20). Edna Fainaru discussed the implications of the Fortnight's move to the old palais in the same issue, p. 6. Stratton supports my own views about this year's event. Space does not permit discussion of many of the films shown in the Fortnight and in the Un Certain regard sections. Some of the films skipped: *The Hit, Rio Orinoko, Eskimo Woman Feels the Cold, Maria's Day, Argie, Variety, The Next Victim, Gwendolyn, Fellow Travelers, Old Enough, Stranger Than Paradise*, and *Where's Parsifal?*. Films left out because they weren't worth writing about: *The Bostonians, The Element of Crime, Vigil, Fort Saganne, Casa de Agua, Never So Happy, Moliere*. Similarly, *Broadway Danny Rose*, shown out of competition, is left out.

able and therefore pure. When Herzog sticks to this archetypal German theme, he is invariably successful, although one suspects that audiences outside of Germany may find the film a frustrating one for precisely this reason.

Green Ants has some fine pieces of conventional filmmaking in it. When the aborigines go to court to try to keep the mining company from blowing up the home of the green ants, one more or less expects that the trial will go against them. Here are people who seem unable to accept or understand Western standards of quantification arguing a case that demands recourse to numbers. And the solicitor general for the state, who argues against them, is the worst sort of lawyer. He bullies, he blusters, he behaves exactly like one would be afraid that he would behave. But the presiding judge is a total surprise. He humiliates the solicitor general by quoting an astonishing range of legal precedents established in British colonial law. These cases allow for exactly the sorts of arguments that the aborigines are making. Since Herzog is directing the film, of course, we learn a good deal more about the subject than we might otherwise wish to know. But this sort of exposition is necessary if Herzog is to set up the opposition between society's laws and natural law that is at the heart of the film. In other words, the digressions are only mysterious if you aren't following the development of the argument.

The bush country allows Herzog to exercise his ability to shoot ordinary documentary footage of some desolate place and invest it with the sort of beauty that is finally what cinematography is all about. Herzog, when he sets out to do it, can convey the sense of place like no one else. He can show you why places get inside people and make them behave the way they do.

The film is also good because it is a celebration of the universal dottiness of human beings, something else that the director both understands and accepts. At the beginning of the film a perfectly normal old lady is obsessed with the loss of her dog, Benjamin Franklin; throughout the film we cut back to her sitting patiently in front of the entrance to a mineshaft, where the dog has supposedly disappeared, waiting with a bowl of dog food and a bowl of water. When we see the bushmen squatting down in what is now the aisle of a supermarket, but which was once the site of the trees where they dreamed their children into existence, we see the same dottiness, in this case perhaps even more understandable. Herzog's great insight is that he understands all of the lost tribes of the universe, even though he doesn't endorse them, and he doesn't try to simplify or idealize their beliefs.

But *Green Ants* is also successful because it enables him to engage in one of his other long suits, exposition. Are there really green ants? Herzog is perfectly willing to bring the narrative to a dead halt while this is explained. How does British law deal with land claims such as those made by the aborigines? Again, he is more than willing to tell you, and he can get away with it because he has a knack for picking out things that are intrinsically interesting. He also isn't afraid to make up details if they fit his plans better, and this talent is also clearly in evidence.

Herzog's green ants are important as a symbol to European intellectuals as well as to Australian bushmen, which is probably why he became so fascinated with them. It isn't any coincidence that for the youthful Tolstoy the ant brotherhood he and brothers dreamed about was an important utopian symbol. "As I believed that there was a little green stick whereon was written something which would destroy all evil in men and give them great blessings, so I now believe that such truth exists among people and will be revealed to them."[2] The ants aren't merely aboriginal artifacts, but symbols that Herzog sees as spanning cultures. The bushmen go through the same sort of mystical patterns that all mystics go through, regardless of cultures. The irony is that the bushmen are the last of the believers in the sort of mystic doctrines that Tolstoy reverted to in his later years. These Australian primitives still have those beliefs, which for them are even more tangible than they were for Tolstoy or other Western thinkers.

Of course most people will see in Herzog's film nothing more than a chronicle of a confrontation between "civilization" or "progress" and the natural. But *Green Ants* is not a testimonial for the Australian Sierra Club. The conflict is between two forms of law: the law of society, which Herzog deliberately lets be symbolized by a humanistic judge, and natural law, symbolized by the aborigines and their beliefs. This other law is strange and harsh, but it represents the transcendent reality that Herzog, who is probably the last of the great German romantics, is looking for in the universe.

The courtroom scene suggests another reason

[2]As quoted by Ernest J. Simmons, *Tolstoy* (New York: Vintage Books, 1960), I.24-25. All other references in this essay to Tolstoy are to *War and Peace*.

why Herzog is as good as he is: when he pokes his camera into unexpected corners he keeps his mind open about what he might find. His problem, and the reason that his film is not any better than it is, is that he seems never able to shake a sort of documentary streak in his work. His films are perversely documentarist in that he seems opposed to a dramatic script, or to any genuinely composed dialogue. Ultimately this restricts his achievements, because film does have formal requirements, and this is probably the reason that the other German film (also filmed abroad and in English) was universally judged to be so much better.

The aborigines and the bulldozer in *Where the Green Ants Dream*.

Paris, Texas has what all Wenders' previous films haven't had: a dramatic script written by someone whose laconic verbal sense is the equivalent of the director's visual style. In addition to Sam Shepard's script, Wenders has a quintet of talented actors. The result goes a long way in establishing him not only as a major director, but as one whose work can be clearly differentiated from Fassbinder and Herzog, which is to say that he has freed himself from the amateurishness and improvisation that has been, together with bad acting and deadly dull dialogue, the hallmark of the German cinema.

Shepard's script, although too long for an effective screenplay by about thirty minutes, is the basis for a work at least as good as *Buried Child*. It has the same sense of the taciturn about it: the main character, Travis, played by Harry Dean Stanton, doesn't speak at all for the first part of the film. But the script builds to an ending that is essentially a set of back to back monologues by Nastassja Kinski (finally demonstrating that she has some talents as an actress) and Stanton. Her Southern accent still fades in and out, but she certainly doesn't let the climax of the film down, which is no mean feat given the quality of the other performances. Aurore Clement is just right as Travis' sister-in-law, the foster mother of his abandoned son. Even her Frenchness works into the script. The two brothers' father met their mother in Paris, Texas. But he always liked to pretend that she was from Paris, France. She was a plain simple woman, Travis says, but his father wanted to make her otherwise. And the two sons have carried out their father's fantasies, one by marrying a woman from France, the other by

trying to make his wife into something she isn't, to the point that he has driven her away.

That conceit, the theme of the abandoned child, and the concept of the west itself, is strongly Sam Shepard's (and reminiscent of his play *True West*). It is unfortunately also his conceit, which he shares with most other contemporary playwrights, that a sort of pop Freudianism can explain everything. But the film works because finally it is Wenders' film, and he is careful to have his characters work as characters first. Earlier, in listing all of the film's strengths, it might have appeared that the director is a sort of passive administrator whose film succeeds more on the basis of his choices in selecting components and actors than on anything else he does. But making good choices is only a part of it, and this film is as good as it is because Wenders not only gets the actors to perform at levels they usually don't reach (especially Kinski), but shapes the script into something of real significance. The Freudian subtext is simply left in the film as a subtext. It enriches, but the actions of the people have their own compelling logic. The brothers work out their parents' relations, but this is only apparent when one begins to think about the film. They both want their women to be mothers. When Travis seeks his abandoned wife out, his intention is not to get Jane back, but to restore her to their son. The softness of the ending, in which Travis realizes that although he can't save himself he can save others, particularly his wife and child, is Wenders, not Shepard. Just as Wenders is free of the phoney Freudianism that disfigures the contemporary theater, so is he unafraid of resolving his film with a romantic ending. Although *Paris, Texas* doesn't have the obvious German resonances that *Green Ants* does, when Wenders shapes his vision of lost individuals who are nevertheless capable of redemptive behaviour, his work begins to resonate with some of the great classics of German literature. If he continues in this vein, he will eclipse all of his countrymen.

Nastassja Kinski as Jane in *Paris, Texas*.

If the best film was ambiguously German, the runner-up was a work that is purely French. A generation of American moviegoers has grown up thinking of French Cinema as Truffaut and Godard. But in the last decade Truffaut has become a minor commercial talent, Godard a

Bennett and Judd (standing) in *Another Country*.

minor experimental one. Louis Malle, perhaps the most underrated of the original group, has gone on to be a cosmopolitan artist making his films outside of France with an international cast. But Bertrand Tavernier remains the quintessentially French director. Among other things this means that he works on a small scale, and that his effects are subtle. *A Week's Vacation, Clean Slate,* and his most recent film, *Un Dimanche a la Campagne* (A Sunday in the Country) are all works that the French feel are mostly theirs, signs of a peculiarly national cinema not accessible to or appreciated by outsiders.

It is interesting to contrast what Tavernier represents with the ideas of an English producer like David Puttnam. In looking for a director for *Another Country,* he wanted someone from outside the system who could be objective about it in a way that someone from inside the system could not be, which is why the director of that film was Marek Kanievska, a Polish émigré who grew up in London. Presumably Puttnam wouldn't have asked Tolstoy to write *War and Peace* because as an insider he lacked the necessary objectivity.

The problem with Kanievska's film is that it becomes a sort of guided tour through the public school system in which finally we are simply asked to expect certain kinds of behaviour because that's the kind of behaviour those sorts of people engage in. The film has an intriguing premise which Julien Mitchell, who also wrote the play on which the script is based, turned into a fine script. The subject is life in a public school in the 1930s, and the effect that the school has on two sensitive boys. One of these, Judd, is a professed communist. We know this more by the fact that he carries a bust of Lenin around than by anything he says. Naturally, Judd is isolated by the other boys. His friend Bennett, on the other hand, is a more conventional sort.

When the film opens, two boys are caught en flagrante delicto by one of the masters, and one of the two, a boy named Martineau, hangs himself as a result. The elite of the school, shaken by the scandal, would like to keep a low homosexual profile, but Bennett falls in love with a boy from another house, and pursues this love so openly that he is finally caught and disgraced by his peers, who keep him from being admitted into the inner circle. Judd shares this humiliation to a lesser extent, but it is Bennett who is broken by the experience. Discovering that he is unalterably a homosexual, he easily becomes a communist and then a traitor to his country. At the end of the film he reveals that Judd was killed in the Spanish Civil War. The film is told in one long flashback: a woman reporter visits Moscow to interview Bennett, who has presumably defected there when his cover was blown.

We are asked to believe, then, that Bennett's discovery that he is a homosexual, his disgrace with his peers, turns him into a communist. One scarcely knows which minority group should be most offended by this explanation. As an explanation for the behavior of the various defectors and spies in Great Britain, it won't wash. Although it is true that homosexuality was a major factor in the rings, and that they were started in the 1930s amongst an elite, it is also true that they started when the victims (or offenders) were in college. More to the point, the spies, far from being rejected or despised by the system, were comfortably ensconced inside it, which was the reason that they were so difficult to catch.

The other, perhaps more formidable problem, is that the idea of the film contains a serious internal contradiction which Kanievska can't resolve: if homosexuality was an accepted form of adolescent behaviour during public school days, how does Bennett's behaviour differ from it in such a way that he does something the group finds unpardonable? Given the facts about English society afterwards, preferring boys to girls would scarcely be the reason. Kanievska is a competent enough technician, and he has managed to do a couple of good things here. He has banished the humor that apparently marred the theatrical performances, and he is certainly right to present the situation as a serious one. He has also been extremely successful in opening up the play and turning it into a film. It doesn't in any way look like a filmed play, and this look extends past the fact that the film is visually interesting. Kanievska has also been successful in holding the actors to a screen standard of performance rather than to a theatrical one, something that the more experienced directors John Huston and Sam Donaldson were unable to do in *Under the Volcano* and *The Bounty.*

But ultimately Kanievska is as much at sea about what went on as was the playwright himself, which is why both opt for a superficial explanation about causality: difference causes mistreatment which causes rejection. But the comments of both Robert Graves and Evelyn Waugh show that the general rule, if anything, was the contrary. And Kanievska (and Mitchell) seem completely unaware of Ophuls' *The Sorrow and the Pity* where someone who came from an apparently similar background, and who was also a

homosexual, is interviewed. The irony that this man was honored as the bravest British secret agent in France — and that the reason he gave for his bravery was that he had something to prove because he was a homosexual — is the sort of insight that the people associated with this film missed entirely. This play also resorts to the pop Freudianism of contemporary dramatists, for whom a few sexual aberrations are sufficient to explain everything about human behaviour. The film is too embarrassed to allow this as the total explanation, and as a result it finally collapses in a muddle of contradictions.

The point, which Tavernier keeps going back to again and again in his films, is that people inside the system do feel trapped by it, and they do resent it. But they generally don't know how to get out of it, either. This is why, as Tolstoy observes, Prince Andrew Bolkonsky welcomed the war with Napoleon. It offered a means of escape from a situation which he otherwise would never have been able to extricate himself. The colonial policeman in *Clean Slate* similarly resorts to violence. It is the artists inside the system who understand the many directions in which people also inside the system are pulled. It is part of the artist's task to assume some sort of objectivity. Although outsiders can develop a feel for it, as Wenders has developed a feel for North Americans, it is the sympathies that Tavernier has for his characters that makes his films as deeply appealing as they are. *Paris, Texas* is probably a better piece of cinema, but *Sunday in the Country* is a film that will be seen by, and speak directly to, a greater number of people, intelligent sympathetic people who will see in the film problems and characters that have direct relevance to their lives.

The central character of *Sunday in the Country*, M. Ladmiral, is an old man who is, as the title of the novel on which the film is based reminds us, going to die very soon (Pierre Bost's *Monsieur Ladmiral va bientot mourir*). He is a minor painter whose career has been essentially untouched by the revolution in French painting (the time is 1912). M. Ladmiral is 72. His wife has died, and he lives in the country, where his son and family visit him on Sundays. Paradoxically, he can't stand the son's wife. As the film progresses it becomes obvious that the favorite child is his daughter Irene, the number of whose visits are in inverse proportion to those of his son.

Tavernier's other great strength lies in his ability to ferret out characters so that we accept their lunacies and see them as people interacting with one another, and we accept that there are all sorts of mysterious things at the root of each person. Where did Prince Andrew's father get his habit of throwing his plate on the floor when irritated? We never know, because all of the characters around him accept it, and Tolstoy won't tell us. Similarly, M. Ladmiral's son is named Gonzague. But Gonzague's pious wife Marie-Therese has changed it to Edouard. Another mystery, and *Sunday in the Country* is a great film because it only unravels mysteries to the point of getting us to realize the essential humanity of the characters. At one point Irene, his daughter, is playing with her little niece, Mireille. It is one of those scenes of physical affection that tells us everything without any words: that Mireille gets no attention from her parents, who are totally absorbed in the two sons; that Irene, despite her independent life, wants a child; that people who are drawn to one another frequently can't tell themselves why. So the scene tells us a great deal.

But then a voice-over says that when Irene looked in the girl's palm she saw that Mireille would die very young, perhaps at twelve, and so she enclosed the little hand in her own. Then the voice continues: Irene accepted that palms could tell one's fate. Is she right? Will Mireille die? Or is Irene simply a little loony? Tavernier won't tell you, and by holding out on us, he manages to make the gradual abandonment of the little girl by everyone progressively more poignant. Irene flitters off, abandoning her, and we see Gonzague standing there with her, holding her hand. It is only then we realize that what they have in common is that they are both abandoned children: M. Ladmiral loves his daughter to the exclusion of the son, and Marie-Therese loves the sons to the exclusion of the daughter. And Gonzague is scarcely a sympathetic character, so that when you see him as an adult you can easily understand why his father doesn't like him. But the girl reminds us that it is parents who make children the way they are — and then keep on insisting that they be that way. Like everything else in the film, the thoughts Tavernier produces are simple, parallel, and profound. Those thoughts are brought to the screen by some beautiful photography which reminds us of all of the paintings of the period, and they are accompanied by a beautiful dialogue that is enhanced by some fine acting. Tavernier is a less than fashionable director because, by contrast with Godard (and with people like Doillon and Zulawski), he seems so conventional. But he can

use the resources of the cinema in a way that no one else working in France can. Scores of French films try to use voice-over narrative strategies, and usually they rely on them as a substitute narrative. Instead of showing us a story in images, or developing it through characterization, they talk it to us. But Tavernier uses it as a resource which allows him to establish the literary flavor, or perhaps even the nostalgia, of his subject. Whenever the voice is heard, it adds something to an already rich narrative. At the present time Tavernier is probably a better artist than anyone else working in France, and *Sunday in the Country* is a masterpiece.

Albert Finney (dark glasses) in *Under the Volcano*.

What makes Tavernier's film so good is the comparison with a trio of Anglo-American disasters. That the best English language film of the festival was a German one was no accident when one considers the competition. *Under the Volcano* is a thorough mess. All that is left of Lowry's novel is a larger than life performance by Albert Finney as Firmin. Finney overacts his role to an extent that some audiences will find remarkable, others ghastly. The Jury apparently was less than impressed, since it picked the two Spanish actors in Camus' *Holy Innocents* instead, a choice that indirectly gives us their estimate of what Huston was doing, because *Volcano* is very much Finney's film. The other characters simply stand around while he crashes into things, often literally, since the character he plays is completely drunk for the entire course of the film.

If this were a play, where Mexico could be represented by a couple of brightly painted sets, it might possibly pass muster, because Finney has a formidable range of tricks. He jumps around all over the set, at one point even lying down on the street, and he makes use of a

veritable arsenal of pitches and tones of voice. And Huston does his best to make Mexico look like a set for an old movie. He gets Gabriel Figueroa, one of the best cinematographers in the world, to produce garishly and even badly lit scenes, and he does the best he can to reduce the countryside to cheap postcards. Jacquelyn Bisset, playing Firmin's estranged wife, does nothing to challenge Finney's pre-eminence. Mostly she stands around looking at Finney as he perorates.[3]

Unfortunately, *Under the Volcano* is a film, not a play. Moreover, although Lowry's writings are pretty confusing, his work is much more than a novelistic treatise on alcoholism, although that's about all the people who worked on the film seem to have gotton out of it. Huston can butcher it, but he can't totally hamstring the images, and the result is a film whose components are powerfully at odds with one another. Both this film and his revision of Flannery O'Connor's *Wise Blood* revealed an artist whose visions were cheap and vulgar, and in each case he has turned something subtle and ironic into a cartoon. Or perhaps Huston is simply too old to be making films of this sort. One thing for sure is that, unlike Bunuel, he isn't getting any better as he gets older, and it was tactful of the Jury to present him with an award for his contributions to the cinema. The award was for his earlier films, and richly deserved. All *Under the Volcano* deserves is to disappear, although, lamentably, it will be trotted out as yet another example of why novels can't be made into movies. Ironically, Lowry was infatuated with the cinema, and there is absolutely nothing in the novel that makes it any more difficult to adapt to the screen than several of the other literary sources (discussed below) which have recently been turned into movies.[4]

The Bounty, on the other hand, starts off with some pluses. It sticks close to the original events, emphasizing those which earlier movies scrubbed: Christian and Bligh were friends who had sailed together before the Bounty expedition; Bligh, a good seaman whose command was exonerated by the ensuing court martial, was only 34 when the expedition sailed.[5] He was an ambitious officer whose aims were thwarted by the economies of the peacetime navy, which meant that he was still a lieutenant (as was Cook, with whom Bligh had sailed with on his earlier epic voyage). So the idea of a naval expedition during which he could circumnavigate the globe had obvious appeal. After he was set adrift by Christian he was able to sail across four thousand miles of the Pacific in a twenty-three foot boat with less than seven inches of freeboard. This was a considerable feat of seamanship, and, whatever Bligh's faults were (he was variously described as abrasive, overbearing, and tyrannical), he was one of the great seamen of the age who went on to serve with distinction during the Napoleonic Wars and to retire as an admiral.

Any filmmaker who tries to represent reality scrupulously should be encouraged, and Roger Donaldson, whose previous success was *Smash Palace*, brings some other considerable strengths to the enterprise. As a New Zealander his visual appreciation of the South Pacific is vastly superior to what North American audiences are likely to expect. This is the Pacific of brooding gray skies, vast expanses of deep ocean dotted with craggy islands, a seascape at once calm and threatening. Donaldson also has the advantage of having a replica of the ship to play with, and his film emphasizes, truthfully, the cramped quarters as well as the sounds of a sailing ship under way. One gets a good sense of what it was like to be on a ship of the Royal Navy in the 18th century.

However, once given the ship, and Arthur Ibbetson's photography, Donaldson can't exploit them. One reason for the mutiny was the size of the ship: it was only half the size of Cook's vessel, and some people at the Admiralty had doubts about its suitability for such an expedition. Retrospectively they were right, and the replica gives Donaldson an opportunity to demonstrate just how big a liability the Bounty was, as well as how good a sailor Bligh was. He doesn't do either. For all the film shows us, the ship could have been powered by a nuclear reactor and Bligh a landlubber. Similarly, after reading all of the accounts of the mutiny, one is tempted

[3]On the other hand, the enthusiastic *Variety* reviewer of 23 May 1984 saw the film as "a triumphant artistic success," while admitting that a few disgruntled souls might not be happy with the adaptation (p. 12). He was right, and McCarthy admitted that "overall response seemed quite mixed" (p. 5).

[4]Lowry's interest in the cinema, and the argument that he used cinematic techniques in his writing, is ably discussed in Tony Kilgallin's eccentric study *Lowry* (Ontario: Press Porcepic, 1973), pp. 130-143.

[5]Despite some of the claims made about Bolt's script being a "vindication" of Bligh and a revisionist history of the mutiny, the full complexities of the case were first set down in 1831 by Sir John Barrow, whose *The Mutiny of the Bounty* is a considerably more subtle work than Bolt's. In the discussion that follows I am indebted to Gavin Kennedy's edition of Barrow (Boston: David Godine, 1980).

to place some of the blame on Tahiti itself. Donaldson is obviously aware of this, because at the court-martial Bligh (played by Anthony Hopkins) offers that up as an explanation. Ibbetson's camerawork is so good that he probably could have made this a plausible story, but Donaldson gives short shrift to Tahiti. It never figures in the story the way it should. This isn't a question of resources but of imagination. Both Herzog in *Aquirre* and Nelson Pereira dos Santos in *How Tasty Was My Frenchman* manage to convey an overpowering sense of place. Donaldson, with geometrically more resources, doesn't even try.

The movie needs such insights, because the story of the mutiny is a curious one that inevitably leads into paradoxes and mysteries. Bligh's trek to Timor after the mutiny was only the first of many bizarre episodes. After Christian took over the Bounty it returned to Tahiti, where sixteen of the mutineers chose to remain. The remainder tried to set up shop on one of the neighboring islands, but they squabbled with the natives and were forced to leave. They ended up on Pitcairn's Island where they remained successfully concealed for decades. In fact they were never brought to justice. What happened was that the mutineers and the Tahitians who went with them killed each other off. By 1814 there was one surviving mutineer, John Adams, and forty-five women and children who were the offspring of the original group.

From Timor, Bligh notified the Admiralty of the mutiny. Their actions provide us with a comic reminder of the ways of bureaucracies through the ages. After refusing to give Bligh a well-armed ship of the right size, the Admiralty was more than willing to dispatch a much larger ship to apprehend the mutineers, and the aptly named Pandora sailed off to Tahiti with instructions to start rounding them up. Captain Edwards, who in real life appears to be the sort of ship captain that generations of moviegoers have thought Bligh to be, wandered around the islands but found only those mutineers who had remained on Tahiti itself. Two of them had managed to get killed in a brawl with the natives, but the other fourteen were clapped in irons.

It appears that Bligh had reservations about Edwards' seafaring abilities. He was right. On the voyage back, her captain managed to wreck her on the New Holland straights. Edwards may have been a lousy sailor, but he was a great bureaucrat: he got all of the officers to sign an opinion that the ship had to be abandoned. Meanwhile the ship sank, drowning four of the mutineers, who may have died because Edwards had them manacled to the ship, and thirty-one members of the crew. One of the Pandora's officers, Heyward, had been one of the loyal midshipmen on the Bounty. As a reward for his loyalty he went with Bligh on the open boat voyage to Timor. He now had the fun of retracing the last leg of that trip in yet another dinghy.

Once home with the rascals, the Admiralty court-martialed them. The court-martial itself makes for disappointing study. One of the alleged mutineers, Peter Heywood, had an active and energetic family with both the will and the connections to get him off. So much of the activity at the court-martial of the mutineers centered around whether or not he was an active mutineer. The Court may have thought that he was, because he was sentenced, but this was simply a formality, as he received a pardon from the King. Heywood ended up a captain in the navy, but there is evidence to suggest that he was more involved with the mutiny than he claimed. Of the mutineers who were hauled back to London and tried, only three were executed. In addition to those mutineers who were never caught and those who managed to get themselves killed fighting the natives, the Admiralty had lost two ships and close to fifty able bodied seamen. One of the reasons why so much is known about all this is the vast quantity of forms and reports that the Admiralty had its captains filling out. No wonder Bligh was so irascible.

Christian met various ends. There was a rumor that he escaped to England, and Adams, the last of the mutineers, told at least three different accounts of his end: that he went insane and killed himself, that he was killed in a fight over a woman, and that he was killed as part of the general fight between the Tahitians and the mutineers. Adams' veracity, and his role in the mutiny and its aftermath, is ambiguous, to say the least. Later visitors to the island were impressed by the extent to which he had instituted a regime of Christian decorum in striking contrast to the usual mores of Tahitian society, which perhaps lends support to the idea that Tahiti itself was the cause of the discord. At any rate, it makes a fine set of tales, and the material for one blockbuster of a movie, which, unfortunately, neither Robert Bolt (the scriptwriter) nor Donaldson used.

The central mystery is the mutiny itself. Bligh and Christian were experienced sailors, as were the mates and the number two officer. While it is true that the ship was badly handled in an at-

tempt to pass the Horn, no sea voyage in the 18th century was a casual affair, as the fate of the Pandora is grim reminder. Nothing happened to the Bounty that was any worse than what other ships regularly suffered. Although the officers were a pretty poor lot, they seem to have been low average rather than worthless. And the men had months on Tahiti as a reward. Then, on the voyage back, they would stop in Jamaica. While not the same as Tahiti, it was, compared to other ports of call, a good one. At the same time there was enough danger from the natives to keep a group of Europeans on their toes and working together.

So the mystery is why was there a mutiny at all? Earlier filmmakers solved this by fictionalizing the conflict, so that Charles Laughton turned Bligh into such a sadistic monster that the mutiny reduced itself to something eminently understandable. That decision, by the way, suggests why Hollywood traditionally cheapened and vulgarized when it adapted literary or historical events. It did so because it allowed the substitution of easily explicable motives and thus made the task of making the film easier. Discounting that — which, by the way, is the one explanation contradicted by virtually all the facts of the case — there are many intriguing reasons left: Christian's obsessive love affair, which may have been exacerbated by Bligh's feeling for him; the effects of Tahiti on the men; substantial misjudgments by Bligh; Christian's mental illness; the size of the boat. The greatest probability is that all six of these factors (adding the incompetence of the other men) were interacting with one another. Nor should one leave out the fact that it is possible that this mutiny, far from being unusual, was simply a forerunner of the vast mutinies that shook the British Navy in 1797, an uprising that often goes ignored.

This embarrassment of riches presents one with some wonderful alternatives, but Robert Bolt's script doesn't make any use of them. Apparently his intention was to argue that Christian is so smitten with a native girl that he goes native while Bligh, faced with all this unbridled sexuality, has a parallel breakdown. He wants to leave and the men don't. When they get to sea, his attempts to shake down the crew cause unrest, and Christian, who wants to sail back to his girlfriend, is persuaded to lead a mutiny instead. However, the script is so incompetent that it leaves out one of the strongest defenses of Bligh's conduct on Tahiti, which is that the natives, seen from a Western point of view, were grossly immoral. In addition to their open promiscuity, they were also shameless thieves. But the film, in a fatal throwback to the old Hollywood traditions, romanticizes the natives, and thus neutralizes them. It also romanticizes Christian's love affair, something whose importance (and even existence) rests on shaky grounds. Sir John Barrow, the historian closest to the scene, doesn't even mention it in discussing Christian's motivation for rebelling against Bligh.

Both Donaldson and Anthony Hopkins, who plays Bligh, were apparently aware that this wouldn't do, but neither one is able to tilt the film effectively, although Hopkins tries. The result is an unconvincing film marred by what appears to be Hopkins' inconsistencies, although to be fair, it looks as though Hopkins and Mel Gibson (who plays Christian) were considerably more familiar with the history of the mutiny than Bolt and Donaldson. If you already know that Christian may have been emotionally disturbed, that Bligh was an abrasive and overbearing man, and that almost all upper-class Europeans were appalled by the "profligacy" and "licentiousness" of the natives (as well as attracted to their women), then the performances are good. If you don't know those things, neither the director nor the script will ever tell you about them, and the acting will appear most peculiar. Given a better script, Donaldson might have been able to make the film work, while a director of real genius would have been able to scuttle Bolt's pretentious outline and produce a masterpiece. This is the sort of film that Werner Herzog should have made, because the Bounty has curious parallels with the same sort of episode that he invented in *Aguirre*. Given the various receptions of the three films on the subject, it is doubtful that we will see another one anytime soon.

Cal, the other Anglo entry (technically it was an Irish film), was also produced by David Puttnam, who was behind *Chariots of Fire*. Irish director Pat O'Connor is scarcely an improvement over Hugh Hudson, although the concept of the film is an interesting one. Cal, neatly enough played by John Lynch, is a young Catholic in Northern Ireland. He lives alone with his father, who works in a slaughterhouse. Cal's stomach is too weak for this sort of work, something he says exactly twice. But he does have the stomach to be a driver for the hits of a Catholic nationalist group. In the film's opening he drives up to a house where his friend Crilly offs a local policeman and wounds his father. But O'Connor seems completely oblivious to the irony here, and this

obliviousness is the style of the film.

In between such odd jobs as don't jangle his nerves, Cal sees the constable's widow, who works at the local library. He is much taken with her. Marcella Morton, ably played by Helen Mirren, is Catholic as well, and her parents are supposed to be Italian, although there is nothing about her that suggests that she is Italian, Catholic, or even Irish. She comes across as an attractive British actress. Probably she simply ignored the banalities of the script and concentrated on one thing only, which was portraying a lonely widow who gradually falls into bed with a younger man. When they relate to one another, both John Lynch and Helen Mirren come across as talented performers working desperately to project feeling and sensitivity into a film that doesn't allow for any.

Helen Mirren and John Lynch in *Cal*.

It is hard to put all of the blame for this on O'Connor, because he manages very well to give the sense of frustration and rage that mark Northern Ireland, as well as to capture the quality of life in the combat zone that it has become. His distaste for the fanatics who form various sides in the conflict is evident, and, in small squirts, it permeates the film. It is hard to believe that a man with that feel for details would, on his own, beat the audience to death with the same flashback. Just in case we missed the opening scene in which Cal drives Crilly up to the Morton household where Crilly shoots Frederick Morton, we see pieces of the scene again and again. When Cal and Marcella go to bed for the first time we see that same sequence again in a sort of perverted flashback, and not just a piece of it, either, but every last frame.

This is the same sort of sappy thinking that disfigured *Chariots*, and it probably is Puttnam's contribution, since he was the producer in each case. When Hudson made *Greystoke*, which is, of course, equally a mess, he used a different sort of approach altogether (what Pauline Kael called a unique mixture of pomposity and ineptitude). All three films are equally problematic as pieces of cinema, but *Cal* is better, because a couple of people in it, chiefly Polish cinematographer Jerzy

Zielinski and Helen Mirren, knew what they were doing (this was Lynch's first screen role). These films all have a nice television look about them in their simplistic approach to characterization and motivation which is matched by the superficial way in which they deal with serious topics. The cockup that is the Olympics, equally with the mess that is Northern Ireland, are topics that a skilled filmmaker could really do something with. Although this sort of filmmaking generally trivializes the subject without producing anything of real merit, the directors manage to produce entertaining movies which they can speak honestly about. This honesty becomes particularly refreshing when compared to the pretentiousness of some of the other films.

Although Skolimowski's *Success is the Best Revenge* is technically an English film, it is so closely related to his other films that it is English only in the most formal sense, i.e., the characters speak that language. The chief problem with the film is that it is ten or so years out of date. The plot is simple: a Polish actor comes to the West to receive a decoration from the French government. His wife and two sons are already in London, and he apparently plans to spend some time there, staging an enormous theatrical happening that will alert public attention to events in Poland. He does this, but his alienated elder son leaves him and goes back to Poland. What either one has accomplished, or hoped to accomplish, remains obscure, as does the film itself.

The film is thus like *Deep End* in its focus on a young boy, like *Hands Up* in its urging of guerilla theater, and like *Moonlighting* in its general treatment of Polish exiles in London. In other words, it is a film of bits and pieces. Some of these are very fine bits, particularly those that deal with Rodak's adventures in London: he goes to the bank to borrow money, is taken to court after a fracas, and forcibly seduces an intrusive but attractive busybody from the city government. These scenes are all very good, and some are surprisingly funny. Skolimowski could make a terrific film about the subject.

But the rest of the bits and pieces are perfunctorily done. Rodak's relations with his wife and sons are too sketchy and ambiguous to be of any interest. The central event of the film, which is the happening itself, is visually and aurally interesting, but the whole enterprise is flawed. Such theatrical happenings went out in the 1960s, but everyone in the story takes what Rodak is doing as a sign of his talent and experimental virtuosity. The film is a kind of insult to the talents of those Poles whose theatrical efforts, far from being twenty years behind, are often on the cutting edge of what is going on in the theater.

Some artists profit from working outside their country. There are enough filmmakers working (Louis Malle, Roman Polanski, Costa-Gavras, Miguel Littin) to remind us that Skolimowski's situation is not an excuse for poor filmmaking. Although his more recent films have been reasonable commercial successes, it seems uncomfortably close to the truth to say that since *Hands Up* in 1967, Skolimowski has been coasting on his reputation. He has never lived up to his promise as has Polanski.

The difference between him and Wajda is instructive, because Wajda's most recent film, *Love in Germany*, while not in the same league with *Man of Marble* or *Rough Treatment* is a surprisingly accomplished film. It has a fine script by Boleslaw Michalek, and some terrific acting by the women, chief of whom is Hannah Schygulla as a young German matron. Most of the film takes place during WWII. Her husband is off in Bavaria guarding a concentration camp, and she is having an incredibly scandalous affair with a Polish prisoner of war. The disconcerting thing about this film is the humor. The two lovers are as indiscreet as possible. The entire town knows, or seems to know, what is going on. Her next door neighbor, viciously played by Marie Christine Barrault, wants to denounce her and take over her little store. But the Germans in this town are basically good people, even the local member of the Gestapo.

And although things turn out badly, the film is finally a comedy. When Hannah goes to the pharmacist, you know that she is going to buy condoms, but you still can't believe the scene as it unfolds, with her trying to buy everything in sight, with half of the town gossips looking on; until she virtually runs out into the street with her purchases, only to drop them all amidst a group of young German soldiers who are delighted to be grovelling around picking things up for her. Only a very confident director would be able to pull it off, and only a scriptwriter who was very sure of himself would ever write it. As played by Hannah Schygulla it is a tour de force of a scene, equalled but not surpassed by Barrault's yammering at her husband (also a German soldier) while she's in bed with him. But finally it is an unnerving film, because you can't quite figure out where all this virtuosity is going.

This is scarcely the problem with Theo Angelopoulos' *Voyage to Cythera*, a long and un-

successful excursion into a sort of cinematic twilight zone. The synopsis for this film (in its entirety) said: "A director wants to make a film about a political refugee. An old man fascinates him and he follows him. The director's fantasies become reality. A voyage in the realm of the imaginary, of love and death."[6] It was hard to piece together even that much, because although the film is beautifully photographed, it is shoddily put together. Giorgios Avanitis' images are of immaculate clarity, and the film is almost worth watching for that reason alone. The problem is that the film, which is extremely slow, allows us far too long to study each scene. And the longer we look, the more problems there are. When the old man crosses the street in downtown Athens, it takes him an eternity to get across it. During that eternity we notice that he is crossing against the light, that there is no traffic at all on one side of the street, and that the other lane of traffic is full of people looking curiously

Rodak and Son. *Success is the Best Revenge.*

into the camera. Such an approach is used whether we are seeing the present, an imagined flashback, or moving into the twilight zone that the synopsis describes.

The Home and the World may be Satyajit Ray's last film, as he was too ill to finish it, and it had to be completed by his son. The movie is based on Tagore's novel of the same name which discussed the conflicts of early Indian nationalism as it was revealed in a triangular relationship. The time is 1905: a young nobleman tries to emancipate his wife, and to educate her. Nikhilesh secures an English teacher for Bimala,

[6]From the Presskit furnished at the festival. The *Variety* reviewer of 16 May 1984 said: "Nobody will have a really easy time and many will have the feeling of being stranded on shores of quicksand symbolism" (p. 133).

and he encourages her to accommodate herself to Western values. He succeeds in doing this, and introduces her to his friends, one of whom is an ardent nationalist, Sandip. Gradually Bimala becomes intellectually and romantically seduced. Obviously Ray was the man to turn Tagore's novel into a movie. The bulk of the film is a flashback, with most of the action consisting of long conversations among the three. The result is an exceedingly talky film.

Given the seriousness of the subject matter, this is probably appropriate, because Tagore may well have intended to produce a series of discourses on the development of India. Nikhilesh sees the perils of nationalism all too clearly, while his friend Sandip sees the consequences of inaction. Each man is given the time to articulate his beliefs fully, which gives the film the subtlety that *Gandhi* solely lacked. The problem, however, is that for this stratagem to succeed, the actors must be chosen very carefully. Victor Bannerjee

Zeze Motta in *Quilombo.*

(Nikhilesh) is virtually perfect, and Soumitra Chatterjee (Sandip) seems a reasonable choice. But Swatilekha Chatterjee ruins the film. Where the role called for sensitivity and nuance, she brings absolutely nothing. It is central to the film that Sandip, when he sees her (remember that women were traditionally secluded from male company) must be completely dumbfounded. In other words, despite their various modernities, the two friends act in accordance with traditional prejudices: Sandip sees her, is smitten with her, and seduces her. Such possibilities were why women were locked up in the first place. The attitude of Bimala's women companions and relatives gives the film that sort of paradoxical irony that would really make the work take off, so Ray is obviously aware of the irony and tries to ex-

ploit it.

But given an actress so deficient in every department, the idea never really gets off the ground. There is nothing in Bimala that suggests why anyone would be smitten with her, or even want to put up with her at all. It is doubly a pity that a director like Ray, whose work is so subtle, and who depends so much on delicacy, should have been stuck with such an awful lack of talent for a film which he had been wanting to make for decades. If there was one peculiar common denominator running through the festival, it was this: a group of respected older directors unveiled works which in every case represented decades of thought and desire, and in every case their films were unsuccessful. As we shall see, Ray was to be merely one in a series.

Like Ray and Angelopoulos, Carlos Diegues is also a familiar name at festivals, and his last three films have been shown at Cannes. Only the first of these, *Summer Showers*, shown in the Fortnight in 1978, has been as good as the films of his contemporaries. But Diegues, like Saura, has enjoyed a virtual monopoly on representing Brazil. This year was no exception. His latest film, *Quilombo*, was shown in competition, while a better film by the greatest living Brazilian director, Nelson Pereira dos Santos, was only shown at the Fortnight. Meanwhile, a really talented younger artist, Carlos Alberto Prates Correia, had an infinitely better film that wasn't shown in any of the main sections of the festival. Diegues is a competent enough artist, and a nice enough fellow, but his filmmaking has become very tiresome.

Quilombo is a return to the theme of his earliest film, *Ganga Zumba*. From the point at which slaves were brought to Brazil, they started to escape. Unlike in the United States, there was no sympathetic region to which they could flee, but they could run further into the interior and band together. So many did so, that a word — *quilombo* — was coined to describe a settlement of escaped slaves.[7] The most famous *quilombo* was Palmares, in the captaincy of Pernambuco, where the slaves set up a society that lasted for close to a century (1602-1694), surviving seventeen successive expeditions sent out against them. Thus from the very beginning of Brazil's history there have been attempts to found separate states within the national borders whose inhabitants would enjoy greater freedoms than the existing government would admit, whether it was Dutch, Portuguese, Imperial, or Republican. Such movements continued into the modern age and have been widely recorded by Brazilian artists: the movement of "The Counselor," written up by Euclides da Cunha as *Revolt in the Backlands*, was used extensively by Glauber Rocha.

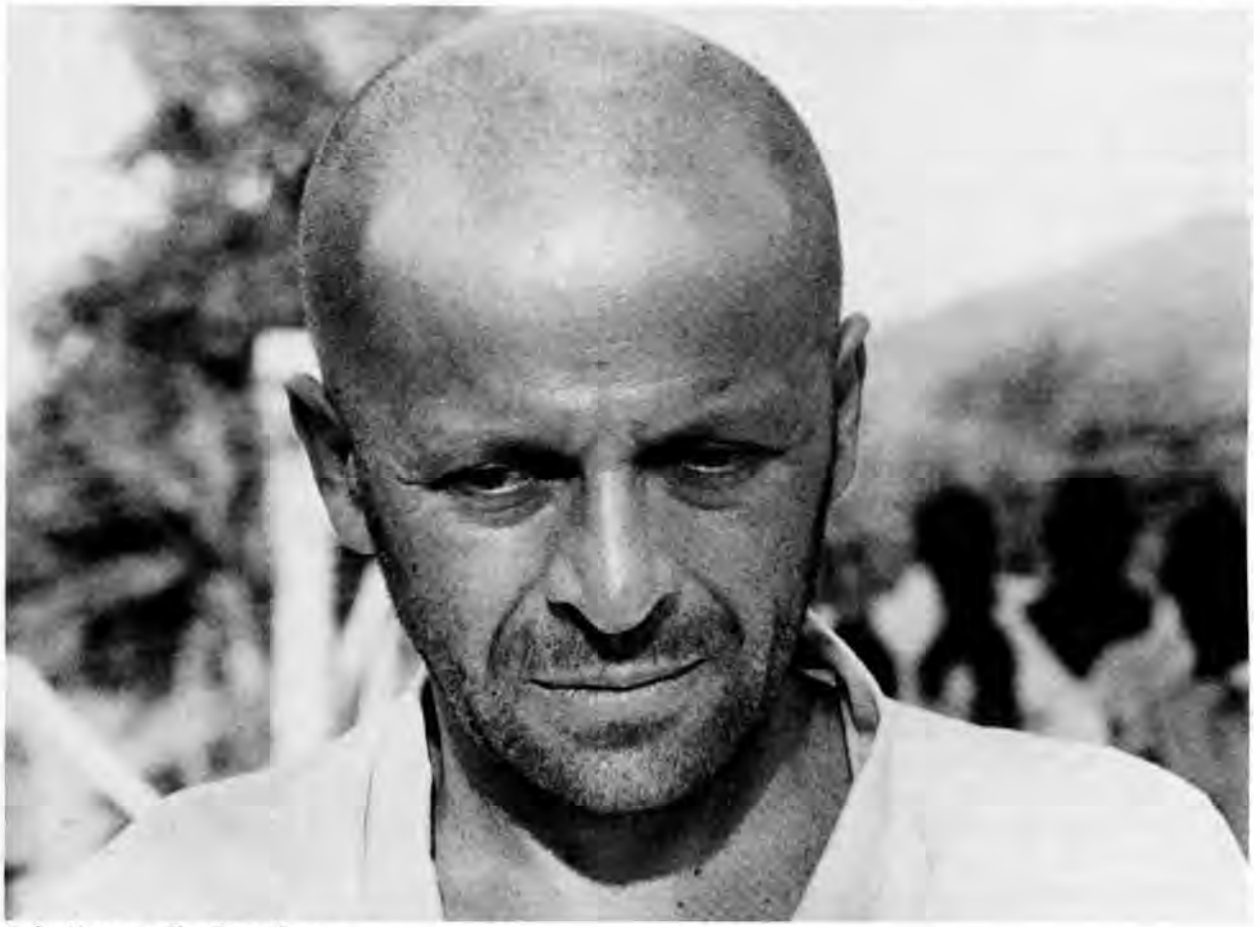
Although the subject matter is important, Diegues' handling of Palmares trivializes it to the point that only someone familiar with Brazilian colonial history can untangle the events. From *When the Carnival Arrives* (1972) on he has had an inexplicable fascination with musicals. Occasionally, as in *Summer Showers*, he has pulled it off brilliantly. But most of the time the attempts don't work. This is one such time. His escaped slaves sing and dance and gambol as though they were the extras in some 1930s Hollywood extravaganza. But turning Palmares into *Down Palmares Way* or a sort of *Flying Down to Pernambuco* in blackface neither contributes to an understanding of the problem, nor to an understanding of the larger movement within Brazilian history mentioned earlier. Although there is a good sound skeleton of a story in the script, Diegues can't bring it to the screen. He was particularly ill-advised to try to make a film that relies on scenes of physical violence, because these scenes are amateurish in the extreme, and the crudity isn't in any way relieved by the nicely choreographed work of the slaves. If anything, such grace calls our attention to the blunders. Presumably European audiences love this sort of film because they think that being Brazilian means that you sing and dance and do bizarre acrobatics. But Brazil doesn't profit from the export of such stereotypes. Nor, internally, can its citizens afford to engage in such simplistic fantasies.

Unfortunately the same problem afflicts *Memoirs of Prison*, the film by Nelson Pereira dos Santos that opened the Fortnight. The director is generally, and correctly, credited with being the father of the New Brazilian Cinema. Although there were earlier works, it was *Barren Lives*, released in 1962, that first attracted international attention. The film was based on an important novel of the same name, whose author, Graciliano Ramos, was one of the major Brazilian writers of this century. It is to Ramos that Pereira dos Santos has returned for his latest film. In addition to being a writer and a public servant, Ramos was a communist. In 1936 he was sent to prison, allegedly for his sympathies with the communists

[7] A good summary of the situation is A. J. R. Russell-Wood's *The Black Man in Slavery and Freedom in Colonial Brazil* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982). Palmares is discussed on pp. 41-42.

in the state of Alagoas, where he was director of public instruction. Although Ramos may very well have been a hard-line communist party member (his only trip abroad was to the Soviet Union), his imprisonment was more the result of a massive witch hunt initiated by the government than a result of anything he himself had done.[8]

What he did do while in prison was to write, and the four volume record of his experiences, *Memoirs of Prison*, was published in 1953 after his death. The film is based on that work. Although



Carlos Vereza as Graciliano Ramos.

his initial treatment was mild, he was moved to progressively harsher environments. He also suffered from the bad diet and became ill. But throughout his imprisonment he observed, he drew conclusions, and he wrote. He is thus a colleague of Solzhenitsyn, who was imprisoned in substantially harsher conditions only a few years later. *Memoirs* is an important work, among other reasons for the fact that it is a forerunner of the underground/prison literature that has increasingly come to be a major part of this century's best writing.

The difficult problem in making such a film is that an imprisoned writer is essentially passive, and writing is in itself not particularly cinematographic. The great strength of *Memoirs* is that Carlos Vereza has a rare ability to project sensitivity and watchfulness together with an impression of ceaseless mental activity. Whenever you see him on screen playing Ramos, you know that he is writing in his head. So much so that the director doesn't have to beat the audience to death with melodramatic writing scenes. Over the years the level of acting in Brazil has been steadily improving, and Vereza's performance is compelling testimony that it has come of age.

The film has two serious problems, however.

[8]The film glosses over Ramos' politics so successfully that the *Variety* reviewer speaks of him as a "liberal" pure and simple (16 May 1984, p. 131). William Grossman, the editor and translator of the standard *Modern Brazilian Short Stories* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), puts it like this: "He was an avowed communist" (p. 52). This doesn't mean (as Grossman also notes) that he was not imprisoned unjustly. So far as I know the consensus is that he was. But Ramos' politics is certainly relevant to the view of prison that he developed.

Pereira dos Santos, like Diegues, is a surprisingly sloppy filmmaker. Back in the early 1960s, this may have been excusable. But this is 1984. And when Ramos looks out the porthole of the ship he is travelling on, we realize that it is 1984, because we see all of the paraphernalia of contemporary Brazil. That isn't the only example, and they are all inexcusable. Although there are quite a few polished films that have been made in Brazil, neither director has apparently learned anything from their work. It seems as though having had to work independently for so long has made it difficult for the older Brazilian directors to learn from the works of others.

This cinematic sloppiness has an intellectual equivalent. A preface to the film says that in 1935 "military personnel affiliated with the National Alliance for Freedom revolted against the government of Getulio Vargas. The rebellion, easily suppressed by the Army, provoked the application of constitutional measures . . . ."[9] This is not a fair statement of the situation. Among other things it omits the fact that the leader of the ANL was a hard-line communist party member, Luis Carlos Prestes, that the ANL at this time was largely run by the members of Comintern, and that the rebellion fizzled because it was poorly planned and because the ANL simply didn't have the support of the population. Prestes' manifestoes had caused the majority of the country's liberals to withdraw their support from the ANL. The film glosses over the complex Brazilian reality of the 1930s and trots out the tired myths of the party hacks. Brazilians have always suffered from the tendency of some of them to exaggerate the importance of their several abortive revolts (including the "Inconfidence" and the declaration of freedom from Portugal), but this particular film is a straightforward attempt to rewrite Brazilian history along party lines.

Although based on Ramos' work/life, the film seems to be only interested in Ramos as a vehicle for a statement about Brazilian society. The director argues that the prison in which Ramos spends his time is a metaphor for Brazil. To that end the jails are filled up with a cross representative section of Brazilian society, so much so that the jails seem to be populated exclusively by the best sort of person (politically speaking), the sort with whom we can sympathize. This isn't an idea taken out of a hat, either. To quote the director: "The prison in my film is a metaphor of Brazilian Society . . . . I would like to convey, as it was Graciliano's wish, the feeling of freedom — to get out of jail, forever, never to be back. I mean jail in the broader sense, the jail of social and political conventions which still keep captive the Brazilian people."[10] This is a conceit that requires a somewhat massive rewriting of Brazilian history. It means that not only must we throw out the election of Vargas in 1950 (when he received almost 50% of the popular vote), but the successive elections afterwards that led to the final government whose existence triggered the 1964 coup.

The distortions are gratuitous, because the real point of interest in the film should be Ramos. Regardless of his politics, or the injustice of his incarceration, he was one of Brazil's great writers, and his life doesn't deserve the sort of sidetracking that it gets in this film. Vereza is capable of carrying the film on his own for stretches, but far too much of the film is concerned with what was going on in the prison around him. This is the least satisfactory part. We get hours of the prisoners singing and carrying on in such a way that there are long periods of time when it appears that Ramos' memoir must have been intended as an operetta. Although the film has some interesting parts, and although its main character redeems it whenever he is on camera, ultimately we are left with the same sort of superficial sermonette about Brazilian history that we had with *Quilombo*. There is a double irony at work here. Traditionally Brazil has been a country where the filmmakers were as sharp as the historians, and where the artists were capable of sophisticated analyses of their society. Now, when the artists can really open up and dissect their culture, they go soft in the head and retell the most ingenuous of fairytales about their

[9]This preface is the prologue to the film; my quotation, however, is from the presskit itself. For material supporting the assertions about Prestes and the ANP, see Robert M. Levine's *The Vargas Regime: the Critical Years, 1934-38* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970). Contrary to the representations of the film, the ANL by the time of the rebellions was controlled by the Brazilian Communist Party, whose head was Luis Carlos Prestes. "Prestes . . . was resented by the party's older leaders for his vanity, his theoretical obstinacy, and his stubborn loyalty to his Stalinist Comintern advisers" (pp. 101-121). His behaviour in the spring of 1935 alienated most of the non-communist members of the ANL.

[10]Quotation taken from presskit. Both the presskit and the film imply that Prestes' wife was deported back to Germany and died in a concentration camp: "Prestes allowed party propagandists to exploit the deportation of his German-born wife: although she probably dies in a Swiss hospital of tuberculosis in 1938 . . . the communist press asserted that she had been liquidated in a Nazi extermination camp, an allegation never satisfactorily documented" (Levine, p. 122).

past. It is a situation doubly ironic, then, because now, when the country needs sober and judicious analyses of the past more than ever before, it is faced with the most superficial of movies.

Directors like Diegues and Saura constitute barriers between national film output and the international audience. Saura's films certainly rank him as one of the major Spanish artists, while it would be hard to construct a list of the best filmmakers in Brazil right now that would include Diegues. But the situation in Spain is worse, because film audiences are aware of other Brazilian directors but they have no awareness at all of the other Spanish directors. Mario Camus, the director of *The Holy Innocents*, is an example. In 1977 he made a remarkable elegy to the spirit of all of those loyalists who had fought in the Civil War, called *Days of the Past*. But its power lay not in its subject matter (a score of artists have tried to memorialize the Civil War), but rather in its aesthetic and technical perfection. It was beautifully photographed, well acted, and with a script whose political subtext in no way obscured its narrative.

Despite all of these qualities, the film disappeared without much of an impression. But *Holy Innocents* should fare better, simply because it was shown at Cannes, and because the two central male characters split the acting award. The award was well deserved, and an intriguing sign of the Jury's curiously impeccable taste, since Paco and Azarais, the two characters, are exercises in the most understated sort of acting, the kind that one only sees in the best films. Both of them are members of an impoverished peasant family whose lives are at the beck and call of their masters. In its treatment of exploitation, the film is unrivalled, chiefly because it describes the process in such an objective and understated fashion.

Paco, middle-aged, with a wife and three children, has been the bosom hunting companion of one of the masters, Ivan. Ivan's passion is shooting birds, and he returns to the estate only for the season. During one of these expeditions Paco, as part of his duties, must climb up in a tree, and when the branch breaks he falls and breaks his ankle. Ivan, distraught that he will miss some of the hunting season, coerces Paco into walking on his broken limb, despite the incredible pain. And Paco, precisely like a dog who must please his master, obeys, with the result that he permanently cripples himself.

The film's brutal power lies precisely in its systematic observation that, to the rich, the poor really are like animals. When the marquesa visits the estate, she dispenses cash to the tenants. She knows some of them, and speaks to them familiarly, even kindly. How are your children? she asks, and then: how are the pigs? There's no difference in her mind. Most directors who tackle this sort of subject feel compelled to blacken the oppressors. But Camus sticks to his essential task. Their oppression is casual, even naive. The marquesa obviously thinks of herself as a good woman. Ivan is simply thoughtless. He has that ability, which Tolstoy recorded so perfectly in *War and Peace*, and which only the hereditary aristocracy possess, of a most terrifying narcissism. It is the equivalent of the old Prince Bolkonsky's punctiliousness, which terrifies people like no amount of cruelty could.

Exposed to this, the two children, Quirce and Nieves, resolve to leave. The sister, Nieves, goes to a factory to work while her brother, Quirce, after a stint in the army, becomes a mechanic. Their experiences frame the story, which is told in a flashback that begins with Quirce, discharged from the Army, stopping by to see Nieves. We then have progressive sequences, each given the name of a character, that take us to the climactic action involving Azarais, who is their mother's simpleton brother.

Azarais is a remarkable character who communes with the birds, washes his hands in his own urine, and defecates at will like an animal, much to the consternation of those around him. Paco, whose sense of smell is so keen that Ivan uses him as a sort of super retriever (in one scene he literally gets down on all fours and sniffs like a dog), can always tell when Azarais is in the neighborhood. The old fool is devoted to the bedridden invalid child, and to all animals and birds. He is, perhaps more than any of the others, the "holy innocent" of the title.

And it is Azarais that Ivan resolves to take hunting with him to replace Paco. He does, and on a day when the bag is nonexistent, he becomes so infuriated that he shoots Azarais' pet bird. Sobered by the old man's anguish, he apologizes. It is the measure of Ivan that he believes that his charm heals all wounds. It never occurs to him that his few words of apology aren't sufficient, so the two promptly go out hunting again. Azarais, from his vantage point in the tree above Ivan's head, deftly snares him with a noose and hangs him. It is a remarkable climax to a film which is full of unexpected turns and twists. The complex narrative structure, with its successive

The Holy Innocents: Azarais, Regula (holding Rosa), Paco, Nieves, Quirce.

Another chaotic moment from *Epilogo*.

flashbacks, allows Camus to keep this scene for the end of the film, even though we have seen much of what follows. In a festival where an inordinate number of films used flashbacks, this was the only one where it served any real purpose. Add another top filmmaker to Spain's list — and hope that the same enlightened reasoning is used with respect to some of the other countries' "official" selections.

Filmmakers have always been fascinated by such cinematic artifacts (or gimmicks) as flashbacks, although very few directors use them meaningfully. Similarly, they have been intrigued by the idea of making a movie about the process of making a movie, or the uses to which film clips (or television snippets) could be put in constructing a film. Both Huston and Angelopoulos played around with these ideas. Gonzalo Suarez' *Epilogo*, however, is the single most concentrated dose of such playings around seen in some time. Gonzalo Suarez is another one of those "unknown" Spanish directors, but one whose utterances about the cinema always make one uneasy. For most people the unease is scarcely remediated by knowing that this is the man about whom Sam Peckinpah said: he's the twenty frames we need to be synchronized with the [expletive deleted] times we live in.

But *Epilogo* is a terrifically witty film. The subject is two writers, Ditirambo and Rocabruno, who have worked together for years collaborating on popular novels. They have split up because the older one has inherited a fine house and doesn't need to work. The other one comes and pesters him. In addition to sharing their work, they share their love for a woman. So the film is also a triangular love affair, as well as another exercise in flashback. It's an exercise in almost everything, because as the two writers start to compose their stories, we start seeing them acted out (sometimes by the same characters we are also seeing in "reality"). These fragmented tales are wonderfully imaginative, and Suarez, who's written quite a few books himself, does a marvelous job of talking about how things get written. Although finally there is just too much in the film for it to be coherent, the incoherence of Gonzalo Suarez is exactly the kind of incoherence that most filmmakers need, and lack. He also has something else that other, "serious" directors could use, which is a real sense of humor. His humor isn't just dialogue and tricks, either. He has a fine sense of playing with the camera, of playing tricks on the viewer, and on the other characters in his film. This is exactly the sort of film that should be shown in the Fortnight. It was, but there weren't enough like it.

Possibly this tinkering with illusion and reality is more congenial to Hispanic artists than to German or French ones. I say this because the other director who keeps circling around and around the subject is the Cuban Tomas Gutierre Alea, whose first major film (still probably his best) played around with the various paradoxes of movies about moviemaking. But in *Memories of Underdevelopment* the subject was not making a film, but the portrayal of a sensitive and yet narcissistic member of the Cuban elite who was trying to come to terms with the revolution. The ideas about moviemaking, and the presence of television, were simply asides in the film. But his latest work, *Up to a Point*, returns to all of these ideas and uses them in ways that become central to the film.

The essential idea of the film is this: Oscar is a successful dramatist who is supposed to do a filmscript for Arturo, a friend of his. The subject of the film is the presence of machismo in post-revolutionary Cuba. Oscar will go down to the docks and talk to the dock workers, while Arturo and his camera crew go around interviewing them on videotape. All of this will constitute the raw material for a film about machismo.

But the project falls completely apart. Oscar becomes infatuated with Lina, a dockworker who he is interviewing to find out about how women view machismo. He increasingly blows off what he is supposed to be doing and spends his time courting, even though he's married to the woman who is supposed to play the role of Lina in the movie. Instead of producing a script Oscar is acting in his own personal soap opera. He loves Lina and carries on with her out in public, but he can't break off with his wife. Like Sergio, the hero of *Memories*, Oscar apparently believes that his status exempts him from the curse of machismo.

So Arturo has not only to deal with the embarrassment of Oscar's amours, but with the fact that the workers, both men and women, don't want to talk about machismo. It has obviously occurred to them that it is scarcely the problem that is crippling the productivity of socialist Cuba. What is crippling it is the fact that the cranes aren't getting fixed, that people are loafing, that the repairs and improvements needed are always delayed. What Arturo is getting on tape is an indictment of the inefficiencies of the system coupled with a good many thoughtful insights

into why things are so confused. The title comes from one such interview, in which a dockworker admits that the revolution has made him 80% new. But it isn't going to make him 100% new. Maybe 85%, he says. Maybe even as much as 87%. But there is no way it is going to make him over 100%. But he likes the way things are going — up to a point.

The practical results of a Marxist education have been to enable people to use the laws of quality and quantity to explain the limits of their transformation. One could say the same thing about the documentarist filmmaking that the film is built around. The Cuban Film Institute has put most of its energies into training documentarists and funding their work, which has a certain predictable sameness to it. But Gutierrez Alea uses this same sort of approach to make a film that says something quite different: that things are in a mess and that all the skilled workers know about it, but that their concerns are personal ones, such as making more money and getting ahead. Arturo realizes that this is not the reality that he is supposed to be filming. He goes home deeply depressed after a bout of afternoon drinking with the dockworkers. This isn't the way I thought it was going to be, he mutters. This isn't what workers are supposed to be like.

Nor does Gutierrez Alea's camera make any attempt to shine things up, either. He doesn't have any qualms about showing us a Havana of junk and ruin, although he is certainly aware of the beauties of the oceanfront area. But the scenery is class linked. When Arturo and Oscar are talking about the film, we see one sort of scenery; when we see the workers, we see another sort entirely. Oscar is just as out of place in Lina's apartment in Havana in 1983 as Sergio's lower-class girlfriend was in his apartment in Havana in 1962. These people, then, are unreconstructed. Oscar is as oblivious as Sergio. Sergio saw many things quite clearly, but he wasn't as interested in them as he was in sexual gratification, which he got primarily by chasing, or fantasizing, about lower-class women. His wife gone, he engaged in a typical pattern of seduction. Oscar does the same thing. The difference is that he's more confused about his motives than Sergio was. At first his motives seem slightly purer. But when we see him on the phone calming his wife and lying to her about where he has been, we realize that his attraction for Lina is just as impure as Sergio's feelings were.

So the title of the film answers that nagging question about how things have changed by saying that they've changed, but only up to a point, and it's a point that probably represents a very real limit as far as individual Cubans are concerned. The director applies the same sort of cool analysis to revolutionary society in this film that he applied to the old Cuba in the earlier film, and the result is a work of great thoughtfulness and depth. Gutierrez Alea, alone of all the directors in Latin America, has a real sense of extracting the juice out of natural dialogue. He likes language, and his characters talk. But they always talk sense, and they never talk as a substitute for doing other things.

The problem is that *Up to a Point* is scarcely seventy minutes long. It is difficult, if not impossible, for one to believe that Gutierrez Alea could make a film that length. And it doesn't look like a short film, either. What it looks like is three quarters of a film with some sort of desperate attempt at an ending patched on to it. The only thing that isn't clear is just what was in the part that disappeared. Gutierrez Alea has certainly made films which consist of carefully juggled fragments, little snippets of film that he carefully assembles to produce the work. Unlike some other directors who work this way, however, his sense of narrative is so elliptical that he doesn't necessarily have the thread of the narrative hanging on all of these pieces. So it is possible to yank parts out and still keep a film with a sense of a story about it. There is too much missing from this film to be able to tell what exactly was going on. One guesses that some of what went would have reinforced the parodic aspects of the work. The ending of Oscar's play that we see performed on screen looks suspiciously like the plot of a recent Cuban film. But all this is guesswork. The only thing that is certain is that three quarters of one of Gutierrez Alea's films is better than four quarters of any other film in Cuba.

If Gutierrez Alea is an established intellectual artist whose latest work is surprisingly abbreviated, Sergio Leone is an established popular director whose latest work is surprisingly long. The second cut of *Once Upon a Time in America* is nearly four hours long. After seeing the film in this version, it is obvious that there was a first cut of substantially greater length, while even before the film was screened at Cannes it was reported that the North American distributor had cut the film down to about two hours for theatrical release.[11]

Just how they went about doing that is interesting, because the film suffers a good deal from even the second series of cuts. Even the

four hour version finally doesn't work, though there are some fine things along the way. The subject is the fortunes of a group of young Jewish men and women who grow up in New York in the 1920s. Although Deborah and her brother Moe are good children (she wants to be a dancer and he works in his father's restaurant), the others are less savory: Peggy dispenses her girlish favors for pastries, and Noodles, although he is in love with Deborah and she with him, sticks to the crooked life exemplified by his friend Max. Although Deborah and Moe are virtuous, it is only by comparison, and there is something tainted about them. The other three members of the gang tag along behind these two, who lead them to great things: after showing some mobsters how to fish barrels of bootleg out of the water, they strike the big time.

But only temporarily, for they are immediately spotted by Bugsy, another, slightly older, hood. He and his buddies have previously beaten up Max and Noodles in ghastly fashion. This time he has a gun, and he shoots the smallest and youngest member of the gang (who is simply a little kid). In retaliation, Noodles knifes Bugsy and apparently kills him, only to be caught by the police and sent to prison. When he emerges as a young man (Robert De Niro), the gang is firmly ensconced in the world of prohibition. Even though he has been in jail, they have honored their original agreement and divided the profits evenly amongst themselves.

Noodles courts Deborah (Elizabeth McGovern), who leaves him to go to Hollywood. In the meantime Max (James Woods) dreams of knocking off the Federal Reserve Bank. Noodles, frightened by this, is urged by Max's kinky mistress Carol (Tuesday Weld) to get all of them thrown in jail on some minor charge that will make it impossible for them to pull off this impossible (to Noodles) job. This takes us up to where the film opens: the plot has backfired: the three other members of the gang, including Max, are lying stiffly in the rain, and everyone is after Noodles as the traitor. He has been betrayed as well, because the money that the five of them have hidden away is also gone. Instead of getting even, he gets on the bus to Buffalo.

Thirty-five years later he returns to New York (and the film does a fine job of handling this shift in time, as well as in making De Niro look that much older). He does so because he knows that he has been discovered. He talks to Moe, now old and shabby, and to Max's mistress, stashed off in an old folks home. It is she who gives him a revelation that seems like an ending of sorts, since the events of the 1920s which form the flashback have taken up about three hours of the film: Max, she says, knew he was going crazy, and he fired on the police to get killed. He did it deliberately. Then Noodles sees Deborah, who tries to conceal from him the truth: Max didn't die, he just disappeared, taking the money with him. He married Deborah, and they have a son who is his image. It is this son who gives the game away. When Noodles sees him, he knows that the mysterious Mr. Bailey is Max.

He goes to see Bailey/Max, who tells him that he (Max) must die, because the investigating committees are closing in on him. He wants Noodles to do it. But Noodles refuses. He walks out of the house. Shortly after, Max walks out as well. He is obscured briefly by a giant garbage truck, and after the truck passes, he is gone. It isn't clear whether he got into the cab, or whether he jumped into the jaws of the garbage disposal mechanism.

Leone has said that time is one of the main characters of the film. This is hard to see. Although there are some nice touches in the flashbacks, the 1920s narrative is presented in big self-contained narrative blocks. In the present, nothing much happens, so it is hard to see that time is anything other than a useful adjunct. What it looks like is that Leone had a difficult time concluding the film, and that the ending he chose is an unsatisfactory one. Leaving aside the metaphysical garbage truck, the reasons why Max plotted his own disappearance (and the death of his friends) are far from clear. There is nothing in the 1920s section to suggest that he had any reason to disappear. So we have to take this need on faith, just as we have to take it on faith that now in the present, Max/Bailey, who has survived all of these years, and built up this vast empire, is going to be threatened by a congressional investigating committee and must kill himself. It seems far fetched, and, given the marvelous density of the 1920s sequences, sadly tacked on. Although once one starts to think about it, the whole logic behind Carol and Noodles in "betraying" Max is strange. It is never really made clear why Max couldn't do the same thing a few months (or years) later, since the Federal Reserve Bank isn't exactly going to walk away.

[11]There is a good summary of the complicated issue of the cuts in the *Variety* review of 23 May 1984. The reviewer notes that "the last forty minutes or so degenerate badly . . ." (p. 13).

Leone, regardless of his reputation as a spaghetti Western director in this country, is a masterful filmmaker. He knows what he's about, and his command of the craft is formidable. The period work is staggering. This isn't just a few cars trundling around on a set accompanied by a couple of people in period dress (as is the case with Fellini's *The Ship Sails On*). Leone constructs an enormously detailed and faithful — and just plain enormous — screen for the action. The docks are full of trucks and barrels and workmen. *Once Upon a Time in America* looks like a film that was made in the 1920s. The acting that goes along with this is extraordinary, so good in fact that these niggling details don't begin to niggle until long after the film is over. The youngsters who play the main characters as children are a formidable group: Jennifer Connelly, who plays the young Deborah, is better at it than Elizabeth McGovern is as the grownup.

The problem with the acting is that the audience is never given any idea about what character it is supposed to sympathize with, or to feel represents a moral center to the film. The surprising failure, given Leone's other works, is that any sort of moral framework is completely missing. Moe, for example, is seen first as a snotty fat boy. He grows up to be an impoverished and hapless victim. He's pathetic, but hard to sympathize with. Carol is a victim too. When Max's gang breaks into the office where she works and robs it, Noodles rapes her. But she enjoys it, and ends up as Max's girl friend. So much for victimized women. Deborah isn't much better. As a teenager she deliberately lets the lovesick Noodles see her naked. Later, when she tells him she is going to go to Hollywood, and resists his advances, he rapes her. It's hard to tell who we should sympathize with: Deborah as rape victim or poor Noodles, whose sexual experiences may have conditioned him to believe that women really like rape. But Noodles is so confused, and Deborah so calculatingly nasty, that one has no idea what is going on in his head. De Niro is never really able to pull Noodles together: you can't tell whether he's a perpetual victim, a flawed hero, or just confused. Although it is surprisingly hard to sympathize with Deborah when she is raped, the fact of that rape isn't going to make Noodles any more sympathetic to contemporary audiences. Similarly, Noodles tells Max he's crazy, and Carol confirms that. But Max doesn't seem crazy at all. Noodles is the one who appears to have taken one too many raps on the head from Bugsy.

All these problems are difficult to understand, particularly in view of the people who worked on the script (they include Enrico Medioli, who did many of Visconti's scripts, as well as Benvenuti and De Bernardi). The problematic nature of the film is particularly disappointing because of the importance of the subject and Leone's abilities as a director. That Jews were as much a part of this country's violent past as were the other immigrant groups is important for an understanding of the contemporary United States (as well as Israel). Leone's handling of the story gives us much more of an abstract study of the relations between power and violence than the softer and familial world of *The Godfather* does. And, ironically, Leone is the man who sees that there is a connection between the Frontier and the Roaring Twenties.

Once Upon a Time in America is still an interesting film, although theatrical audiences who see the one hundred and fifty minute version will probably dismiss it as a violent mishmash. The only thing that's sure is that the film that by rights should have made everyone realize that Leone is a great director won't. Like Ray (and Huston and Angelopoulos), Leone came to Cannes a mature and established director with a project that was the result of years of work, only to find that somewhere in the process of filmmaking he had lost his movie. But of the group, Leone's film is the only one where you can see the pieces of a major work (and the abilities of a phenomenal artist) visible. Like Gonzalo Suarez, Leone's bits are more interesting than other people's finished films.

Leone's colleague Marco Bellocchio, who has established himself with quite a few critics as a significant talent, is an apt example. He was represented by an extremely short (less than ninety minutes) adaptation of the Pirandello play *Henry IV*. Marcello Mastroianni plays an eccentric nobleman who, as the result of a fall from a horse during a costume party where everyone dressed up from the middle ages, believes he is the German Emperor Henry IV. He lives in a genuine castle surrounded by paid servants who enable him to continue his delusion. Years later his friends come to the castle with a psychiatrist who resolves to cure him by means that once again remind us of the intellectual poverty of modern drama when confronted with Freud. The cure works, sort of, in typical Pirandellian fashion, moving to one of those conclusions in which the hero reveals that his insanity was a conscious attempt to escape from familial treacheries, and

so on. It is a tidily enough executed television film, completely out of place at the festival, and a sort of oddity for RAI (Italian Television). While Bellocchio didn't exactly Hustonize Pirandello's play, he managed to trivialize it: whatever weaknesses Pirandello might have, he isn't Neil Simon, but that's exactly what Bellocchio turns him into.

The organizers excluded some French films that were thought of as shoo-ins for the festival. They did include, however, Jacques Doillon's *La Pirate*, which deals with one woman (played by Maruschka Detmers) who is trying to get the woman she loves (played by Jane Birkin) away from her husband. They are watched and abetted in this by a young girl and a man (Philippe Leotard). There is a good deal of running (or crawling) down the corridors of hotels in excesses of emotion, and far too many shots of the two actresses embracing one another. Finally there's a lot of violence. *La Pirate* is one of those marvellously pretentious films in which incoherence is thought (by the director) to be profundity. The result is an unintentional comedy, although from their reactions most of the critics didn't find it too amusing: there were many hisses, whistles, and boos at the end. They were richly deserved. Where Doillon's reputation comes from is a mystery, but the fact that he has one at all says a good deal about the mess that contemporary French cinema is in.[12]

It is puzzling that Western audiences will generally submit to such muddled histrionics, or to the somnambulance of Angelopoulos, and at the same time literally flee from films made outside of North America or Western Europe on the grounds that they are obscure or hard to understand. This was particularly the case this year, when one of the outstanding films of the festival was just the sort of work that is usually dismissed as too literary or difficult for audiences.

Marta Meszaros is the leading woman director in Eastern Europe, and probably in the West as well, but her work has never placed her in the first rank of Hungarian directors. There has always been a certain slowness and sameness to her work: the films dealt with a certain kind of sexual conflict in a curiously predictable way. Although her films contained real insights about human relations in Hungary, the behaviour of the characters was always problematic. At fifty she seemed to be one of those artists whose work, while always interesting, became less so the more of it you saw.

Diary for My Children, a drastic improvement, is a tightly constructed excursion back into the director's adolescence and Hungary after WWII. From the opening frames of Hungary seen from the air, the black and white photography is striking. This is Meszaros' first film to have such accomplished cinematography (done by her son, Miklos Jancso, Jr.), and the opening is accompanied by an orchestral soundtrack that conveys a sense of the ominous. Both images and music also give a sense of steady movement, of a certain kind of thrust, which forecasts and then reinforces the script itself. The pacing, the rhythm, and the speed of the film make it altogether different from anything else she has done. The black and white photography, although perhaps surprising, allows for some excellent period touches, since the film is set in the late 1940s. Actual documentary footage is mixed in with new footage in a way that is wholly remarkable and yet necessary to the point Meszaros is trying to make.

The subject is a serious and controversial one. The period immediately following the War is still a touchy subject for Hungarians (and other Eastern Europeans as well). The documentary footage used is an embarrassing reminder of the slavish devotion to Stalin: on his 70th birthday trams were put into service in Budapest specially to commemorate the glorious occasion, each one having the same number 70. And the film records all of this, as well as capturing footage from the first Hungarian films of the period. It also follows the contradictions already inherent in the new society such as socialist fashion shows, which are also shown in the film via documentary footage. The lives of the characters in the film echo these contradictions. The heroine, Juli, is a teenager who has grown up in the Soviet Union, where her parents, talented Hungarian communists, fled in the 1930s. But her father was taken away by the police, never to be heard of again, while her mother took sick and died. The orphaned Juli was cared for by an older couple, also dedicated Hungarian communists, and when they return to Hungary they do so because of "grandpa's" younger sister. Magda stayed on and fought, and she has emerged as an

[12]Some choice quotes from the negative *Variety* review of 23 May 1984: "Quirky . . . . Needlessly arty and distant . . . . Performances . . . are emotionally repelling" (p. 26). McCarthy: "*La Pirate* provoked the loudest catcalls and the greatest astonishment at its selection" (p. 5). An almost equally negative review of Zulawski's *La Femme Publique*, which was rejected by the organizers as a French entry, is in the 16 May issue, p. 132.

important person, serving first as the head of a newspaper, and then as director of a prison. She knew Juli's parents, and wants to adopt her. Magda has appropriated a magnificent apartment for them to live in, and she is determined that Juli will grow up among the children of the party elite.

Externally, Budapest may be in ruins and the economy a shambles, but life for the new elite is remarkably plush, something that the film records in cutting detail. From the first, however, Juli is a problem. She is unwilling to forget her father, and she is unwilling to accept the "official" explanation of what happened to him, since she was there. So the political subject of the film is the demoralization of the original revolutionaries and their children as they witness the bizarre combination of high living, terror, and paranoid fanaticism that characterize the new regime. Juli knows only one way of rejecting this regime — stubbornness and defiance. She refuses to come to terms with Magda, who genuinely loves her. She understands, with all the quirky perceptiveness of adolescence, that by rejecting Magda's affections she can wound her in a way that nothing else can. She also intuits that if she lets Magda adopt her she will be giving consent to the official line about her father: by becoming Magda's child, she ceases to be her father's, and then society can comfortably forget that he ever existed and was done away with. It is her existence as an orphan that reminds everyone of the delusive nature of the system. But the struggle with Magda is far from schematic, however, because Juli is unable to articulate the difference between her defiance as typical adolescent behaviour and defiance as revolutionary reaction. It is a testimony to Meszaros' sureness of touch that even while our sense of justice is always with Juli, we can see through the politics of the situation to a lonely woman who deeply loves the girl and whose strictures and concerns about her are like any parent's.

Nor are Magda and her friends any better at dealing with the situation. They try remedies ranging from collective self criticism sessions of the sort they use against themselves to paddling her. One of the reasons that none of these things work is that there are adults around who see that Juli's struggle to preserve her link with her father is a struggle for human freedom and a rejection of the regime. Magda's older brother, who has cared for Juli as her grandfather, is deeply disturbed by what he sees going on around him. He is too old and too terrified to be active, but he provides Juli with passive support. Magda's friend Janos, a widower engineer living with his crippled son, also rejects the fanaticism he sees around him. Juli turns to him for support in her struggle with Magda. But he too is more or less helpless, although he does intervene decisively enough in her favor when she is being spanked. After an unsuccessful adolescent attempt at running away from Magda, Juli separates from her in more adult fashion and moves in with Janos and his son. But the inevitable happens: Janos is

Diary: Janos is taken off to jail.

too logical, too thoughtful, to be allowed to function in the Hungary of the period. Like her father, he too is arrested in the night and dragged away. So Juli and Janos' son grow up together. Now separated for good from the elite, she goes to work in a factory, going to school at night. In 1953 they are allowed to see Janos in jail. Without his beard, through the wire netting, he looks exactly like Juli's father (the same actor plays both roles). What are you reading? he asks her. Dostoevsky, she answers. The difficult child is turning into the difficult intellectual.

What makes this highly autobiographical film move like none of her other works do is the images and the music, which are, quite simply, the best done in Hungary for some time. *Diary for My Children* is not a difficult or obscure film, although most audiences will miss the rich topicality of the subtext. It is a subtext which the West has never experienced and which most Hungarians would be delighted to forget. The

French critic Michel Perez, after seeing this film, objected to the fact that the Hungarians persist in going back into their immediate past and digging it up as though it explains everything. By this he was reacting to the idea that it is possible to pin all of one's sins on one's immediate ancestors, and thus to appear as though all problems have been solved.[13] Although this is always a danger when one does social criticism that is firmly grounded in the past, since 1947, there have only been five films made in Hungary that really dealt

Baron Samoday speaks Chinese to the police captain.

with the situation in straightforward fashion. *Angi Vera* and *The Stud Farm* were made within the last five years. *Diary for My Children* was made in 1982 and just now released. *The Witness* was made in 1969 and first shown in 1982. There are too few films dealing meaningfully with the subject to suggest some sort of trend, and too few for the importance of the period to an understanding of contemporary events.

The fifth Hungarian film to deal with this period is a funny and savage work. *O Bloody Life*, by Peter Bacso, repeats many of the concerns of his 1969 film *The Witness*. The intervening years, however, have not mellowed him appreciably. The time is 1951, and the heroine, Lucy Sziraky, is an aspiring comedienne whose greatest aim is to appear in operettas. Although Western audiences are likely to associate these exclusively with Vienna, they were as much of a part of the cultural life of Budapest as of its sister city. Under socialism, operettas were given a license to exist, and there were works written that attempted to use the ideas of the genre with the concerns of socialist realism. When the film opens, Lucy is appearing in one, *The Tractor Girl*. The title pretty much gives it away, but Bacso's camera takes in the whole scene, complete with real chickens, a chorus of agrarian proletarians, and the charmingly kitschy Lucy, who is seduced shortly thereafter by her director.

Kiptar just before the harvester eats him.

But the police break into the apartment in the middle of their lovemaking and, besides scaring the pantless director witless, evict her: her divorced husband was a member of the nobility, and she is being exiled to a country village, her apartment appropriated (doubtless for some worthy person like Magda). Marooned in the village, Lucy works in the fields. Despite the fact that an exiled baron, the local party secretary, and the local police captain all fall in love with her, that she has no qualms about sleeping with anyone to get out, and the obvious fact that the exile was a mistake, she is unable to get out. She is stuck in the boondocks surrounded by hicks, imbecilic communists, and jealous aristocrats. Finally, in a bizarre stroke, she is summoned back to Budapest to sing the lead role in *Czardas Princess*. Terrified and physically traumatized, when the curtain opens she sees the baron, whom she thought had been shot, ensconced in the audience as an army officer. It is the last

[13]This review was in *Le Matin*, 17 May 1984, p. 30.

straw. Slowly, terrifyingly, she begins to sing: "This bloody life, this life of madness, why do we grasp for it as though it is sweet as honey?"

Although the film is in some ways a difficult and perplexing one, it is a major achievement. This brief summary omits the most obvious point, which is that the film is deeply, maniacally, funny, although it does point out the extent to which Bacso uses music as the unifying thread: everyone, regardless of his politics, has the same need for art, and all of the major characters respond to Lucy because of her talent. Of course the subject seems an unlikely one for a comedy, but no one would have imagined a comedy about the show trials either, which is the subject of *The Witness*. It will probably not find the same audience as the earlier film, however, because it is a darker, nastier, work. The schoolteacher Kiptar, who is also the local party secretary, is a good and gentle person. Some of his actions are of course imbecilic: he organizes the schoolchildren to help paint the houses of all the alleged kulaks black. The houses of good communists are painted red. The children build great kites with socialist slogans on them. All the while they sing songs of the proper sort, even though the tunes suggest the same sort of music that Lucy has been performing. But Kiptar is a gentle person: he confesses to Lucy that he became a communist because before he was nothing, and he had tuberculosis, but a stay at the Rakosi sanitarium cured him. He is also sincere about his beliefs. And it is important to remember what the documentary footage from Meszaros' film goes a long way towards reminding us, which is that such moronic fatuousness was the order of the day. Neither director is making it up.

One of the strengths about the film (like Meszaros' film) is that people like Kiptar are portrayed as sincere. They aren't really opportunists, just naive. Kiptar can't understand why the local peasants hate him. Like the idealistic younger brother in *The Stud Farm*, he is set upon in the night and brutalized by the locals, who dump red paint on him. It is typical of Lucy that when he comes staggering in covered with red paint, she realizes that she loves him. It is one of the many master strokes in the film: Lucy, herself a victim, falls in love with people as they reveal themselves also to be victims, and she senses in some way that in this new state everyone has the potential to be both victim and victimizer. The Baron Samoday, for example; exiled with her, he determines to set a good example. When the police break into his hovel and want to know what he is doing, he is ready for them. Inspired by the great successes of the Peoples Armies, he answers, I am studying Chinese. Awestruck, they ask him to say something in Mandarin. The police captain is stumped, although from the look on his face one begins to realize that the real crime in this society isn't political deviance, it's high intelligence. Samoday's future looks ominous. So later, during an impromptu picnic (Bacso always has a shrewd eye for the fact that these aristocrats aren't working nearly as hard as they think — their humiliation is largely psychological and symbolic) one isn't surprised when the army comes in one of those ominous sedans and takes Samoday away. He is still in his bathing suit. Can I take my clothes? he asks. You won't need them, he is told, a reply that certainly confirms for both characters and audience that he is going to be shot.

But when Samoday is taken to the proverbial clearing, it is only so that he can put on an army uniform and serve as interpreter for the visiting Chinese delegation. This is why Lucy sees him at the operetta. Although Bacso doesn't draw any conclusions from it, Samoday and Kiptar together suggest something that has a terrifying ring of truth to it, which is that the New Society is increasingly going to be composed of people who are, one might say, unconscious careerists. They don't sit down and articulate it that way, but unconsciously they have chosen to fit in, to succeed, and in a regime desperately short of people, they will.

Poor Kiptar, as the idealist, is ultimately done in. He spends his time organizing a musical entertainment for the workers getting in the harvest. Word spreads, and on the day of the event Kiptar is told that party bosses will come. This is the humble schoolteacher's great moment. He embraces Lucy and jumps up on a harvesting machine to address the workers. When he sees the motorcade, he is moved to a paroxysm of energy. One of the workers starts the machine, and the hapless Kiptar is devoured. It is a particularly nasty way to go, and it marks one of the key differences between this film and the Bacso of fifteen years ago: in the newer film nasty things really do happen to people.

For Lucy, of course, life must go on, and the police captain now becomes a bigger part of her life. He has appropriated a vast mansion, complete with a dummy horse on which he sits. When he gets Lucy into the bedroom with him, he reveals his aspirations to be a singer too. And Lucy takes his gun and makes the naked police captain sing a duet with her. It is an incident both bizarre

and comic, but it illustrates the opposing belief systems operating in the film. Lucy believes that inside — beneath their uniforms or clothes — men are basically people. If you can take the police captain's uniform off, you find a frustrated musician. He really gets into singing, only to be periodically reminded of the humiliating situation he is in. Similarly, when you put an army uniform on the exiled baron (and no one could be a better symbol of the old regime than Samoday as he is played in the film) you have an officer in the people's army. But the truth, as Bacso suggests, is what the system has discovered, that you can make people do whatever you want them to by changing their clothing. Or, to look at it another way, the system simply devours people, either literally (Kiptar's martyrdom is representative of the deaths of people like Juli's father) or metaphorically, as is the case with Samoday. The debate then is between two traditional views of mankind, a view that asserts that all men are brothers under the skin, and another, more sinister one, that says that you can make people anything you want them to be.

So Lucy's beliefs, and her pathetic attempts to fight back, to struggle, to survive, represent the beliefs of a large number of people. And Bacso doesn't simplify things so much that these oppositions become schematic. One of the strengths of the film is that the characters are characters first and foremost. Lucy and the two communists really are attracted to each other in a weird triangle. The police captain, for instance, after his embarrassing moment, tries to woo Lucy by taking off his uniform, hiring a violinist, and serenading her with an air from one of the operettas. So Lucy is partially right: take the uniform off and you get a different man. But he then tries to rape her. Notice that we didn't say a better man, just a different one. Once again the police break in (only Bacso would have the nerve to use such a terrifying device as a repeated gag). Up against the wall, they tell the two equally terrified combatants — and it is typical, by the way, that the police captain is as scared as is Lucy. Now, they ask, which one of you is Lucy Sziraky? This is too much even for the police captain. But his bewilderment is matched by Lucy's when she learns that she is to sing in the operetta.

It is hard to escape some comparisons with Chaplin's *The Great Dictator*. Both films are deep parodies of systems which we usually only think of in serious ways, and which we therefore expect to be talked about seriously. So there is that same precarious relationship between tone and subject, just as both films make use of the importance of dress in a totalitarian state: when the Jewish barber dresses up in a uniform at the end of the film, everyone assumes he is the dictator Adenoid Hynkel. In both films reality is equally arbitrary. I mention the comparison because it seems to me that everyone tends to forget (or to dismiss) Chaplin's conscious decision to talk about the terrors of a totalitarian state using a broadly parodic vehicle, and to regard it as some sort of aberration on his part. But after seeing Bacso's two films it becomes increasingly obvious that Chaplin was right: this is absolutely one way to talk about the problem, and in many respects it is the best way.

Carlos Alberto Prates Correia probably makes the best looking films in Brazil. Every frame appears carefully composed, and his scenes are good enough to pass for accomplished still photographs. In addition, he's virtually the only director working in Brazil who can make you realize the extent to which Brazil is a country of extraordinary beauty. These virtues are particularly in evidence with *Nights of the Sertão*, which is based on the short story by Guimarães Rosa, "Buriti." *Nights* is very close to being the best looking Latin American film of the last ten years. In addition to the beautiful shots of the landscape, he photographs his people so well that they really don't have to do anything except sit there. It's a rare ability in a country where, with a handful of exceptions, the cinematography, while always workmanlike, is never particularly polished.[14]

But the film is considerably more than the images, because it is an ingenious adaptation of a writer whose prose is problematic for a scriptwriter. Guimarães Rosa is justly regarded as one of the great stylists of Brazilian fiction, but his works, precisely for that reason, tend to resist any sort of transference into another medium. Although Brazilian directors have done some astonishing adaptations of their national literature, the works of Guimarães Rosa have been dismantled and lugged to the screen rather than adapted. The result, as is the case with Paulo Thiago's *Sagarana*, is frequently interesting as a film, but it isn't really successful as an adaptation of the writer.

Nights deals with the problems of transposi-

[14]The *Variety* reviewer of 16 May 1984 said: "Almost every image is superlatively beautiful, and the dialogs are deeply emotive, although one must make some effort to understand their meaning (even in Portugese)" (p. 136). Unfortunately, the stills available for this film and the one cited in note #13 don't give any real idea of just how good the photography is.

tion in three different ways, all of them handled successfully. First, the film relies extensively on voice-over narrations in the form of reflections by the characters themselves about what is going on. As Leon Hirszman demonstrated in his adaptation of the Ramos novel *São Bernardo*, this is a peculiarly effective way to keep the literary flavor of a work; after all, good prose sounds like good prose when we hear it. Second, *Nights* relies heavily on long slow shots of the world of the *sertão*, giving us a feeling not only for the natural part of the landscape, but also for the structures and objects that make up the ranch of Buriti. The characters are thus doubly trapped, not only by themselves, but by the vast space and the concrete objects that surround them. I think that this is the feeling that Guimarães Rosa was trying to evoke whenever he wrote of the *sertão*, and the film really captures that aspect of it, just as in *Vidas Secas* Nelson Pereira dos Santos is able to capture the sense of a bleak and inhospitable northeastern landscape so essential to Ramos' novel.

The third component consists of bits and pieces of narrative, chiefly the narrative of the encounters of the inhabitants of Buriti. The two central characters are the two young women, Lala and Maria Gloria. Lala's husband has left her, and she is marooned at Buriti with her father-in-law and her two sisters-in-law. The text of the story — and of the film — is the undercurrent of the attractions that these people feel for one another: Lala and Maria Gloria for one another, Lala for her father-in-law and he for her, Maria Gloria for the young Miguel, the farmer Gualberto for her. The fragmentary narrative captures the central fact of these attractions, while maintaining the elliptical way in which they are all handled; for all the simplicity of the story, it is, like all of the writer's works, confoundingly difficult to understand. On the

The Condor in Church.

basis of his earlier *Perdida* Carlos Alberto could be seen as potentially one of the most exciting of the newer Brazilian directors, and the more recent film not only confirms that, but it establishes him as a significant talent too much overlooked by international critics. It is also a reminder that Brazil, like Spain, probably has more genuinely talented filmmakers working per capita than any other country in the world.

Colombia doesn't, and so a film of any sort from that country is an event. But *They Don't Bury Condors Every Day* is the name of a surprisingly well-made period piece from Colombia which unfortunately is based on a knowledge of Colombian history that few people outside of the region have. This is a pity, because the director, Francisco Norden, takes precisely the right ap-

proach to his subject and is able to execute it despite an ominously low budget. The background is this: the assassination of the liberal party figure Gaitan in 1948 touched off a virtual civil war in Colombia usually known as "La Violencia." Political murders of every sort became commonplace. Perhaps as many as two hundred thousand people died. Although the struggle was between the liberal and conservative parties, most of the guerillas were liberals or leftists. But they had conservative counterparts as well, whose assassins were known as "pajaros" or birds, and the most famous was called "Condor."[15]

Condor was an asthmatic clerk in a small provincial library who also operated a cheese stall. He was a modest man of deep conservative principles who came to the attention of party leaders when he cowed a liberal mob by throwing a stick of dynamite into their midst. In short order Leon Maria Lozano became the most feared man in the region. Norden doesn't waste any time trying to make this believable: he counts on the fact that the way he presents the story will in itself be convincing. And it is. Leon Maria, ably played by Frank Ramirez, has just the right amount of hardness in his face, the sort of reserved dignity, that makes him a real presence on screen. His character hangs together: deeply religious, even puritanical, he refuses to enrich himself at the expense of his victims. In fact, in many ways he is an admirable man, the kind of man who can say, as he does on three different occasions, "I have my principles," and make the lines work.

But he also conveys the strength of a man so hated that when he is poisoned, and it looks as though he will die, the villagers begin a celebration outside of his house. Earlier, one of his daughter's admirers was courting her with a local band outside the house, and Leon Maria, outraged, emptied a chamber pot on them. So now the band too is celebrating outside his window. But he recovers, and when someone mentions the celebration, he observes, matter of factly, "condors don't die every day." The next frames show us the bodies of the musicians lying along the roadside where they have been murdered. He is clearly not a man to cross. But the government changes, and he is pensioned off. Leaving church one evening, Leon Maria is shot down in the street.

Condors is not as accomplished a film as *Travelling Companions*, a Venezuelan film which commemorates a roughly analogous period in the history of Venezuela in bitterly ironic fashion. But it is a well-made film that could serve as a model for other artists with ambitious ideas and limited budgets. When Norden pans around in the film, he has planned things well enough so that there aren't any embarrassing reminders that this is not really the early 50s. He understands that one of the most effective ways to establish a period atmosphere is to use old automobiles. But in doing so he has avoided one of the traps that most directors fall into, and his cars look driven in, dusty, used. Probably it is his long background as a documentarist that makes him sensitive to all of these things. But the world is full of documentarists who, when they turn to fiction films, apparently forget everything they learned in photographing reality, and Norden doesn't. He realizes that you can't show much violence in a low budget film (outside of Hollywood), because you don't have the technical resources. So he opts for a surprisingly varied set of what are essentially still photos of the sprawled bodies. But he does it so well that it doesn't become monotonous. The result is a restrained film, and the dialogue is equally restrained, something else that most fiction filmmakers have trouble with: it always seems that the easiest way to get around your problems is through dialogue. But unless you have a full complement of trained actors, it doesn't work. And it doesn't always work even then.

The result is a surprisingly well-made film detailing an important part of Colombian history in such a way that we realize that although the situation of Leon Maria is a particular one, the implications of his rise to power and the consequences are not. The chief problem with the film is that it assumes a knowledge of *la violencia* that few people have. What this means in practical terms is that audiences and critics have trouble in understanding just what is going on.

Although Miguel Littin is Chile's most well-known film artist, Antonio Skarmeta has always seemed the most talented. Unfortunately for his reputation, he started out as a scriptwriter, which meant he was less well known than someone who was directing his own films. But Skarmeta's scripts for *Calm Prevails Over the Country* and *The Revolt*, both of which were directed by David Lilienthal, were model expositions on their subjects of police repression and national liberation. After watching other people direct, Skarmeta

[15]See Robert Dix's *Colombia: the Political Dimensions of Change* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967),pp. 360-372. The *Variety* reviewer, lacking this sort of information, had some problems with the film (16 May 1984, p. 26).

decided he could direct as well. The latest result, *With Burning Patience*, is a film about Pablo Neruda with the actor most qualified to portray Neruda in the title role. Moreover, Skarmeta as director has precisely those qualities that someone choosing the subject must have: he is a deeply intellectual writer who is also a very funny man.

All of these things are necessary in order to produce a film about a man who is more than Chile's greatest poet. People in Chile who can neither read nor write know who Neruda is. People outside of Chile who can't read a word of Spanish know his poetry. So the problem for the filmmaker is how to make a movie about an international cultural monument without turning it into a pious documentary, while on a technical level, the problem is how to make a movie about a man whose great contribution to Western culture has been words.

Skarmeta solves both of these problems neatly enough. The center of the film is Neruda's postman. Neruda lived on a small island off the coast, and Mario peddles around Isla Negra delivering the mail, most of which is obviously Neruda's. This is one of those deeply practical approaches that seems to elude so many directors, although the logic is wonderful: who else would be seeing the great man on a daily basis? And who else would Neruda have to put up with? Because Mario is one of those hero worshippers who you know is going to cause trouble, and you can see in Neruda's eyes that he knows it as well. Of course Robert Parada, who plays Neruda, knew him, and so presumably his portrayal is authentic. But he does it so well that after a few minutes you don't care whether it's authentic or not: this is the way the poet should have been. That he probably was is simply icing on the cake.

And so Neruda is drawn into Mario's chief problem, which is attracting the attention of Beatriz Gonzales, who works in the local tavern. She's so attractive that Mario is tongue-tied. As he tells Neruda: when I first met her I could only get out five words. Neruda: which ones? Mario: what's your name? Neruda: and the other two? Mario: Beatriz Gonzales. And Neruda, who is also grappling with his nomination to be president of the Republic of Chile, agrees to walk down to the tavern and meet Beatriz Gonzales. Mario, armed with some metaphors, begins to win Beatriz's heart and to alienate her mother.

There are so many strengths to this film that it's hard to tick them all off. Skarmeta's years of working in Germany have sharpened his ear for Spanish, so the dialogue is a delight. It has lines of Neruda laced with lines of Skarmeta, and the two fit together so well that if the poet didn't talk this way, the more's the pity. The film says a lot about the relationships between artists and the people. To both Mario and the Widow Gonzales poetry is not some ivory tower occupation, but a valuable tool. The mother recognizes that those metaphors are dangerous as well. "Your smile may be a butterfly today" she tells her daughter, "but tomorrow your breasts will be two cooing doves, your nipples two juicy raspberries, your tongue the warm comfortable carpet of the Gods, your backside a ship in full sail, and what's between your legs will be a furnace where the metal rod of our race can be melted down in the heat."[16]

Widow Gonzales knows both her metaphors and her daughter, and Skarmeta knows his stuff. He knows, for instance, that a good script and good actors are cheap commodities — just because both are scarce doesn't mean that their price is high — and he has not only written a good script, he's picked some excellent actors. Oscar Castro is perfect as Mario, bringing just the right mix of primitive naiveté and intelligence to the film. But the real casting triumph is Beatriz. As played by Marcela Osorio she has both looks and the presence to make Neruda understand Mario's problem: when Neruda sees her he too is almost speechless. She also has just the right sort of sensuality, and when she slips away to meet Mario down on the beach, it is obvious that those metaphors have brought out not a passive female, but a seductive young woman: it is she who begins to initiate things.

About the only way in which this film looks cheap is that it was shot in sixteen millimeter. As a result, the scenes don't have quite the sharpness that one likes to see in a theatrical film. But my guess is that any audience that knows anything about Neruda will be so entertained by what they hear that they won't notice. In a year in which so many experienced artists couldn't, in the final analysis, make really satisfying films, it is a real delight to find someone who has. Skarmeta's film also has sobering overtones: in many ways, as the ending reminds us, it is an elegy to the Chile of *Unidad Popular*, and thus to a country, and to a state of innocence, forever gone. But it seems to me the best elegy that there could possibly be. □

[16]Quotation taken from the English translation furnished in the Presskit. The film's dialogue is in Spanish.

The Films

Competition

Theo Angelopoulos. *Voyage to Cythera.*

Marco Bellocchio. *Henry IV.*

Mario Camus. *The Holy Innocents.*

Carlos Diegues. *Quilombo.*

Jacques Doillon. *The Pirate.*

Roger Donaldson. *The Bounty.*

Werner Herzog. *Where the Green Ants Dream.*

John Huston. *Under the Volcano.*

Marek Kanievska. *Another Country.*

Sergio Leone. *Once Upon a Time in America.*

Marta Meszaros. *Diary for My Children.*

Pat O'Connor. *Cal.*

Satyajit Ray. *The Home and the World.*

Jerzy Skolimowski. *Success is the Best Revenge.*

Bertrand Tavernier. *A Sunday in the Country.*

Wim Wenders. *Paris, Texas.*

Other Sections

Peter Bacso. *O Bloody Life.*

Gonzalo Suarez. *Epilogo.* (Directors Fortnight).

T. Gutierrez Alea. *Up To A Point.* (Havana, 1983).

Francisco Norden. *They Don't Bury Condors Every Day.* (Un Certain Regard).

Nelson Pereira dos Santos. *Memoirs of Prison.* (Directors Fortnight).

C. A. Prates Correia. *Nights of the Sertão.* (Gramado, 1984).

Antonio Skarmeta. *With Burning Patience.* (Biarritz, 1983; Huelva, 1984).

—The names in parentheses refer to the other sections of the festival in which the film appeared, or, if shown in the market, to the festival at which it won a prize as best film.—

John Mosier *is the Film Editor of the* New Orleans Review.

Gabriele Wohmann

EVERYTHING WENT QUITE WELL AGAIN

Translated by Allen H. Chappel

Everything went quite well again
I took care of the mail
Didn't let myself be persuaded in any way
Met Myrna Wagner
Couldn't make up my mind
Went ahead on my own
Found it nice
Found it a little less nice
Took care of the afternoon mail too
Declined again
And on my second trip to the mailbox
Saw Myrna Wagner again
Only at a distance
So I made a detour around the square
It began to go against the grain
But I controlled myself
Found the Town-Hall matches
Was able to accept the offer
Heard the gardener
Crunching around in the bottom of the pond basin
Kept looking in that direction
Considered it still insignificant
Nevertheless I thought it over
Later, later

Acquiesced
Gave in under certain conditions
The drinks at the Gaisbergs
Were excellent, the tidbits too
So everything went quite well again
But before going to sleep I thought again
About the gangrene
About the insomnolent word death
Knew no sedative for Eternal Sleep
And saw the silly new district
Of the cemetery before me
The miserable gravel path in the northern section
Where they are putting the dead this year
And then on the right
Next to the grave of Herbert Strecker
And the unused place to the left
His grave
For which nothing occurs to me
For which I cannot warm myself
Until it then did after all begin
With sleep, dream
Of nothing particular
Whereupon accordingly it can be determined
That it went quite well again.

Reed Way Dasenbrock

WORD-WORLD RELATIONS: THE WORK OF CHARLES ALTIERI AND EDWARD SAID

In 1924, Leon Trotsky concluded his polemic against the Russian Formalists by saying, "They are followers of St. John. They believe that 'In the beginning was the Word'. But we [marxists] believe that in the beginning was the deed. The word followed, as its phonetic shadow."[1] Trotsky would be just as dissatisfied today, for little has changed in sixty years. The history of literary criticism in the twentieth century is that of a succession of formalisms, each school further than the last from adequately or responsibly connecting word and deed, or word and world.

After Russian Formalism came the largely American New Criticism, which saw literature as a kind of emotive discourse in contradistinction to the referential discourse of the sciences, and which insisted that the proper way to read literature was to read the text closely, considering it in isolation from any context. Reacting against the particularism of New Criticism but not against its insistence upon the autonomy of the aesthetic object, Northrop Frye in the 1950s attempted to sketch the structure of literature, the essence of which was its self-referentiality. On the Continent in these same years, the even more systematic Structuralist school devoted its attention to the codes of literature, the system of signifiers, again largely ignoring what those signifiers signified. Structuralism, as everyone knows by now, has given way to post-structuralism, which has inherited Structuralism's concern with the signifier but claims that the free play inherent in the signifier means that nothing determinate ever gets signified. As the most influential post-structuralist, Jacques Derrida, has pronounced, "Il n'y a pas de hors-texte."[2]

Now it is not at all clear what Derrida means when he says this, a fact that is simply grist for his mill. His translator translates it as "There is nothing outside the text," and then, as if she had second thoughts, she puts another, more literal translation ("there is no outside-text") and the French phrase in brackets. The more literal translation is less eye-catching but ultimately more compelling and disturbing. For it is quite clear to most of us that there are things outside the text and though, as the history of philosophy shows, it is hard to argue against someone who denies this, no one who isn't a professional philosopher ever feels compelled to bother. Solipsists can be safely ignored, even if they can't be refuted. But what I think Derrida is saying when he says that there is no "outside-text" is that we cannot absolutely specify the context to which a text belongs. It doesn't adhere strongly enough. Texts by their very nature strip themselves of their contexts and stand alone. This is a much more disturbing thought because our understanding of any utterance depends upon context. If context is indeterminate, then writing is indeterminate, and even if we use words to say something pointed and determinate about the world, the indeterminacy built into writing frustrates that aim. Derrida is thus not exactly a follower of St. John. It is not that in the beginning was the word and the deed came after, but that word and deed, word and world, exist in two different realms and there is no easy, unproblematic passage from one to the other.

It is easy enough to imagine Derrida making mincemeat of Trotsky's formulation of the connection between deed and word, social reality and language. The word is far more than a phonetic shadow; it casts quite a few shadows of its own. And Derrida's formalism or "textualism," as Edward Said calls it, is probably the most influential approach in literary criticism today because it has made us so aware of the degree to which language can be said to constitute a world of its own. Nonetheless, anyone who with Trotsky (and St. John, for that matter) believes that the significance of language (and therefore anything done in language, such as literature) lies in its engagement with the world must find Derrida's position unacceptable. Those who argue for the social importance of the word do indeed find themselves today in a powerless minority, even in the university let alone in society at large.

[1]Leon Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution*, trans. not listed (1925; rpt. New York: Russell & Russell, 1957), p. 183.

[2]Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. 158.

But that is no reason for celebrating and finding a theoretical justification for this state of affairs, as Derrida's textualism, especially in its American incarnation as the critical school deconstruction, tends to do.

In this context, critical approaches which connect the word and the world in ways less susceptible than Trotsky's to textualist refutation take on a pivotal importance. What the world of criticism (at least that part which is not textualist) is looking for is an approach which can incorporate what has been learned in sixty years of formalism yet go beyond formalism and re-assert the importance of the word for and in the world. However, those in the market for such an approach have learned by now to beware. That sixty year history of formalism is full of announced moves beyond formalism. Finding someone who admits to being a formalist is practically impossible, yet in the work of those who claim to connect the word and the world, we can see again and again that they have simply found a new way to assert the primacy of the word, a new restatement of St. John.

Despite this, critical theorists keep trying to build a bridge we can cross between the word and the world and two of the most recent of these attempts, Charles Altieri's *Act and Quality: A Theory of Literary Meaning and Humanistic Understanding* and Edward Said's *The World, the Text, and the Critic* command particular attention.[3] Both critics want to connect the word and the world and both recognize that this involves a critique of textualism, but they also recognize that any simple-minded return to an earlier pre-textualist criticism is out of the question. This is not to imply that the perspectives they offer are at all alike. Indeed, it is the fact that despite these shared aims their work differs radically which suggests that a comparison of Said's and Altieri's work might be fruitful. Neither work, as should occasion little surprise, fully solves or even dissolves the dilemma facing criticism I have outlined, but as two of the most interesting, cogent and fully developed attempts to do so, they deserve serious consideration.

The essence of Said's position derives from the work of Michel Foucault, which might be termed Left post-structuralism. Foucault would argue just as emphatically as Derrida that the meaning of any text is not simply what it seems to say, that every text has its lapses, silences and conflicts. But these conflicts do not take place in some decontextualized space of textuality, for every kind of discourse is situated in a social context and it is power that determines the forms and modes of discourse, no matter how innocent that discourse might seem. In one of the essays in *The World, the Text and the Critic*, "Criticism between Culture and System," Said argues that Foucault's notion of power is somewhat naive and simplistic; and Said wants to complement Foucault's work with Gramsci's more Marxist sense of how discourse is determined by the hegemony of particular social forces. But the crucial point on which Said insists is that texts are worldly. The ways they are made and the ways they are read and understood both reflect and create our world. And he sharply criticizes textualist critical theory for its refusal to see the connectedness and worldliness of literary works.

But of course it is how they reflect and create our world that is crucial, and here Said is perhaps less helpful. A single, comprehensive theory answering this question is not to be found in *The World, the Text and the Critic*. Part of the reason why is simply that it is a collection of essays written on various topics over a number of years. But one of the themes unifying these essays is an argument to the effect that a single, unified-field theory of criticism may not even be desirable. Theory alone, in Said's view, will not quite do. Certain theories are appropriate for certain kinds of material, for certain kinds of work. But Said doubts that we will be able to construct a meta-discourse which could somehow be able — by virtue of being true — to rise above the forces that determine discourse. Instead, our only hope is to become genuine critics, which as Said stresses too few of us are, and keep a critical stance vis-à-vis every explanatory language we use. Said presents the quest for theory as an Idealistic one, a search for the immutable form behind the mutable phenomena we perceive. His more historical understanding of man and culture argues in contrast that the ways word and world have related to each other are varied and mutable, so that someone seeking an understanding of them must remain flexible in his methods and somewhat critical of every theory. There is, of course, a political aspect to this perspective of Said's, as the role he would like to see criticism fulfilling is criticism on a very broad scale, criticism not just of a selected canon of great texts, but criticism of the ways we repre-

[3]Charles Altieri, *Act and Quality: A Theory of Literary Meaning and Humanistic Understanding* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1981); Edward W. Said, *The World, the Text and the Critic* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983). All subsequent citations will be parenthetical.

sent the world to ourselves and to each other. Said himself has practiced this broader criticism in *Orientalism* (1978) and *Covering Islam* (1981) and in so doing has demonstrated the relevance of critical theory to broad cultural-political questions.

That is the positive aspect of Said's failure to present a comprehensive theory, but I think that there is a negative aspect as well. Despite everything he says about getting "beyond textualism," he still largely adheres to textualist ways of reading. This is easy to discern in *The World, the Text and the Critic* whenever he has any specific remarks to make about specific writers and works. In an essay about Conrad, "Conrad: The Presentation of Narrative," for example, he has this to say:

> Words convey the presence to each other of speaker and hearer but not a mutual comprehension. Each sentence drives a sharper wedge between intention (wanting-to-speak) and communication. Finally wanting-to-speak, a specifically verbal intention, is forced to confront the insufficiency, and indeed the absence, of words for that intention.
>
> (pp. 103-104)

Or again, in the same essay:

> For what Conrad discovered was that the chasm between words saying and words meaning was widened, not lessened, by a talent for words written.
>
> (p. 90)

It would take another, very different essay to discuss the adequacy of these remarks about Conrad. My point here is that in these passages, and in many like them, we are back in the familiar world of deconstructionist idiom and perceptions, in which language necessarily fails to signify and any author's intention to mean is frustrated. This is, in short, precisely the textualism which Said so eloquently reproaches in other essays in *The World, the Text and the Critic* for trivializing the text by severing it from the world.

There is thus a contradiction in Said's work which he has yet to recognize and work out. The contradiction is that, on the one hand, he is committed to a study of systems of representation in the broadest sense and, on the other hand, in that study he habitually uses the language and method of post-structuralism which presents all representation as flawed, incomplete and necessarily problematic. This contradiction ran through *Orientalism*, which was brilliant and compelling — if highly controversial — as it depicted the way in which the discipline of Orientalism has been determined by the needs and forces of colonialism. But Said went beyond this to argue that Orientalism was simply discourse created by the West's needs and was not about what it claimed to be about, the Orient, at all. He alternated, in short, between showing the pressures on the representation of the Orient and arguing, incoherently, that nothing was represented. In *The World, the Text and the Critic*, an analogous wavering between a Gramscian and a Derridean or textualist position is everywhere apparent. What I find compelling in *The World, the Text and the Critic* and Said's other work is his call for a recognition of the worldliness of the text that will move us beyond textualism. But Said himself, in order to represent that worldliness, is going to have to abandon the textualist presuppositions he is still holding onto. For these do not constitute a theory that can help build a bridge between the word and the world; rather, they constitute a mind-set that will prevent such bridges from ever being built.

The great merit of Charles Altieri's *Act and Quality* is that he recognizes this and has found, in Anglo-American linguistic philosophy, a theory of meaning that can represent the successes of representation. *Act and Quality* is a dense book, far more difficult to read through than *The World, the Text and the Critic*. But anyone who takes the trouble is going to learn a great deal about the work of Wittgenstein and J. L. Austin and many other figures in this philosophic tradition. With Altieri, I believe that this tradition is the best source for a theory of meaning that moves beyond textualism's obsession with the absence of meaning.

This stance forces Altieri into what Said wants to avoid, an open polemic confrontation with deconstruction and its textualist insistence upon the indeterminacy of meaning. Relying primarily upon Wittgenstein's notion of meaning as use and secondarily upon Austin's and Grice's work with speech acts, Altieri formulates a powerful critique of Derrida's skepticism about the possibility of determinate meanings. For Wittgenstein and for Altieri, there is enough of a "hors-texte" for us to communicate with each other intelligibly, and therefore for us to speak of a com-

munity of shared meanings. This does not mean that there is nothing problematic about understanding. Anglo-American linguistic philosophy sees the same problems in language that Derrida sees. But, as I have argued elsewhere, it goes beyond that position to see also that we are not nearly so imprisoned in language as the textualists would insist. We can get from the word to the world when we need to.

Altieri argues this with considerable clarity and with greater learning in linguistic philosophy than I shall ever attain. But unfortunately he doesn't argue it quite as forcefully as he might. He may be too well read for a polemicist, or simply too respectful of his opponents. Aware of everything that could be (and has been) said against his position, he sounds too often as if he were occupying some kind of rhetorical Thermopylae or Alamo, soon to be overwhelmed by the foreign invaders. Thinking of all their weapons and qualifying his position accordingly, he tends to make his case sound weaker and more tentative than it really is. The instructive contrast here is someone like Stanley Fish. Fish never hedges and files: he damns the torpedoes and steams full speed ahead, rhetorically presenting himself as absolutely sure of his position and ready to outgun and massacre his opponents. As a result, his position is well-known, extremely clear, and extremely influential. But this contrast cuts both ways: Altieri simply states his case more precisely, and though as a result his work may make its way more slowly, its impact may well be more enduring for that reason. Ultimately, I respect Altieri's lack of Fish's dash, though I suspect it is why not nearly enough people have read *Act and Quality*.

Moreover, Altieri is not putting all of his energies into a polemic against deconstruction. A reluctant polemicist, he engages in polemic only because he needs to establish a better theory of meaning than those currently in vogue in literary criticism. What he wants to do with such a theory is expressed in the full title of his study, *Act and Quality: A Theory of Literary Meaning and Humanistic Understanding*. For Altieri, works of literature are not simply texts, they are acts, deliberately undertaken and purposive. One writes to have an effect. This emphasis of Altieri's partly comes out of J. L. Austin's work on the performative or illocutionary force of language: using language, in Austin's analysis, is a way of acting in the world as well as a way of referring to it. And this goes a long way towards breaking down the word-world dichotomy which has bedevilled literary theory. Altieri wants to deepen Austin's analysis in order to account for the significance that we find in great works of literature: Dante's *Commedia* is performative in a much richer sense than "I now pronounce you husband and wife" because it has continued to act in the world — through the effect it has had on its readers — for 650 years. In Altieri's view, great literature is worldly, as Said would say, because it provides a complex and valuable cognitive experience of the world for the reader. If we are to make sense of our experience of literature, we must be able to assess this qualitative dimension inherent in works of art.

Altieri's work, thus, is ultimately a defense of poetry and of humanistic knowledge. It is because of this that he must attack theories that assert the indeterminacy of meaning. If the meaning of a work is indeterminate, how can we recover what kind of an act it is? And how can we assess and evaluate it as a cognitive experience? And in turn this defense of humanistic knowledge helps to select the grounds on which Altieri argues against indeterminacy. For Altieri, meanings are not objectively determined as much as shared. Each work of literature is grounded in a complex cultural grammar, and as we learn to read we in turn learn that grammar. Learning to read is thus an education into a cultural community, into a set of shared values, the values expressed in these works of literature. There is an inherent circularity here, but that circularity is part of the nature of humanistic understanding, which offers above all a way, not really to "know thyself" as much as to "know ourselves."

Now Said's response to all of this is easy enough to imagine and undeniably relevant: who are "we" and what defines or determines this canon of significant literature and significant values? This Wittgensteinian community sharing a cultural grammar has social, historical and political dimensions ignored in Altieri's idealistic description of the social institutions of literature. And these dimensions help shape the nature of the act achieved by the work of literature. And I feel that Altieri's project, far-reaching as it already is, needs to encompass two aspects of Said's work before it can truly account for the quality of the action achieved by, say, Dante's *Commedia*. First, the sense of the world being acted in (and on) by literature needs to be made much denser and more specific. This is something that would have to be taken into account in specific analyses rather than in works of theory such as *Act and Quality*. But a full recovery of the

performative force of the literary work requires a thorough grounding in the social context of the work. That is also a historical grounding, and the second aspect of Said's work Altieri could usefully borrow is Said's historical understanding. That community with a shared cultural grammar Altieri speaks of is a community in history, subject to time's mutability, and this is something that should shape our understanding of the literary work. Said has a much sharper sense than Altieri of the historicity of discourse, and a theory concerned with recovering the qualities inherent in literary discourse needs that sense.

This is to say that Altieri, like Said (though I think to a much lesser degree), inherits weaknesses as well as strength from his theoretical models. Said reminds us that "no social or intellectual system can be so dominant as to be unlimited in its strength" (p. 241). Or, as Stanley Cavell reports an irate non-Wittgensteinian saying once, "You know, it is possible that Wittgenstein was wrong about *Something*!"[4] Though the work of Wittgenstein and the Anglo-American tradition of linguistic philosophy in general provides Altieri with a rich theory of meaning that he has extended to literary criticism in a rich and subtle way, that tradition is less than overwhelming in its historical and political awareness. And for this reason, though, if I had to choose, I would unquestionably choose Altieri's tradition of linguistic philosophy over Said's post-structuralism as a basis for a viable critical theory; I would rather not choose. We have something to learn from both Altieri and Said, and they have something to learn from each other.

Said shares with his French intellectual mentors a remarkable and deplorable ignorance of the intellectual tradition out of which Altieri is working. Introducing a discussion of Derrida and Foucault, Said remarks, "Thus, potentially at least, contemporary criticism exists to confront problems of a sort abandoned by philosophy when it became as insular and scholastic as it became in the Anglo-American tradition. The problem of language and its unique and difficult being is central to this criticism . . ." (p. 183). It is difficult to imagine how anyone with the slightest knowledge of Anglo-American philosophy could imply that it has failed to confront the problem of language. The more common criticism is that it has done nothing else. Elsewhere, while looking for a critical method that can deal "with a text and its worldly circumstances fairly," Said goes into a brief and quite interesting discussion of the Zahirite school of medieval Arabic exegesis (pp. 36-39). Judging by Said's presentation, this school does indeed sound as if it could deal with the text's worldliness better than contemporary textualism. But it also sounds quite Wittgensteinian. And here as elsewhere Said's ignorance of contemporary philosophy is a serious limitation. He seems to be looking for an alternative to textualism, but he doesn't know where to look. It is the work of Wittgenstein and Austin and Altieri's application of their work to literary theory that provide the ways to make sense of the worldliness of the word that Said needs.

The synthesis I am proposing here is that we use Said's work to purify Altieri's Wittgensteinianism of its contextual naiveté and that we use Altieri's work to purify Said's post-structuralism of its textualist solipsism. If we could do that, we would indeed have a theory of meaning that could account for the fact that we do have shared understandings of literature, and yet we would also be able to see those understandings as socially and historically shaped. Only such a theory and such a critical understanding of the limits of that theory will enable us to move truly beyond formalism, to make sense of the word and the deed and the word as deed. □

[4]Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. xvii.

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Ralph Angel

FRAGILE HARDWARE

Phone call . . . stacks of something
on top and in the drawers of all the desks . . .
I think a thing done is a similar time of day, and all day long
the sun rattles our fragile hardware.
In the heart of the city, the window-glare that becomes
each building is a door, and that door is closing.

I wanted romance to be a start. Right here, in the harsh open.
We show up for work, grow tired, isn't that
enough? Eyeliner, the silken ties, we were making things easier
and walking down Grand Ave. or drinking coffee at Pasquini's
we want to hear about so and so, who did such and such,
who did it again.

Rustling time like this, sharing a little necessary
agitation. Now let's mess up the surface,
knock a few colors around, avoid the scene of which we're
so obviously a part. Yeah you've heard my complaints before.
You didn't think it could be done.
Do I understand your question?

So much you already know . . .
No one was for extravagance, but getting by
has come to feed us, and it puts us to bed.
In Pershing Square, a man falls to his knees
for all the wrong reasons. Outside the bank, a woman pulls
her fingers through her hair. She pulls harder.

Peter Cooley

A SPRING POEM

It is a small white pigeon,
the soul of my daughter sleeping.
Now, the fever broken,
her tiny body in the moonlight fells its leaves,
calm thickens with her first snow down.

How many hours, running
I have endured the flaming maples
to arrive at this clearing in the wood.
How cooly now the wind stretches itself
to watch the bird eye me, I her.

Because this little fluttering of white
pluffs itself beside my voice
quite distinct from Alissa.
Or is Alissa
this soul-talk, God, these coos you have made up
for me to translate?
Look, I write them down:
approximations, come-springs, of your white feathering.

Nancy Cotton

SOME RECENT BOOKS ON CRITICAL THEORY

Structuralism, post-structuralism, and the aftermath of deconstruction are still in the critical limelight. Help books (but does the reader call for help or do the authors give assistance?) of varying levels of difficulty and value offer the reader, lost in the cosmos of criticism, maps through this territory of the mind. First of all we have Robert Scholes' *Semiotics and Interpretation*, a companion volume to his earlier book, *Structuralism in Literature*. Whereas the first work was primarily theory, the later one puts the theory into practice. There are chapters on poetry, drama, and fiction, preceded by two beginning chapters which generalize about Scholes' criticism. Scholes is a semiotician who studies the codes, or systems, or culture which structure our perceptions. Not bothered by post-structuralism, Scholes, unlike Jonathan Culler, does not find his structuralism turning into deconstruction. Instead and unusually, Scholes blends his structuralism with humanism of the Chicago school, Neo-Aristotelian variety, a rare mixture in these days. This combination is the result of Scholes' considering himself primarily as a teacher, one whose character, as well as intellect, help to shape the minds of his students. He begins with a beautifully clear explanation of what the humanities do.

> The humanities may be defined as those disciplines primarily devoted to the study of texts. As the physical sciences concentrate on the study of natural phenomena, and the social sciences on the behavior of sentient creatures, the humanities are connected by their common interest in communicative objects, or texts. Human beings are text-producing animals, and those disciplines called "humanities" are primarily engaged in the analysis, interpretation, evaluation, and production of texts.

He wishes to expand the humanities to include not just the study of texts but also the study of the cultural rules which govern texts, and here he opposes most other structuralists who think these rules are essentially inhuman. The study of cultural codes which traverse a text, instead of the study of unified, perfect art works, can still increase the reader's pleasure and knowledge, and "help us assign meaning, value, and importance to the individual events and situations of our lives." The influence of texts upon our lives is one side of the coin. The other side is the weight our experience brings to bear upon the texts we read. The aura of common sense and goodness which colors Scholes' humane approach leads him to believe in the referentiality of literature. Most structuralists consider that signs refer only to thoughts, not to reality. In the manner of Samuel Johnson kicking the rock to refute Berkeley, Scholes says, "Even semioticians eat and perform their other bodily functions just as if the world existed solidly around them." And he goes on:

> The theory of literature that I am advocating here depends upon our acceptance of the view that an act of communication may indeed point to the phenomenal world and even have the temerity to aim at what may lie behind the wall of phenomena — as *Moby Dick* seeks to tell us something about a real whaling industry and the behavior of real whales and whalers, while also probing deeper into the mysteries of the universe.

In other words, there is a correspondence between language and the world, which is the basis for Scholes' sense of the worth of literature. This is a two-way correspondence. As fiction helps us find meaning in our lives, so "what we know from experience of love and lust, charity and hate, pleasure and pain, we bring to bear upon the fictional events . . . ."

However unusual Scholes' criticism sounds, in practice his semiotic investigation of the cultural codes surrounding a text is often not distinguishable from ordinary historical scholarship. And he admits that at times his method is not very distinctive. His chapter on certain poems of W. S. Merwin, William Carlos Williams, and Gary Snyder is semiotically unremarkable, relying on a knowledge of genre, biography and earlier works. (At times he displays a naive faith

in the power and extent of allusion. Can Merwin's one line elegy, "Who would I show it to," really recall "Lycidas," "Adonais," "In Memoriam," Johnson's criticisms of "Lycidas," and more? I'm skeptical.) Often *code* seems just a trendy word for the historical and cultural ambiance of a work, and because scholars have investigated this for years, Scholes' attack on New Criticism is a bit like the beating of a dead horse. For instance, his chapter on "The Female Body as Text" is very good in its discussion of the reason for the absence of the clitoris from sexual literature, but *code* could be excised without any serious consequences.

On the other hand, semiotics seems essential to the different techniques of narrative he discusses. The eclecticism of the teacher is apparent in Scholes' analysis of James Joyce's short story, "Eveline," in which we find a heady combination of Tzvetan Todorov, Gerard Genette, and Roland Barthes. Each method alone is interesting; the three together are ugly and torture the small story. More pleasurable is Scholes' interpretation in another chapter of Hemingway's story, "A Very Short Story." Here we see the difference between the *text*, or all the words, and the *diegesis*. "The text may present the events that compose a story in any order . . . but the diegesis [constructed by the reader] always seeks to arrange them in chronological sequence." The reader's "diegetic impulse" creates a tension between himself and the text and "enables us to explore the dialogue between text and diegesis, looking for points of stress, where the text changes its ways in order to control the diegetic material for its own ends. The keys to both effect and intention may be found at these points." This tool proves very useful and enables us to see the distinction between *text* and *work*. Against the complete work, the text stands fragmentary, open to the reader's supplements, to, in this case, the biographical knowledge of Hemingway's life which Scholes uses to interpret the story.

Scholes ends his interesting interpretation of Hemingway's story with a warning against "all forms of idolatry" and a plea that we "examine everything before us freely and fearlessly, so as to produce with our own critical labor things better than ourselves." Above all, he says, undercutting a little his earlier humanistic leanings, we should be "suspicious and flexible." Let's hope that we shall be so flexible that when we find something worthy of praise, we'll have the courage to leave our suspicions behind and praise it.

Jonathan Culler's *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* is the worthy sequel to his excellent *Structuralist Poetics*. It is as good as that book, which was very, very good. Culler would like to do away with the misleading opposition we make between structuralism and post-structuralism because Culler believes that most critics who are structuralists, unlike Scholes, are also post-structuralists. A structuralist's examination of the meaning of our linguistic rules and codes invariably ends in the meaning being undermined by those very codes. Also, this opposition tends to join structuralism with rationalism and post-structuralism with irrationalism, an absurd tendency to Culler's way of thinking. He believes post-structuralism to be eminently logical. Finally, the lumping together of so many diverse kinds of criticism under the post-structuralist label obscures distinctions. On the other hand, Culler proposes that we bring all forms of modern criticism together as reader-response criticism, because they all center around the experience of the reader, and thus end the fruitless opposition of structuralism versus post-structuralism. We should consider deconstruction as the end-result of the attempts to answer the questions which reader-centered criticism poses.

The main schools of criticism variously involve the reader. Structuralism sees that the disparate, multiple codes of a text find unity only in the experience of the reader. Reader-response criticism *per se* distinguishes the different roles we play as readers. Feminist criticism considers the sex of the reader. Culler's chapter on feminist criticism is astounding, surely a watershed in showing the change of attitude toward feminist criticism from early ridicule of Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* to his serious consideration of women's probing of the phallocentric assumptions of literature. Feminists point out that women readers are alienated from themselves, and they encourage women to learn how to read as women, not as men. Further, the very foundations of criticism should be examined in order to discover the bias toward male authority there. Each of these modern schools of criticism treats the reader as an interpreter; in relation to contemporary texts the reader may be actually the writer. This role is different from the affective role of the Renaissance and, especially, the eighteenth-century reader. Jane Tompkins points out in *Reader-Response Criticism* that the contemporary reader interprets whereas the earlier

reader felt.

Concentration on the complexities of reader-centered criticism has brought us up against difficult questions. First of all, who is the reader? Is he naive, or some kind of informed reader who is conscious that he plays a role when he approaches a text? Then there is the question of power. Who is in control, the reader or the text? There seems to be a crazy, unresolvable vacillation between the two, in which if you started off favoring the reader, you end up on the side of the text, or vice versa. Another question is, what is in the text? Is it an infinite source, or does the reader bring to the text what he finds there? And what is the outcome of reading? Does one find knowledge or simply make the discovery of the impossibility of reading? Culler focuses upon the evolving career of Stanley Fish to highlight the perplexities of these questions. The lone Fishian reader becomes a member of an "interpretive community." His once active reader is later manipulated by sentences. Yet nothing is really in the text. The text is a product of interpretation just as the reader himself is, so that the reader makes rather than finds what is in the text.

At this point Culler has several chapters on Derrida's philosophy of deconstruction. Most of these chapters are easy to understand. Terms such as *presence , differance, marginality* are clearly explained, as well as the whole topsy-turvy world of Derrida, in which writing and speech, presence and absence, the signified and the signifier, the significant and the marginal change places. An indication of Culler's richness is his chapter on speech act philosophy and Derrida's dispute with John Searle over the meaning of the trading places between constative and performative utterances in J. L. Austin's *How to Do Things with Words*. You see deconstruction here at work, as you do in the examples of deconstructive criticism at the end of the book. These examples are from young, little known critics, who, unlike the more established critics, demonstrate rather than theorize, so that the reader has the real thing before him.

Deconstruction answers the questions posed in reader-centered criticism: by treating the reader as informed — he knows earlier criticism and replies to it; by finding a dualism between text and reader; and by showing the impossibility of reading. Deconstructive readings find in a work two warring concepts which a reader can't choose between, or they find the reversal of two terms of a hierarchy, or they find something of marginal interest more important than what is of significance, or they find the conflict of forces within a work transferred outside the work to warring critical interpretations.

Whereas Culler identifies Fish's criticism as monism, he tries over and over again to refute this charge leveled at deconstruction, though why monism is a dirty word and dualism a favorable one escapes me. Whereas Fish finds that everything is "constituted by interpretation," Culler insists that if monism is logical, dualism is necessary. Although "what one learns about texts and readings puts in question the claim that anything in particular is definitively in the text," there must be a text to interpret. Yet Culler does away with the usual hierarchies and says that all discourse resides within a general textuality or "archi-literature," so that philosophy and literature, for instance, differ not in essence but in the rhetorical strategies they use. Can't there be inessential differences within a monism? But perhaps it is unimportant what we label deconstruction, as long as we understand that the signified can always turn into the signifier. We are always dealing with representations, not with imitations and originals.

The future of deconstruction is unclear. Derrida has not discussed the nature of literary criticism. The general idea of the textuality of all writings and hence the considering of everything as literature is interesting, but the finding of particular instances of opposing, irresolvable concepts is not so promising. Like Zeno's paradoxes of motion, it is clever, logical, but can't hold one's attention for very long.

Wisely, I think, Culler doesn't treat the Yale deconstructionists, the focus of another book, a collection of essays, *The Yale Critics: Deconstruction in America*, by three editors, Jonathan Arac, Wlad Godzich, and Wallace Martin. One of their hopes is that their collaboration will give a "new direction" to criticism "through the flexibility [their book] achieves as the work of 'critics,' neither of a 'school' nor of a single individual." Because these scholars concern themselves with the wrong questions, this seems unlikely. In his introduction Martin says that the "purpose of this volume is to disentangle the themes and theories" of Harold Bloom, Geoffrey Hartman, Paul de Man, and J. Hillis Miller, so that each can be considered in his own light. Each of these critics has published copiously. Is anyone, any more, asking how they differ from each other? On the other hand, the editors find Frank Lentricchia extreme in separating Bloom from the group, although Lentricchia is only repeating

what Bloom himself does. The editors' other wrong question concerns "the gap between Anglo-American and Continental criticism" and the fact that this "gap has made significant dialogue between the two extremely difficult . . . ." This critical gap, tediously dwelled on, is a form of the most traditional theme of American literature. It was the most commonplace of commonplaces before contemporary criticism ever got hold of it. The discrepancy between the backwardness of America as opposed to the sophistication of Europe is a staple of our literary diet. American culture must lag behind European culture as sure as effect follows cause. True to Zeno's paradox, we can't catch up. It seems fruitless to pursue it further. The two foundations of the book seem to be either, on the one hand, trivial or, on the other, trite. From these unexciting beginnings, a theme for the volume as a whole emerges. In his introduction, Martin says "that criticism is in the process of enlarging its scope beyond the precincts of pedagogical and national compartmentalization, and that the certainties within which its debates have traditionally been contained have broken down, throwing everything, once again, into question." Who would disagree with this?

The book is cemented together with apparatus. There is a preface by the editors, an introduction by Martin, and an afterword by Arac. The preface explains the book, the introduction explains the book, and an afterword dogs our heels at the end, explaining again the essays to us. The bibliography has the most peculiar form I've encountered. It mixes together general items and individual author items. Inadequately described, it may be the result of a printer's error. The essays are divided into three sections. Part I concerns the background of Continental thought and American criticism; Part II has four individual essays on Hartman, Miller, de Man, and Bloom; and Part III finds distinctions between the European background and American criticism.

Disconcertingly, the first essay, "Variations on Authority: Some Deconstructive Transformations of the New Criticism" by Paul A. Boré, discusses the influence of American criticism on European deconstruction, an actual reversal of that famous gap. But the common attitudes of New Criticism and deconstruction toward irony and the intentional fallacy are old ground, covered, I think, by Gerald Graff in *Literature Against Itself*. The second essay, Wlad Godzich's "The Domestication of Derrida," is largely about Paul de Man and is a little repetitive of Stanley Corngold's "Error in Paul de Man." Corngold's is the better, less opaque essay. It traces a clearer path through the involutions of de Man's self-cancelling thought, although Corngold seems a little unrefined to lay so much stress on de Man's age. Of the two essays in the third part, Donald G. Marshall's "History, Theory, and Influence: Yale Critics as Readers of Maurice Blanchot" tries to expose the feet of clay of Hartman and de Man through pointing out their misinterpretations of the French critic and novelist Maurice Blanchot, but Marshall appears simply picky, because he allows no room for misreading. The other essay in Part III is important and interesting. Robert Gasché, in "Joining the Text: From Heidegger to Derrida," discusses the transmutation of Heidegger by Derrida, specifically the relationship between Heidegger's question of Being and Derrida's idea of text. Questionable is this essay's presence in this part, concerned as the introduction says it should be with the differences between European and American criticism. Unless I am mistaken, Derrida is French. □

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FEATURED ARTISTS

Ralph Angel has published work in such journals as *Partisan Review*, the *New Yorker*, and *American Poetry Review*.

Kim Bridgford won the 1983 National Society of Arts and Letters' National Career Awards Competition in Poetry. She received an M.F.A. from the Iowa Writers' Workshop.

Allen Chappel's most recent publication is *Ilse Aichinger, Selected Poetry & Prose* (Logbridge-Rhodes).

Peter Cooley's third book of poetry, *Nightseasons*, was published by Carnegie-Mellon University Press.

Sandra Cooper has received a number of writing awards. She lives in Crystal Springs, Mississippi.

Mark Grote has received fellowships for his sculpture from both the National Endowment for the Arts and the Louisiana State Division of the Arts. His work has been exhibited throughout the United States. He is represented by galleries in Cincinnati, Atlanta and New Orleans.

Ron De Maris is a regular contributor to *Carolina Quarterly*, *Southern Poetry Review*, and *Kansas Quarterly*.

Melissa Lentricchia lives in Hillsborough, North Carolina, where she continues work on *Story-Tellers*, the collection from which the story in this issue is taken. Other stories from the group have appeared in *Raritan*, *Indiana Review*, and *Sou'wester*.

Breon Mitchell's books include *James Joyce and the German Novel: 1922-1933* and *Beyond Illustration: The Livre d'Artiste in the Twentieth Century*.

Vilas Sarang lives in Bombay. His work is available in the Penguin anthology *New Writing in India*.

Daniel Weissbort was born in England and now teaches at the University of Iowa, where he directs the translation program. He edits *Modern Poetry in Translation*. His most recent translation is of Claude Simon's *The World about Us* (Ontario Review Press).

Gabriele Wohmann was born in Darmstadt in 1932. The two most recent collections of her poetry are *Grund zur Aufregung* (1978) and *Komm lieber Mai* (1981). She has received the Bremen Prize for Literature and the Federal Cross of Merit.