MIDWESTERN MISCELLANY XXVII

Fall 1999

being a collection of essays and occasional pieces on the Midwest, its writers, and its writing, with particular emphasis on Chicago by members of

The Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature

edited by
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In honor of
Larry Lockridge

PREFACE

For the second time *Midwestern Miscellany* makes a biannual appearance. In Spring 1999 it focused on a wide range of Midwestern writers and writing; in this issue, Fall 1999, it examines writing by some of the many writers who have made Chicago an exciting literary place as well as the literary capital of the Midwest. The issue concludes with another excerpt from "A Chapter of Autobiography" by the late William Thomas.

The two issues of *Midwestern Miscellany XXVII,* together with *MidAmerica XXVI,* combine to produce a wide ranging survey of Midwestern writers and writing. At the same time they explore in depth specific works by specific writers that illustrate the diversity of Midwestern literature in this century.

This issue is dedicated to Larry Lockridge, author of *Shade of the Raintree,* a major biography of a major Midwestern writer, and recipient of the *MidAmerica* Award for 1998. His work gives further testimony to the richness of the Midwestern literary tradition.

June 1999 DAVID D. ANDERSON

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THE CHICAGO RENAISSANCE IN FICTION

DAVID D. ANDERSON

The Chicago Renaissance in American literature was, simply put, a brief regional literary movement early in the twentieth century that nevertheless gave such diverse writers as Carl Sandburg, Edgar Lee Masters, Susan Glaspell, Floyd Dell, Ben Hecht, Sherwood Anderson, and others, as well as two important editors, Harriet Monroe and Margaret Anderson, and their journals, *Poetry* and *The Little Review,* respectively, to the American literary mainstream. Its significance in American literary history has been explored in detail in such works as Bernard Duffey's *The Chicago Renaissance in American Letters* (1954), Dale Kramer's *Chicago Renaissance: The Literary Life in the Midwest,* 1900-1930 (1966), and dozens of other literary histories of Chicago, the Midwest, and the nation, as well as in studies of writers who participated in it, were influenced by it, or who paused briefly in Chicago to change trains or to indulge in a thirty-five-cent lunch, a mug of heady brew, and the even more heady conversation in Schlogl's, that "...Ancient Tavern on a Well-traveled Highway" cast in indelible literary memory by Harry Hansen in his *Midwest Portraits* (1923).

The Chicago Renaissance may have begun with the century as young people from the towns, villages, and farms of the Midwest found their ways to Chicago to find themselves and their futures, or earlier with the World's Columbian Exposition, or that later moment in 1911 when Floyd Dell, the new twenty-four-year-old editor of *The Friday Literary Review* of the Chicago *Evening Post,* three years out of Davenport, Iowa, gave Margaret Anderson, at twenty-one newly arrived from Columbus, Indiana, and a series of Midwestern towns, a book to review and instructed her in the spirit of Chicago, the age,

and the moment. "Here is a book about China," he told her. "Now don't send me an article about China but about yourself."

Regardless of the moment of its birth, by 1917, when H. L. Mencken paid tribute to Chicago in the New York *Evening World* as the literary capital in an article later broadcast to the mother country in *The Nation* of London (April 17, 1920), the Chicago Renaissance had begun to run its course.

Floyd Dell had gone on to New York, Margaret Anderson had taken *The Little Review* to San Francisco and then New York and beyond, George Cram Cook and Susan Glaspell had gone on to Provincetown and a new American theatre, and Sherwood Anderson, desperately writing advertising copy and the stories of *Winesburg, Ohio,* plotted his escape. By the time the London literary world had, through Mencken, acknowledged Chicago's role in the new American literature, the movement had become little more than the subject of such future memoirs as Hansen's *Midwest Portrait* (1923), Margaret Anderson's *My Thirty Years' War* (1930), Burton Rascoe's *Before I Forget* (1937), and Ben Hecht's *A Child of the Century* (1954), as well as Sherwood Anderson's posthumous *Memoirs* (1942, 1969), and the studies by Duffey, Kramer, and others.

Nevertheless, as Mencken and his successors have pointed out, the Chicago Renaissance, however one dates its origins and demise, had given important writers—Theodore Dreiser, Edgar Lee Masters, Carl Sandburg, Sherwood Anderson, and others—and important works—*Sister Carrie, Spoon River Anthology, Chicago Poems, Winesburg, Ohio*—and their literary editors and artists an important role in the literary and intellectual life of the nation; and especially through Sherwood Anderson, a legitimate son of Mark Twain, it had given American fiction a new language, a new form, and a new American character.

Chicago itself, as place and as experience, plays a substantial part that goes well beyond mere setting in much of the work—verse as well as fiction—that came out of the Chicago Renaissance—in Susan Glaspell's fiction, Sandburg's poems, and Dreiser's novels of the decade—and the experience of the Renaissance was to loom large in the memories that became memoirs in succeeding decades. Curiously, however, the experience of the Renaissance, both personal and literary, did not become the major substance of literature that it might have become. Although Glaspell's first two novels, *The Glory of the Conquered* (1909) and *The Visioning* (1911) reflect her expe-

riences as a young woman and a student in Chicago, as do a number of the stories in *Lifted Masks* (1912), and *Fidelity* (1915) reflects her earlier relationship with George Cram Cook, the experience of the Renaissance, that which gave freshness and reality to her writing and a new direction to her work through Cook and the Chicago Little Theatre, would become only a few nostalgic paragraphs in her memoir-biography of Cook, *The Road to the Temple* (1927).

Like Glaspell, Maxwell "Bodie" Bodenheim, paused briefly in Chicago, at the end, however, rather than the beginning of the Renaissance, on his way from Hermanville, Mississippi, and the United States Army to Greenwich Village and a measure of literary notoriety. His brief co-editorship with Ben Hecht on the *Chicago Literary Times* (1923-1924) and his celebration of the new sexually liberated woman in *A Virtuous Girl* (1930), set in an earlier Chicago, mark him as an authentic if late member of the Renaissance, but, unless he was indirectly bragging, *A Virtuous Girl,* the central character of which is seduced by a young Jewish man resembling Bodenheim, and his other Chicago-based fiction reflect the place but neither the movement nor the people who had made it.

Nevertheless, three novelists, Floyd Dell, one of the earliest members of the Renaissance, arriving from Davenport, Iowa, in 1908, and one of the first to go on to New York, in 1913, Sherwood Anderson, who at forty found himself and his literary voice in the movement, and Ben Hecht, a Chicago reporter turned foreign correspondent during American participation in World War I, 1917-1919, who returned to Chicago as the Renaissance was running its course, not only use the Renaissance experience in their fiction, but they reveal attitudes toward others in the movement and the movement itself curiously at odds with their own vividly and nostalgically remembered experiences. They are at odds, too, with the memoirs of those others for whom the Chicago Renaissance was such a significant period in their lives and literary growth.

Each of the three, however, recalls his experiences in the Renaissance and the people of whom it consisted in a memoir that reveals both nostalgia and appreciative understanding. Floyd Dell's *Homecoming* (1933), Sherwood Anderson's posthumous twice-edited *Memoirs* (1942, 1967), and Ben Hecht's *A Child of the Century* (1954) reflect clearly what the Chicago Renaissance had meant for each of them, and the memories are curiously alike and important in defining the movement as it was, as it had affected and

directed the course of their lives and work, and as it played a significant role in the emergence of what was to become a new literature for a new age, both of which were to be determinedly modern.

Important as was place to each of the writers, the place that was Chicago and the places in which they—the liberated artists of the new age—met, where they might share ideas, works, and enthusiasm, whether it was the studio where Floyd Dell and Margery Currey, then married, held forth at Fifty-Seventh Street and Stoney Island Avenue, the rooming house on Cass Street where Anderson wrote "Hands," or the Covici-McKee bookstore on Washington Street where Hecht and Bodenheim held court, or the Schlogl's of Hansen's memory, the movement was clearly one, its groups and gatherings, whether in 1911-1913, as it was becoming alive, or a decade later, in decline, curiously alike.

For all of its people, as Dell, Anderson, and Hecht make clear, the movement was an ingathering of the young — Sherwood Anderson, who came from Elyria, Ohio, at 36, early in 1913, was by far the oldest and at the same time the youngest at the Currey-Dell salon—from the corners of the Midwest from whence all railroads ran to Chicago, and at the same time it was a convergence of searches each determined to find liberation—in life, in personal experience in artistic expression. It manifested itself in stimulation and cross-fertilization, in the rejection of traditional rules, values, and traditions, in a new artistic and sexual freedom, in new relationships, marital and otherwise. In Chicago in the second decade of the century a new literature, a new freedom, a new sense of artistic achievement and a new American woman combined to produce what its participants were convinced was a new, modern age.

In their memoirs it is clear that Dell, Anderson, and Hecht found themselves and their ideas and their work taken seriously for the first time, and that the attention gave each of them the confidence and determination to become serious literary artists.

For both Floyd Dell and Ben Hecht, the Renaissance experience was to provide the substance for the novels that began their writing careers, and in each the work is not only clearly autobiographical but it draws in clear detail the experiences and relationships each had—and in Hecht's case was still experiencing—in Chicago. Dell had gone to New York in the Fall of 1913, had published his first book, *Women as World Builders,* in 1913, had become associate editor and then editor of *The Masses,* had, with others, been charged with

conspiracy to commit sedition in 1917 and 1918, had served briefly—ten days—in the Army, and finally, in 1920, turned to fiction. Hecht, who had written reviews and plays in Chicago and had gone to Europe as a correspondent as the war came to an end, returned to Chicago determined to succeed as a writer in a Chicago Renaissance rapidly becoming literary history.

Dell envisioned a telling of the story of Felix Fay, his alter ego, who, like Dell himself, comes out of small-town Iowa to Chicago in search of an elusive fulfillment in life and in love. The result was not one volume but two, *Moon-Calf* (1920), the story of Felix Fay's early education and rebellion in Iowa and his determination to go to Chicago, and *The Briary-Bush* (1921), the story of Fay's growth and his self-discovery as a man, a lover, and a writer in Chicago.

The Briary-Bush is not only the story of Felix Fay and his search for success in writing and in love; it is the search of two young people for the fulfillment that they are convinced they can find in the city and in the arts, Felix, clearly Floyd Dell, initially through the aspiring young artists, "idealists of all sorts and kinds," as they are described by Rose-Ann Prentiss, the dancer become social worker who welcomes him at the Community House where she teaches modern poetry. At first he is frightened by the artistic enthusiasm and Bohemian spirit of the young people and by Rose-Ann, clearly Margery Currey. Almost immediately, however, Felix sees potential success in love and in art as one, especially as Rose-Ann makes her modernist concept of marriage clear: in any marriage she would accept, each may and must have a fulfilling life outside the home as well as in. By mid-novel she and Felix cast their futures and fortunes together in a marriage on those terms, although Rose-Ann asserts that were she brave enough, there would be no ceremony.

The novel is at once literary history and personal narrative as it portrays in detail both the stormy Currey-Dell marriage and the artistic life of which they were a part, centering as it did on the salon-studio at Fifty-Seventh Street in the novel. Felix works on the *Evening Chronicle,* he teaches poetry at the Community House, he discovers Flaubert, and "He had decided to write—what, he did not know yet, and it did not matter: something, anything, a play, a poem, a story—whatever came into his head, good or bad..." (89). With the purchase of writing materials, a thesaurus, and a student's lamp he knew his writing career had begun.

Perhaps the most revealing part of the novel is Rose-Ann's recounting of her conversion from conventionality to modernism, at twenty-one, in Springfield, Illinois, where she is working as a librarian, when she discovered through a book that she might be free. Felix, confessing wonder, asks the name of the book.

> "It was 'Leaves of Grass' ... Well, there was a shelf of forbidden books—and one day I opened one of those forbidden books, and read a passage ... I'll tell you: it was 'A woman's body at auction'—do you remember it? Uncouth, wonderful lives—not so much poetry to me as a revelation. I remember I stood there reading some of those lines again and again ... saying them over to myself ... like an anatomy textbook—but making me feel, as no textbook had ever done, that these wonderful things were *my* body. ..." And she chanted, solemnly, like a litany. ... (192).

So she came to Chicago to dance, and she became a social worker and married and Felix wrote, often with frustration. They discovered the Chicago Theatre and took a walking trip in Wisconsin and then returned to "... the studio, to a whirl of exciting parties, to books and ideas, to the problems of ambition, to the *Chronicle* office and a theatrical season just opening with hectic announcements of 'Alias Jimmy Valentine,' 'The Case of Becky,' 'The Pink Lady,' and 'The Chocolate Soldier'" (224).

The tensions of the Dell-Currey open marriage are clear in the novel, and sketches of friends who may be Edgar Lee Masters, Sherwood Anderson, Margaret Anderson, and others are clear in the background, but unlike the lives on which it is patterned, the marriage endures as Felix and Rose-Ann finally leave Chicago together, not to New York and another Bohemia, as Dell had done, leaving Currey behind, but to California where they would grow together.

The novel is without question the best fictional transcription of the Chicago Renaissance that the movement produced, and in spite of—or perhaps because of—the naivete of Felix and Rose-Ann, it is much less dated than one might expect. The spirit of the movement and its confidence that personal freedom and artistic fulfillment are one and that they are attainable through faith and determination are clear. The end of the novel, unlike the reality upon which it is based, was the only possible outcome for a fictional portrayal of a movement as innocent and as full of promise and, in retrospect, as fleeting as was the Chicago Renaissance, at least as Dell, still a young man at

32, remembered it in a Greenwich Village that had become for him as potentially perilous as it was real.

Ben Hecht, writing his memoir from the perspective of mid-century and after a major depression and another, more deadly world war, remembers in *A Child of the Century* (1954) the Renaissance in terms not unlike those of Dell's novel: "[Chicago] contained days of brightness and an American literary renaissance—a small one, but our own" (216), he wrote, but that renaissance, more immediately portrayed in his first novel, *Erik Dorn* (1921) is not quite the portrayal of young people becoming artists and finding fulfillment that he remembered in his sixties. Like *The Briary-Bush,* it is clearly autobiographical; Dorn is a young newspaper man, married for seven years to Anna, but he meets and falls in love with a young woman, Rachel, who had come to Chicago at eighteen to study art. Finally Dorn leaves his wife and he and Rachel go off to New York, as Hecht himself, married five years in 1921, was to do three years after the novel's publication, perhaps in a case of art foreshadowing as well as imitating life.

Like *A Child of the Century,* published thirty-three years later, *Erik Dorn* contains fine portraits of some of the major and minor figures in the Renaissance: Crowly, an editor, is based on a reporter-friend; Emil Telsa, a painter, was in reality Emil Amin, a colleague on the *Chicago Literary Times,* "Old Carl," a poet, was clearly Carl Sandburg, and the most memorable if less than flattering portrait, Warren Lockwood, a published novelist, is Sherwood Anderson. In the most graphic part of the novel Dorn, avoiding both Anna and Rachel, spends a night on the town with Lockwood. Lockwood takes Dorn to visit an avant-garde sculptor; Dorn is bored; they eat in an unappetizing restaurant; Dorn is unhappy; they walk through pouring rain, and Lockwood threatens to put Dorn in a novel. Finally, in a low dive full of drink, laughter, obscenity, and jazz, together with the pervasive odors of sex and perspiration, Dorn loses control, seizes a woman, and takes her upstairs to a reeking room. Later Lockwood finds Dorn in the rain, his clothes torn. "'I've had a look at hell' he whispered [to Lockwood] and with a laugh hurried off alone" (239). Later Dorn tells Rachel, "'That damned Warren Lockwood led me astray'" (240).

The novel did nothing for relationships between Anderson and Hecht. In the novel Dorn, like Hecht, goes on to adventures in

Germany before returning to Chicago. In a later novel, *Humpty Dumpty* (1924) Hecht included the following exchange:

> "I was reading that Sherwood Anderson book," Stella smiled. "I had it on top. It's mine, you know. I bought it."
>
> "You will waste your time reading Anderson," Savaron answered. "I can give you all of Sherwood in a sentence—the wistful idealization of the masculine menopause ..." (224)

Unlike Dell and Hecht, Sherwood Anderson wrote no major fictional depiction of the Chicago Renaissance, although the experience was for him, on the verge of middle age, with a sales and industrial career, a marriage, and a family, all in shatters behind him, perhaps more vital than for either of the younger men. It taught him that he might become a writer and it gave him the stimulus to become one. In his memoirs, both *A Story Teller's Story* (1924) and *Sherwood Anderson's Memoirs,* he remembers the experience fondly, but in two novels, as well as in several short stories—"Seeds" (1918) and "The Triumph of a Modern" (1923) especially—he remembers less fondly, and in the novels with a substantial measure of bitterness. The novels are *Dark Laughter* (1925) and *Beyond Desire* (1932), and in both the Chicago Renaissance experience is in the past; nevertheless it remains a strong motivating force in the life and memory of a central character in each novel.

What Anderson had called "A Robin's Egg Renaissance" (195), a "rather wonderful new world" (234), and a gathering of "... Little Children of the Arts" (227) in his *Memoir* was, in both novels, an experience that could best be described as fraudulent. *Dark Laughter* is at once the story of a man who is literally a refugee from the Chicago Renaissance and its goals of personal liberation and artistic fulfillment and that man's search for a new identity and a true liberation. The central character of the novel is Bruce Dudley, a craftsman who works with his hands in a small factory in Old Harbor, Indiana, on the Ohio River. With his fellow worker, master craftsman Sponge Martin, he spends much of his time fishing, eating sandwiches, and drinking moonshine along the river. Anderson tells us, however, that although Dudley had recently come home to Old Harbor, where he had lived as a boy, he had left his real identity as John Stockton, newspaper man and would-be writer, behind in Chicago, together with his wife Bernice and her misguided conviction that she is a literary artist. Clearly reflecting Anderson's sec-

ond, open marriage to Tennessee Mitchell, dancer and sculptor, which had ended the year before when Anderson had secured a Reno divorce after nearly a year of bitter negotiations, the novel may also reflect his bitterness during his last years in Chicago at spending his days "... writing advertisements for somebody's canned tomatoes ..." (*Letters,* 45). As Bruce reflects on his past, he remembers the meaningless, pretentious chatter of his wife and the would-be artists and writers of their clique; he remembers, too, the inability of his wife to see beyond appearance to the truth of a story she could not finish. Finally, knowing the fraudulence of a life devoted to self-deception, in an incident reminiscent to Anderson's departure from business a decade earlier, a departure elevated by Anderson into a durable literary myth, he walks out of the marriage, the movement, and Chicago; he wanders to New Orleans and back to Old Harbor, and he has begun a new life, a life free of pretension, where he will find love and perhaps find his art.

In *Beyond Desire,* Anderson's only near-proletarian novel, the Chicago Renaissance is part of the past of Ethel Long, the librarian in the mill town of Langdon, Georgia. Ethel's story, told in the third of four "books" or novellas which make up the novel, is the story of self-deception on a scale as great as that of Bernice, Bruce Dudley's wife, in *Dark Laugher,* but it is self-deception with a difference. Ethel is a member of one of the town's first families, and she is an avowed "new woman" in the spirit of the Chicago Renaissance; consequently it is not unthinkable to carry on an affair in the library when the lights are out. Her lover is Red Oliver, a young factory worker and a labor leader who had formerly also been a member of one of the town's good families.

Ethel had attended the University of Chicago, where she had received her library degree and been introduced to the literary life of the Renaissance, and she was convinced that she had come home a free woman. But the Renaissance had not "freed" Ethel; it had merely confused her values; she admires magnificence, "elegance, style, a world of color and movement" (159); she rejects the Chicago literary scene as tawdry; at a literary party, "A poet named Bodenheim came [into the room], smoking a corn-cob pipe. It stank" (150), and she revolted. At the party she realizes "What a lot of frumps there are among the literary ladies ... I'm the best-dressed woman here" (150). Finally she rejects the literature of the Renaissance—the lowly people of Dreiser and Lewis and the tedious

stories of tedious Midwestern towns. Whether or not Ethel is typical of the women of the Renaissance is not evident in the novel, but her betrayal of Red Oliver is clearly foreshadowed as she abandons him for a wealthy young lawyer from one of the town's good families, who offers a conventional marriage. Her Renaissance experience had not liberated her; it had reinforced the values of Langdon, Georgia, even as it is clear that she is corrupted by the confusion with which she attempts to live.

The vignettes of the literary life in Chicago that Anderson includes in his portrayal of Ethel Long are the best Anderson wrote anywhere, and it is clear in them that the inherent weakness that corrupts Ethel is not the result of the Renaissance but of her inability to see beyond its surface, to see, for example, that sexual liberation is neither an end in itself nor an excuse for momentary gratification, but it is, instead, a symbol of the liberation of the spirit that forever eludes her.

With the publication of *Beyond Desire* in 1932, the Chicago Renaissance passed out of the substance of literature, however fleeting and scant that was, and into the province of the memorist, the critic, the scholar, the literary artist. One can only speculate on the novels of the Renaissance that might have been written but were not, the interpretations of experiences now forever lost, the sense of an experience that was at once forever young and impossibly innocent, even as it proclaimed its confidence in its own wisdom and art during those brief years in a new young century now passing rapidly into history.

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"BETWEEN THE MISSION AND THE FACTORY:" EUNICE TIETJENS'S *PROFILES FROM CHINA*

MARILYN JUDITH ATLAS

In 1917 Eunice Tietjens, recently promoted to associate editor of *Poetry,* published her first of several volumes of poetry, *Profiles from China,* a culturally important work which represented the increased international flavor of the modern poetry movement. Born in the Midwest, specifically, Evanston, Illinois, Tietjens, as a child, spent a good deal of time in Western Europe. She was thirteen when her father died, and her mother, Idea Hammond, an artist, decided to take her four children to Paris, Geneva, and Dresden, where she could pursue her life as a painter and educate her children in a more expansive fashion. Sixteen years later, in 1914, when Tietjens was a divorced, single mother at thirty, she made another international trip with her family. She traveled with her mother, daughter, and her sister, Louise, a Chinese missionary, to Asia where they lived for two years.

When the family left the States, World War I had already begun in Europe and *Poetry* had been in existence for two years. Tietjens had been a part of the *Poetry* staff for about a year. Art was flourishing in Chicago and Tietjens was central to the action: with the help of money collected after Eunice Tietjens pawned her engagement ring, Margaret Anderson's *The Little Review,* another important Modernist journal, had been launched. Eunice Tietjens's gesture may have been extravagant—she had just been divorced from Paul Tietjens, the composer of *The Wizard of Oz*'s musical score, but it served as a "New Woman" gesture, simultaneously ironic and hopeful, turning a lost dream, a burden of memory, into radical art. Tietjens recollects the pleasure and vitality of Chicago's art scenes in her autobiography, *The World at My Shoulder,* explaining the spirit

of the group and the self-consciousness of the Chicago artists around 1912: "It was a great creative period, and we knew it at the time for what it was" (21).

From the beginning of Chicago's poetic renaissance, there was Midwestern energy from what Tietjens called the poetry triumvirate, Carl Sandburg, Edgar Lee Masters, and Vachel Lindsay, and there was also energy from Europe and Asia. Tietjens had been affected by her European education, but also by Edgar Lee Masters handing her a copy of the *Bhagavad-gita* which, according to her autobiography, changed the course of her entire existence (20).

Eunice Tietjens was the first of the *Poetry* staff, other than Ezra Pound, the international liaison to both *Poetry* and *The Little Review*, to leave America. She did so hesitantly, because she loved her new position on the *Poetry* staff, but this trip to Japan and China solidified her sense of herself as an important voice within the Chicago art scene.

Before she left for Asia, Tietjens knew little about this part of the world. Rather than reading whatever she could, Tietjens consciously chose to wait. She would study the area later. First, she wanted to experience the world of China without a road map. Others in Chicago were interested in Asia, but they were even more interested in Western reactions to Asia. If the search among Chicago artists and intellectuals was also outward and international, it was still the discovery of an authentic self that lead the intellectual and artistic community of Modernism. Emmett Dedmon, a Chicago historian, credits Floyd Dell, editor of the *Friday Literary Review*, a supplement of the Chicago *Post* and an important vehicle for transforming Chicago into a center of Modernist thought, for instructing Margaret Anderson, future editor of *The Little Review*, while she was one of his apprentice reviewers, to be subjective when reviewing books. It is no coincidence that in the anecdote Dedmon reiterates, Dell is handing Anderson, a book on China to review. Dell is instructing Anderson to disregard it: "'Here is a book about China,'" Dell allegedly says. "'Now don't send me an article about China but about yourself.'" As Dedmon notes (281), subjectivity was in vogue during the 1910s and interpretation of Asian culture was considered more vital than relating facts. First came the subject and then the subject matter. But the subject matter was often international.

While Ezra Pound turned to Eastern and Western classics and Carl Sandburg turned to African rhythms and chants for material to share, Eunice Tietjens explored contemporary China directly. She

saw how in the lives of twentieth century Chinese the old and new were oddly juxtaposed to one another. The rhythms, songs, and textures she experienced helped her find her own style. She embraced China as secret text and the key to her own poetic voice.

Sometime shortly after Tietjens's return to Chicago she wrote an unfinished essay on China which can be found at the Newberry Library.[1] In this fragment she explores the political changes that had just taken place in that country: "the greatest of the endless Chinese revolutions took place, the marathon dynasty was overthrown and China became a republic." For Tietjens, the poet, this revolution must have paralleled the revolution she saw taking place in poetry and modern art.

Modern China and World War I were also linked in her mind. Eunice Tietjens was much affected by World War I. After she returned from China, she served as a war correspondent stationed in France for the *Chicago Daily News*. This new Chinese republic, she noted in her autobiography, was one of the Allies in World War I: China had sent its people to build roads and help in the war effort. *Profiles from China* illustrates that the two events, the new republic of China and the war, were connected for her. She used this connection as a metaphor for the violent and ungainly world she saw before her as a Westerner visiting a modern China she saw as violent and corrupt as well as beautiful and wise.

For Tietjens, the world of the Modern is one which fascinates and mystifies her. She knows she can only experience ancient and modern China with Western eyes and she is frustrated by this, but accepts it. In her autobiography she gives many examples of how her perceptions are culture bound (70-129), but she values her poetic insights into a culture that with its sordidness, tragedy, beauty and humor was one of the greatest influences of her life (121).

After spending two years in Asia, Tietjens returned to Chicago. Although she had no education past high school during an era when women such as Susan Glaspell pursued higher education, she had enough informal credentials to be a lecturer at the Little Theatre on Japanese contemporary poetry. The Chicago intellectuals and artists required no formal degrees. During the twenties, Tietjens continued to share her knowledge of China and Japan. She wrote two histories for the Burton Holmes Travel series, *Japan, Korea and Formosa* (1924), and with her sister, Louise, *China* (1930). Between these, in 1928, she published an anthology, *Poetry of the Orient: An Anthology*

of the Classic Secular Poetry of the Major Eastern Nations, the first anthology of its kind published in America. In her autobiography, Tietjens writes that whenever she found herself depressed, she returned to China for solace. Something in the complexity that she perceived in Asia comforted her, allowed her to feel more authentic, more creative, enabling her to connect to the world and to herself.

Eunice Tietjens wanted her poetry to speak to the people. The Newberry Library has one of her unfinished articles entitled, "The Present Renaissance of American Poetry." This essay is little more than notes, but suggests that countries honor poets who speak to the people. Edgar Lee Masters and Robert Frost, she writes, are honored in America for this reason:

> "America has for the first time found a voice and in the nature of things it is not—it cannot be a single voice. It is an orchestra, in which each of the varying, often indeed conflicting elements which make up the life of this most heterogeneous nation ... less homogeneous than Emerson, Whittier, Bryant, Longfellow, Holmes ... ."

In her introduction to *Poetry of the Orient,* Tietjens goes beyond praising America's orchestra of voices. She writes that she wants to help Chinese poets speak for themselves to Americans. She attempts to give the reader advice on how to effectively read Chinese poetry. Tietjens explains that a poet is not a race phenomenon and must be read as an individual. In *Profiles from China* she speaks for the Chinese, but she is conscious of the difference. Probably here in *Poetry of the Orient* she is taking a backward glance and attempting to help us read her first book of poetry, *Profiles from China* and perhaps her best. She is writing as a Midwestern American and as an individual poet, part of the orchestra, a poet from a certain time, and a certain place experiencing another culture. She wants to be heard responding to another culture and she is not apologizing. Westerners need to hear the poets of the Orient directly, but they would also be enriched by reading her poetry on China. Tietjens honors poets first. She is not, nor does she want to be read as a "Race phenomenon," a Western translator of Chinese culture. She wants to be read as an individual poet.

Even before *Profiles from China* was published, there was a great deal of interest in Tietjens's individual poems about China. Before the book was published, Tietjens had placed some of these poems in such journals as *Poetry, The Seven Arts,* the *Chicago Evening Post,*

The Graphic, and *The Little Review.* After it was published it quickly went into a second printing and by 1927 a third.[2]

In *Profiles from China* one can easily see Tietjens's Imagist experimentation. The creation of individual characters was the center of many of her poems. Around the turn of the century, portraiture was combining with a strong interest in images to create new art forms. Gertrude Stein had experimented with portraits and images in *Three Lives;* Edgar Lee Masters had done the same with vastly different effect in *Spoon River Anthology;* and Sherwood Anderson, two years later, would find his own way to explore portraits and images in *Winesburg, Ohio.*

One finds in *Profiles from China* experimentation with images, haiku, and free verse. This is Tietjens's poetry at its best. It is very visual as well as political in its attempt to speak of the Chinese working class to the people of America. *Profiles from China* is filled with a certain sadness, but Tietjens's optimism also emerges. This is her attempt to influence the direction of human culture, to help people perceive their possibilities and failures as well as explore her own.

This small book of poetry is divided into an introductory poem and three additional sections, "From the Interior," "Echoes," and "China of the Tourists." It is a book of poetry that fluctuates between "the whistle of the factory" and the "great bell of the mission." There is capitalism and spirituality in this vast, troubled, corrupt China, and there is beauty. Beyond China's great poverty, Tietjens notes great inspiration.

Tietjens begins *Profiles from China* with a "Proem" entitled, "The Hand." This hand is attached to a large man and is more like a woman's or chimpanzee's than a man's. Tietjens is playing with the Great Chain of Being, studying a hand her narrator perceives as fastidious, self-conscious, skillful, and cruel. This hand belongs to the "new" Chinese man: "In the firelight the smoke curls up fantastically from the cigarette between your fingers which are the color of new bronze" (12).

With this artistic image, this new bronze hand, between genders and between species, the reader begins the first section, "From the Interior," a section containing twenty poems, beginning with one entitled "Cormorants." Cormorants are sea birds that the boat masters use to help them catch larger fish. The boat masters bind rings of straw around the cormorants' throats, so they can catch larger fish for their masters, but they themselves only swallow small things. These birds are willing to bring the large fish they catch back to their

masters in exchange for puny fish they can swallow. "Cormorant" is about compromise, servitude and slavery: "... Lazily you preen your great wings, eagle wings, built for the sky; .../ Faugh! The sight of you sickens me, divers in inland filth!/ You grow lousy like your lords for you have forgotten the sea" (16). The narrator of the poem is condemning the birds, blaming the victims for accepting their servitude, for being inland, for being land-locked. The eagle to which the narrator alludes is reminiscent of America and the lousiness and servitude perhaps represent not only Chinese workers, but European and American soldiers of World War I, the great mindless armies and the beauty and power unactualized, and in this context, unlikely. A scoundrel sage who still has wisdom, a storyteller whose face cannot be read by the narrator, the face of a wooden people whose eyes "burn dully with a reflected light," a woman proudly hobbling on lotus feet, a choiceless bride sitting like her own effigy, a beggar professionally maimed, are the central images of some of her other poems in this section. The narrator of many of these poems is very conscious of being left out, alien, unable to read the people of China, and being disgusted by what she does read.

Behind the narrator's discomfort is often acceptance. Tietjens's poem, "The Well," demonstrates this. There is luck in the well, clean because it is sacred, sacred because it is clean, and the coins thrown into it will bring luck either to the wisher or to the illegal collector of coins. There is also the first person narrator's acceptance in "The City Wall," even though the narrator cannot fully understand what she/he is viewing: "As I walk, lifted above the squalor and the dirt, the timeless miracle of sunset mantles in the west,/ The blue dusk gathers close/ And beauty moves immortal through the land./ And I walk quickly, praying in my heart that beauty will defend me, will heal up the too great wounds of China" (31). Here the sunset serves as beautiful cover, essential if healing is to happen. Feeling becomes as central as understanding. Humans can handle only so much grimness and then the gift of cover functions well as a gentle and essential harbor. Tietjens embraces self-protection. Her narrators wish to see and wish to hide. Ishmael's insight aboard the Pequod, that one must never go directly while sailing, or he/she will get locked by the wind, works here for Tietjens's narrators who contemplate and retreat in equal measure.

In another poem, "Our Chinese Acquaintance," a Chinese man educated in Belgium, tells the narrator: "But China is very dirty ......

(sic) Our priests are rascals, and the people ...... (sic) I do not know./ Is there perhaps a true religion somewhere? The Greeks died too—and they were clean" (36). Tietjens gives us a culture, diverse, painful, funny, and absurd. Often she portrays the Chinese people as self-conscious compromisers, but she has her narrators reiterate again and again that they don't understand what they are experiencing. In her poem, "Meditation," the narrator suggests that China might, with all of its grossness, be better than Europe or America and have more potential:

> The mission and the factory are the West. What they are I know.
> And between them lies the Orient—struggling and suffering, spawning and dying—but what it is I shall never know.
> Yet there are two clean spaces in the city where I dwell, the compound of the church within the wall, and the courtyard of the factory beyond the wall.
> It is something that in these two one can breathe. (45-6)

This is important: Europe has transplanted its system in China and while this may be questionable, something else has arisen, a space, clean regardless of culture, where at least the Western narrator can breathe. Tietjens is ambiguous as to who is privy to this compound, to this church and factory courtyard, but whoever has access, she implies, can breathe. China is a country troubled and troubling for its own people and for this Western narrator/narrators.

Th second section of *Profiles from China,* "Echoes," is composed of eight poems and begins with a haiku, "Crepuscule," which means twilight: "Like the patter of rain on the crisp leaves of autumn are the tiny footfalls of the fox-maidens" (51). Earlier, in a poem entitled "The Story Teller," the narrator asks, "does a fox-maiden, bewitching, tiny-footed, lure a scholar to his doom?" (18). China is full of stories, if one can understand them. A number of the poems in this section are very short. They warn the readers to attend to images and to remember that the truth lies between things and comes in a variety of forms. Many of these poems are filled with anxieties. The narrator explains to the reader that in a world filled with echoes, what passes as reason and reasonableness, can never lead one in a proper, spiritual, workable direction. In "Feng-Shui" the last poem in this section, the narrator attempts to share his or her wisdom:

> At the Hour of the Horse avoid raising a roof-tree, for by trampling of his hoofs it may be beaten down;

> And at the Hour of the cunning Rat go not near a soothsayer, for by his cunning he may mislead the oracle, and the hopes of the enquirer come to naught. (58)

Tietjens is embracing magic, accepting even the fallibility of oracles. One can never be too careful in this mystery called life, with this wisdom called China.

"China of the Tourists," the title of the final section of *Profiles from China,* contains ten poems. The first, "Reflections in a Ricksha," is narrated by a person who is riding a rickshaw and comparing the man who pulls it to a horse. The details the narrator shares make the narrator and the West he or she represents, less human than the man pulling the vehicle. The narrator's last stanza reveals the narrator's guilt, his or her simultaneous pleasure and entrapment:

> At home I am a democrat. A republic, a true republic seems not improbable, a fighting dream.
> Yet beholding the back of the ears of a trotting man I perceive it to be impossible—the millennium, another million years away.
> I grow insufferably superior and Anglo-Saxon.
> I am sorry, but what would you?
> One is what one is. (62)

The narrator is simultaneously honest and ironic. How can someone defining oneself as a democrat ride in such a vehicle? What is causing the narrator to feel superior when we see him or her as victimizer and hypocrite? The whole question of privilege and who is more depraved is brought to light in this poem and not answered.

Other poems in this section examine human desire for possessions even at the cost of loneliness, and question the human ability to worship in a church where in the aisle lies an army rifle. Reality, again and again in these poems, interferes with life's pleasures and easy answers. One such emotionally ironic and complex poem is, "On the Canton River Boat." In this poem the narrator is annoyed because a sentry speaks of piracy, wears deep green socks and worries about protection when the narrator, deep in denial of his or her vulnerability, without any understanding or even at this point, wish to understand, would prefer simple transcendence. The reader knows that the narrator is Western, foolish, ignorant, and understandably tired of being a privileged outsider who cannot know the political and economic complexity within the country she or he is traveling through and perceiving in shards.

Tietjens ends *Profiles from China* appropriately with a poem entitled, "In the Mixed Court: Shanghai." The smell of the stoic, sullen prisoners represents decaying nature, its ugliness, filling the room. Above the prisoners are two judges. These judges represent the problems of civilization. The narrator asks who is the better judge, one who is good and doesn't care or one who is clever but sells himself cheap. In the poem the judges put their heads together. "They are civilization and they are very grave" (72). Tietjens thus ends this poem and her book cynically using the double entendre of the word, "grave" several times in the poem. Not much choice here. Civilization, as the Modernist conjectured, would end in entropy. But earlier in this section, in a poem entitled, "The Altar of Heaven," Tietjens has in a short poem given us an image of spiritual hope, a great white circle beneath a leaning, rain-washed sky (69).

Nature, worship, spirituality, dreams, sit side by side with corrupt culture and harsh reality in these poems. Here in *Profiles from China* are two Chinas, two Americas, two faces of war. In *Profiles from China,* Eunice Tietjens is writing her beautiful and ambivalent free verse letters home to the Midwest, home to a heterogenous, Modern America from the world of ancient and modern China. As the artist, Eunice Tietjens offers what she can in modern form from a troubled culture, to a troubled culture, from a troubled self.

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NOTES

1. The Newberry Library in Chicago has a collection of Eunice Tietjens letters and memorabilia. There are over 4000 items in over 1700 folders. Harvard University Library, the Library of Congress, the University of Chicago Library, and Yale Library also have manuscripts and letters.
2. A fine unpublished dissertation by Willie Nell Stallings Love, University of Maryland, 1961, examines both her life and work. Information on the publication history of *Profiles from China* can be found on page 6.

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JAMES PURDY'S *GERTRUDE* (1997): A VISIT TO CHICAGO PAINTER GERTRUDE ABERCROMBIE (1909-1977) IN HADES

PAUL W. MILLER

In 1997, when he published *Gertrude of Stony Island Avenue,* James Purdy was 83 years of age. Therefore one would expect him to be well qualified by long observation if not by experience to write the story of an older person who finds in her declining years the love and happiness that have eluded her up to the time of death of her daughter Gertrude, the title character of the novel. In *Gertrude of Stony Island Avenue,* Purdy meets these expectations. (The Stony Island referred to, a South Chicago street located a few blocks east of the University of Chicago, is associated in the novel with the sapless, airless, faded, dowdy gentility that "Gertrude approaching womanhood could no longer endure" [*Gertrude* 96]). The older person about whom Purdy writes is Carrie Kinsella, a woman in her sixties, seventies or eighties, I would guess, though her age remains a mystery. The happiness she achieves by the novel's end, though somewhat factitious, may nevertheless be well enough presented to give rise to "that willing suspension of unbelief ... which constitutes poetic faith."

In its use of historical, biographical, autobiographical, and geographical realism that includes some metaphysical and mythic elements, this Chicago novel exhibits certain similarities to the three Chicago works Purdy wrote and published some years ago: *63:Dream Palace* (1956), *Malcolm* (1959), and *Eustace Chisholm and the Works* (1967). Though fictional and in some respects even surrealistic, each of these novels has a measure of realism associated with a recent period of American history. While *Malcolm,* a novel of the fifties, is set in the fast-paced, drug-crazed, motorcycle-cruis-

ing world of the "contemporaries," *63:Dream Palace* and *Eustace* portray the depths of the Great Depression in Chicago. Eustace Chisholm, the failed writer of *Eustace,* is so poor that he has to write his poetry with charcoal on old copies of the Chicago *Tribune.*

In *Malcolm* and *Eustace,* biographical and autobiographical realism is carried so far that these works may properly be described as *romans à clef.* In today's terminology, they are "insider" novels with realistic characters who have been identified as actual Chicago persons by friends of Purdy from Chicago, where he lived at intervals from 1935 to 1956. Among his now deceased friends I have interviewed who identified themselves and others in his novels were Wendell Wilcox the author (1906-81), whose best known work was a novel ironically entitled *Everything is Quite All Right* (1945), and Gertrude Abercrombie the Chicago painter. Wilcox appears as the failed writer Parkhearst Cratty in *63:Dream Palace;* as the astrologer Mr. Cox in *Malcolm;* and as Eustace in *Eustace Chisholm and the Works.* Gertrude Abercrombie, portrayed as the painter Eloisa Brace in *Malcolm* and as the painter Maureen O'Dell in *Eustace,* has now become the titular subject (though not the protagonist) of *Gertrude,* Purdy's most recent Chicago novel. This time, as befits Abercrombie's rising critical reputation late in her career and her considerable posthumous reputation as an artist, the character Gertrude is portrayed as a recognized if not celebrated artist rather than as a merely struggling artist like Eloisa Brace and Maureen O'Dell. What Wilcox and Abercrombie had in common, besides their dedication to the arts and the strong likelihood that they were at one time Purdy's best friends in Chicago, was their repeated portrayal by Purdy as major characters in his fiction. Until the appearance of *Gertrude,* one would have to say that Purdy portrayed Wilcox more frequently and extensively than Abercrombie in his fiction. But with the reappearance of Gertrude, this time as the title character of a fourth Chicago novel, the balance tips the other way. One is left wondering, though, why Purdy has devoted so much attention in his fiction to these Wendell and Gertrude characters, and more particularly, why he chose to revive the Gertrude character again in 1997, long after the Wendell character had been forgotten. It may partly have to do with the fact that the moderately successful writer Purdy, always somewhat autobiographical in his fiction, may be more inclined to identify himself with the eventually successful artist Abercrombie than with the failed writer Wilcox, with whom he sev-

ered his close relationship after publicly insulting Wendell and his wife at a dinner party in 1956 (Miller 151).

Extending the biographical, or perhaps we should now say the autobiographical, significance of these novels is Purdy's recurrent portrayal in them of a deracinated youth, like Purdy himself at age fifteen when his parents were divorced. In *63:Dream Pàlace* Purdy plays the role of Fenton Riddleway, a poor, recently orphaned hayseed from the country. In *Malcolm* he plays the part of an abandoned rich boy sitting on a "gold bench" outside a palatial hotel, waiting for his missing father to appear and for his life to begin. In *Eustace Chisholm and the Works* he becomes Amos Ratcliffe, a strikingly handsome and well educated but poverty stricken student of the classics who has severed all ties with his mother and who "wouldn't know his father if he met him naked in a shower bath." All three novels begin with an innocent, orphaned or abandoned, apparently doomed youth soon corrupted in the city. At the end, autobiographical realism gives way to melodrama as each of these young men disappears, dies, or is killed. The presence of Purdy in these and in other characters inhabiting the early Chicago novels is pervasive. Therefore one is hardly surprised to learn from one of his former friends, the writer Samuel Steward, that "James is the hero of all his books."

In all three of these novels, historical, biographical and autobiographical realism is reinforced by vivid descriptions of Purdy's familiar haunts along 63rd Street, in Jackson Park, and at the University of Chicago, where Purdy attended graduate school between 1935 and 1937, and again in 1944-45.

Intertwined surprisingly with the gritty, realistic elements in these novels, are such distinctively Purdyesque topics as palmistry and occultism, laced with speculation on such metaphysical concerns as the limits of human freedom, the possible rule of fate or destiny in the universe, and the existence of God.

Clearly there are important echoes of Purdy's earlier Chicago novels in *Gertrude,* such as the character Gertrude herself and Carrie's mysterious, God-like husband, "Daddy" Kinsella, who initiates Carrie's quest for her daughter as Mr. Cox initiates Malcolm's. There are also such familiar South Chicago place names as Stony Island, Jackson Park, and 63rd Street, where black musicians played the bebop and jazz to which Gertrude was wholly devoted (115). The novel also has a metaphysical or mythological

dimension, with Cy Mellerick, Gertrude's last lover, being associated with the god Hermes (as well as with Purdy himself during his youthful period of close friendship with Abercrombie), Carrie with the goddess Demeter, and Gertrude herself with Venus in life and Persephone in death.

But in *Gertrude* there are also three significant departures from the patterns of the early Chicago novels. In the first place, the chronological setting of the recent novel is not as sharply defined as in the earlier Chicago novels. Thus one critic, perhaps on the evidence provided by an antique electric car that one of the main characters drives around the city, has concluded that the novel takes place soon after World War I (McCombie 277; *Gertrude* 97). A more biographical reading of the novel would lead one to a much later date, 1979, as its setting, two years after Abercrombie's death (*Gertrude* 14). Secondly, the main characters, with the exception of Gertrude herself, are not as obviously based on identifiable Chicago friends of Purdy, realistically portrayed. Finally, although there are reflections of Purdy himself in all the characters, as usual, there is not any *one* character in the novel with whom the author especially identifies himself throughout. Indeed the author's *main* autobiographical appearance in the novel is bifurcated, divided between the characters of Carrie and Gertrude.

On the subject of his first departure in the new novel from the pattern of the early Chicago novels, one must concede that Purdy's problems in establishing *any* sort of reasonable chronology for *Gertrude* must have been formidable. Nor could he afford to ignore such problems, since Gertrude the deceased character is clearly drawn from the well known artist Abercrombie, who died in 1977, and who, according to the book's dedication, was one of the three people for whom the novel was written. Logically, therefore, the novel had to be bound to a timeline following Abercrombie's death. Moreover, Chicago is a city Purdy had not lived in, and perhaps had not even visited, since 1956—a city radically changed by the late 1970s. By then many of the favorite South Chicago haunts of Purdy as a poor University of Chicago student and of Gertrude as a struggling painter must have vanished. Hence, these places would be impossible, in a work aspiring to be the least bit realistic, for Carrie to visit in her guided search for reconciliation with her dead daughter. One further obstacle to Purdy's Gertrude novel being set in the late 1970s, as it logically must be, is the consideration that Gertrude,

dying at age 68, must have had parents a generation older than she, yet we are invited to believe that after her death these oldsters form a happy *menage of trois* with "young" Cy Mellerick, Gertrude's last lover. (In fact, according to Abercrombie specialist Susan Weininger of Roosevelt University, Gertrude's father died on May 30, 1948, and her mother on Jan. 2, 1961). Thus it is understandable if Purdy blurs the time frame of this novel a bit, as in fact he does.

Before developing the second point of contrast between *Gertrude* and the earlier Chicago novels, I must grant that Purdy's portrayal of Gertrude herself is not only accurate but memorable. In Carrie's words,

> [Gertrude] was not a beautiful girl. Her chin was too pointed. I even once thought of plastic surgery, for the rest of her face was quite lovely with beautiful large green eyes, and lovely Titian-colored hair .... It was her body that attracted the men. And it was men that occupied most of her time when she was not painting her peculiar oil portraits, portraits which now hang in many of the world's museums. (2)

But alas, Purdy's portrayal of most of the other characters in *Gertrude* is uncharacteristically off-hand. Though possibly modeled on his former friends or acquaintances in Chicago or elsewhere, most of the characters around Gertrude, including Daddy, Evelyn Mae, and even Cy Mellerick, appear to have been created more to meet the exigencies of plot than to encapsulate in fiction the rich variety of eccentrics Purdy had once known in Chicago and had so vividly portrayed in his early novels.

Though he gives short shrift to the character development of secondary characters in *Gertrude,* he is much more successful in his bifurcated, autobiographical portrayal of the two most important characters in his novel, Carrie and Gertrude herself. Thus, he convincingly portrays Carrie as guilt-ridden by her alienation from her dead daughter as Purdy himself must have been guilt-ridden by his strange and apparently unprovoked alienation from Gertrude during the last months of her life. But his crowning achievement in autobiographical as well as biographical characterization in this novel is surely not Carrie but Gertrude, portrayed as an alienated, self-starting, artistic genius like Purdy himself, rejected by family and society alike.

Though dead and appearing only once in the novel to her mother in the form of a huge self-portrait behind a door symbolically lead-

ing to Hades, Gertrude is the one presence in the story of whom everyone else is almost constantly aware. She is its pole star, about whom all the living characters rotate. A dedicated artistic genius like Gertrude Abercrombie herself, the character Gertrude, having been totally rejected by Carrie, owed nothing but her rebelliousness to her mother's upbringing. Mysteriously robbed by her domineering husband of all capacity to love, this mother lacked the natural bond with her daughter that would have enabled her to carefully guide her passage to some sort of normal womanhood. The most compelling evidence of Carrie's failure as a mother is her inability to warn her pubescent daughter of the onset of menstruation, a terrifying event in Gertrude's life that drives her to her cousin Leotta rather than her mother for an explanation of what has happened to her. From that time forward, as Carrie recalls when Cy spills a whole glass of red wine on her white dress, she and her daughter were implacable enemies (120-22).

Who was this Gertrude Abercrombie on whom Purdy's fictional Gertrude is based, and why, over the years, has she repeatedly appeared in his fiction? Though she was born in Austin, Texas, on February 17, 1909, both her parents came from the Midwest. Her father Tom was from Aleda, Illinois and her mother, Lulu (Janes) Abercrombie, from Tomah, Wisconsin. Gertrude was an only child. Her mother was a professional singer of light opera, often on the road with her father, who was also a musician. Following the outbreak of World War I, when Gertrude was five, the family returned to the U.S. from Berlin, where her mother had been studying opera (Weininger 10). Two years later they settled in Chicago, where Gertrude spent the rest of her life. Highly independent and largely self-schooled as an artist, she nevertheless received a degree in Romance Languages from the University of Illinois in 1929, took numerous studio courses in art, especially drawing, and studied briefly at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and at the American Academy of Art in Chicago (*Gertrude Abercrombie and Friends*).

Abercrombie described herself a surrealist, but not in the sense that her work was derivative from European surrealism. Also, she recognized that her regional surrealism was grounded in autobiographical realism, as she has stated more than once: "It's always myself that I paint, but not actually.... Everything is autobiographical in a sense, but kind of dreamy.... Surrealism is meant for me

because I am a pretty realistic person but don't like all I see. So I dream that it is changed. Then I change it to the way I want it. It is almost always pretty real" (Weininger 11-12).

In 1935, when Abercrombie first met Purdy, she was living at 57th Street and Harper, a few blocks east of the University, and west of the Stony Island Avenue referred to in the title. She was just beginning to achieve recognition as an artist, as signified by numerous recent showings in galleries and by her winning the 1936 Joseph Eisendrath prize at the Art Institute's Chicago and Vicinity Show for her 1935 autobiographical painting "There on the Table." Purdy lived nearby with five or six men in a "pretty gay" house at the corner of 57th and Dorchester. In 1940 Gertrude married Robert Livingston, by whom she had one child, Dinah, born in 1942. In 1944, the Abercrombie-Livingston family moved nearby to a big, old brownstone at 5728 Dorchester. Here Purdy, resurfacing in Chicago after several years absence, was provided with a room in exchange for babysitting, and here Gertrude continued to live for the rest of her life. Her first marriage having failed, she married an ex-con named Frank Sandiford in 1948. This marriage proved to be worse than the first, and like the first, ended in divorce.

Like most artists, Abercrombie had to struggle long and hard for recognition. How, however, her paintings are among the holdings of the Chicago Institute of Art as well as other major art museums,and in 1991 she was the subject of a major retrospective exhibition of her work at the Illinois State Museum in Springfield.

But although Gertrude the character dominates Purdy's latest novel, even as Gertrude Abercrombie dominates Purdy's creation of the character Gertrude, it is Carrie Kinsella, Gertrude's mother, who is its protagonist and first person narrator. Unlike other major characters in the novel, who remain unchanged, Carrie undergoes a radical transformation from submissive wife, teetering on the edge of a nervous breakdown, to self-actualizing, mature woman. At the end, despite her advancing years, she apparently begins to find belated sexual fulfillment in a *ménage à trois* involving her husband "Daddy" and the young lawyer Cy Mellerick, Gertrude's last lover before she died. This triangle, calculated to spice up Carrie's moribund relationship with her moribund but possibly reviving husband, recalls the love triangles in *Eustace,* among other Purdy novels.

In the novel, though portrayed as a wretched husband and father, Carrie's husband plays a god-like manipulative role in her transfor-

mation, somewhat like Mr. Cox's in *Malcolm*. Just as Mr. Cox sets Malcolm's search for his father in motion by giving him important names and addresses to look up, so Daddy directs and assists Carrie's quest for the daughter she never loved or knew. First he sends her to visit their mutual friend Evelyn Mae, a professor of Elizabethan poetry. The ostensible purpose of this visit is to avert Carrie's possibly imminent nervous breakdown by introducing her to some of the less threatening possibilities and dimensions of love. Its deeper purpose, though, is to help Carrie discover the "real" Gertrude with the help of Cy Mellerick as her guide, identified in the novel with Hermes the messenger god who conducts souls to Hades (113). In the course of Cy's visits with Carrie to Gertrude's favorite Chicago places, the mother discovers aspects of her daughter's character and life she had never dreamt of, or had been unable to face.

In life Gertrude was like Venus rising from the foam, self created and promiscuous. In death, pursued from one of her favorite Chicago haunts to another, even to the underworld grottoes of Jackson Park, Gertrude is more like Persephone, followed to Hades by her mother Demeter. But whereas Demeter followed her daughter in hopes of bringing her back to life, Carrie follows Gertrude to Death's kingdom in a quest for self knowledge and for motherhood and sisterhood with Gertrude, along with the capacity for sensual love that had eluded her from puberty onward. Thus, though Gertrude is not the story's protagonist, she may well be its most important character, in terms of her impact on others, especially Carrie. Together with "Daddy," functioning almost like destiny, it is Gertrude who sets the story in motion and brings it to its unexpectedly happy ending for Carrie, Cy, and Daddy himself, a blissful trinity of lovers doubtless applauded by Gertrude in Hades.

The question of what may have impelled Purdy to revive Abercrombie as a literary subject after so many years remains to be considered. What became clear in the course of my interview with her about a month before she died on July 3, 1977, was that as a follow-up to alienation from her parents for many years, she now felt totally rejected by Purdy as well, whose friendship had meant so much to her and had sustained her for so long. She could not imagine why he was angry at her and would have nothing to do with her as she felt death approaching. His tribute to her, included with others in the brochure that accompanied her retrospective exhibition of nearly 100 works at Hyde Park Center in the winter of 1977,

was complimentary but coldly objective. It lacked the warmth of intimate friendship that so distinguished the tributes offered by Wendell Wilcox and Dizzy Gillespie. Wilcox, for example, wrote beautifully:

> A great many came to admire and wonder at [Gertrude], but out of all these, few were loved. These few were loved with the truest warmth, and they gave her their warmth in return. There is in these closer friendships a feeling of something predestined, as if they have come from a long way back in time and will go on forever.
>
> (*Gertrude Abercrombie/A Retrospective Exhibition*)

Moreover, though invited, Purdy did not attend the Hyde Park Exposition. What injured Gertrude most, though, was his refusal to lend her the portrait she did of him in 1936. She wanted to show it in the Exposition. "It wouldn't have hurt him to lend it to me," she said.

Though Carrie's transformation in the ending may persuade us of Gertrude's posthumous power over the living, it also strains credulity. Even so, this novel is constructed with a sufficient tincture of realism and historicity to make it more than an exercise in nostalgia. Like the major retrospective exhibitions to date of her work, it constitutes a significant tribute (long overdue on Purdy's part), to the life and art of Gertrude Abercrombie.

Finally, let me suggest why Abercrombie over the years has been such a rich mine of literary inspiration to Purdy. To an amazing degree in the early Chicago novels he applied to fiction the method of autobiographical surrealism grounded in realism that Gertrude employed in her painting, especially in the 1940s and 1950s, at the height of her artistic powers. In his early Chicago years Purdy had found in her not only a kindred spirit, but also a source of creativity, and even an alter ego. Therefore, as he proceeded to write autobiographically, Gertrude became for him the perfect autobiographical subject—himself, but disguised as a woman, freely and repeatedly accessible. In truth, Purdy's autobiographical portrayal of Gertrude, Wendell, and other friends in his fiction bears more than a passing resemblance to Gertrude's private, autobiographical symbolism of seashells, cats, owls, moons, and barren trees—all projections of different aspects of Gertrude herself.

But in his most recent Chicago novel, Purdy's portrayal of Gertrude and her mother, though still autobiographical, may also be

motivated by his determination to exorcise or at least assuage the guilt he must have felt for having rejected Gertrude's friendship when she was dying and needed him most. Perhaps it is not just his protagonist Carrie but also Purdy who seeks reconciliation with the dead Gertrude from whom Carrie had so long been alienated. Carrie's quest for her rejected daughter's love, a quest which eventually leads to the underworld, finally meets with success when she hears Gertrude's larger than life self-portrait speak the following words of comfort: "Mother, you came to me at last" (138). But whether Purdy also has found a balm in Gilead by telling still another version of Gertrude's story remains for him to know and us to find out.

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THE CULTURAL PREDICAMENTS OF ETHNIC WRITERS: THREE CHICAGO POETS

ROGER J. JIANG BRESNAHAN

At the beginning of the first chapter of *The Souls of Black Folk*, W. E. B. DuBois posed the question of how it felt to be 'our' race problem:

> Between me and the other world there is ever an unasked question: unasked by some through feelings of delicacy; by others through the difficulty of rightly framing it. All, nevertheless, flutter around it. They approach me in a half-hesitant sort of way, eye me curiously or compassionately, and then, instead of saying directly, How does it feel to be a problem? they say, I know an excellent colored man in my town; or, I fought at Mechanicsville; or, Do not these Southern outrages make your blood boil? (9)

DuBois goes on to suggest that Americans of African ancestry occupy the status of a metaphorical seventh son in the world, giving rise to a peculiar gift of "double-consciousness" as an American and as a Negro, such that one can never be just a person, just a sociologist, just an American citizen. (10-11) He or she must also be the embodiment of the race problem.

The cultural predicament of American writers of certain ethnicities stems from this double-consciousness, but it's a concept so fraught with difficulty as to be thought of as a two-edged sword. If DuBois was right in his perception of a double-consciousness, then even when writing of topics seemingly distant from the experience of his or her ethnicity, the ethnic writer possesses—or such is the expectation of at least some readers—a double-consciousness. Both the reader and the author are constantly reminded that he or she could have written from a recognizably ethnic point of view or written of specifically ethnic topics. In a peculiar way, the ethnic writer

bears the burden of the past in ways undreamed of in mainstream literary production.

The Asian American writer Garrett Hongo tells of a reading at a Berkeley bookshop by Cynthia Kadohata from her 1989 novel, *The Floating World:* Hongo describes it as a work "... partially set during the time of World War II, [that] tells the story of an itinerant family of Japanese Americans wandering throughout the West and South in search of work. ... [but] never once mentions the federally ordered evacuation of citizens of Japanese ancestry from the West Coast" (51). Hongo recounts the scene after Kadohata's reading when some in the audience roundly condemned the author for falsifying history by omission. Kadohata's defense was that she was narrating a story from her own experience "about a family of loners and misfits" and that it was not her intention to write about the camps. Hongo wryly comments:

> ... there was a powerful faction among Japanese American intellectuals who felt it was illegitimate of Kadohata to have refrained from any overt references to the internment camp experience. ... She was then criticized for abdicating her responsibilities as a Japanese American writer, denounced for not fulfilling expectation, for not writing from the public truth of the time. (51-2)

In effect, for the audience at the Berkeley bookshop, and other readers since, the master narrative of the internment was so powerful that any work omitting it could not be seen as authentic, no matter how true to actual experience.

Looked at another way, one could argue that for successful authors, the expectations of their intended readers condition the choice of an approach to subject matter. The Filipino American writer and literary theorist N. V. M. Gonzalez cites Frantz Fanon to the effect that "the first chapter of black history—as it is understood in the white world—deals with cannibalism" (46). Elsewhere in this wide ranging essay-cum-memoir, Gonzalez cites additional instances of how the writer of color might be marginalized by the expectations of readers, particularly mainstream readers:

> Consider the scene: Fanon, after doing a lecture on Negro and European poetry in French, is approached by an acquaintance. "At bottom," says this Frenchman, "you are a white man." But Fanon is not misled into accepting this "honorary citizenship." This is done all the time. André Breton once said of Aimé Césaire:

> "Here is a black man who handles the French language as no white man today can." (50)

Such pronouncements as that of Breton or of Fanon's well-meaning acquaintance are always unsettling because hardly anyone would have trouble recognizing that how one speaks a language should not be a matter of skin color or ethnicity, much less of race. Yet it is also widely accepted that socially constructed expectations concerning color, and more so the conflation of ethnicity and color with race, mean that in the case of a writer of color, readers and auditors tend to regard those characteristics as the primary category. Conceding that some of these accolades may be apt, and that all are perhaps well-meaning, Gonzalez observes that "they incorporate an odd mixture of hope and doubt expressed with an equally odd mixture of sincere admiration and patronage" (51). Citing another example, Gonzalez notes that Alfred Kazan has called V. S. Naipaul "the deserved heir of Joseph Conrad's stylistic gifts" (51).

The problem seems, then, for the ethnic writer to accept or reject, but always contend with the mantle of authority offered by readers. To do otherwise would violate the writer's own identity. To illustrate, we may attend to the following story told by Langston Hughes:

> One of the most promising of young Negro poets said to me once, "I want to be a poet—not a Negro poet." meaning I believe, "I want to write like a white poet"; meaning, subconsciously, "I would like to be a white poet"; meaning behind that, "I would like to be white." And I was very sorry the young man said that, for no great poet has ever been afraid of being himself. And I doubted then that, with his desire to run away spiritually from his race, this boy would ever be a great poet. (*Nation,* June 23, 1926)

Having thus skated around the problem, which might be called the racial imperative, we may now turn to three exemplary poets who have worn the mantle of their ethnicity deliberately, though lightly. That they are all Chicago poets may appear to some as an artificial constraint. To be candid, the fact does stem from the occasion for which these reflections were first written. Yet the fact is that all three—Gwendolyn Brooks, Li-Young Lee, and the late A. K. Ramanujan—write of Chicago and not just in it. This serves to remind us that all writers are faced with at least one cultural predicament, that regional writers face another, and that yet another must be confronted by ethnic writers.

Gwendolyn Brooks has, through a long career as a public poet, both responded to the cultural imperative and evaded the cultural predicament it presents. Her poetry wells up from a very deep consciousness of African American social issues and cultural values. At the same time, she has evaded the cultural predicament by conveying a presence of a black woman writing. Considering the large body of her work, much of it is universalist in the sense that it is about the more common human experience: all that is required to understand much of her poetry at its most fundamental level is the human mind. Yet even then, accidentals such as places, names, foodstuffs, suggest a human perspective that is not one that just happens to be African American. It is one that is ineluctably African American. Brooks has also responded to the cultural imperative to represent African American life and aspirations. A lot of that poetry is unflinchingly hard-edged, as the early poem "Negro Hero" from her 1945 collection, *A Street in Bronzeville,* where a war-hero muses ruefully that he "had to kick their law into their teeth in order to save them" and has had to prove that his blood was "bright enough to be spilled." He declares: "it was hardly The Enemy/ that my fight was against/ But them" (*Blacks,* 48).

Brooks's representations of African American life are broad-ranging and complex. The villains of her narrative verse are not always predictable, but there is one constant: self-defeating attitudes come in for a large share of the blame. For example, "Ballad of Pearl May Lee" (60-3) drips with irony as it tells of a lynching from the nearly gleeful point of view of the victim's wife who judges he got what he deserved for his womanizing ways. Such poems are problem-pieces for their unexpectedly human dimensions. Nevertheless, they represent good work and the disjunction in their vocalization exemplifies the difficult subject matter.

Still, Gwendolyn Brooks's reputation hinges on the expectation of her readers that she will depict racial issues in predictable ways. Consequently, virtually the only poems consistently appearing in anthologies are "We Real Cool," "The Chicago Defender Sends a Man to Little Rock," "The Lovers of the Poor," and her tribute to Malcolm X. Brooks, however, is much more than these well-known pieces. Much of her work seeks to convey irreducible facts of African American life as it celebrates African American life-ways, particularly in the urban context that Chicago provides.

In some ways, though, there are aspects of those experiences that are inaccessible to those who have not lived them, no matter how sympathetic the reader may try to be. What is left out of the anthologies is her more strident and more authentic representations of African American urban life. For example, while the attitudes of the youths portrayed in "We Real Cool" come in for justifiable censure, yet the widespread popularity and longevity of this poem suggests an uncomfortable level of middlebrow tsk-tsking. Much less known are poems such as "The Blackstone Rangers" that depict the real despair and alienation that result in youth gangs: "Sores in the City/ that do not want to heal" (446) or her cautious admiration for the toughness of the young women in "Gang Girls" (449-50). Likewise, there is an element of unflinching honesty in "Riot" (470-71), which depicts white fear in the context of one of King's now almost forgotten aphorisms: "A riot is the language of the unheard."

Here then is the cultural predicament of ethnic writers: how to convey not just the ineffable (the problem for every writer, particularly for poets) but especially the inaccessible. Thus Brooks's readers, particularly her white readers, will respond on certain levels to the characters that populate her poems: to Annie Allen and to Maud Martha in terms of gender and common humanity, for example. So too, for the poems celebrating historical figures—not just Malcolm X, but also Langston Hughes, Medgar Evers, Paul Robeson, Whitney Young, and Harold Washington. But there will be other dimensions that many will be conscious of missing. This is Brooks's true genius as a poet. She neither oversimplifies nor conveys complete understanding. Her answer to the cultural predicament is to accept its complexities and pass those complexities on to her readers.

Li-Young Lee and A. K. Ramanujan exemplify the cultural predicament of the ethnic writer in ways quite different from Gwendolyn Brooks. Lee was born in 1957 in Indonesia of Chinese parents. He has received numerous awards and fellowships for his poetry, including the Delmore Schwartz Award for his first book of poems, *Rose* (1986), and the Lamont Prize for *The City in Which I Love You* (1990). Unlike Brooks, who has been at it a longer time, Lee's output is still slim. And living in Chicago rather than on the West Coast, he is not called upon to represent Asian Americans or even Chinese Americans. Besides, the fact that he was born in Indonesia and that his journey was mediated by his family settling for various periods in Jakarta, Hong Kong, Maccau, and Japan means

that he has less in common with most Asian Americans, particularly Chinese Americans.

Nevertheless, Lee's poetry reverberates with gentle memories of a Chinese immigrant home. Much of its seeks to remember his father, an appropriate theme for a patriarchal culture. There are frequent references to food and life-ways, much as Gwendolyn Brooks has sought to imply ethnic identity in the African American populace that resulted from the Great Migration. One of Lee's poems, for example, situates early morning as the time

> While the long grain is softening
> in the water, gurgling
> over a low stove flame, before
> the salted Winter vegetable is sliced
> for breakfast.
> "Early in the Morning," *Rose,* 25

Another poem speaks of

> White rice steaming, almost done. Sweet green peas
> fried in onions. Shrimp braised in sesame
> oil and garlic.
> "Eating Alone," *Rose,* 3

One of Lee's longer poems, "The Cleaving," in *The City in Which I Love You* (86-7), ends with this catalog of the commonality of recent immigrants within the multicultural mosaic:

> ... the sorrow of his Shang
> dynasty face,
> African face with slit eyes, He is
> my sister, this
> beautiful Bedouin, this Shulamite,
> keeper of sabbaths, diviner
> of holy texts, this dark
> dancer, this Jew, this Asian, this one
> with the Cambodian face, Vietnamese face, this Chinese
> I daily face,
> this immigrant,
> this man with my own face.

Lee's book of remembrances, *The Winged Seed* (1995), which may be considered a prose-poem, narrates not chronologically but rather by association the story of his family's odyssey from mainland

China to America. The Asian American writer David Mura has called this book "a long, rhapsodic work, filled with memories of family and life, yet structured like a lyric love poem," (*Minneapolis Star Tribune* Oct. 22, 1997). This complex work was adapted by Mura and staged by the Pangea World Theatre Company at the Guthrie's experimental venue. The playbill for that performance called it "a story of exile and exodus—a tale of this century—of its refugees, political prisoners, its cultural upheavals and the struggle for freedom." One telling passage relating the common experience of immigrants is the following recollection on speaking accented English:

> ... I noticed early on that all accents were not heard alike by the dominant population of American English speakers. Instead, each foreigner's spoken English, determined by a mother tongue, each person's noise, fell on a coloring ear, which bent the listener's eye and consequently, the speaker's countenance; it was a kind of narrowing. ...

He speaks of a recurrent dream of having a "mouth full of rotten teeth," of holding his hand over his mouth "hoping to hide the alien thing," and of being considered feeble-minded by teachers who spoke very loudly to him and his siblings "as though the problem were deafness." (78)

A. K. Ramanujan, like Li-Young Lee, settled in Chicago after coming to the United States from India. He published verse in both English and the Indian language, Kanada, and translated verse and prose into English from Kanada and Tamil. Ramanujan arrived in mature adulthood, not as a refugee driven from hostile shores or even, like Li-Young Lee, a child accompanying wandering parents. Rather, he came as an expatriate intellectual, a respected professor with ready berths in prestigious universities. He was awarded a MacArthur Fellowship in 1983 and held a named-professorship at the University of Chicago until his sudden death in 1993. Ramanujan's poetry is more intellectual than popular and is almost entirely rooted in the Subcontinent. If any Indian community in the U.S. had been looking for a spokesperson to represent their experience and aspirations, it would not have been Ramanujan. He was a very good poet with an eye for detail.

To the extent that Ramanujan wrote about events in the present or ethnicity in America, it was usually humorous. Chicago is strongly and explicitly present in Ramanujan's poetry, most often as

a foil to an event or location in India. It is as if his poetic personna is acutely aware of his presence in two places at once. It may also be said that Ramanujan was working out the contradictions in his situation—what I have called the cultural predicament. Clearly, he had reached some understanding, but just as clearly he died before reaching a solution to his dilemma. At the time of his death, he was completing a new volume whose working title was "The Black Hen." Oxford's website lists a forthcoming collection, but it is not clear whether these most recent poems are included.

Brooks, Lee, and Ramanujan, then, represent prototypical positions with respect to the predicament of being an ethnic writer in American culture. What Brooks brings to most of her work, particularly the Bronzeville poems, is a resolute conviction concerning the centrality of African American life to the American milieu, and she conveys that conviction to her readers. Indeed, the work of Gwendolyn Brooks and Saul Bellow have this in common: they have made inconceivable the notion of Chicago without Jews or Blacks. Li-Young Lee similarly writes from the point of view of the newer immigrants. And the experiences of these newer immigrants are, frankly, less known and less understood by the poetry-consuming public. Still, Lee must be said to be part of a flowering of such experience within the publishing industry, including such other literary spokespersons as Bharati Mukherjee, Vikram Seth, Gish Jen, Cecelia Manguerra Brainard, Fae Myenne Ng, Lois-Ann Yamanaka, and others. Ramanujan, too, represents a major segment of the ethnic population—recent or longtime immigrants who remain alienated from American culture and whose stock of images remains with the homeland. Significantly, Ramanujan's closest observations of American life are humorous ones—neither mocking nor sneering, but more bemusedly wondering.

While Brooks, Lee, and Ramanujan may be said to accurately or sensitively relate their own lived and observed experience, it is quite another thing to say they accurately represent their cultural communities. Here, too, we might recognize a sliding scale, with Brooks being accorded the most credibility, largely because her sensibilities ring true for a population better known to poetry readers, with significant numbers of those readers sharing the cultural experience that Brooks depicts.

How, then, to deal with cross-over representation? Elvis Presley, for example, is generally credited with popularizing cross-over

music in that he frequented Black clubs and learned from Black musicians such that he was able to create a new music that was neither black nor white. In terms of representation, opinions can run deep, and the suspicion of pandering to the minstrel tradition is still strong. In the essay referenced earlier, Garrett Hongo relates a call from a journalist eager to get his reaction to the award of the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction to Robert Olen Butler for *A Good Scent from a Strange Mountain.* This is a collection of short stories, written by a white man, each in the voice of a different male or female Vietnamese immigrant. The journalist wanted to know what Hongo as an Asian American writer thought about a white writer expropriating—Hongo says, "adopting"—Vietnamese voices for his own purposes.

Against the historical background of "stereotyping and ventriloquizing Asians in this country" (53), Hongo is still unable to tell the reporter whether Butler's book might be offensive to Vietnamese Americans, but he worries that in his own fence-sitting he is in effect "acting as an apologist for white colonization of ethnic cultural space" (53). Hongo comes down on the side of the issue that says one cannot dictate who has the right to represent a culture. "There is a profound difference," he writes, "between the idea that any group has an exclusive right to engage in authorized acts of cultural representation and the idea that cultural representations are not open to criticism, whether by a group or an individual critic" (54).

In effect, Hongo defends both Butler's right to represent Vietnamese immigrants' experiences and Cynthia Kadohata's right to tell a story set during the Second World War that doesn't allude to the camps as the defining moment of Japanese American history. In each instance, of course, a case would be made for exceptionalism: that Kadohata, after all, is escaping rather than relating Japanese American experience, and that Butler's stories are told sensitively and seem to ring true to Vietnamese immigrants' cultural values in a positive and sympathetic way; or that Butler's perspective will have to do for now until we have a body of writing, in English, from an "authentic" Vietnamese American perspective. Hongo, however, refrains from such arguments and instead asks us not to participate "in the habitual comminglings and false oppositions of matters of art with matters of social justice" (55).

Harkening, then, to the observations of Aimé Césaire for the Caribbean, what seems to be happening to American literature and popular culture is that we are undergoing a profound creolization.

We are becoming, in Césaire's words, a "maroon culture." James Clifford's *Predicament of Culture* has a very evocative chapter on Césaire's neologism marroner and the related marronage, not as abandonment, as the word seems to imply in English, but as those who escape from bondage to freedom, the salient instance being the slaves of Guiana who escaped from the whip to establish a new culture in the swamps.

The signs of this "maroon culture" are all around us, and one way of seeing them is through DuBois's notion of a double-consciousness. Chicago is not just a convenient venue for this realization, not just the place where Brooks, Lee, Ramanujan, and others have been working out their predicament of being writers and ethnic writers. From a historical point of view, it is especially fitting that Chicago be a locus for this profound change in American culture and in a way we perceive that culture since there has long been a sense that Chicago is a place where artists have come to practice freely, as the blues artists once made their way up the Mississippi along with the Great Migration depicted by Jacob Lawrence and its resulting culture so evident in the Bronzeville community created by Gwendolyn Brooks. And it is especially fitting that a maroon culture would arise in the city that has itself risen from the settlement established by DuSable, the all-but-acknowledged capital city of the United States in terms of both its geographic and cultural centrality. As if to underscore the centrality of Chicago in this maroon culture, Li-Young Lee's "Furious Versions" in *The City in Which I Love You* (23-4) speaks of two classical Chinese poets from the Tang era who have evidently chosen Chicago as the place for their own reincarnation:

> America, where, in Chicago, Little Chinatown
> who should I see
> on the corner of Argyle and Broadway
> but Li Bai and Du Fu, those two
> poets of the wanderer's heart.
> Folding paper boats,
> they sent them swirling
> down little rivers of gutter water.
> Gold-toothed, cigarettes rolled in their sleeves,
> They noted my dumb surprise:
> *What did you expect? Where else should we be?*

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SAUL BELLOW AND *THE NOBLE SAVAGE*: AN ANTICIPATORY REVIEW

DAVID D. ANDERSON

At eighty-four Saul Bellow, in a recent excerpt in *The New Yorker*, continues his fictional chronicling of the dangling man, the American male, usually but not always Jewish American, caught between two competing solitudes, two identities, two cultures, two dreams, a chronicle of apparent choices when in reality there are none. That literary journey began in 1944 with the publication of *Dangling Man*, the story of Joseph, not yet a soldier, no longer a civilian, who finally resolves his immediate dilemma by requesting induction, and it continued through the searches of Augie March (1954), of Tommy Wilhelm (1956), of Eugene Henderson (1959), of Moses Herzog (1964), of Charlie Citrine (1976), and of the middle-aged Albert Corde (1982). That chronicle continues, Bellow's eternal character growing older, still pursuing a resolution of the unresolvable, but coming no nearer a resolution of his dilemma and ours. We can assume that pursuit will certainly continue with the publication of Bellow's forthcoming novel, *Ravelstein*, the story of the aging Abe Ravelstein, promised for April 2000, and of which we've had a brief taste in *The New Yorker* of November 1, 1999.

In each of these characters there is much of Bellow as he ages and searches for unity and stability, perhaps even meaning, in a society and an existence that allows none of them, and there is much, too, of the people in his life, ranging from boyhood pals from Chicago to Ernest Hemingway, Delmore Schwartz, Isaac Rosenfeld, R. P. Blackmur, John Berryman, and most recently in his forthcoming novel, I suspect, his close friend, the late Allan Bloom. And in each there is much of a man who resists corruption in a corrupt age, commercialization in a commercial age, celebration in an age of celebra-

tors and celebrities, as he seeks neither success nor fulfillment but rather insight, revelation, perhaps even truth.

From Joseph in *Dangling Man* through Augie March, Henderson, Albert Corde, and predictably to Abe Ravelstein, there is a quality or characteristic that, if it does not resist corruption, attempts to transcend it as each character, in turn, seeks meaning, if only for a moment. When Albert Corde contemplates the universe from the top of the dome at Mt. Palomar, that which will give him insight into what he is, he contemplates what Joseph pondered forty years earlier as he looked across a somber Chicago cityscape, what Augie March celebrated as he carried Chicago with him across varied human and natural geography, what Eugene Henderson sought in Hemingway's Africa, and even, I suspect, as Ravelstein's high spirits mask his, in Bellow's words, "serious preoccupations." Each of Bellow's people, dangling in a world with dilemmas that defy resolution or order, shares with the others an important characteristic that permits him to survive in the face of the imponderable, to reject the convenience of accommodation or the conclusion of surrender. Rather he carries on,seeking order and stability if not a refuge, as Joseph had in the Army, or as Corde had in coming abruptly back to earth and to an apartment high over Lake Michigan.

This continuity, a continuation of each of his people's search for meaning, perhaps even for innocence and purity in an age and culture in which both have become clichés, is based on a determination that, to a greater or lesser extent, each of his people shares; it is a quality, too, that dominates Bellow's personal life as has already been documented in Ruth Miller's *Saul Bellow: A Biography of the Imagination* and in articles by James Atlas, and it will surely be explored further in Atlas's forthcoming biography of Bellow; it is a quality that defines Bellow's perception of American character in terms reminiscent of Mark Twain, Sherwood Anderson, and other writers who influenced him.

This quality, this characteristic, this undefined and perhaps undefinable trait that provides an ultimate unity beyond the apparent diversity of his people, is Bellow's conviction that, in Chicago or the greater modern world of which it is a microcosm, there is hope for human redemption, that somewhere, in an age that sees only cynicism or despair, beyond the materialistic facade of Bellow's century and his city, each of his people, his individual failures not withstanding, can contribute to the continued search and the conviction

that perhaps the search itself rather than ultimate resolution is the means whereby the individual if not the species and the society it has created will endure. Bellow's people, each of them an individual and each part of Bellow's whole, are going somewhere; creatures of hope, they remember, as does Augie March, that apparent failure is irrelevant to the search, that it doesn't prove that the search is either pointless or foolish, that, as we—and Augie—know, Columbus's America is neither illusion nor delusion, but it exists in faith if not in an ultimate, tangible reality, that the search for it hereby creates its own reason for being.

Of all Bellow's apparently diverse people, his two major creations of the 1950s, Augie March and Eugene Henderson, most nearly define Bellow's post-World War II optimistic conviction that the individual can find purpose in the search. That exuberance, lacking in both of his early characters, Joseph in *Dangling Man* (1944) and Asa Leventhal in *The Victims* (1947), is lacking, too, in the characters in the later novels, especially Moses Herzog of *Herzog* (1964), Charlie Citrine of *Humboldt's Gift* (1976), Albert Corde in *The Dean's December* (1982), and Uncle Benn in *More Die of Heartbreak* (1987). That exuberance in the early novels was perhaps, as Bellow later insisted in conversation, the result of having been influenced by what he described as "Sherwood Anderson and the other innocents." But I suspect that Bellow's continuing recreation of the American male determined to avoid the contamination or corruption of a material age is characterized by a fundamental conviction apparent in each of his people, whether marked by the exuberance with which Augie March transcends the chaos of post-war Europe or with which Eugene Henderson dashes off across the "pure white lining of the grey Arctic silence" rather than return to the identity he has finally and permanently rejected, or with the near pessimism and resignation with which Herzog recognizes he has nothing more to say, at least for the moment, the gloom of Humboldt's burial as Citrine casually dismisses the few nameless spring flowers that penetrate last fall's fallen leaves, or Corde's return with regret from his glimpse of the heavens.

The loss of Augie's and Henderson's exuberance in the novels of the sixties, seventies, and eighties and the emergence of an older more restricted, and more nearly defeated *persona* has much, perhaps, to do with Bellow's personal circumstances, as James Atlas, Ruth Miller, and even Bellow's son Adam have suggested in various

works, but perhaps more important is Bellow's own experience with the attempt in 1960, 1961, and 1962 to make tangible reality of what he had insisted was true in his portrayals of Augie and Henderson.

Both Augie and Henderson were, as Bellow portrayed them, to pluralize the words of Hoxie Neale Fairchild, whose classic work *The Noble Savage: A Study of Romantic Naturalism,* published in 1928 and reprinted in 1961, "free and wild being[s] who [draw] directly from nature virtues which raise doubts as to the value of civilization" (2). Whether or not Bellow was aware of the book, its reprinting, or Fairchild's words is moot; what is indisputable is that as early as 1955 Bellow had begun to discuss with his then-close-friend Jack Ludwig founding a literary journal. Designed to publish the works of new writers who refused to be corrupted or compromised by the standards of the academy, commerce, or the slick journals of the age, it was to be called *The Noble Savage.* They were joined by Keith Botsford as the third editor, and the first issue, published by Meridian Books, appeared in February 1960. The fifth and last issue appeared in October 1962.

The years of the journal's gestation, those of the writing of *Henderson the Rain King,* of teaching at Bard College, briefly at Northwestern, and then at Minnesota, of Bellow's second marriage running its course and the third ending precipitously, and Bellow's return to Chicago were the years that were to provide the substance of *Herzog,* perhaps Bellow's best novel, which was written as *The Noble Savage* lived its brief life. Begun in 1961, *Herzog* was published in 1964. The perennial problems faced by *The Noble Savage* were not different either in kind or degree from those faced by other literary journals, and perhaps the most significant were, as they always are, financial. When combined with increasing differences with the publisher, Meridian Books, a branch of the World Publishing Company, a largely reprint company based in Cleveland, Ohio, the demise of the journal after its fifth issue was perhaps as inevitable as it was predictable. The publisher would print only six thousand copies and bear only limited financial responsibilities, thus eventually, after its demise, leaving Bellow solely responsible for the debts of the journal.

The duration of the journal was marked, too, by dissension on the editorial board between Bellow and Ludwig, although they were close friends, and between Botsford and Ludwig, almost from the beginning. By the third issue, however, Ludwig was gone from the

masthead, to be replaced in the fourth and fifth by Aaron Asher, Bellow's editor at Viking.

During its brief life, however, the journal contained, in each issue, a remarkable array of work by the most remarkable younger writers of the age, most but not all American, thus carrying out Bellow's determination to publish only the best of his contemporaries, those whom he was convinced would endure. In Volume One he published Ralph Ellison, Wright Morris, John Berryman, Arthur Miller, Herbert Gold, and others, as well as the not-quite-contemporary Josephine Herbst, with whom he had become close in Chicago in 1958. The journal also included in each issue a work designated "Ancestors," a fiction by a distinguished non-contemporary. In Volume One it was Samuel Butler's "Rambling in Cheapside"; in Volume Two it was D. H. Lawrence's "The Portrait of M.M." in its entirety; in Volume Three it was Isaac Babel's "A Reply to an Inquiry"; in Four it was Alexander Pushkin's "Count Nulin." In Five he published "Anna, Emma, and Love in Our Time," the work of his late friend Isaac Rosenfeld, who had died alone at 38 in a furnished room on Chicago's North Side.

Volumes Four and Five have a somewhat more diverse, international, content, perhaps revealing Bellow's fondness for those writers, but by and large the selections are a remarkable cross-section of the promising younger American writers of the 1950s; indeed, the volumes combine to serve as a useful literary textbook of the age. Editorial judgment is sound in almost every case, and the series certainly does bear reprinting.

Perhaps equally evident in the editorial selection of content in each volume is what appears clear to me: the close relationship between the title of the journal and the writers selected to appear: most of the writers he includes have had substantial critical and modest commercial success. Each, in other words, in the decade of the 1950s, achieved a modest literary success that by its very nature precluded commercial success, and apparently none of his writers sought it. Each, in other words, is one who, in keeping with Bellow's portrayals of Augie March and Eugene Henderson, rejects the trappings of commercial success and pursues honesty and truth in his or her own life and consequently in the art that reflects it. Each writer is determinedly free, each questions in his or her work the values of the society of which he or she is a part, and each consequently reflects in his or her person and work the individual who remains aloof and

uncontaminated, the artist whose work seeks honestly to define human experience. Bellow's concept of the Noble Savage is not that of the nineteenth century romantics; he values sophistication, knowledge, and insight rather than innocence and simplicity in his people, and they are firmly rooted in mid-twentieth century American life, just as are the writers and works included in the five issues of the journal. But, in retrospect, the journal should have been successful in spite of its determinedly non-commercial content, even though none of the writers' names was a household word, at least not then, and most of them never achieved more than limited public reputations. The journal carried no advertising, probably would accept none, and its fate was inevitable, whether or not its life was shortened by the editorial conflicts that marred its existence from the beginning.

The demise of *The Noble Savage* was unsettling to Bellow but not permanently so—in recent years he has chosen again to edit his own journal—but the demise was only one of a series of unsettling events that marked the beginning of the 1960s. His first marriage to Anita Goshkin had ended with the success of *Augie March,* and he married Sondra Tachacbasov in Reno, where he had ended his first marriage, on February 1, 1956, a marriage that was to end three years later in recriminations and ultimately, when he learned some months later that she and Ludwig had had a long affair, with a profound sense of betrayal. Nevertheless, perennially optimistic, he married Susan Glassman, another dark-haired intellectual, in 1961, leading Gore Vidal to comment that Bellow always married the same woman, a comment equally valid for his fourth and fifth marriages, to Alexandra Tulcea and Janis Freedman. The third marriage would last only three years.

The failure of *The Noble Savage,* the failure of his marriages, the sense of betrayal by Sondra and Ludwig, the aimless movement from East to Midwest and back and forth again, ultimately returning to Chicago in late 1961, the continued political tension between East and West, the changed city to which he returned, and the continued stresses of earning a living and supporting two sons—soon to be three—were among the elements that directed his thinking as he sat down once again to write a novel that would be published in his fiftieth year.

The result was *Herzog,* Bellow's best novel, his most intimately personal, and his first significant attempt to use his character, Moses Herzog, as his mouthpiece as well as his alter ego. Herzog is Bellow

outraged at a society of predators, at those who betray him, at a city and a society dehumanized, and he expresses his outrage in letters, letters written at his kitchen table and never sent, to people he knows and people he doesn't. In each he tries to explain the unexplainable, the story of his life, his betrayal, his defeat. He writes, too, to nationally known figures, from the living—Martin Luther King, Jr. and Adlai Stevenson—to the dead—Spinoza and Nietzsche—to judge them and their work. And finally he has nothing to say; he has been as tough on himself as on the others, and suddenly, momentarily, he is at rest. With Herzog, Bellow turns abruptly away from the innocent exuberance of the natural beings Augie March and Eugene Henderson; his noble savage is, if not abandoned or forgotten, at least put aside for the foreseeable future.

With Herzog Bellow had come full circle; the young man in the boarding house room overlooking Chicago in winter had returned to center stage in Bellow's work, where he was to remain through the *personae* of eight more novels; the exuberance of Augie March and Eugene Henderson had perhaps been only a fleeting aberration in a literary life that had come out of Chicago's drab North Side and into the mainstream of the drab twentieth century.

And yet Bellow tantalizes us with Ravelstein. And perhaps in him we will again meet Augie and Henderson; the passage of time perhaps no detriment to Ravelstein's exuberance, his old age only a heightened sensitivity to the ongoing farce at which he enjoys an orchestra seat. At the end of Bellow's century and the beginning of another we shall know if, as I suspect, Bellow's Noble Savage, innocent and yet aware, makes another appearance.

Michigan State University

A CHAPTER OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY: PART TWO

WILLIAM THOMAS

iii The Journey

Neither *The Salt Lake Tribune* nor *The Deseret News* had a plac
on its staff for a man whose reportorial experience comprised les
than four months on *The Idaho State Journal.* But I thought I coul
write advertising, and impressed a man who conducted an advertis
ing agency enough for him to suggest that I write, to show what I wa
capable of, the copy for a booklet he was getting up for a coffee dis
tributor. I sat in the Public Library and wrote about coffee houses o
seventeenth and eighteenth century London. He thought it would do
and said he would make some sketches and present the layout to hi
client. But it came to nothing, he could not give me a regular job
even eighteen dollars a week. He thought I ought to be able to mak
a connection in Los Angeles, and I dare say he was tired of seeing m
so much in his office.

I debated between Los Angeles and Denver. Quist had gone t
Denver but had not got a job there, and it was probable he was nov
somewhere else. I wanted to be no farther from home than I wa
already, but also wanted to see the Pacific coast. I flipped a coi
three times, and three times heads came up. I bought a bus ticket t
Los Angeles.

In 1926 travel by motor stage was not systematized, and the bu
was a seven-passenger Cadillac touring car. Including the drive
there were eight of us, the others being a young man and his brid
two men who called themselves Blackie and Kentucky, another ma
who scarcely spoke during the three-day journey, and Bruce King.
sat on one of the folding seats in the tonneau, and Bruce King sat nex
to the driver, with one of the other three single men by him. We le
Salt Lake early in the forenoon and there was nothing to delay us; bu
after lunch we went slower and slower.

The reason became apparent. The driver was not obliged to meet a schedule and wanted to make the night stop at the place of his preference instead of going as far as the day allowed. He and Bruce King had already become friendly, and he knew a couple of girls in Beaver.

There, in the little hotel, we had a family-style meal, everybody at one big table, where the dishes were passed from hand to hand. Afterward Bruce King asked me if I cared to have a date. I did not care one way or the other, having no wish to meet a girl whom I would never see again, no wish for anything but that time might go and that we be on our way. I allowed myself to be persuaded, and of that girl and that evening I recall only our walking across a sandy waste of streets without paving or sidewalks to her house. She was a big girl with a plump, madonna-like face, and the wind blew her hair about it, too brown to be called blond and too light to be called chestnut, just thin drab hair about a characterless face. I have that mental image, as brief and meaningless as what one recalls of a dream.

We probably found nothing to talk about, and I must have left her early, for later in the evening I sat in the hotel lobby by the stove with Blackie and Kentucky and a traveling salesman. Blackie was a professional gambler, he said. He was going to Mexicali, and was sure he could make a stake there. He talked about great gamblers he had known. "Once when I saw San Joaquin Slim in San Francisco, he was broke and asked me to lend him thirty-five dollars. I did. A week afterward, when he paid it back, he had seventy thousand. The next time I saw him he was broke again." Nick the Greek, Blackie said, was known for taking long chances and losing as complacently as he won. "He made a million dollars in Mexico City and lost it all at Monte Carlo."

Kentucky, who said he and the Ohio River had "growed up together," was a hobo. An experienced train rider, he preferred to enter Los Angeles by other means, for he had especial aversion to a redheaded Union Pacific "bull" at Barstow. "He's worse than most bulls, he don't just tell you to get off, he shoots first and talks afterward." Kentucky told about a boy who ignorantly rode a train into Barstow. "He chased him into the desert with lead and didn't hit him only because the boy could run. But he killed him anyway, the kid ran till he collapsed, out there in that heat. ..."

We stayed the next night in Las Vegas. Bruce King and I walked about town and past the honky-tonks. Bruce was broke. He wanted to know if I could lend him money for tomorrow's meals. He was sure he could borrow from friends as soon as we reached Los Angeles.

Bruce was a boyishly handsome youth with light curly hair and a girl's complexion. His sobriety of manner and eager friendliness were charming, and remained so after I ceased to be of use to him and he terminated our partnership, which began that night and lasted several weeks.

iv Bruce King

We got a room on Bunker Hill. Bruce thought the person most likely to lend him money was a woman he knew of the films, and he telephoned her the evening after our arrival. She could not meet him before the next day, however, and the next day it was raining. I came back from my breakfast to find Bruce and her in our room, sitting on the bed, embarrassed by my innocent intrusion. I retreated to the hall, and Bruce came out.

"I've got to have more time with her, Bill," he said. "Give me a chance. Go away, will you, and don't come back before four o'clock."

I sat in a billiard parlor all afternoon. When I came back Bruce was alone. He reported failure. Not only had Vivian refused to lend him money, she wanted back the two hundred and fifty dollars he had previously borrowed from her to pay for an abortion, for one of her friends, whom he had made pregnant. Vivian herself was an old sweetheart of his, he said, and implied that the day had not been wholly without reward. I said that did me no good.

Everything I have to tell about Bruce is fantastic. He was surely not old enough to have had all the experiences he laid claim to, and I do not like to think he assumed me as gullible as to believe all he told me about himself and his life. But his apparent ingenuousness was so disarming that I had to pretend I believed him at the moment of the telling.

"Though my name is Bruce, it is not Bruce King or Bruce Hawthorne or any of the others I've used since I left home." Perhaps because "Bruce King" is a singularly happy-seeming combination of syllables, I had suspected it was an alias the moment he introduced himself to me at the hotel which served as bus headquarters in Salt Lake. His home was Kansas City. He was graduated, he said, from the University of Missouri at the age of eighteen. Thereupon his father gave him a hundred dollars and said he wished to see no more of him for six months. "That was four years ago. He hasn't seen me since."

Bruce and three companions bought an old car and went to Denver, arriving there with no money left. They sold the car for ten

dollars, and the others deserted Bruce. The Salvation Army got him a job washing dishes, and he learned he could always get that kind of employment, but soon was beyond the need for it. He became a confidence man. "I conceived the gag," he said with pride. "It takes four to work it. We traveled all over the East. I posed as a college student with money and acted the 'come-on' part. We lived at the best hotels. Money! We spent it all. There was always more."

"What stopped you?"

"We got caught. That is, my partners did, and I had the narrowest escape of my life. In Baltimore. Joe and I were on opposite sides of the street. I saw a bull walk up and grab Joe by the arm. Just then another cop started for me. I ran into an alley with the cops after me. This alley had high fences and board walls on both sides, and I ran till I came to a pile of lumber that I could get onto and over. On the other side of the fence was another fence, a back yard, and a chicken coop. I ducked into the coop. In two minutes I knew there was a cordon of police around the block. A cop went past the coop and then came back and leaned against it, and I could see him through a crack in the side. Every now and then he'd tap the board with his stick. I was scared plenty.

"All afternoon and half the night I stayed cramped in there, not daring to move. Every little while I'd hear 'Seen 'im yet, Fred?' and the answer 'No.' I stayed there till after midnight. Then I had to smoke. I did. Nothing happened. I waited a while and smoked again. Still nothing happened, but I waited a lot longer. It was four in the morning when I crawled out and walked to the hotel. The clerk and the bellhops and the elevator boy all looked at me queerly. I wondered if they really knew who I was, and half expected to hear somebody calling for the police. When I got to my room and looked into the mirror I say why. I was wearing a dark blue suit, a very good-looking suit—you ought to have seen it then! The next day the bellhop said 'You looked like you'd been out with the chickens last night.' 'I sure was, kid,' I told him.

"Later I was working another scheme of mine in Pennsylvania. There were three of us, another man and a girl. It was a money-maker, we lived well, went to theaters and concerts wherever we were, and both of us laid the woman. One night in Pittsburgh I got a sudden hunch we had better move. I phoned for a pullman reservation for Peggy. She got on the train first and Jack and I got on just before it started. We hid in the lavatory till all the berths were made up, and