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ESSAY BY JAY MARTIN

BIOGRAPHY AND HUMANITY 5

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[Ronald Reagan] was totally interior. He lived inside his head, in the proscenium of his own imagination. He was not a deliberate deceiver. It never occurred to him to let anyone in his thought process because that was where he lived all the time.



The surface reality of Reagan was boring. His everyday conversation was boring. His documents were boring. He was a mystery that had to be plumbed. . . . All biographers make an intense imaginative leap into the reality of the past. I knew literally what it was like at Eureka [College in Illinois]. I had studied old photographs, put them up to my nose. My idea was to give physical form to the biographer's mind. It was there already. I just gave it flesh.



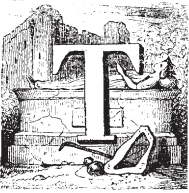
The narrator of Dutch is only semifictional. . . . All I have done in the way of fictionalizing myself (I never fictionalize him) is to make myself Reagan's contemporary, in effect extending that closeness of observation—plus the same density of documentary detail—back to the earlier stages of his life, in order to render it as vividly and honestly as I do the presidency. And all I ask of my reader is simply to accept my presence as unquestionably as we accept that of any truthful storyteller who acts as an intermediary between what he knows, and what we want to know.



[Ronald Reagan] was a great president. . . . He is also—to finish with a simple statement—the bravest and most incorrupt figure I've ever studied.

—Interviews given by Edmund Morris in 1992–1999
concerning his biography *Dutch: A Memoir of Ronald Reagan*.

NOTE



This is part of what will be a continuing series of papers issued by the Gould Center. The purpose of this series is to inform trustees, administration, faculty, staff, students, and the intellectual community about the efforts of the Gould Center, and to vivify the study of the Humanities on the CMC campus.

We call the series *Humanitas-Communitas* to suggest the close connections between the humanities and the community, or public affairs, in the modern world.

Contributions to the series from any of the constituents named above are welcome. What we propose to create is not so much a newsletter as a forum for thought about the humanities in the present day.

The controversy that erupted into the popular news media over Edmund Morris' new biography of Ronald Reagan, *Dutch*, exhibits how important the biographical genre has become in contemporary American culture.

Expressions of distress, almost amounting to outrage or horror, that Morris had "invented" a fictive narrator to tell the life story of Reagan, suggests how much we have come to rely upon biography as our window to "objective" history. Morris' postmodernist violation of this expectation stimulated many commentators to attack him violently.

In the following essay, I go behind this current controversy over form to investigate some of the characteristics that the adequate biographer must have and some of the interest that must engage him or her.

The proliferation of biographies is not likely to diminish soon. All readers of this essay are likely to read biographies, and some will write them. My essay is meant for both readers and writers.

Jay Martin
Interim Director



BIOGRAPHY AND HUMANITY

BY
JAY MARTIN



alph Waldo Emerson remarked that history is an assemblage of biographies. Much of literary criticism depends upon biography, most especially when the dependence is unacknowledged. Psychoanalysts, psychiatrists, and clinical psychologists always begin a treatment by taking a life history. Much of what we know of science is biographical. We know more about what happened to Galileo than we know about his technical advances in science. Anthropologists take oral histories from their informants. So do sociologists. Philosophical ideas, William James always maintained, bear a strong relation to the personalities of their originators. Art criticism started with books like *The Lives of the Artists*. For a long time, every presidential candidate in America authorized or commissioned a “campaign biography.”

Sometimes, the political or public figure, the economist, the poet or novelist, the philosopher or scientist tries to disavow, undermine or prevent a biography—he or she may burn his papers or even take the risk of circumventing the biographer by writing the most personal (and most concealing) of biographies—the autobiography. But eventually, in almost every instance, the biographer has his way.

Biography is the genre that cuts across all fields of inquiry in human life. It belongs to no one discipline or school or political party. Along with the letter, it is the most democratic of literary forms. Wherever human life goes, the biographer follows. The subject may be a towering intellect, such as Einstein, or an almost anonymous “wild Indian,” such as Ishi. Biography looks into every corner of mankind’s house. By being the

most human, it is the most humanistic of forms. By being the most democratic of genres—showing the close connection between the extraordinary, singular subject and all ordinary men and women, as Amy Lowell once pointed out—biography is the most communitarian of forms.

Here is a bit of (auto)biography: I myself have written several biographies and am now at work on an exciting biography of John Dewey. He himself cut across all human fields. He was arguably America's greatest philosopher, the most important thinker about education in the twentieth-century, a political commentator, a social activist, an art critic, an intellectual historian, a spiritual force, a son, a brother, a husband, a father, and a grandfather, a travel-writer, and a visionary. He examined whatever of life is recorded in the book of changes, and he helped new changes to occur. This variety makes him the perfect biographical subject, for his own multitudinous life matches the capacity of the biographical enterprise.

When I tried to think of a subject for an essay on the human community for *Humanitas/Communitas* that would comprehensively extend to all the branches of knowledge—those represented at any such college as CMC—I naturally turned to my own interest in biography, and I found there the center of all interests—human life. Biography is about the intersection of humanity and community.

In what follows I tell four biographical stories, exemplifying the varied needs that any investigator into human life must satisfy and illustrating the capacities that the biographer must develop to a fine point: curiosity; a rigorous reliance upon evidence; an understanding of the psychology of intentions; and an awareness of the unconscious, which makes up such a large portion of life. My subjects are, for the most part, literary, but that is the accident of my own particular interests. Four subjects from any other field or fields would have served just as well.



HISTORICAL TRUTH AND NARRATIVE RELIABILITY: FOUR BIOGRAPHICAL STORIES

My subtitle points to four biographical imperatives. At one and the same time, the biographer must be curious about and true to the full exploration of his or her subject's life; true to documentary history; true to the subject's conscious perspective and "intentions"; and true to the life of the subject's shifting unconscious strivings. The notion of "truth," to which I will return towards the conclusion of this paper, relates to the "coherence theory of truth" which has been effectively explored by Charles Hanly in *The Problem of Truth in Applied Psychoanalysis*. For now I leave the theoretical aspects of the question and turn to the narrative problems. True to the biographer's ways, I will make my point through four biographical, and also, in some measure, autobiographical, stories.

THE FIRST STORY: PAUL LAURENCE DUNBAR

I want to tell a simple story that illustrates the responsibilities of the biographer at a very basic level. My theme is: biographers must have a core curiosity, a strong desire to pursue mysteries wherever they lead.

The mystery that I will, as an illustration, unravel, involves the first major African-American poet, Paul Laurence Dunbar. In 1888, when he was still a high-school student in Dayton, Ohio, Dunbar started to write poetry; by the time he was 21, he published a slim book, *Oak and Ivy* (1893). That same year, on the strength of his publications, he secured a job as Frederick Douglass' assistant in the Haitian Building of the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago.

He was beginning to acquire a small reputation, especially in Ohio and more generally in African-American circles. He gave readings for small fees. Three of his poems were accepted by the *Century Magazine*, one of the best journals in America; he was the first black writer to appear in its pages. In January of 1895, he would prepare a second book, *Majors and Minors*, for publication.

Eventually, in 1896, it would be this book that William Dean Howells would review in one entire column in *Harper's Magazine*, calling Dunbar



the first important American poet of unmixed African blood. In turn, this would lead to the rapid publication of Dunbar's *Lyrics of Lowly Life*, issued by one of America's leading firms, Dodd, Mead & Co., with Howells's introduction. Within four years this book sold 12,000 copies, an astonishing number. By the end of 1896, then, Dunbar would be famous, and would even make a triumphal lecture tour of England, managed by Major Pond, who also handled Mark Twain's lecture tours. So important a personage had Dunbar become by then that Pond sent his own daughter with Dunbar to manage his bookings in England.

But in the period just preceding this, in the winter through the summer of 1895, Dunbar dropped out of sight. Where was he, what was he doing, before Howells' review appeared? Consultation of the biographies of Dunbar written by Brawley, Cunningham, or Addison Gayle shed no light on this question. Not one of these or Dunbar's other biographers were sufficiently curious to wonder where Dunbar was for an important period in his life.

I decided to look.

Late in February 1895, an event occurred which would have touched Dunbar closely: Frederick Douglass, the great abolitionist and former slave, died. A memorial to Douglass was quickly held by the black community in Richmond, Indiana in the second week of March. This provided me with a lead. I looked in Richmond's *Daily Palladium* for an indication that Dunbar might have attended—and there he was! Dunbar attended the memorial service for his former employer. Indeed, a benefit for Dunbar himself was held at the same time at Richmond's Phillips Opera House. As his contribution to the Douglass Memorial, Dunbar composed "Frederick Douglass," one of his best known and most often reprinted poems.

Oh, Douglass, thou has passed beyond the shore,
But still thy voice is ringing o'er the gale,
Thou'st taught thy race how high her hopes may soar
And bade her see the heights and never fail.
She will not fail, she needs thy stirring cry,
She knows thy guardian spirit will be nigh,
And rising from beneath the chast'ning rod,
She stretches out her bleeding hands to God!

The brothers Christy, editors of the black paper the *Indianapolis World*, came over to Richmond and took a copy of the poem back to Indianapolis with them. The *World* described itself on its masthead as

“The leading Afro-American Advocate of Independent Thought in America.” The *World* gave Dunbar’s encomium to Douglass its first publication on March 16, 1895, and its first reprinting the following week. “A race that numbers among its members a Douglass and a Dunbar need have no fears of its destiny,” the Christys wrote.

With Douglass dead, Dunbar took his place as the leading spokesman of the race. Dunbar stayed on in Richmond, Indiana, as *The Daily Palladium* reported. He was given another warm reception. The first reception he had received there brought him back again in late March.

Then he dropped out of sight again. Where had he gone? I looked at the letters to his associates. A letter of his to a young New Orleans black female poet, Alice Ruth Moore, dated May 23, 1895, was written from Indianapolis. In it he said he had been staying there for “three weeks.” So, he had gone over to Indianapolis from Richmond. Clearly, the Christys were admirers and even promoters of Dunbar, and so it seemed likely that they had invited him to their city.

That naturally turned me back to the Indianapolis *World* where any appearance of Dunbar would have been reported. I began to read through the one file of the *World* that still exists (in the Indiana Historical Society), and eventually, when I got to page three on April 20, there it was—a full column advertisement with photo: “Paul Dunbar, the Rising Young Negro Poet, will make his first appearance in Indianapolis at Bethel Church.” This announcement was followed by press comments on Dunbar’s earlier appearances in Toledo, Detroit, Richmond, and Chicago. He was announced for May 2. In the next issue of this weekly, April 27, more press notices and a favorable letter from James Whitcomb Riley were produced in another column.

The *World* reported the reading for May 2 fully: “Every number that he rendered was a ‘hit.’ The audience evidenced their appreciation by rounds of applause.” John L. Griffiths, who had introduced the reading, placed a letter in the *World* describing the evening as “one of the unmixed enjoyment.” On May 4, the *World* printed a new poem, “The Ol’ Tunes,” by Dunbar. Rapidly, another reading was arranged on May 9th at Simpson Chapel, and subsequent readings at Allen Chapel on the 15th and in the YMCA Hall on the 21st were announced.

These readings were such a success that Dunbar was given a reception by the members of the Indianapolis Atheneum Club on May 7th, with music, recitations, and social conversations. Dunbar even responded to his welcome by composing a poem for the evening, “To the Atheneum,” which was reprinted in the May 11th *World*. “To the Atheneum” shows

that Dunbar had already met a lot of people in the black community of Indianapolis:

When Buckeye folks do fall in love
With folks, it's hard to turn us,
And sakes alive! My heart's as warm as if
It held a "Furniss"

. . . .

I'll pray the Lord that watch and "Ward"
He'll ever keep above you,
And make your wishes boomerangs
Because, by jove! I love you!

Here, then, I came upon a Dunbar work that was characteristic of his best dialect poems and is a good exhibition of his poetic talent. That same issue announced: "Paul Laurence Dunbar, the rising young poet and reader of Dayton, Ohio can be secured for church, club, and society entertainment on reasonable rates." The manager of the *World* himself was handling arrangements. In short, this was Dunbar's first great success.

Just on the edge of fame, he had found a place in Indianapolis. Very rapidly, he was regularly featured in the *World*. In their editorials, the Christys were soon promoting him as an illustration of the cultural evolution of the whole African-American community. In an editorial titled "Poet Dunbar," they wrote:

But, be it said to our credit, that while our opportunities for culture are broadening, and our pursuit of the higher branches of learning is drifting in channels alongside our Caucasian brother, our faculties are becoming more penetrative and our sense of perception is taking on a finer point, which when focused upon an object perceives its component parts by the aid of a clearer conception than was possible through the blurred lens of uncultured minds.

No more striking illustration of our progress on this line could be furnished than the reception which has been accorded Mr. Paul Dunbar, the talented young poet, who has been among us for a fortnight past. Mr. Dunbar comes not a supplicant for what of sophistry or bombast we may not have spilled on other visitors to our day, but only desiring the realization that he finds response to the chord by which he hopes to vibrate the hearts of mankind, inspired by the muse who deigns to use him as a mediator. In this desire Mr. Dunbar has been truly successful, and has found the hand of both races extended to aid him to the place

in the galaxy of the age's songsters, which he so richly deserves. And it might be added that the success of Mr. Dunbar has been little short of phenomenal.

Dunbar responded by continuing to write for the *World*. The June 1st paper carried a story, "The Devereau Jewels," by Dunbar. This is a previously unknown story, of course. Other previously unrecorded pieces would soon follow. He was engaged to do several readings. A news item in the June 1 issue stated that "the indications point to a very large attendance at the Dunbar entertainment to be given at the New Bethel Baptist Church next Monday night." He also read at the Blackford Street Church on June 5.

Dunbar's contributions to the paper continued. The June 8th edition of the *World* contained another new story, "Sue," in the manner of Bret Harte. On the same page a new poem by Dunbar was printed—one of his not infrequent religious meditations, with a quality of pre-blues melancholy. Titled "Hymn," it begins:

Oh, God, to thee this morn I soar,
Upon the swelling wings of song;
Pulsating upward from the shore,
Above the seething billows' roar
I sweep on pinions free and strong.

Nor love or life, nor fear or death
Can chain me to the sordid earth;
I feel beneath my breast a breath
That bears me high o'er hill and heath,
And breaks the chain of human birth.

In the same issue were three unsigned editorials. Unsigned, they might be missed, but they were certainly written by Dunbar. One of them pursues a favorite Dunbar theme—"Every Negro journal should carry at its head for the encouragement and inspiration of young race writers, this inscription: 'Let us tell our own stories and sing our own songs.'" Another editorial puts this into practice, announcing the upcoming publication of poems by two promising (and locally well-known) African-American writers: Joseph Seaman Cotter and James Edwin Campbell. Dunbar was clearly soliciting poems from poets of his race, and was influencing the direction of the paper. Another editorial gives an autobiographical recollection by Dunbar of an incident occurring at the "Haytian" Building when a white woman hailed Frederick Douglass as "Fred Douglass": "The

grave old man took the proffered hand, and raising his hat with the utmost courtesy and smiling one of the sweetest smiles we have ever seen, he said, 'Well, my mother called me Frederick.' It was gently, sweetly said, but the woman felt the rebuke and blushed to the hair."

The June 15 edition reveals unambiguously a surprising new development, and lets us know what had been going on behind the scenes. The masthead of the *World* announces in bold letters, "PAUL L. DUNBAR, editor." Dunbar had been busy since taking the paper over in early June. The June 15th issue does print the promised poem by Campbell. There is also a new poem by Dunbar, "When Rachel Sang"; and also a story by Dunbar, "Dorothy Preston's Pride." A later edition prints the Cotter poem, which Dunbar had commissioned and another poem by Dunbar, "Gettin Gray" (July 13), later reprinted as "Growin' Gray" in *Majors and Minors* (1895–6).

So it continued. On July 6 another story by Dunbar, "Old Rogers' Romance," appeared; the next issue contained Dunbar's story, "Lishy," and a poem by the young African-American poet, Alice Ruth Moore, with whom Dunbar had been corresponding. On July 20, she also contributed a story, "The Willow Tree." (Eventually, three years later she would become his wife.)

Then in the August 3 edition, after two months in the job, Dunbar is no longer named as editor, and the paper changes its character again. Obviously, he had left Indianapolis, and the Christys had again taken over the paper's direction. But Dunbar kept up at least some connection with the paper, for as late as November 2, 1895, he contributed a poem about the Indianapolis chapter of the Order of the Eastern Star, led by Roxie H. Bell.

At the edge of fame, Dunbar left Ohio and disappeared, for all anyone has known. But he was in Indiana. One hundred years later we can now see that this rise to the editorship of a paper and his new status as the leading representation of his race must have influenced Howells, who was from Ohio, to look at the little volume *Majors and Minors* and to write his influential review. Perhaps most important of all, Dunbar's stay in Indiana was his first experience of the pressures of celebrity. In being treated as the major cultural representative of African-Americans, Dunbar had an excellent introduction to fame. He did not leap into fame suddenly, after Howells's review; he had already had a taste of fame in the African-American community. Before the time that Howells's review appeared and the invitations to read or lecture poured in, Dunbar already had a try at handling stardom. This helps to explain why he was able to make such an easy transition to "stardom" nationally and internationally.

August 1895 found Dunbar back in Dayton. Howells' review had come out, praising Dunbar as "the only man of pure African blood and of American civilization to feel the Negro life aesthetically and express it lyrically." From this time on Dunbar lived in the glare of publicity. He would not disappear again for the twelve years that he lived before he died of tuberculosis.

Apparently Dunbar neglected to keep a file of the *World*, and so he reprinted only two of the poems he published there in his later books. Three poems, five stories, and a dozen editorials were simply "lost" because no biographers had the curiosity to wonder: what was this young man doing for the half year just prior to his national fame? What was he learning during this time?

Such minute curiosity is crucial to any biographer. Curiosity is the biographer's first endowment, and the basic ingredient of any humanistic quest.

THE SECOND STORY: HENRY MILLER

On an early afternoon in 1982 the telephone rang in my office in Taper Hall, at the University of Southern California. With remarkable bad luck, I was there to answer it.

"Hello?" I said doubtfully, for I expected no call.

"Jay Martin—Professor Jay Martin?" a young woman's voice said as doubtfully.

"Yes."

"Hold on for Mr. Rosset."

The line suddenly had that leaden quality that meant I was on "hold." Nearly three thousand miles of sodden line connected New York with California.

I had not talked to Barney Rosset for five or six years, but I did not mind waiting for him. As I researched my biography of Henry Miller, Rosset had emerged as one of the few absolutely sound persons of integrity in all of Miller's tangled publishing career. As the founder and editor-in-chief of Grove Press, in 1959 Rosset had begun a buccaneering campaign of the subversion of censorship that eventually led to his publication of D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and then Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* and *Tropic of Capricorn*. Not only did Rosset tirelessly and boldly see these books through numerous court challenges once they were published, but in the case of Miller he first had to bend all his efforts to convince the author to allow the publication of the

Tropics in the United States—something that Miller had consistently refused to consider.

The phone line came to life. After a few seconds of pleasantries, Rosset came to the point.

“I have a manuscript here titled *Opus Pistorum* by Henry Miller that Val and Tony have brought to me. I’m planning to publish it and I want to know what you think of it.”

As he spoke, I was sorting through my mental biographical file. The first thing that fell out of the memory bank was my own amused struggle with the manuscript a few years before. More typed manuscripts of *Opus Pistorum* existed in libraries around the country than of any other work bearing the name of Henry Miller as author. My second thought was that all three—Rosset and Henry’s two children, Valentine and Tony Miller—must be thinking more of the excitement of putting out an unpublished work by Henry Miller than they were considering, carefully, the actual work itself. Miller had died recently. During his lifetime he had never considered publishing the work, but now he was not available to make any objection.

“I wouldn’t do that,” I said, as firmly as I could, but with a sinking feeling. “The book is not by Miller.”

“Of *course* it is,” Rosset said a little too insistently. “It has all his characters from *The Tropic of Cancer* in it. It’s his style.”

“I don’t think you’ve looked at it carefully,” I responded. “It’s not his style at all.”

“Noel Young thinks it is. What I’d like to do is send it to you and have *you* read it.”

“I have read it.” I wondered if Young, head of Capra Press and Miller’s publisher in recent years, had read it.

“Maybe not this version. I really think it is Henry’s. It’s in the Miller Collection at UCLA.”

“I’ve read it—read it there,” I said. From memory, I gave him the titles of some of the sections—“Sous les Toits de Paris,” “La Rue de Screw,” and “France in My Pants” were the only ones I could remember. Those corresponded to some of the headings of the manuscript in his possession, Rosset conceded. “So you won’t even consider looking at it? Maybe write a preface?”

The purpose of the call was on the table. *Professor authenticates unpublished Miller manuscript. Miller’s biographer gives the literary stamp of approval to new book by “Tropics” author.* I wondered whether to try to talk Rosset out of his plan. The likelihood seemed slim. Perhaps *one* try?

“*Opus Pistorum* was not written by Henry; it was written by a woman. I could prove it to you.” He must have thought I was joking: in any event, doubting Rosset did not wait for my answer. He said good-bye and hung up.

So I sat in my office, holding a phone which soon started to buzz as if it were the sound of the Grove Press printing presses starting into life. Even as I sat there, I could picture thousands of typically black-bound Grove Press books tumbling out, each one stamped in gold with “Opus Pistorum by Henry Miller” on the spine.

Some months later this fantasy came true. And then there was a book in existence officially labeled as written by Henry Miller!

When *Opus Pistorum* appeared, the book lacked an academic preface such as Rosset hoped I would write. But it had something that seemed better: a legal document appended to it—an affidavit filed by Milton Luboviski at the United States Embassy in Paris. It reads:

In the summer of 1938, I was a partner in the Larry Edmunds Bookshop at 1603 North Cahuenga Boulevard in Hollywood, California. In September of that year, Henry Miller arrived at the bookshop on a Sunday afternoon when the shop was closed. He knocked on the door, introduced himself and I admitted him to the shop. . . .

On September 1, 1941, Larry Edmunds died and I became sole owner of the bookshop. In those days the shop was not doing well and I supplemented our income by selling various items of pornography whenever it was possible to obtain them. My customers were mainly studio producers, writers and directors. . . .

Henry (Miller), being in need of money, offered to write material for me that I would be able to sell. I offered to pay him one dollar per page in return for all rights to the material he would write for me. Shortly thereafter he began to bring in several pages at a time and I paid him in cash at the agreed rate. Within a few months the pages had accumulated into a complete book which he entitled *Opus Pistorum*. When he gave me the last pages, around the middle of 1942, I recall him saying, “Here is the end of the book. I hope you make a few months’ rent from it.”

I retyped the entire manuscript, making four carbon copies. I then had all five copies bound by a book binder and, thereafter, sold copies to Julian Johnson, Daniele Amfitatrof and Frederick Hollander. A few years later, I gave a copy to my friend, Robert Light, and kept the original for myself.

As I read the affidavit, I pictured Rosset saying something like, “Well, that ought to settle the hash of that jerk in California”—meaning *me!* And so it should have done, for if Miller *had* written the book in California in late 1941 to the middle of 1942, what had I been doing trying to convince Rosset not to issue the book?

No biography tells the whole story about anything, much less everything. If the biographer is careful and lucky, he may tell the story of the *life* as a whole, but never of every episode. I certainly had not told the whole story of *Opus Pistorum* in my biography, and when *Opus Pistorum* appeared in print, I did not care to be drawn into the controversy about the identity of the work’s author. I just let it go.

But now, in deciding to look at how a biographer determines what is historically accurate along with what is sufficient and reliable as a narrative, it is worth looking back at the second chapter in Book Three of my biography, *Always Merry and Bright: The Life of Henry Miller*. What I wrote about this matter in my biography was very brief, amounting only to this description of some events of 1940:

An Oklahoma pornography collector’s agent offered Miller one dollar a page to compose private works of pornography, but his [Miller’s] imagination rebelled at being expected to pour out such garbage.

After making a valiant try (which the patron thought “too poetic”) in two tales of about seventy pages each—“Mara-Marignan Marinated” and “Quiet Days in Clichy,” written in May and June 1940, Miller simply found that he couldn’t write acceptable pornography. Still, Henry’s name as the author of *Tropic of Cancer* was worth money and he farmed out the job to an acquaintance with the suggestion that she simply take the cast of “Cancer” and the Paris scene and run amok with it. Seven sketches, qualifying as sheer pornography, resulted. The titles had weakly humorous twists, such as “France in my Pants,” “Sous les Toits de Paris” (crudely punning on “Under the Twats of Paris”), and “La Rue de Screw”; and though they were as far as possible from Miller’s style and subject, the oil millionaire lapped them up. *Tropic of Cancer* would have bored the shit out of him. So Miller had returned to the United States, where his books couldn’t be sold, to become a fumbling pornographer and even to have his pornography ghost-written. That was the way, in America, to earn enough money to visit his parents with arms full of gifts.

But there was much more behind this paragraph, and now it is worth going into the rest in order to illustrate the biographical process.

I had spent a good deal of time several years earlier determining whether Miller had been the author of this manuscript. Then, when it was clear that he had not written it, I made an effort to find out who had been its author, believing that this too would shed some light on Miller's outer and inner life. It had done so. In following documentary clues, the biographer will go wherever they lead, both because of curiosity and also for the sake of historical accuracy. In this case, the trail led straight into the seamy world of pornographic publication in those dim days of the nineteen-thirties and forties when censorship was still powerful and the publication of pornography was severely punished by law.

Let me start, however, with Miller's return to the United States in 1940, a year and a half before the events described by Milton Luboviski in his affidavit. Miller had just been forced out of Europe by the beginning of the Second World War, after ten extraordinary—and productive—years in Paris and a concluding tour of Greece. Anaïs Nin promised to meet him at the dock when his ship, the "S.S. Exochorda" arrived in New York in the frigid cold of a January day in 1940. Ten years before, he had left New York with \$10.00 in his pocket. In the meantime, he had written *Tropic of Cancer*, *Tropic of Capricorn*, *Aller Retour New York*, *Black Spring*, *Hamlet*, *Max and the White Phagocytes*, *Scenario*, and *What Are You Going to Do About Alf?*, as well as editing *The Booster* and a shelf of books. Now, in 1940, he stepped off the boat with \$10.00—not even enough money to pay duty on the gifts he had brought with him. Anaïs did not meet him; she stayed home with the flu. Alone, Henry took a taxi to a then cheap New York hotel, the Royalton, which took the overflow of writers and artists from the nearby Algonquin: and he prepared, rather wearily, to resume his old game of sponging off his friends.

The trouble was that he had few friends to sponge off. Most were broke, like Anaïs, whose banker husband was in Europe; she was trying to make her way alone. *One* friend had money, Caresse Crosby, with her houses in Bowling Green, Virginia, and Washington, D.C., and her sprawling apartment at 137 East Fifty-Fourth Street in New York City. She was generous with invitations but parsimonious with cash.

Upon his return from Europe, Henry went down to Washington, D.C. where Caresse had an art gallery. She was one of the most interesting women of her time. Born in New York City in 1892 as Mary Philips Jacob (a descendant of both the Pilgrim leader William Bradford and of the inventor of the steamboat, Robert Fulton), she spent her childhood in a house at the corner of 59th Street and Fifth Avenue, on the present site of the Plaza; and in her girlhood she lived in Westchester County. Though

not fabulously rich, her father had been raised, as she put it, “to ride to hounds, sail boats, and lead cotillions,” and he lived high. She grew up, she later said, “in a world where only good smells existed.” “What I wanted,” she said of her privileged childhood, “usually came to pass.”

It came to pass in 1914 that she was married to Richard Rogers Peabody, son of one of the three great New England families. He turned out, however, to have only three interests, all acquired at Harvard: to play, to drink, and to turn out, at any hour, to chase fire engines. By 1920, his drinking took first place in his interests; and Mary—now calling herself Polly—Peabody took J. P. Morgan’s advice and moved to the country with him in order to try to curtail his drinking. But Dick could find a bottle *anywhere*.

Then she met Harry Crosby. He was handsome, wrote passionate poems, and immediately told her he loved her. Together, they were related to most of the American greats. Names like Van Renselaer, Grew, Adams, Norton, Alexander Hamilton, Schuyler, and Wigglesworth dotted his pedigree. He had only a few fixed principles; one was, as he wrote to his mother, “I wouldn’t stay ten minutes with a girl if she wasn’t pretty.” He had only two sets of ideas: one about love, and the other about death, and he mixed the two up. Within two weeks, he and Polly went down to New York, had lunch at the Ritz, and spent the night in Room 943 of the Belmont. Harry’s suicide with another woman nine years later in 1929 was to be one of the most shocking news stories of a decade replete with shocks. During that decade, Polly (now self-rechristened Caresse) and her husband signed a suicide pact; carried around instructions for their cremation; wrote a dozen books separately; took more lovers than that, again separately; and together founded and edited the Black Sun Press, which published such works as Hart Crane’s *The Bridge* and sections of James Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake*. Harry’s work appeared in *transition* and Caresse took up sculpting in addition to writing. They knew every writer in Paris. After Harry’s sensational suicide in 1929, Caresse edited her husband’s works and arranged for prefaces to four volumes of Harry’s *Collected Poems*, written by D. H. Lawrence, T. S. Eliot, Stuart Gilbert, and Ezra Pound. She remained in Paris until the mid-thirties, continuing the Black Sun Press and beginning Crosby Continental Editions, which published paperback works by Hemingway, Faulkner, and others. She continued to know every writer in Paris. Naturally, she knew Henry Miller when he arrived. She herself wrote four books of poetry and also composed her autobiography, *The Passionate Years*, and edited the journal *Portfolio* after her husband’s death.

She and Henry Miller met in Paris in 1933. A year after her return to America in 1935, she married a man named Selbert Young, many years her junior, and bought and renovated Hampton Manor, a ruined but splendid plantation house in Bowling Green. (Later, she bought a castle north of Rome that gave her the title of *Principessa*, and still later, she owned mountaintop retreats in Cyprus and Delphi.) In Paris, besides Anaïs Nin, she was the only person known to Henry Miller who was well supplied with money. Soon after his return to America, he accepted invitations from her to visit her in Washington and Virginia. Naturally and easily, after he told Caresse about his bad luck with publishers, she invited him to move into her large New York apartment where she set aside a snug little bachelor's apartment for him. She gave him lodging, but no money.

So, he still needed cash. His parents were in great need; his father was very ill. he wrote Huntington Cairns, an attorney and unofficial United States Censor whose decision had banned the *Tropics* from the U.S., that he was broke and “would take anything from anybody, like a dog takes a bone.”

During the late thirties, in Paris, he was considered a distinguished author; Lawrence Durrell, Raymond Queneau, Anaïs Nin, and many others declared him to be a leader of the modern movement. Now, in New York, in 1940, he gave his agent five book-length manuscripts and twenty-two articles or sketches—and not one sold! Only one publication of his was being printed in America. This was a pirated edition of *Tropic of Cancer*, which Roy Brussel was publishing in New York, though the place of publication was given on the title page as Mexico. (The disguise was of no help. Brussel was eventually sent to jail for ten years for this printing.) But Miller had not yet received a cent from this pirated edition. (Some time later, he did get a few dollars of the \$1,000.00 meant for him, most of which went to Anaïs Nin.) No wonder he soon drifted toward the sub-rosa world of pornography publishing. New York, after all, was the American center of the pornographic publishing industry which peddled forbidden literature to the vast American hinterlands; and now that the war was shutting down European outlets, the native market for home-grown smut was growing rapidly.

Gershon Legman, the bibliographer of erotica—and, privately, a writer and publisher of pornography—was in New York reading the proofs on the above-mentioned Brussel “Medusa-Imprenta” edition of *Cancer*. When Miller met Legman, he tried to convince him to print a pirated edition of *Tropic of Capricorn*, too. Legman probably would have

taken it on, except that he was seething with anger at the anti-Semitic remarks in Miller's *Aller Retour New York*, which he had only recently read. He attacked Henry as a Jew-hater. Miller's responses were characteristic: first, he was shocked; he did not consider himself anti-Semitic at all. Second, he consulted Legman's horoscope and determined that he was, in any event, unsuitable as a publisher. Well, *always merry and bright!* Next, since he was desperate for dough, Miller made another proposition. He sold Legman a copy of the Obelisk Press Paris edition of *Tropic of Cancer*, into which he wrote the real names of all the characters. (Eventually, in one of Legman's periods of poverty, he sold this book to a dealer who resold it to a Broadway/Hollywood writer, in whose papers it passed to the University of Texas, where I read it.) In any event, Miller got \$50.00 from Legman for his annotated edition, and he blew the whole fifty on presents for his parents; he had refused to visit them in Brooklyn until he could go with his arms filled with gifts.

However, Legman soon returned to Miller with a proposition of his own. In early 1938, Barnet B. Ruder, an agent for an oil millionaire named Roy Melisander Johnson of Ardmore, Oklahoma, had approached Legman to supply his client with commissioned erotica, at the rate of \$50.00 for each 100-page manuscript. Having collected all the available printed pornography, Johnson found that only the first reading of any piece excited him, and his "jaded virility" placed him in the position of having to have new pieces continually written for him. Legman had written these materials himself for over a year. But he found that the composition "was making me just as impotent sexually as it was presumably making the customer super-virile." In late 1939, Legman turned the job over to a friend named Robert Sewall, a young man talented at literary imitation. He was especially adept at writing in the style of the classical pornographers. In executing commissions for the Oklahoma millionaire, Sewall first wrote in the manner of Frank Harris's *My Secret Life*. Later he made a pornographic imitation of *Tropic of Cancer*. Still later, Sewall changed his focus to a pornographic parody of Dashiell Hammett, first sending these to Johnson under the title *The Devil's Advocate*, and later in 1970, having them published—by Grove Press—under the name of Bruce Abbot and with the title *The Sign of Scorpion*.

The reason that Sewall shifted the focus of his imitation from Miller to Hammett was that Johnson asked his agent to find out from Legman whether Sewall's manuscript, offered to him as "indirectly" from Miller, were really by Miller himself. By coincidence, this occurred at exactly the

moment when Legman was helping to prepare the Medusa edition of *Cancer*, and he had recently received a visit from Miller. Legman recounted what happened next in the following manner. He explained to Johnson's agent that "Sewall's work was only a parody, but I know Miller. . . . The agent [responded after a time for Johnson] . . . that if I could get Miller really to write erotica for the customer in Oklahoma, I would receive \$25.00 per manuscript myself as agent." Legman did not know where Miller was living, or how to contact him; but he called on Miller's friend, the poet Kenneth Patchen, to set up an appointment with Miller. It was arranged to occur in mid-town Manhattan at the Gotham Book Mart, the great bookstore, where one could buy first editions of Hemingway and Mallarmé above the counter and of Joyce and Miller from below it. (Frances Steloff, the owner, sold 500 illegal copies of the Medusa edition from that location).

Instead of Miller, a beautiful woman—quite an exotic and erotic figure herself—showed up at the appointed time. She introduced herself as Anaïs Nin and then turned on Legman in a fury for his having omitted her preface from the pirated edition of *Tropic of Cancer*. (Her anger was apparently genuine. In the six intervening years since 1934, she must have forgotten that "her" preface had been written, every word of it, by Miller himself. Such are the vanities of men and women that the cruel gaze of the biographer sometimes uncovers).

Legman remained unperturbed at Nin's tirade. He was there for business, and besides a beautiful woman in a rage was stimulating, a wonderful erotic experience. When she calmed down, he proceeded to negotiations. The offer being made to Miller, he explained, was for \$1.00 per page of pornography—\$100.00 for a hundred-page manuscript. The oil man's mouth was watering for genuine pornography from the King Kong of smut.

But Legman's mind was not only on business. He was also giving Nin the once-over all this while, licking his lips, believing (and he was not far wrong) that she was Miller's mistress and thinking that she looked like "a real *poule de luxe*." She herself ought to give pornography a try, he cajoled her. He was an expert on the subject and, he informed her, so far as he knew, no woman had ever written real erotica. Even books supposedly written by women were really composed by men—*Fanny Hill* by John Cleland and *Die Weisheiten der Aspasia* by Fritz Foregger Von Greiffen-Thorn. Nin set aside her anger and warmed to the subject. Was that so? No woman? Well, then, what did Mr. Legman believe that men most wanted to know? "We want to know if women really have orgasms of if

you're just faking it half the time." So that was it . . . well, perhaps she would try. A dollar a page? Could she too earn that? Yes, Legman said, authentic pornography from a woman would be a real stimulant. And he advised her, "be sure to keep carbons." The customer was already quite old; and when he died the manuscripts could be revised and published in Paris under their author's name when the war was over.

"But if I did write for the collector—or if Henry did," Nin said, "we'd be taking your job away."

"I did it for two years," he said, "and I'm ready to scream. You'll see, you'll scream, too."

"Well," she said, "I'll tell Henry your proposition. As for herself, well . . . I think we will meet again." Always the lady of mystery.

Henry certainly needed this money, and when Anaïs told him of the offer, he made a determination to try to write pornography to order. On the surface, by reputation, it seemed that he should have been able to do so with ease. But while his books, especially the *Tropics*, had opened up literature to sexuality, he was distinctly a writer of experimental prose—surrealistic, rather than realistic, as Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, and others who praised his work had immediately seen. He never really wrote pornography at all, any more than Joyce had. But he wanted the dollars. So he set to work to try to write smut.

Remembering one of his best times in Paris, those months when he and Alfred Perlès had lived together on the outskirts of Paris, at the end of the Metro line, in Clichy, he started right in and wrote two tales about his sexual adventures in the company of Perlès. He sat at his desk in the rear of Caresse Crosby's apartment, looking out of the window over the gardens, and dreamed of being back in Paris.

The two manuscripts that he produced are, to a reader today, full of conflicts and cross-purposes. On the one hand, they are crude efforts to write titillating sexual episodes, even as they evoke, on the other, Miller's wonder and joy at being in Paris. The strain of writing on commission shows in both tales—yet so does the pleasure of Paris—so different from the sodden life he was living in New York. (Later, Miller took the basic spirit of these two tales and rewrote them into a wonderful, sunny little novel, *Quiet Days in Clichy*.) But as they stood in 1940, the two tales were mediocre as literature and feeble as pornography.

The Ardmore millionaire certainly found the tales too literary, and he complained to his agent: "Tell Miller to forget the poetry, put more sex in." "A private collector offers [Henry] a hundred dollars a month to write erotic stories," Anaïs Nin confided to her diary. "It seems like a Dantesque

punishment to condemn Henry to write erotica at a dollar a page, . . . [Writing] smut to order is a castrating occupation, because to be meeting with a voyeur at the keyhole takes all the spontaneity and pleasure out of his fanciful adventures.” She was right. Henry lost his inspiration. For the first time in nearly a decade, he ground to a halt. Trying to write pornography brought on a case of writer’s block.

In the late summer of 1940, when he finished the second manuscript and collected a second \$100.00 check, Henry could not go on. It was not sexuality but ecstasy that attracted him. He felt a strong compulsion to write a book from which sex was entirely absent—and in this context, it is important to see that as a reaction to his irritations at having agreed to write pornography, he turned to the book which many critics consider his masterwork, a literary work about Greece titled *The Colossus at Maroussi*, with not a mention of sex in it. And so in a curious way, the oil millionaire set Miller free from the steamy pornographic jungle.

Miller had always been good at boosting himself, but he had also always devoted as much attention to promoting the welfare of his friends as he had done for himself. Once he decided that he could not continue writing pornography, he looked about for substitute authors to whom he could farm out the work so that at least his down-and-out friends, if not he, could make a buck.

One of the young men he turned to was Bernard Wolfe, an admirer who eventually wrote a dozen books. In an autobiographical account (published by Doubleday in 1972, *Memoirs of a Not Altogether Shy Pornographer*, a satiric allusion to Kenneth Patchen), Wolfe writes that he met Miller soon after Henry arrived in New York in 1940. Wolfe was even more destitute than Henry. Henry soon sought to help Wolfe to some money through this pornographic enterprise. Wolfe was willing, and Miller was as good as ever at boosting his friends. Henry informed the oil man’s agent that one of his best friends was a “very talented surrealist poet, big with the ladies and equally big with the words.” The poet had gone to Tibet where he had been “evaluating . . . his very rich and variegated sex life . . . recording it all, his vivid memories . . . [in] the most profound and inspired sex writing I’ve ever seen.” The “poet,” of course, was Wolfe. The oil man decided to give him a try. Miller could not write pornography, but he knew its audience.

“You write those pages,” Miller told Wolfe, “I’ll turn them in.” Henry’s promotional talent, with its considerable invention matching Miller’s substantial generosity, kept Wolfe afloat for some time. Miller even got the price raised to two or three dollars per page for this “poet.” In due

course, Wolfe wrote several books of erotica, including a translation into English—with added pornographic passages—of Herman Hesse’s *Steppenwolf*.

While Wolfe was turning *Steppenwolf* into an erotic epic at \$3.00 a page, Anaïs Nin had decided that Legman’s proposal—his business proposal—had considerable interest for her. (He made other proposals to her, and they had a three-week affair, during which she found Legman “insufficiently ‘literary.’”) Where Miller found difficulty writing pornography, she found in erotica a liberating release from her analytic, introspective bent, represented in her own diaries and her work of criticism, *D. H. Lawrence: An Unprofessional Study*. She actually found that she liked writing pornography. She didn’t need Henry’s intervention at all. Through Legman, she had gotten her own connection to the collector’s agent; and she enthusiastically began to turn out erotica for him. Eventually, much of this was published in her *Diary*, Volume III, and two collections, *Delta of Venus* and *Little Birds*. Her writing was what she called “sensuous or poetic-erotic descriptions,” boned up from the *Kama Sutra*. Her “research” was reflected in her writing. For example:

Faces did not interest her. Her attention was spent exclusively in a certain region of a man’s anatomy. Her burning eyes had a fantastical way of appraising a man’s possessions. It was professional. She prided herself on pairing people according to the most subtle rules of the Kama Sutra and with more acumen than other women. She would suggest certain conjunctions. She was as expert as a glove fitter. There was no pleasure if the glove was too tight or too loose. Bijou felt that nowadays people did not give enough importance to proper fittings. People were growing careless. If a man found himself floating in too vast a garment, he made the best of it. But according to Bijou, he would miss the clutching embrace that annihilated loneliness. Or if one had to slip as if under a closed door, shrinking or suffocating or fearing to laugh heartily for fear of immediate displacement, that would also be inharmonious. People were losing the art of perfect conjunctions.

Soon Anaïs was receiving cash payments of \$1.00 per page for the nice, tidy, 100-page installments that the collector favored. To be sure, the collector was also sending her the same message he sent to Henry: “Stick to the narrative. Less poetry. No philosophy.” But there was no mistaking her style for Henry’s. They admired each other’s serious work, but they never influenced each other in the slightest. Her style was as far as possible from that of the Tropics. It bears not the slightest resemblance, either, to the imitation of Miller in *Opus Pistorum*. Here is a passage from *Opus Pistorum*:

The bitch must have played a year in burlesque to learn a strip routine like the one she showed me. Artfully, she leaves her stockings and shoes on after everything else has been tossed off. And there's a red silk cord around her belly with the piece of jade hanging in her bush. It looks very neat, that little piece of green stone, snuggling into that bit of black. She leaves her clothes heaped on the dragon spread and offers it for inspection. . . .

The stone is the cheapest sort of junk, of course, but it's what's under it that I'm interested in. Lotus doesn't mind when I pay no attention to the thing . . . she smiles quickly when I pinch her thighs and run my finger between her legs. There is an odor about her that reminds me of the tiny scented cigarettes that Tania used to smoke . . . she smiles down at me while I sit on the edge of the chair and run my finger into her tail. She says something in Chinese and it sounds fascinatingly filthy.

Let me summarize. My biographical narrative takes us to 1940. Legman had been writing smut. Miller wrote two feeble pornographic manuscripts involving characters from the *Tropics*. Bob Sewall wrote Miller imitations. Bernie Wolfe was writing as if from Tibet. Anaïs Nin was starting to write her own diaphanous pornography. *Opus Pistorum* was not yet written—but none of these persons was to write it.

At this same time, Miller was trying to save a sum of money beyond what he needed for daily sustenance; for he wanted to make a tour of America by automobile and to write a book about this trip. (This tour did materialize, and the book about it became *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare*.) He saved some money by going down to Bowling Green to stay with Caresse and Bert Young shortly after Caresse left New York for the summer. John Dudley, the painter, his wife Flo, and Salvador and Gala Dali were already ensconced at Hampton Manor. Henry rather disliked Gala. But at least everything was free. This enabled Henry to save all of the \$750.00 advance on expenses that he got from Doubleday, Doran for signing a contract to write a book about America. But taking an advance put him in a bind; now he had to make the trip—but \$750.00 was not enough to make it on. He tried to scrounge up some money early in the fall through lecturing. He wrote to Herbert West at Dartmouth and Allen Tate at Princeton about speaking at those universities, but nothing came of it. Where else could he get money?

The collector was always waiting in Ardmore to lap up any 100-page segment that Henry would offer, any genuine article by Henry Miller. Ironically, no one else seemed to want anything from him. In 1940, *The New Republic*, *Twelve Arts*, *Esquire*, and *The Kenyon Review* all turned

down submissions by him. But the collector's agent would take anything he offered. It was as if a long, anxious, quivering arm stretched all the way from Oklahoma, with palm upturned; and on the palm lay a stack of \$100.00 bills. Henry had but to peel off as many as he liked.

He peeled off a few, talking the agent into an advance of \$200.00. Now the only problem was how to write the pornographic pages. The painter Abe Rattner, who was to accompany him on the trip, was ready to go; and Henry, too, was anxious to depart. But he couldn't turn out the smut. Finally, they left on October 24, 1940—with the collector's pages still unwritten. He still owed \$200.00 worth of erotica. To *return* any money was unthinkable. Therefore someone had to satisfy the commission. *Someone* had to write what became *Opus Pistorum*.

Meanwhile, Anaïs experienced no inhibitions similar to Henry's. Once she got started on her erotic writing, it flowed easily. Always insatiable, the collector asked for more—more. By late September, 1940, Anaïs turned this new fascination of hers into a game. With the young American poet Robert Duncan; the British poet George Barker; the critic Harvey Breit; Virginia Admiral, a young painter studying with Hans Hoffman; and finally Caresse Crosby, now back in New York for the fall, Anaïs started to release a flood of pornography. She wrote in her diary about this group:

This started an epidemic of erotic "journals." Everyone is writing up their sexual experiences. Invented, overheated, researched from Kraft-Ebbing and medical books. We have comical conversations. We tell a story and the rest of us have to decide whether it is true or false. Or plausible. Is this plausible? Robert would offer to experiment, to test our inventions, to confirm or negate our fantasies. All of us need money, so we pool our stories. I could not turn them out fast enough, so I inserted some of Virginia's, some of George Barker's.

Anaïs soon began to see herself as "The madam of this literary, snobbish house of prostitution writing. . . . I supply paper and carbon, I deliver the manuscript anonymously, I protect everyone's anonymity."

By this point, the reader knows what Barney Rosset didn't know, or want to know. Miller did not write *Opus Pistorum*—but Henry was a good, reliable, orderly German, and he did arrange to have it written before he left on his automobile adventure. His eye naturally landed on Caresse Crosby. After all, she was already pitching in at Anaïs's smut factory for fun, not money. Always facile and clever, she wrote easily and quickly, with hardly an effort. As October slipped away and Miller

prepared for his trip, he explained his plight to Caresse. Couldn't she turn out 200 pages—just for fun—and sort of in his style, just to get him off the hook? What should she write about? she asked. Sewall's take-offs on the *Tropics* provided a ready answer. She could use that method, basically, and "continue" the adventures of Miller's characters.

Caresse took out a sheet, wrote *Opus Pistorum* at the head, and started right in. Henry left to look at America. After she turned out three sections comprising 200 pages, the collector's agent asked for more. Caresse's writing was just what Johnson wanted—no poetry, no philosophy, no symbols—just plain sex. In Caresse he had found his *real* Henry Miller at last. So, Caresse just continued right on and wrote *another* 200 pages! What better way to while away the evenings, while Bert Young, her husband, fell into a drunken stupor every night. In her diary Anaïs observed that everyone who wrote pornography with her wrote out of a self that was opposite to her or his identity, but identical with his desire. After Harry Crosby's doomed and troublesome romanticism, or perhaps just after all the years of abiding by social proprieties in New York and Boston and the wearisome decade of intellectual lovers in the nineteen twenties, it must have been a spectacular release for Caresse just to take love as casual lust and let it go at that.

Henry, of course, got a copy of what she had written in his name. Indeed, it seems more than likely (Henry's typewriter was used) that he actually typed the second 200 pages of her manuscript when he came back to New York for his father's funeral in the early winter. What an irony: Henry had become Caresse's typist for a book parodying his work!

By the time that Miller arrived in Hollywood in the summer of 1941, he had a copy of the whole manuscript with him, at least partly typed by himself. The scriptwriter Gordon Kahn told Miller that Milton Luboviski of Larry Edmund's bookstore dealt in pornography. Bitterly aware of how salable the "genuine article" by the King of Smut himself could be, Henry was willing to profit by his grossly distorted reputation in America.

So he went around to the bookstore on Hollywood Boulevard and contacted Luboviski. Perhaps Milton would be interested in a genuine piece of unpublished pornography by Henry Miller? If so, Henry would write something up, something juicy, just for him. *Of course!* Luboviski said. But what Miller had up sleeve was a typed copy of *Opus Pistorum*, Caresse Crosby's work, sold to the Oklahoma millionaire under Miller's name. During the next several weeks that Miller stayed in tinsel town, he spent some of his time retyping the manuscript and brought in a sheaf of papers every now and then to Luboviski at the store, as if it

were a work-in-progress. But, though the bookseller believed the work was written by him, he did not, as an editor of Grove Press confirmed to me, have any “tangible proof that Miller wrote the book for him—none whatsoever.” So, he collected for a second time of Caresse’s *Opus Pistorum!* Nor did he forget how easily he could turn a buck with this scam. In 1950, when he was living in Big Sur he had four copies of the first section typed up by a friend in Carmel and he sold them all in the erotica market. One of these found its way into the Sex Research Library of the Kinsey Institute, where it was filed slyly under “Henry Miller?” The Institute bibliographer—Gershon Legman!—knew why there should be a question mark. But he himself was not certain who had actually written this manuscript. He guessed at Caresse Crosby, and he was right.

With Legman’s re-entry into the narrative, let me bring this story to an end, so that I can draw from it some principles concerning biography. They are fairly obvious against the background of this account, and so I will state them baldly and boldly.

Biography is not history, though it looks like history, but is instead a precise organization of materials according to the central position—and to some degree the perspective—of the subject of the biography. In order to write the one-half paragraph which I devoted to the production of *Opus Pistorum* in my biography of Henry Miller I had to *know* all the history which I have now set down in these pages. But, when I wrote the book, I did not feel any need to set down all the history I knew. In *Always Merry and Bright* I told much less than I knew, but what I did write was designed to tell the story of Henry Miller, not of all his friends or of twentieth-century history. My use of the documents was guided by the centrality of Miller in the narrative; put in an equation, the narrative equals the author plus the documents. Nor, even now, have I told all the history that I know of this incident. Would the reader like to know the sort of shoes which Anaïs wore to the Gotham Book Mart when she met Legman? We know because, partly true to his name, Legman showed an erotic interest in women’s feet, and the shoes which encased Anaïs’s luscious articles were lovingly described by him. Would the reader like to know what color typewriter ribbon Henry Miller used in February 1940? I know because I have seen many other Miller manuscripts, and this is part of the reason I can tell when Miller was doing the typing on *Opus Pistorum*. The biographer has to know as much of the history as possible—but he cannot write mere history if he wants to write biography. The selection of detail is determined by the requirements which arise from the narrative of a life.

As a corollary, most obviously, the biographer of anyone but a hermit must know the histories of all those people who associated with his subject—in this case, Anaïs Nin, Wolfe, Caresse Crosby, and so on—but he should submerge the largest part of what he knows into only that part of their history which contributes to his biography. As to my own choice in this particular case, I wrote only that Miller turned the pornographic work over to “an acquaintance with the suggestion that she simply take the cast of characters of *Cancer*,” etc. I saw no reason to complicate the narrative with a specification of Caresse Crosby’s identity. That Miller did not write these manuscripts was the main thing. That despite his American reputation, he could not write pornography was the central issue.

Caresse Crosby was able to write the manuscript of *Opus Pistorum*. Though she uses Miller’s characters, the narrative contrasts strongly to his perspective. In fact, *Opus Pistorum* is written from the point of view of a woman, something that Miller never accomplished; all orgasms and sexual pleasures in general are experienced through a female perspective. Even the inside titles are quite unlike Miller, who had no capacity for shallow punning. No purpose of my biography would have been served by my going into these matters then. I contented myself with giving, in the notes, the citations for two manuscripts of *Opus Pistorum*, two letters in the UCLA Library from Legman to Miller’s earliest bibliographer, Bern Porter, in which Legman told part of the story in denying that Miller wrote *Opus*; and a letter, in the Southern Illinois University Library from Henry to Anaïs Nin, written in May of 1941, concerning the manuscript. (I could have added that I talked to Henry on the subject, and he vigorously denied authorship; and that Caresse Crosby’s papers, especially her unfinished autobiography, also in the Southern Illinois Library, should be consulted. There is also a postcard by Lawrence Durrell in the same library denying that Miller was the author of *Opus Pistorum*. John Martin of Black Sparrow Press also has noted that when he showed Miller a typescript of *Opus Pistorum*, borrowed from Milton Luboviski, Miller became visibly upset. He stated angrily that he was not the author and that he absolutely would not endorse it by inscribing or signing it.)

Were I writing my Miller biography now, after the publication by Grove Press of “*Opus Pistorum* by Henry Miller,” of course I would have to add one more sentence flatly denying his authorship of this work, and I suppose I would then attribute it to Caresse Crosby in order to seal the denial. This would be all the more necessary in that one researcher has stated in print in the *TLS* that—based on a misreading of my book—Anaïs Nin was the writer to whom Miller “farmed out” his commission.

My “her” refers, of course, to Caresse Crosby, not Anaïs Nin. As matters stand, however, the book was “authorized” by Rosset as Miller’s, and the image of Henry Miller generated by this association with *Opus Pistorum* has been permanently affected for thousands of readers.

In the meantime, the duplicity of Miller in farming out his pornographic writing to Caresse, yet selling it under his own name, has had its effects. It is a plain fact that much of what we “find” in literary texts is based on unacknowledged biographical information. Once we “know” the author, we seem to “know” a great deal about a text, even as we proclaim that the authorship is irrelevant. A substantial part of literary interpretation is a projection from what we unconsciously assume about the author. By its publication Grove Press “authorized” *Opus Pistorum* as Miller’s; and even such a skilled reader as John Updike was taken in. In Updike’s novel, *Roger’s Version* (1987), he writes that his hero finds “comfort and inspiration in pornography,” especially in “the late Henry’s *Opus Pistorum*, so vile it was posthumous,” though having “redeeming qualities . . . exalting . . . the damp underside.”

Following the publication of *Opus Pistorum* “by Henry Miller,” three books have included accounts of the “place” of this text in his body of writing. All three assume that because Grove Press published the book “by” Henry Miller, it must have been written by Henry Miller.

In 1990, Kingsley Widmer revised his earlier work, *Henry Miller*, originally written as a Twayne series book in 1963. Widmer writes:

However limited Miller’s perspective, his obscenity may be granted appropriateness and effectiveness, literary significance, and considerable historical influence.

But Miller also wrote pornography. *Opus Pistorum* was trade-published posthumously (1983), although it was written four decades earlier (1941–42). . . . There are a few bits of Miller’s verbal gusto. . . . *Opus Pistorum* also has a few touches of Miller’s apocalyptic rhetoric and comic self-depersonalization. . . .

The unspecified “bits” and “touches” of Miller in the book may be from some of Miller’s writing inserted into her text by Caresse, or are Caresse Crosby’s parodies, or possibly are the pure imaginings of Widmer based on his conviction that Miller wrote the book.

Mary V. Dearborn, in *The Happiest Man Alive: A Biography of Henry Miller* (1991), generally takes her account of Miller’s activities during 1940–42 from my biography, but ignores my comments on *Opus Pistorum*

and simply swallows whole the Grove Press ascription of Miller's authorship: "He turned out a few more sketches, which would later be collected in the posthumous *Opus Pistorum*. . . ." She acknowledges that "During his lifetime, Henry Miller publicly denied that he wrote any such commissioned pornography," but adds (puzzlingly) that this may have been "in deference" to Anaïs Nin's wishes "that their relationship remain secret." Finally, she asserts uncritically that Miller "did acknowledge his pornography to those he trusted, like his American publisher, James Laughlin." But in the letter to Laughlin which she cites Miller does not acknowledge *Opus Pistorum*; and it was written several years after the fact. By then Henry saw the prospect of making more money from his carbon copies of Caresse's text, and he was ready to dissemble and equivocate.

Robert Ferguson, in *Henry Miller: A Life* (1991), is much more cautious. In treating *Opus Pistorum* he abandons biographical narrative completely and settles for indeterminacy. Whenever he mentions *Opus Pistorum*, he indicates that Miller may or may not have written the book: ". . . the issue is whether Miller was responsible for these particular studies. . . ." Still, Ferguson generally conveys the impression that he believes the pieces are by Miller, who, he says, denied he had written them as a way of "lessening his shame." He parallels *Opus Pistorum* to *Moloch*, a book which Miller certainly did write, as "skeletons rattling in his archives." The Grove Press publication of *Opus Pistorum* as Miller's probably tipped the balance in Ferguson's mind. He nowhere quotes or mentions my warning that Miller was not the author of *Opus Pistorum*, and in fact he does not even refer to my account, though his index cites a ghostly reference to me on page 276, where my name does not appear at all. At his conclusion he undeniably associates *Opus Pistorum* with Miller's authorship: "Miller no longer shocks. Not even the appearance of the hard-core pornographic *Opus Pistorum* in 1983 attracted much attention in America. . . ."

The sum and substance of the work of these three biographers is this: the authorization of *Opus Pistorum* by Grove press as Henry Miller's creation had an effect upon all three writers; this passed into their renditions of his life, and thereby into literary history, and finally into literary criticism or public "knowledge." Even sooner, it passed into reviews of "Miller's" book, as feminist critics roundly castigated him for this perfect example of misogyny—when the book was, after all, written by a woman. Ideological critics will always find what they are looking for. All this time the appropriate biographical research and narrative waited to be written, but was not likely to be done once the book was published as Miller's.

To “tell the truth, but tell it slant,” Emily Dickinson said was the task of the poet—that is, to tell the truth as the poet individually saw it. It would and must be the biographer’s motto too—but with this alteration: to tell the truth from the slant of the subject.

Economical researchers will not like biography, then: it is the most wasteful form of research. To write an accurate biography, one has to acquire vast amounts of collateral historical knowledge and then to *know* that 90% of it *is* collateral, and be ready to jettison it for the sake of the subject, into a reliable narrative in which the main character is never submerged for the biographer’s display of his own historical knowledge. The story I have told here is interesting, but a biography written on its principles would be several thousand pages long: it could potentially never reach a conclusion, and would eventually gobble up into its narrative all the life of its time.

The biographer must be contented with *one* life, keeping it balanced and proportioned from first to last; writing it in a style compatible at one and the same time with its subject’s style of life and also with the requirements of a narrative portrait. So the first great principle of biography is that of dissolving historical completeness into a reliable narrative concerning one personality. This amounts to reconstruction of what once occurred, but has since been lost. Deconstructionists come at this from the other side. Instead of historical completeness they evince a fervent interest in the incomplete, the fragmentary, the indeterminate, the unreliable, the purloined life. Every biography will, of course, have its recesses of mystery, but these should exist not because the biographer was striving for incompleteness, but because for all his work, mystery remained. Nothing would be easier than to write deconstructionist biography.

THE THIRD STORY: ROBERT LOWELL

So, the biographer must be *curious*. Second, he must aim at *informed accuracy*. But these are not enough. Two other aims remain to be examined.

The third great principle of biography comes into play beyond the margins where history and documents stop, and the narrative leads into the *mysteries of motivation*. Here the biographer must construct the tangle of wishes and fears and fantasies that may never have been fully understood even by the subject himself or herself. Until the biographer fuses reliable insight with historical fullness and biographical narrative into new *meaning*, the biography will remain incomplete. Every biographer



soon discovers that any life he inspects carefully has a few central mysteries—not necessarily of documents, as in the instance of Dunbar; or of fact, as in the case of Miller—but of *causality*. Like opals embedded helter skelter in a piece of dark rock, a few internal mysteries exist in any life. These are mysteries of *intention*. They shine forth with perfect obviousness, but do not readily yield their secrets to historical research.

Let me illustrate by a glance at the life of Robert Lowell how the biographer works with these causal nodes. Lowell's earliest reputation was based on very few poems. Aside from translations of dramatic adaptations of the work of others, Lowell published six very slim books between 1944 and 1967. Even in this small production, some of the earlier poems were revised and included in later collections. In all, these six books contain fewer than 100 poems, most of them quite short, save for *The Mills of the Kavanaghs*, all together totaling less than three thousand lines. He worked in several poetic forms; at first with a baroque complexity of stanza patterns and line lengths, modeled after Donne and Crashaw; then in a blank verse somewhat resembling Frost's; next, in a loosely constructed, only occasionally rhyming confessional mode; and at the end of the sixties, in spare, undecorated highly condensed satirical verse, something like the poetry of Juvenal as Lowell understood that author. The forms and modes he chose exhibited his commitment to modernist verse, starting with the influence of the metaphysicals and proceeding to self-revelatory confessions. He chose hard metres and he allowed the difficulty of his choices to show. Most specifically, he was influenced by the "Fugitives" and by the poets they most admired, especially T. S. Eliot. As a young man, at Allen Tate's suggestion, Lowell had gone to Vanderbilt University to study with John Crowe Ransom. Later, with his student friends Randall Jarrell and Peter Taylor, he followed Ransom from Vanderbilt to Kenyon College. This New Englander thus made himself a member of the second generation of the Fugitives, a group of Southern writers who set out to restore intelligence to poetry and sharpness to literary criticism. They emphasized wit, paradox, metrical skill, ambiguity and compression; they opposed Romanticism and the literary forms associated with romantic themes. Lowell followed the Fugitive principles in his first six books. Before 1967, he had not published a single sonnet, for instance; few modernist poets had, for it was generally held by modern poets that the sonnet had been worn out for poetic use both by its great practitioners—Shakespeare, Spenser, and Milton, for instance—and also, even more so, by the little tribe of delicate late post-romantic sentimentalists in England and America who had

lowered the level of poetic expectations in sonnet-writing to the energy needed for a library tea.

Then, in June of 1967, after two years during which he wrote nothing original, Lowell started to write slack, fourteen-line poems. By December, he had written 70 such poems—nearly as many, in six months, as in the previous 23 years. During 1968, he averaged *four sonnets per week!* By the end of 1968, in 18 months, he had written four thousand published lines, and many more that were completed but rejected. This change was momentous, but it was not all. Previously, he had treated only a few basic subjects in his poetry. Now, anything could be gotten into a poem. Within the next four years this hitherto reticent poet published six hundred and thirty-three pages of poetry, or somewhere around twelve thousand lines—and on every possible subject. In 23 years he had published less than 3,000 lines; now, in a mere four years he quadrupled that amount.

Here, indeed, is a gleam on the surface of the dark waters of Lowell's life, the very sort that needs to be explained if the biographer is to provide a reliable narrative in any sense whatsoever. Such occasions, such times of transformation, are crucial to any biography. Ian Hamilton, Lowell's authorized biographer, took up the challenge:

It is hard not to speculate about the "sources" of this new abundance. One influence . . . was John Berryman's *Dream Songs*: seventy-seven of these had been published in 1964, and since then they had been appearing by the dozen—each song comprising eighteen (or sometimes nineteen) lines divided into three stanzas. . . . Lowell had poured his whole self into lyrics that could be offered to the world as "finished": he had made his personal predicaments stand as fit metaphors for the terrors of the globe. But with Berryman's example in mind, he could now see how much of random circumstance, how much of life's haphazard, interesting flow, was by rule excluded from poems that held their own intensity and artifice in awe.

Hamilton continues, unsurely:

Two other sprawling, catch-all epics had haunted Lowell for years: Williams's *Paterson* and Ezra Pound's *Cantos*. But he had never trusted himself to veer that far away from the formalist stringency he had learned from Tate and Ransom, *Life Studies* had marked the limits of his disobedience—thereafter he had gravitated back to rhyme and meter.

Other influencing factors can be thought of. The death of Randall Jarrell had removed one critical voice that Lowell was in fear of—What will Randall think of that? It had always been one of his first worries. It is

possible that Jarrell might have found most of these new fourteen-liners slack, near-journalistic, or too much like casual diary jottings: they might have seemed to him too mumblingly unrheterical, too self-indulgent. This is guessing; but there is a surge of truancy from the idea of some absolute critical authority, a “breaking loose” from the requirement never to write badly.

Hamilton is simply thrashing about for any explanation whatsoever. He decides to try another:

Another element—but to be thought of with the utmost caution—was the effect of the drug lithium, which Lowell had begun taking in the spring of 1967. . . . Certainly, there is a low-keyed agreeableness in most of the new sonnets; a passivity, or receptivity. There is also a slackening of grandeur and ferocity in the way he views his own obsessions, a new willingness to accord near-equal status to whatever happens to have happened.

Here, at a crucial place in any account of Lowell’s life, at a time when Lowell went through a wrenching change, Hamilton’s story breaks down completely into a series of slack speculations. The narrative simply sits on the page, with the helpless biographer speculating about four possible (but improbable) motives for this sudden upheaval: (1) emulation and competition; (2) old models of possible influence, but without any account of why these should have influenced Lowell now; (3) the removal of shame (this seems to be indirectly a transference projection of Hamilton’s belief that these poems are “beneath” Lowell); (4) a possible chemical change (but lithium would most likely produce an opposite effect than the sudden efflorescence of flights of poetry). Hamilton does exactly what a biographer who wants to write a reliable narrative *cannot* do: he invites the reader to take his choice, and the choices he gives are flat and unimaginative, lame, even misleading. Most likely this whole procedure exhibits Hamilton’s biographical haste combined with an English critic’s lack of knowledge and comfort concerning modern *American* poetry.

For after all, anyone who knew American poetry at all well would have seen in Lowell’s sudden, remarkable explosion of sonnets a strikingly evident parallel to the career of one other American poet. The casual observer of the glittering surface of literary history, composed of only major personages, would, of course, see Lowell as influenced by Berryman, Pound, Williams, or Jarrell. After all, major writers are not supposed to be influenced by minor ones. But when Lowell started to

write sonnets with extraordinary speed, on subjects that were broadly conceived, the informed observer would be reminded at once of the twentieth-century America poet who was famous for writing sonnets, and *only* sonnets. Henry Wells wrote of him:

Most persons acquainted with current American letters know [him] . . . as the author of an incredible number of sonnets. He is the man who writes fifty thousand sonnets, the man who has published a book consisting of a thousand sonnets, the man who composes sonnets while waiting for the traffic light to change.

The poet's name is Merrill Moore. Born in 1903 in Columbia, Tennessee, Moore went to Vanderbilt University where he received his B.A. in 1924. Louis Untermeyer, the leading anthologist of modern American poetry during 1919 to 1950, included Moore in his series of anthologies. "Merrill Moore was barely twenty," Untermeyer remembers, "an undergraduate of Vanderbilt University, when, after a couple of lectures, I got to know him in Nashville. He was the youngest member of a little group that called itself *The Fugitive* and published a magazine of that same name. The *Fugitive*, by almost any account, represented the first decisive announcement from twentieth-century Southern writers that Mencken had been wrong in call the South 'the Sahara of the Bozart.'" Produced collaboratively by poets who congregated around John Crowe Ransom, the *Fugitive* magazine coincided with the rich outpouring of literary talent in the South that soon would make it seem as if modern American writing was identical with Southern authorship. In addition to Ransom, others who were actively published in the magazine were Allen Tate, Laura Riding, Donald Davidson, and, slightly later, Robert Penn Warren. Moore's poetry was welcomed into the magazine, and eventually he published 46 sonnets and 16 short lyrics in its pages. From the first he was a prodigy. The editorial policy of the *Fugitive* was that at pre-publication sessions, with all the group's members present, each submitted a poem, which was freely criticized and subsequently revised. It was then presented in final form at the next meeting. Everyone except Moore abided by this procedure. He admitted his poems for criticism. But for him the criticism session set up a chain reaction that led not to the revision of one poem, but to the production of a dozen new ones.

Following the gathering of his *Fugitive* poems into two books, in 1929 Moore published his first independent collection, titled *The Noise That Time Makes*; the book was appreciatively introduced by John Crowe

Ransom. Ransom's stress in his preface was upon Moore's autobiographical drive to "publish himself fully," seeing himself from innumerable angles, from the perspectives of his mental states, his social life, his work, his daily occupations, his interests, and so on—from the outside in, as well as from the inside out. "He has a fresh and living language," Ransom said, "rather than a literary or poetic one, and he uses it directly on his own actual materials." Untermeyer nicely says that his poetry "pushes its way through experience and dreams."

Moore's writing continued without abatement. His book of 1938 consisted of a thousand sonnets, titled *M.*, both for the number and for Moore's initials. This book was made up of a selection of Moore's work chosen from several thousand sonnets by a panel consisting of Ransom, Davidson, Untermeyer, and Dudley Fitts.

Writing with such extraordinary rapidity, Moore produced a certain kind of poem—one that was automatic and spontaneous, symbolic, stylistically translucent and fluid, with pointed phrasing and drama that was sharply etched, improvised and continually fresh, even as their associative qualities eventually form a fairly complete picture of the author who produced them. As to their style, technically considered, Moore himself wrote:

I have never taken the sonnet legislation too seriously, although I am prepared to accept the descriptive dogma of some authorities that all forms other than the "regular" and "irregular" sonnets are "illegitimate" sonnets, which is what I choose to call mine. I accept the dogma. What then? Now let us make a fresh start. Is a poem still a "sonnet" if it has 14 lines and a form of its own? I would say *yes*, and add that in my opinion there can be many sonnet forms—in fact, any combination of lines that add up to fourteen.

Louis Untermeyer described his form as "a new hybrid: the *American* sonnet," possessing a "*native* syncopated speed—so different from English and Italian tempi—[having an] abrupt approach and swift abandonment . . . occasioned by . . . [American] backgrounds. . . . There is nothing arbitrary about these American sonnets." Untermeyer importantly added, ". . . the rhythms are based on the rise and fall of the breath rather than on the beat of the metronome. It is not scansion but stress that determines the line length." In terms of prosodic experiment Moore is a bridge between the practices of Ransom and those of William Carlos Williams. Williams, a strong supporter of Moore's, observed in 1951 that Merrill Moore had "saved [the sonnet's] life."

From this account, it must be evident by now how parallel Moore's and Lowell's careers were, how evidently Moore preceded Lowell. To say that biographically Lowell was following in Moore's footsteps would be an exaggeration. But about fifteen years after Moore, Lowell went to Vanderbilt, then Kenyon, to study with Ransom. He read the *Fugitive* with care (as he told Anne Dick in 1937) and knew Moore's work well. As the *Fugitive* published Moore's first work, its successor, the *Kenyon Review*, published Lowell's earliest pieces. As Ransom introduced Moore's first book, Allen Tate, Ransom's younger colleague, wrote a preface for Lowell's first collection. Lowell, like Moore, moved from Ransom's to Williams's influence. Lowell eventually did what Moore always did—he wrote sonnets prolifically—and sonnets, too, that precisely mirror Moore's prescription for the American sonnet: loose, flexible, associative, generally ironical, often using colloquial dialogue, and usually consisting of portraits of persons. Like Moore's, the prosody of Lowell's sonnets was based on breath rather than scansion.

Here are two sonnets, both involving the theme of drunkenness:

Alcohol does funny things, to the blood;
Some people seem to fall apart at the seams
When they take more alcohol than food,
Some start to have delirium in their dreams.

One man told me: "I was an in-and-out drunk
For forty days and during all that time
I drank twenty beers a day, each cost a dime,
I got the money pan-handling. I stunk."

"What did you eat?" I asked him. "Not much food,
Once in a while a hamburger on a bun
But little else; I really lived on beer
Until I started to see them G—Da—things."

"What things?" I asked him, wondering what he'd say.
"Cats on fire and dogs in neon rings!"

Another one:

Suddenly, no disinclination to murder—
brown hours, they stream like water off my back.
I want to top the crowns of the tallest flowers
with the blade of a hand, sweep, sweep and down-sweep,
running in bull-horns down the garden path,

pretending left, right and wrong are in the wind . . .
Harder to be an audience than on stage,
live in the small unknown Horatian suburb;
the lawn is skinned, the wife tensed, the great torrent
lost in the melancholy stream of traffic,
I live in the sun, and my lips keep twitching.
I suffer more for myself than I do for you
burning in the sun of the universal bottle;
and the spineless vermin slink and stink in the woodwork.

Following are two portraits of men, one of a genteel New England aristocrat, the other of a trapper who has lost his own zest for life:

When Robert Witt dies, it will be decorously,
He is spending this summer at Peckett's On-the-Hill.
There is something very polite about everything Robert does.
He can smile, and I've often seen him laugh fit to kill.

Robert Witt is one of the nicest fellows I ever knew
I think he knows everything—he has read every book,
On historical fishes and all the things they do.
He's one of the best doctors and, I think, a gentleman.
He lives alone, in comfort, on Commonwealth Avenue.
At meetings his remarks are extremely scholarly.

He is erudite, and a little bit sphinx-like, too.
He will probably give his books to the medical library.
And Robert will lie in his coffin very still.

And the other:

In the unspoiled age, when they caught a cow-mink,
they made her urinate around the traps,
and every bull mink hunting along the stream
went for the trap, and soon the mink were done—
the last we knew was in the freeze of '17,
a last bull making tracks in the snow for a last cow.
My friend, once professional, no longer traps:
“There's too many other ways to make a living”—
his army pension, and two working sons.
He builds homes for bluebirds, martins, swallows.
When a pair mates in one, it's like a match,
a catch, a return to his lost craft of trapping,
old China's hope to excel without progress . . .
His money went to *Wildlife*, he killed too much.

The first of each pair is by Merrill Moore, the second by Lowell. They are distinctive, but their distinctiveness scarcely masks the great similarities between them.

Where have we arrived? I have been arguing that had I been Lowell's biographer, when I arrived in my narrative to tell about Lowell during the summer of 1967, with the necessity for accounting for Lowell's sudden profligacy of sonnet writing, I would have boldly considered that if this major poet was being influenced by any poet at all, it was by Merrill Moore, at the time dead for ten years and already, in 1967, fallen into oblivion. But so far as I can determine from any available materials, neither Lowell nor any of his associates asserted that Lowell was influenced by Moore at this time. The historical documentation is lacking. Despite the clear suggestion that Lowell may have become so obsessed with Merrill Moore that he had thrown aside his own poetic habits and his style, bringing Moore back to life in his own poetic practice, still, on the surface, no grain of historical data seems to confirm this, and for a biographer to assert it boldly *on this evidence alone* would risk credulity and strain narrative reliability.

The hypothesis certainly has more immediate and better explanatory force than Hamilton's lame series of half-hearted suggestions about why Lowell suddenly started to write sonnets with such abandon. Why should Lowell have especially cared to follow Moore's genre? If no other links with Moore or his work could be established, very likely—in my imaginary Lowell biography—I would wonder about Moore's sudden surprising influence and suggest briefly only that Moore's examples had influenced Lowell. I would have let the rest settle into the ashes of private speculation.

Unless a spark blows something up out of those ashes—*then* the connection between the two writers might demand assertion. There is one thread of connection; indeed, a very special connection, between Moore and Lowell. It turns out to be decisively important. Let me show how it arises and where it leads. It leads to a surprisingly intimate connection between Moore and Lowell. Merrill Moore did not end his education with a B.A. at Vanderbilt and then spend the rest of his life composing sonnets in a Southern village. Following his graduation in 1924, he entered Vanderbilt Medical School and received his M.D. in 1928. After a year's internship in Nashville, he decided to move to Boston, where he began a residency in psychiatry with rotations at various city hospitals. He completed his residency in 1934 and began psychoanalytic training. Hanns Sachs, a famous colleague of Freud's, one of Freud's inner circle,

was his analyst. In 1934 he opened an office for private practice on Commonwealth Avenue, and also began to teach at Harvard Medical School.

In 1934 or early 1935 a married woman suffering from a severe depression began to see Moore for psychoanalytic psychotherapy. At his suggestion she kept a diary of her readings in psychoanalysis. At his suggestion, too, she also wrote a rather defensive autobiographical account in the third person. She wrote that she found her husband “neither agreeable, interesting, nor admirable. . . . She wishes to do nothing and see no one. She was utterly hysterical, and would have liked to die.” Moore’s patient was Charlotte Lowell, Robert Lowell’s mother. Doubtless part of the distress and depression which she experienced at this time was due to the difficulties she had with her only child, Bobby. She was not the only Lowell suffering psychological distress. Bobby Lowell was obviously troubled too and had intermittent episodes of loss of impulse control. She brought her son for a consultation with Moore in the spring of 1935 when the boy was at St. Mark’s prep school. Dr. Moore continued to see Robert periodically during the next two years. Then in December of 1936, a family crisis broke out. Lowell reacted angrily to his father’s interference in a love affair he was having with a young woman named Anne Dick, and he badly beat his father in his own house. Charlotte’s psychoanalytic work with Moore encouraged her to see Bobby’s relation to Anne Dick, an older woman, as a symptom of his oedipal wishes for his mother. Nonetheless, she was incensed at the impudence of his attack upon his father and went to Moore to ask him to commit Bobby to an institution! At this juncture, Moore began to see Robert Lowell as a regular patient; and in one way or another, usually at a distance, he continued to do so for the next ten or twelve years.

Though mainly psychoanalytic in his mode of treatment, Moore seems to have thought that Robert’s trouble was that of an acting-out, impulsive adolescent. He appears to have missed the early signs of schizophrenia in Lowell, and to have concluded that behavioral modification through a change of environment would be just what the young man needed. Instead of hospitalizing Bobby, he persuaded him to apologize to his father. Then he sent Lowell to a friend of his, the British writer Ford Madox Ford, who happened to be stopping in Boston on his way to visit Moore’s close friend Allen Tate. He suggested that Ford introduce Lowell to Tate. The plan worked to perfection. Moore gave Bobby a copy of the *Fugitive* poems and put him on a train to Tate’s. By mail he urged Tate and Ransom to help Lowell switch from Harvard

to Vanderbilt. Soon, this was arranged, and Lowell attended Ransom's poetry classes during the remainder of the semester.

This was not the end of Moore's direction of Robert Lowell's life. Indeed, he took over every aspect of it. Moore even arranged for his friend Milton Starr to be Bobby's banker in the South. Mr. Lowell grudgingly turned his son's allowance over to Moore, and Moore sent it to Starr, so that Bobby would be protected from any direct money transactions with his family. The father was being edged out of the family, and Moore was taking his place. Moore's contacts with Bobby and Charlotte continued. In 1939, Moore arranged for Charlotte to consult Carl Jung in Zurich concerning Bobby. ("If your son is as you have described him," Jung told her, "he is an incurable schizophrenic.") Later, when Lowell was in Boston, Moore put Bobby up as his guest at the Harvard Club, took him to lunch, and saw him in and outside the office. As late as 1949, Dr. Moore was the person called when something had to be done to get Lowell out of jail after a fist fight with a policeman. He came all the way to Chicago to bring Lowell back to Boston and to get him admitted to a psychiatric hospital. He wrote to literary friends to try to squelch rumors about Lowell's mental state. In short, Moore ran Lowell's life far more than Lowell's father ever did. Almost everything of importance that happened to Lowell was arranged or overseen by Dr. Moore, the great writer of sonnets.

Lowell's poetic career, as well as his long, tedious career as a mental patient, began with Moore. If anyone could be said to be so, Merrill Moore was a father-figure to Bobby. All during the years that Lowell was alienated from his father, Moore was constantly at hand as a poet-father to support Lowell's positive aims as a writer; but he was also a therapist-father.

At least in Bobby's mind, Moore became even closer to being his father than this. "Did [Moore] become mother's lover?" Lowell wondered in the 1970's. There was reason to suspect that in fact his mother and Moore were intimate—though Lowell's question also almost certainly reflected a wish that Moore would marry his mother and actually become his father. Relations between Charlotte and the psychiatrist-poet had become extremely close. From being his patient, Charlotte was invited to take a part-time job in Moore's office. At first her tasks were mainly secretarial, but soon Moore allowed her to treat a few of his "milder cases" under his supervision. He later offered her a full-time job. Lowell's friends Blair Clark and Frank Parker shared Robert's suspicions about Charlotte and Merrill's intimacy. They knew that Charlotte sent Moore rose petals

in some letters and that he sent her seashells. After they went together to see “The King and I,” she wrote to him as “Anna” and he signed his letters as “Yul Brynner, alias the King.” Moore told Lowell his negative opinion of Bobby’s father: “a relatively hopeless . . . problem child no. 1,” Moore called the Commander. Charlotte and Moore never did marry, but in a legal sense Moore practically did become Bobby’s father. When Lowell’s parents left for a European trip in 1939, Charlotte had Moore appointed as Bobby’s legal guardian, and Moore declared himself “only too happy to . . . act *in loco parentis*.”

As late as 1953, Moore made an extraordinary proposal, which he broached to Lowell’s wife Elizabeth Hardwick for her support: that Charlotte and he collaborate in writing a book about Lowell’s early life up to 1937, “to the day he left Boston to go South and meet Ransom. . . . Such a book was done about Rimbaud. I have a copy of it. Another was done about D. H. Lawrence recently. I think Bobby’s life is as interesting (to me it is more so) as either of these men. . . .” In the clearest possible way he was proposing that he and Charlotte have a literary baby, and he did so in a father’s exaggerated language of love. Certainly Bobby’s father had always been the butt of Charlotte’s criticism, but for Moore she seems to have had a constant, affectionate regard. “You know, you were an unwanted child,” Moore flatly said to Bobby in one of their earliest therapy sessions. But it seems that if his mother and father hadn’t wanted him, Moore *had* been a father—much like a stepfather—and even *more* than a father to him. In the last days of his life, Lowell put it flatly: Moore’s “Tennessee rattling saved my life,” he wrote.

Now, the biographer is certainly on the track of something! Had Lowell never met Merrill Moore, but knew of Moore’s work—how could he not?—and simply produced the sonnets that he did write, I could have asserted on pretty firm grounds that in 1967 he had suddenly been caught up in Moore’s influence, imitating Moore—as if to continue Moore’s kind of sonnet work was more important than continuing his own way with poetry. But with the knowledge of the further extension of Moore’s influence into the deepest recesses of Lowell’s psychic life and the origins of his literary career, it is not only possible but would be mandatory for the biographer to see the sudden increase in Lowell’s productivity and his wholly unexpected use of the sonnet as deriving from an unconscious, compulsive attempt to bring Moore back to life in himself and in his activity.

Now, the biographer would be obliged to provide a reliable narrative of Lowell’s motives in “killing” or submerging himself so that Moore

could return to life. And this leads me into a brief scenario of the psychic mechanisms behind Lowell's new poetic activity. In 1967, Lowell reached the age of 50. He believed that both his parents had died at 60, and he soon began to assert to friends that he himself would not outlive them. In fact, he did die at 60. In 1967 he had ten years to live, and what is more, he expected to live for no more than ten years. His wife, Caroline Blackwood, called his death "a suicide wish." She felt that when he reached 60, he simply gave up, that he *wanted* to die then. The British psychoanalyst Elliot Jacques writes of the internal clock that ticks out the parents' lives inside the child's: "The sense of the agedness of parents, coupled with the maturing of one's own children into adults, contributes strongly to the sense of aging—the sense that it is one's own turn next to grow old and die." When late in life, Lowell himself wrote, "always inside me is the child who died, always inside me is his will to die," Lowell was stating in his own way a point similar to Jacques's remark: "How each one reacts to the midlife encounter with the reality of his own eventual death . . . will be markedly influenced by his infantile unconscious relation to death." The truth is, taking Lowell's poetry as a whole, its most constant preoccupation is with death and loss, mourning and sorrow, nothingness and grief. From the beginning of his career he wrote many elegies—for his ancestors, his relatives, and his contemporaries.

But when the biographer arrives with Lowell at the start of the last decade of his life, he must see that the preoccupation with death and mourning became all consuming. Lowell's last decade was thanatology. All history became a graveyard for his contemplation: the book *History* is a book of the dead, a charnel house of sonnets, for the long dead, the famous and the forgotten dead, the recent dead, for relatives near and far, for friends and acquaintances, for dead parents, for the dying and the daily dead. The book is all self-mourning, Lowell's thanatopsis for himself. Lowell's earliest sense of his own childhood death of self and his later experiences with continuous loss, he consolidated in 1967 into a long wail of anguish. This amounted to his own full-blown version of what A. H. Chapman has called "the concept of the Nemesis." George H. Pollock well describes the idea of Nemesis as a person's belief that

. . . he is destined to repeat in his life the pattern of a significant other person's life which ended in tragedy and catastrophe. The conviction that there is an extensive life-pattern mirroring, even in the correlation of events and ages when they occur, may persist over many years or even an entire lifetime and may form the basis of a "personal myth." The person whose pattern is being followed is usually dead or was

hospitalized, almost always is the father or mother, and the loss occurred during the childhood of the patient. The “nemesis” feeling is partly conscious and is rooted in the patient’s feeling of responsibility for the death or illness of the person whose life he is doomed to imitate. Guilt over hostile or competitive feelings results in symptoms that follow the path of the talion principle of retribution.

Lowell, of course, would have been internally encouraged to believe that catastrophe was cyclical and repetitive because his own mental breakdowns had often followed a cyclical pattern, frequently occurring with the first signs of spring. Intimations of hope came on the wings of despair for Lowell. Deeper and more primitive was the belief that he had been cursed at birth, and thus that the disasters of his generation were hardly more than confirmations of his own now approaching doom. For Lowell, the Nemesis continued to consume his friends and alter egos. Increasingly, his chief interest in the news was in the obituaries. One after another, his earliest ideals, the poets of the previous generation, died. He could scarcely face their deaths with equanimity, for he had founded a large part of his identity on their activities, and his correspondence was full of commentary on their passing. But it was at least “natural” that the older generation should die off. However, when, in the mid-1960’s, his own contemporaries started to go, often from suicide, Lowell felt that something of himself died with them: the whole generation seemed cursed. “I think that I never met anyone who has somehow as much seeped into me,” Lowell wrote of the dead poet Delmore Schwartz. Schwartz had once seemed the most promising poet of his time; in 1966 he died, half forgotten.

Lowell wrote prose obituaries and elegies for his contemporaries in poetry. The theme of each of these pieces is: *Why did we live at all?* Starting in 1967, sonnet after sonnet had the same theme. With reference to each of the dead poets, Lowell offers a different answer—to give expression to horror (Sylvia Plath), to honor nature (Roethke), to capture the essence of the dream world (Schwartz), to save “humor and honor from the everlasting dross” of quotidian life (T. S. Eliot), to survive madness or blindness (Ezra Pound, Wyndham Lewis), to take pleasure in fear (Louis MacNeice), to remain sensual (William Carlos Williams), to mourn, especially in the midst of success (Robert Frost), or even to express ultimate freedom by “suicide, the inalienable right of man” (Berryman).

At the same time, during the final decade of his life, Lowell wrote numerous poems—almost all sonnets—mourning the death of his

parents. In one of his volumes alone there are seven poems of grieving for dead parents. He mourned so often and so publicly in print for his family and friends that hardly a relative or acquaintance seems to have slipped into the grave without an accompanying poem by Lowell.

All but one! For Merrill Moore, the poet who influenced him strongly as a model for the early achievement and acceptance that Lowell himself so much wanted, and Moore the therapist and substitute father who never quite became a father—for Moore there was not a word. Not one . . . or perhaps thousands! In late July of 1967, when Lowell wrote his first sonnet, it was precisely ten years, almost to the day—since Merrill Moore had gone into the hospital for a cancer operation from which he died seven weeks later. Lowell believed that he himself had ten years to live; Moore had died ten years before. In the symmetrical form of this cylindrical history Lowell started to pour out sonnets more like Moore's than like Lowell's own previous work. The poems let Lowell die but gave Moore new birth. Lowell wrote elegies for everyone but the one person whose death he couldn't accept. Moore had saved Bobby's life; now Robert Lowell gave back the favor. He resumed Moore's writing career—so unlike his own.

I am, of course, following out the logic of the communication which Lowell makes in his behavior, while fully recognizing that his motives were unconscious for him, even as he must certainly have been conscious of the resemblance between his new poems (and the massiveness of his production) and Moore's work. Consciously, indeed, he would not have agreed to “kill” himself in order to save Moore's life, to give up his own career in order to let his father-poet resume his. The renunciation of his oedipal victory and his reparation for it in deferred obedience can be clear to *us*, but Lowell could probably not have acted it out with such single-minded devotion had it been merely a conscious wish. It was so momentous in his life because he was so completely unaware of it.

What I have been offering in this third story, then, is a construction in biography; making known what no one—neither historical data, nor even the subject himself—had previously known. Neither documentary detail nor an explicit statement of intentionality on the author's part is likely to appear for confirmation. Yet unless a biography has an iron core of complex chains of conscious and unconscious meaning that are persuasive, and unless these are as organizing in a book as we know them to be in life, a biography will be wooden and unconvincing, as false to art as it would be to life. Though all its “facts” are true, *it can have little reliability as a narrative, without the life of unconscious intention, wish,*

and fantasy. The historical truth of documented history must be governed from two directions in biography—by the truth of the subject’s perspective and by the truth of his unconscious.

My supposed biography of Lowell, then, would do as I have done here—explore the alteration of Lowell’s poetic practice in the arc of the last decade of his life, which took him into the underground of his old losses and griefs, with Moore as his Virgil and the American sonnet as his golden bough.

The biographer must have, then, a variety of shifting commitments toward his materials, allowing his subjects to live as rich a life as possible, despite the gestalt of the biographer’s organizing drive to make his narrative as clear and simple as can be. In my biographical sketch of an episode in Dunbar’s life, I needed only to unearth what previous Dunbar biographers had ignored. In my story of Henry Miller, the biographer has only to find out what Henry Miller himself knew all along. In my story of Lowell, the biographer needs to release from its unconscious bindings the life-preserving, life recreating compulsion to save his “real” father that led him to surrender his own poetic manner and to adopt Moore’s. Theoretically, this could have become conscious in Lowell had he analyzed the compulsion rather than acting it out.

But the biographer must do more. If he is to do his whole job he will also need to illuminate the more cloudy areas of the first years of life—those so important, determining years—of his subject’s existence, and to go, therefore, into developmental experiences that could never be made conscious except as reconstructions based on sound inferences. And this takes me to my fourth story.

THE FOURTH STORY: JOHN DEWEY

At the present time I am writing a biography of John Dewey, arguably America’s greatest philosopher. What follows is a risky, chancy, incomplete speculation into the earliest years of John Dewey’s life, long before his remembering could remember. It is at one and the same time illustrative of how the biographer thinks, and also how, if he is lucky enough, he may gain entry into the always unconscious earliest life of his subject.

I deliberately start with a tiny question, to show how far—and where—it can go in biographical writing. The question can easily be put in the form of a child’s game: “What is wrong with this picture?”



The “picture” is the list of the names of the children of John and Alice Chipman Dewey: Frederick Archibald, Evelyn, Morris, Gordon Chipman, Lucy Alice, Jane Mary and, finally—Sabino.

Sabino! How did it come about that this, the last of Dewey’s children, flourishes in such latinate luxuriousness amid the Anglo-Saxon roll-call of the other names?

In biography, as in life, every question has a simple answer, usually followed by a knot of complex ones that often lead not to an answer, but, more usefully, to a process of knowing. I could (and will) give the simple truth—except that in biography the simple truth is likely to be wrong. And so instead I follow the biographer’s instrument for truth-telling and move again to narratives.

John and Alice named their children with ruthless commemorativity. Frederick’s name combined that of Dewey’s father, Archibald, with Alice’s grandfather’s (her grandparents had raised her); Evelyn’s recalls Alice’s grandmother’s “Evalina.” Morris was named after George Morris, Dewey’s philosophic mentor at Johns Hopkins and Michigan. Gordon Chipman was Alice’s father’s full name. Lucy Alice derives from Dewey’s mother, Lucina Artemisia, and Jane Mary combines the names of the Deweys’ great friends, Jane Addams and her associate Mary Smith.

But *Sabino!* His story, oddly enough, begins with Morris’s. Part of the arrangement which led Dewey to move from Michigan to the University of Chicago was the prospect of having a nine-month leave after an initial term of teaching in the Fall of 1894. This break would provide a good opportunity for the whole family to learn French in Europe, and it was decided that on May 19, as soon as school was out, Alice should sail on the S. S. Manitoba for London with Fred and Evelyn, and begin the *wanderjahr*. Born in October 1892, Morris, it was determined, at only a year and a half, was better left home until the family was settled. He could come over with his father in January 1895, when a family reunion could be effected in Italy. All through the summer and fall of 1894, then, John had little Morris on his hands, and because of this he concentrated all of his parental attention on every little behavior of this one child. Besides, in writing to Fred and Evelyn, he had little that was amusing to say except to describe Morris’s latest developmental adventures. So Dewey’s correspondence is filled with closely observed details of Morris’s life.

Dewey was also completing an article on “The Psychology of Infant Language” based on observations of his three children, and in revising, was looking to Morris for up-to-the-minute confirmations of his theories. “I had a great time from the psychological point of view with Morris

yesterday,” he wrote Alice on September 20, and concluded “that the training of children . . . is one of the exact sciences.” He even wished that “I could begin over again with Fred—I hope I shall never forget the lesson I have learned from Morris.” The sum of all this is that, left alone to observe Morris intently, he fell head over heels in love with the child. He put this indirectly to Alice: Morris, he wrote, “shows how much he misses you by the way he clings to me. . . .When I come in he appreciates me and sticks to me like a clam, so he and I get a good deal of sympathy out of each other.” Later he said that Morris “is the most perfect work of art. . . .”

“Morris has caught up with his physical system, and the state of signs and symbols and dawning memory and expectation is upon him,” John wrote to Alice. “Morris woke up early this morning and after playing with me awhile in bed he climbed out to play outside,” Dewey told Morris’s mother. He continued his account. Following Morris’s departure, Dewey napped and when he awoke he found Morris washing the windows. “Morris,” he said, “almost converts one to Royce’s theory of imitation—save that he is somebody himself”; his imitations are “purely plastic.” He followed the development of Morris’s inquisitiveness: “Now the clock has just struck nine, and he said, ‘Where’s that clock? Want to see tick-tock’ and ran off into the parlor.” He noted Morris’s language experiments: “Morris’s vaccination scab has come off and so now he hunts up a mosquito bite on his leg and says, ‘See tore.’”

But as the months wore on, Dewey’s pleasure in Morris was paralleled by terrible bouts of depression and loneliness; he missed Alice and his other children so much that he was nearly inconsolable. As early as August 5, he wrote, “I think yesterday was the bluest day I have ever spent.” Alice was similarly depressed; thought of Morris, she said, “is the one bright spot . . . that keeps me from feeling a wanderer on the face of the earth.” As soon as the school term was completed, on December 13, 1894, Dewey left Chicago with Morris to board ship in New York, and in due course they met the rest of his family in France. They travelled to Italy, and there, in mid-March, Italy’s reputation for a deadly lack of sanitation proved to be all too true. In Milan, Alice and Evelyn became ill, and Morris came down with diphtheria. In a matter of days he was dead. The trip that had promised such wonders was over. John, who had gotten so close to the boy, was crushed; and all Alice could think of, as she herself recovered, was to get home as soon as possible. Writing to her grandmother, she could strike only one note not filled with gloom: of the hospital where Morris died, she wrote: “The head nurses and Sisters

of Charity and everybody there showed a humanity and simplicity which will always make us seem friends and relations of the Italians.” Aside from that, as one of Dewey’s daughter’s wrote years later, “Morris’s death was a blow from which neither of his parents ever fully recovered.”

Time passed. The ten years that Dewey spent at the University of Chicago was a time of monumental philosophical accomplishment. There he created what William James deemed a new school of distinctively American philosophy. Harvard had thought, but no school, James said; Yale and Cornell had schools, but no thought; but at Chicago Dewey had fused philosophic thought into a movement and created a school of historic importance.

In the spring of 1904, Dewey resigned from Chicago. Prior to joining the faculty at Columbia, he decided to take his family on a second trip to Europe. In the interim, three more children had been born. The oldest, Gordon, was eight years old in 1904, having been born about 18 months after Morris’s death; he helped to console John and Alice for Morris’s loss; he “replaced” Morris, and both his parents doted on him. Two girls, Lucy and Jane, were the younger children.

Back in Chicago, everyone agreed that like Morris, Gordon was a remarkable child, “a mature personality, without precocity,” even at the age of six. The summer of 1904 saw the seven Deweys on the way to Europe once again. This time, even before the Deweys disembarked in Liverpool, disease struck again. Aboard the vessel, which Alice declared “filthy,” the ship’s physician, Dr. Starrett, diagnosed Gordon as having “food poisoning.” He was pretty sick, certainly; immediately upon landing in late July the Deweys brought Gordon to the nearest hospital. John remained with Gordon, while Alice took the younger children out of danger to the city to Chester, where they were met by friends and were soon taken to Ireland, while John and Alice remained in Liverpool.

The bad news came out little by little as Gordon got steadily worse. From Chester, Alice gave Mary Bradshaw the first report: “Gordon is pretty sick. About the other children I am anxious to hear. The fever and other trouble they had in the ship is quite enough to be the beginning of typhoid.” She fretted that symptoms in the other children should be carefully watched for by Mary. When Gordon was definitely diagnosed as having typhoid, her fears for the other children mounted; he, after all, was being taken care of in a good hospital, while they might be increasing their danger by “going about.”

The Deweys took rooms at 5 Harringway, Sifton Park, Liverpool, four miles from the hospital. Within a week it seemed that “Gordon

had turned the corner in the disease.” A Dr. Monserrat, a specialist in children’s diseases, advised that Gordon had a “mild case” of typhoid, though he was still losing weight. His father soon procured copies of *Gulliver’s Travels* and *Hiawatha* and spent days reading to the feverish boy. Meanwhile, happy news came from Ireland that the other children showed no symptoms. At last, a little over three weeks later, Gordon was released from the hospital, and the three proceeded on to Ireland. But on August 30, at Ballinsloe, Gordon had a relapse—“mild” at first, then evidently serious. On September 9th, Dewey uttered his worst fear, that Gordon was “sicker . . . than he was the other time.” Two days later Gordon died suddenly, before the other children, who had gone to England with Mary, could return. “The nervous strain on Mama,” Dewey—himself broken-hearted—wrote the children, “has been great.” Years later Jane wrote that “the blow [to Alice] . . . was so serious that she never fully recovered her former energy.” As for John, even months later he was lamenting that with Gordon’s death “the light went out,” and he was moaning “how much harder and emptier it gets all the time. I don’t know how much longer I am going to be able to hold out.”

Nevertheless, Alice bravely continued their plan of taking the children to the continent to learn languages, while John sailed for New York to begin his teaching duties at Columbia. He was inconsolably depressed. At his new post, he told Alice, “I am minding my own business . . . and not attempting to improve anybody or anything—I’m done with that. . . .” News of Gordon’s death soon reached the Deweys’ friends in Chicago. A memorial meeting was held at Hull House, where Jane Addams made the principal address. Dewey’s former colleague, the philosopher James Tufts, wrote that Gordon was “so quaint and original that we always felt we were coming into the presence of a new and fresh personality when we talked with him.” On a visit to Cambridge, Addams told William James of the event, and on October 9 he wrote to John: “How sad a beginning of your and Mrs. Dewey’s new life. Pray receive the tenderest sympathy of both my wife and myself—there is nothing more to be said in these pathetic situations.”

But there was more to be done. During the fall semester Dewey moped about, interested only in visiting colleagues who had children. He mourned for Gordon, and he missed his living children intensely. As soon as classes were finished, he sailed for Europe and joined his family in Venice. They proceeded southward. And then, in Naples, the strangest sort of event occurred. The Deweys were lunching in a *ristorante* when John’s eye was caught by the sight of a handsome young Italian boy

outside it. He looked about eight years old, Gordon's age. Something about him, some grace, overwhelmed the philosopher with a longing for Gordon. John Dewey acted (as he often did, despite his disclaimers) impulsively. He beckoned to the boy, questioned him, fed him, and eventually, before the afternoon turned to evening, marched him off to his home and concluded with the boy's mother to take him into the Dewey family and raise him in the United States! And so, Sabino—rechristened “Bino”—became Dewey's last child. Dewey never regretted this moment. Three months later he told Alice, “I am glad I followed my feelings for once.”

Sabino soon acted exactly like a youngest son of the Deweys, for within a short time he too came down with a severe illness. But he proved stronger than Morris and Gordon. He recovered, and thereafter exhibited what Jane later named “his unflagging gaiety, courage, . . . and capacity for making friends, [which] brought comfort to the bereaved family.” Back at Columbia for the spring term, John spent the time away from his children in a depressed mood. “I haven't seen any little children for a long time and I am just hungry for them,” he wrote to Evelyn in March. As soon as all the family returned to New York in the spring, John began to shower Sabino with care, taking him to the dentist and buying him new American—New England—clothes, such as overalls and moccasins, while with considerable zest Evelyn became his big sister and Lucy his little one.

Well, then, this is the solution to the puzzle of how a Scots-Irish New England philosopher came to have a child called Sabino. But, after all, the “solution” doesn't really hold together; for it raises more new questions than it solves old ones. The main new question, of course, is: Why is it that Dewey acted as he did?—and so precipitously?—“for once.” How was it that he cast away caution and threw aside all obstacles in carrying out the almost inconceivable idea of taking a new child, a total stranger, into his family? What made him come up with the idea of replacing Morris and Gordon with a new child?

For the answer to *that* question we must go back much earlier than 1904, and far from Naples, back to a time before Dewey himself was born, and all the way to Burlington, Vermont, where his mother and father married and started to raise a family.

In 1856, Archibald Sprague Dewey, grocer, and Lucina Artimisia Rich Dewey, his wife, became the parents of a boy they called John Archibald, naming him after Archibald and his family. Two years later, another boy,

Davis Rich, named after Lucina's father, was born. Both boys grew satisfactorily until the 17th of January, 1859, when a tragic accident occurred that was reported in the Burlington *Daily Free Press* the next day:

Distressing Accident.—We learn, with pain, that our friend and townsman, A. S. Dewey, has lost his oldest child by a distressing casualty. The child, a fine little boy, between two and three years old, was fatally scalded last evening, by falling backward into a pail of hot water. The customary appliances of sweet oil and cotton batting was made, when, by some accident the cotton took fire, and burst into flames upon the person of the child. The last mishap added to the pain of the little sufferer, as well as to his parents' distress, and death resulted (from the scalding principally, as we understand), about seven o'clock this morning. The afflicted parents have the sincere and tearful sympathy of the community, in their sudden and most painful bereavement.

It was, indeed, a most horrible accident and, with the combustion of the wrappings meant to soothe him but destined to further torment him, an excruciating death for the child and a horrible experience for the parents. Yet, no longer than a week following this accident another quite different event occurred: Lucina conceived a child. Forty weeks later, on October 20, 1859, she gave birth to a boy. His parents named him John. Simply John—John Dewey, his dead brother's name.

Only a few days after the death of his oldest brother, this new baby was conceived. He was duly named John, after the dead child. Clearly, he was a replacement child for the dead one.

Psychologically, the predicament of the child who is consciously or unconsciously destined to replace a child who has died is a severe one. Especially if the new child is given the same name, the situation can be filled with conflict. Consider what is at stake. The new child often has to bear, on the one hand, the expectations that the parents had for the dead child. On the other hand he may also direct at him or her the pent-up negative emotions of the parents about the previous child's death.

From the first, the replacement child is expected to "make up" for the loss of the initial child. He or she must be completely successful; parents even state, at times, that he must accomplish everything that his namesake was prevented from achieving. More specifically, to satisfy the unconscious wishes of the parents, he must develop in exactly the same way as the dead sibling had. If John Archibald had slept, crawled, eaten, or otherwise behaved in a certain way, then John would be unconsciously expected to do the same. In a very special way, the replacement child is needed by parents as a way of *undoing* the first tragedy by redoing the

life all over, in a “second chance” that would be successful. That is, the first duty of the replacement child is not to live for himself, but for the dead sibling and the living parents. His or her life is consecrated by all to the acting out of an altruistic ideal—to live for others.

At the same time, parents inevitably experience anxiety toward the replacement child. Any sign of illness—inevitable in infants—will bring on the fear that this child will suffer the fate of the other. Very early, parents communicate to the replacement that he or she may be fragile, even doomed. On the other hand, once the child lives past the term of the one who is replaced, parents may convey a sense of giddy hopefulness that the child is the darling of fate. Thus, replacement children are likely to exhibit the strange combination of caution, derived from their earliest parental experiences; and of ecstatic release, from the later ones.

The overriding fear of the replacement child is the fear of separation, abandonment. The older child was forever separated from the beloved parents by death; the replacement fears the same loss—to be orphaned, forever cut off from parents or all sources of affection. He is likely to hunger for closeness and to react with considerable depression to any interference in intimacy; any separations, even short ones, are likely to be anguishing. The replacement child is likely to be cautious in making visible demands on loved ones, for fear that such demands will not be met. It is hard for the replacement child to break attachments and to form new ones; but once an attachment *is* broken, it is not likely to be resumed; instead, it will be left behind.

Derivatively, the replacement child, too, is likely to pick up the stain of any traces of guilt directed his way, and to react by attempts to make restitution for the fate of the elder sibling. On the other hand, once he lives past the age of the dead child, the replacement child may breathe freely and act as if omnipotent: having escaped the fated period, what further fate could pursue him?

Clinical experience and psychological research establish such conditions concerning the replacement child in general; but in the case of any individual a unique pattern will of course emerge, even as it will possess ties to the general model.

In my own practice I have treated one patient who was a replacement child; as a clinical supervisor, I have overseen the treatment of another by a fourth year resident. My own patient was an extremely successful businessman who was still ambivalently dependent upon his parents for their approval, which they seldom gave. The shadow of his older same-name sibling hung over his every move: impelled to work extremely hard

and to achieve a great success, he still remained secretly convinced that he could never match the success which his older brother would have accomplished had he lived. Suicidal thoughts were often in his mind: should he kill himself, his unconscious told him, he would be loved and idealized, just as his older brother was, by the parents. But he could not summon the courage to kill himself, so he felt he could not succeed even at death. He was doomed to success, yet he considered himself a failure.

The other patient was a severe borderline, and was often hospitalized. His older brother had died in an accident at the age of five, and my supervisory case was literally required by his mother and father to “follow in your brother’s footsteps”: he was given his brother’s clothes and even his socks and shoes to wear. The pressure was too great and he wanted to kill his parents who, he believed, wished that *he*, instead of his brother, had died. In actuality he treated his parents indifferently, but displaced his hostility toward them onto others, and of course most of all onto himself.

John Dewey’s path was neither of these. This was partly determined by a surprising action of his father around the time when John reached the age at which John Archibald had died. A particularly crucial time for the replacement child—and for his parents—comes when the time approaches at which the elder child died. Parents will give the new child signals of its arrival by subtle signs, and sometimes quite explicitly name the anniversary, as it approaches, in an anxiety-ridden “countdown.” Unconsciously, the parents grow increasingly anxious that the living child will duplicate the destiny of the deceased.

How telling, then, was the decision which Archibald Sprague Dewey made as the second birthday of John Dewey and the anniversary of John Archibald’s death approached. The Civil War had broken out in April 1861. In the summer of 1861, Archibald suddenly sold his grocery business and enlisted as quartermaster in the First Vermont Cavalry. In the wink of an eye he was gone, joining the Union army in northern Virginia with his brigade. He had separated himself from the domestic destiny by plunging into the national tragedy. He would not be around for John’s second birthday.

This action of Archibald’s had the effect of throwing John and his mother intimately together while inevitably distancing him from his father, all the more easily idealized because distant. In all outward forms the relations between father and son thereafter were respectful but, as we shall see, there was always an affective gap between them. John’s remark, when he later filled out a form for inclusion in a cyclopedia of national biography, that his father was “noteworthy” for “wit” and “geniality” has

a condemnation underneath its commendation. Archibald was awkward with his son and used his wit to keep him at arm's length when intimacy threatened too closely. This is perhaps nowhere better signaled than in a very strange passage in a letter from Archibald to John of October 21, 1885, the day after John's 26th birthday. Archibald wrote, rather pointedly at first: "I didn't forget yesterday—the anniversary of your burglarious entrance into the family circle, but the weather was so fine that I did not like to lay aside the spade for the pen. . . . If mother's correspondence don't miscarry you will receive a trifling reminder that we both thought of you." In addition to the suggestions that Archibald *had* forgotten his son's birthday, or that the weather was too fine to trouble himself with writing, or that their remembrance of him would be appropriately symbolized by something "trifling," is the odd word "burglarious." John had come like a burglar into the family circle, stealing a place that did not belong to him! What word or metaphor would better convey that he was a replacement child who would never have been born had not his father's true son and namesake, John Archibald, died?

The intensification of the Oedipal crisis which would have been occasioned by sudden separation from father and markedly increased intimacy with mother is obliquely conveyed by Dewey's earliest memory, which precisely concerns the first night he spent with his father—in 1864—after their long separation. He stored up this memory for a long time and did not put it into words until 1931, when a friend asked him emphatically about his childhood memories of Easter, and then it tumbled out: "I can't remember anything about my Easter childhood," he stated, and associated for a few sentences until he arrived at a recollection of Christmas:

The Christmas I remember best was one when I was four years old I think; my father was stationed in West Virginia in the war, and mother took us down to spend a winter there, and one of the few things I remember is waking up and seeing this bed across the room, it seemed a mile, and then getting some things; one of them was a little wooden churn. Afterwards my mother told [me], it must have been many years [later], that she thought we would be so disappointed, because it was so impossible to get things there, and yet how happy we were with what we got. . . .

Ambivalent feelings of alienation—mother and father's sleeping together, separately from him, in a bed that seems "a mile" away; mixed with feelings of joy at receiving father's gifts again, are merged in this recollection.

Certainly, in later years it was mother's gifts of emotional sincerity that most moved and influenced John, while his father kept him distant with wit, a gift that John never acquired. "I am [,] your father," Archibald closed one of his letters, immediately adding: "Bear the burden manfully." But his mother petted him and fretted about him. All during his first year at Johns Hopkins, she wanted to hear from him every week, she was anxious that he be sure to come home for Christmas, she was worried about his health—especially the latter. She still had not lost the haunting fear that the replacement child would die. With great seriousness, if not rebuke, she demanded of him on February 2, 1883: "What is the reason we do not hear from you—not a word this week. Have you taken any precautions with regard to smallpox? If you have not—will you *please* do so *at once*? Do not think dear John that it is any light matter to laugh at. Your landlady's ideas are no doubt good as far as they go, but [they] do not cover the whole ground. Dirt is not the only evil in the world, Carlyle and your landlady to the contrary."

Where, then, does this lead with regard to the question of what possessed John Dewey to conscript an eight or nine year old Italian boy into his family? He was moved to do so by his grief, of course, and his wish to reverse reality—and this led him to the doubtless unconscious but instantaneous conclusion that if he himself had long ago assuaged his parents' grief by replacing the dead boy, John Archibald, then by adopting a child to replace Morris and Gordon he could bring comfort to Alice and himself. The child would be Gordon's age and would come from Italy where Morris had died a year or so before Sabino was born. John had replaced John Archibald and Gordon had replaced Morris; and now Sabino would replace Morris and Gordon. Despite printed claims to the contrary, Dewey never actually executed legal documents to effect the adoption of Sabino officially. He did better: he simply took him into the family, as if he had, by *fiat*, given birth to Sabino, fully formed at eight years of age. He was not legally adopted: he just *was*, even as he *became*, a full member of the family, at once.

This said, the inquiry into Sabino scarcely comes to an end. If Dewey's "adoption" of a replacement child were only the concrete acting out of the "solution" which his own parents had "found" to their despair, it would be interesting in itself in the exhibition of the dominance of the repetition compulsion in the psyche. But the replacement syndrome accounted for a great deal in Dewey's life, career, and philosophical developments. The psychology of the replacement child provided Dewey with the special turn to his personality which, as time and the place where

he operated as a philosopher allowed, gave him the kind of inner experience that imputed a distinctive turn to his philosophy.

Without making a minute demonstration of his philosophic progress article by article and book by book, I can safely assert, nonetheless, that the distinctive features of Dewey's philosophy involved the following propositions: that logic and philosophic inquiry are instrumental—that is, designed to create and to continue a process of thought; that thought should flow into action; that all thought and action were contingent and that life involved continuous risk, not certainty; that thought-turned-into-action naturally flowed into social life, experience, and chance-laden activity; that education is the best test of philosophy; and that social change could be its consequence. Dewey writes in “The Practical Character of Reality”: “Better it is for philosophy to err in active participation in the living struggles and issues of its own age and times than to maintain an immune monastic impeccability, without relevancy and bearing in the generating ideas of its contemporary present.” He knew that there was as great a likelihood of failure as success; for “the pathos of unfulfilled expectation, the tragedy of defeated purpose and ideals, the catastrophes of accident, are the commonplaces of all comment on the human scene.” He told a female friend who asked him to state simply what he meant by his book *The Quest for Certainty*, from which the last quotation came, “Well, the sum and substance is, there isn't *any certainty*.”

This philosophy offers several nice parallels to the psychology of the replacement child, who lives in a risky world—as a survivor, the darling of fate; but just as likely as his sibling to be doomed; as a person whose life is not entirely his own, but who instead has a mission to live for others—his sibling, his parents, and (by extension) for society, especially for the disappointed, doomed, outcast and broken in society. He is ready to live adventurously, to break old attachments and form new ones; but he is also likely to be cautious and refuse to follow starry panaceas, utopian ideologies, and wild schemes. He will keep his commitments until they prove radically disappointing.

Such in fact was the character of Dewey's philosophy and the dispositions that guided Dewey's life. His experience gave him a special empathy for the second best, the second-class citizen, the loser in society. He was writing out of the confused, risk-filled but hopeful experience of the replacement child when he wrote to “My dear, dear children” on August 5, 1894: “and remember that we belong to the common people. You must get strong in your bodies as well as in your minds so you can

help. There are so many, many things all mixed up together that it is hard to tell what to do. It is like trying to walk straight in a dark room where everything is scattered about.” It was the same when he wrote to Alice in 1886 that reading historical accounts of how badly factory workers had been treated made him want “to indulge in a little . . . dynamiting.” It was the same, during the deep economic depression of the winter of 1893–94, when he contemplated the “frightful” “misery” of the poor and homeless; or when he castigated Pullman for inhumane treatment of the strikers.

More personally and privately, the passion and hidden hopes of the replacement child appear in his letters to Alice, where the remarkable, almost unthought-of possibility that he could be loved just for himself alone blossomed into the most astonishing outpouring of love and yearning to be loved still more. The most surprising aspect of Dewey’s personal, unpublished correspondence is its display of unmitigated ecstasy of love for Alice. As a girl of five she herself had been orphaned. Following her mother’s death, her father had literally wasted away in depression over his wife’s demise. When they met and fell in love, the orphan and the replacement child rivalled each other in initial depression, followed by the overflow of loving emotions. Hardly had Dewey met her when he was hinting to her that he now felt a stranger in his old surroundings. Then, before long, this University of Michigan philosopher who was writing professionally on Leibnitz, was also writing such letters as the following, of New Year’s Eve, 1885:

For, my own sweet one, with whom and in whom I am one, and without whom I am but want, and a longing, and a reaching out for something, your love is eternally new, because it unchangeably is. My own sweet beloved, love of my heart, when are you coming back? When I can keep myself busy all the time, you only fill all my heart, but the minute I think of what is in my heart you fill my being so full that, Darling I cannot endure it unless you come to me and let me pour back into you, the source of all love, in which you have, of your sweetness and infinite riches, flooded me. . . . I must again lose myself in the depths of your love and in the joyous peace of your presence. . . .

Letter after letter from John, and back from Alice, poured out in like manner, and these continued over years with no waning of emotion. They reveal, too, the hopes and fears of the replacement child. Even Dewey’s dreams alternated between blissful wish-fulfillment ones and those centered on the pangs of loss. “Darling, I had such a beautiful dream of you last night,” he wrote on April 13, 1886; “I dreamed you were back and

kissed me.” But also: “I had a nightmare last night. I dreamed that upon my return to Ann Arbor I found Wilcox seated at my left hand in your place.”

One more extraordinarily provocative episode occurred in Dewey’s old age that suggests how the syndrome of the replacement child can continue down the years, unmodified. In 1946, nineteen years after Alice’s death, John Dewey was remarried—to Roberta Lowitz, a woman whose family he had known even before he met Alice. Mrs. Sabino Dewey was matron of honor; and Sabino, along with Fred and Jane, attended the ceremony. Sabino, the replacement child, had been the only one to follow in Dewey’s footsteps, carrying on his work in elementary education, teaching in Dewey progressive schools, and designing and manufacturing “education equipment for constructive activities and scientific experimentation.” He was a *real* Dewey, after all.

Previous to the wedding Jane had lived with her father in his Fifth Avenue apartment, but she moved out when the bride moved in.

So now, again, all his children were gone. He was alone. And what did Dewey think about? The twice-told story appears for a third time! This eighty-eight-year-old man, this philosopher, suddenly found himself deeply concerned with the plight of orphans in post-war Europe. And within the next two years . . . he adopted two Belgian orphans, a complete Noah’s Ark of a family. First a boy, then a girl. The boy was eight years old. He was named—John.

Of course, Dewey’s life and philosophy were not ruled monomaniacally by the syndrome of the replacement child. Anyone would have to acknowledge the influence of Dewey’s mother on his social conception of philosophy, for instance. Her obituary in the *Addams Mission Monthly* makes clear that long before her son did, she concerned herself with relief of the poor and protection of the unfortunate. The settlement house movement and the person of Jane Addams certainly affected him. So did the Hebartian movement in educational philosophy. He was saved intellectually by his teacher Morris’s discovery of Hegel, and then he worked through Hegel by way of psychology, and through psychology by way of William James. I could, of course, go on at great length about the varied influences upon John Dewey. Each of these and a hundred other threads need to be followed fully before the large picture of Dewey will emerge. But the influence of his role as a replacement child will have to be worked in with all the rest, even though, for Dewey himself, this could never have become conscious, since it started even before his birth, and it was wholly pregenital and preverbal.

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

In my four narratives I have taken the biographer's path into the varied theoretical issues of historical truth and narrative reliability. The concepts of "truth" and "reliability" are the foundations upon which biography is based. Philosophically speaking, there exist two theories of truth and reliability: truth through correspondence, and truth through coherence. The first holds that truth consists of the fundamental theory of the natural sciences, which seeks to discern the unambiguous truths of nature. Documentary history, as I have traced it out in Dunbar's life and in the story of Miller's *Opus Pistorum*, involves the search for truth according to the correspondence theory. Either Dunbar was in Indianapolis at such and such a time, or he was not. Either Miller wrote *Opus Pistorum*, or some parts of it, or he did not. If we describe the object "*Opus Pistorum*" as "authored by Caresse Crosby," we have an exact, unambiguous correspondence.

But the stories told of Robert Lowell and John Dewey involve the search for insight founded upon the coherence theory of truth. This theory holds that, as Hilary Putnam writes, truth is based on the "*internalist perspective*," for the ground of truth is to be found in the human mind itself, not in mind-independent or discourse-independent "states of affairs." As Charles Hanly puts it, in the coherence theory "minds give nature meaning." When Freud wrote that "a number of very remarkable, disconnected facts are brought together . . . into a consistent whole" in the thesis of *Totem and Taboo*, he was clearly relying upon the coherence theory of truth. The biographer, in a large part of his work, does the same. In my narratives two different versions of coherence theory operate. The truth of Robert Lowell's change in his poetic manner is based upon the coherence of his internal dynamics as these can be discerned in the unfolding of his life. The truth of Dewey's activities as a replacement child is based on psychological theory, as derived from clinical practice, developmental psychobiology, and child observation. It has applied coherence; its central power comes from outside the study of Dewey's psyche, whose origins are of course inaccessible.

I take it that in the biographical enterprise there are a minimum of two minds at work, the biographer's and the subject's, and that each is in a metaphoric sense "intending," and in a real sense "operating" so as to interpret the other. The biographer who has carefully examined his own transferences toward his subject experiences the subject's life as forcing its coherence upon his own mind, even as he aims actively to see the

coherence that exists in the subject. Two minds—both of which must of course be made to live in the biographer—exist in the biographical dialogue.

That the biographer discerns coherence in a life does not mean he has *put* it there. The task of the biographer is to do, with endless patience and in massive installments, what I have done in my four little stories: to look for the truths of correspondence and the truths of coherence, and to judge and balance each kind of truth with the other. For many centuries, perhaps since man first began to speak, people have been telling stories about their fellow men; and it seems likely that they will continue to do so until, as Faulkner put it, the last “ding-dong” of time. Perhaps biography was our first way of getting to know the kinds of truth that exist, and maybe it will remain so, as long as we continue to be interested in the truths of man.



What I have outlined here as models of humanistic, communitarian inquiry—curiosity, a drive for accuracy, a focus on intention and motivation, and an awareness of unconscious strivings—are, I believe, intrinsic and essential in all human inquiry, not only in biography, but in the study of politics, ideas, history, or society.

