

Highlanders killed at Ticonderoga, or Jennie McCrea murdered by the Iroquois during the French and Indian War, will do the turn and make the past present for those who seek it out. Needless to say, those who are thus “prepared” will be able to hear the “Rebel Yell”—and to imagine such outcries and shouting and the feelings they reflect—that “rage of belief, the tears, the mystery,” better than “all that’s so much magnified and near.”

In “Late Answer: A Civil War Seminar,” memory is treated not as a distinctively Southern faculty but as precisely the opposite: what a Southern poet believes that *all* Americans require if their civilization is to retain anything like continuity, a sense of its own origins in the colonial experience and of all the unfolding that has brought it into its deracinated present. Nations of men that neglect to cultivate the faculty turn into what Allen Tate describes as “provincials in time” and are thus rendered so individual and separate as to be forced into recapitulating the human experience from its start when they arise each morning and greet the day. For the only alternative, says this formula, is mere nostalgia. And it will not suit modernity or postmodernity to begin politics there. In this context, mourning is expected to foster memory, which in a practical sense is quite plausible. Mourning results in “historic empathy,” as we recall what we have lost. The love between parents, children, and grandchildren is the basis of all tradition. That and the affection for tested principles and familiar, friendly places and

ways connected with our nurture—a political philosophy recommended in Davidson’s *The Attack on Leviathan: Essays on Regionalism and Nationalism in the United States*. By this matrix is fostered a reconstitutive memory that is not “shut in many books.” Davidson recommends it to all as a basis for the pious life—not just to Southerners or Americans. For he knows from his careful study of the history of poetry that nothing can replace the work of *memoria* when there is a long continuity of life led according to a particular style—another aspect of the “freehold” cherished by the old man, the memory-keeper, whose recommendation concludes Davidson’s “Hermitage.”

In his essay “Yeats and the Centaur,” Donald Davidson discusses the Irish poet’s image of modern art as a centaur, “finding in the popular lore its back and strong legs.” But the rest of the centaur, Davidson insists, is another matter. It is an unnatural beast, a hybrid given to unattractive or monstrous behavior. And if one part of it is strong in back and legs, the other component has no business being attached to that strength. Yeats knew old Ireland, its lore and literature. But he also knew and took seriously William Blake, Neoplatonism, Gnosticism, all sorts of occultism, mythography, the theory of automatic writing, and the Society of the Golden Dawn. The difference between the man of tradition (the voice of Irish memory who asked “Who goes with Fergus?”) and the fellow who wanted to “sail to Byzantium”—along with the way those two sometimes appeared together in a single Yeats poem—Davidson emphasized in teaching the great Irish poet in his class on modern poetry. This difference is also mentioned in his poem “Meditation on Literary Fame”:

Yeats, consorting with moon-demons, heard  
Images only, clutched at the abstract Bird  
Of charred philosophy until he lost  
Usheen, whom once he knew, and his dear land,  
And all the Celtic host.

Which of course says the same thing that Davidson maintained in his Yeats essay.

Once the poet’s relation to his tradition is broken by the private enthusiasms that have so much interested modern artists (who wish to think of themselves as high priests or aristocrats not as memory-keepers), it becomes difficult to address anything but the coterie that fosters these isolating enthusiasms and encourages his alienation. Because of what he thought about memory, Davidson stood at as great a distance as possible from the modern stereotype of the alienated artist. Yeats (whose achievement Davidson honored) both did and did not assume that posture. The calculus of memory pulls the artist back and reconciles him to an essentially inherited role, to a world where some things are merely given (but not what we do with them), a world of mystery and manners. But the old patterns in the great quilt of life tell a true story—of our limits and of what is predictable:

Happy the land where men hold dear  
Myth that is truest memory,  
Prophecy that is poetry.

That knowledge, too, is part of the “freehold” to which we either hold fast or lose our way.

## Eurocentric Rag

by Robert Mezey

I make a lot of money and I have a perfect tan;  
I wear Armani clothing, I’m a very fancy Dan;  
I’ve dominated women ever since the world began—  
Yes, I’m phallocentric, logocentric, Eurocentric Man!

Oppression is my favorite sport, I play it with élan,  
And I scorn the weak and womanish, the sloth, the  
also-ran;  
Let them forage for their dinner from my silver garbage  
can  
And thank their generous benefactor, Eurocentric Man.

I’ve conquered everybody from Peru to Hindustan  
And I make ’em speak my language, though they very  
rarely can;  
I’m the king, the pope, the CEO, the chieftain of the  
clan—  
Yes, I’m phallogo, logophallo, Eurocentric Man!

The beauty with the hothouse grapes, the young boy  
with the fan  
Are only minor luxuries, like my Silver Cloud sedan;  
I bet you’re very curious about my Master Plan,  
For I’m your nightmare, haunting, taunting, Eurocentric  
Man!

# Writer and Community

by Fred Chappell



Most writers feel honored by literary prizes—in the way I feel so honored by the award of the T.S. Eliot prize—whether they accept them or not. At the same time, many writers share the wish that their vocation could be carried on anonymously. By the time they have become suitably proficient at their art and have established a proper reputation among their peers and critics, they are no longer compelled by personal glory. They have often tired a little of the notion of fame. A decade or two of essaying the spectacular but exhausting Parnassian slope will do some serious damage to self-pride. This vanity is then fairly annihilated when we raise our eyes to observe how much farther up the ridges our ancestors have established themselves and with what ease they seem to have done so.

The advantages of anonymity are attractive. In the first place, if a critic had no name to point his cruelly barbed shafts at, the guilty writer could escape with a minimum of public embarrassment. He would still writhe and whimper in private, but at least his mother would not have to know the truth; he could choose some other anonymous work, one that had received only praise that rang like silver bells, and claim that one as his own. The other advantage of anonymity is that it would prevent scrutiny of the writer's personal life.

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I do not propose to talk at length about the private lives of authors; they really do not bear much looking into. If writers were as well-known as film stars, and if the tabloids were interested in any dead people besides Elvis, the *National Enquirer* could fill its pages for years to come with stories of the follies and deviltries of scribblers. I could contribute quite a few myself—except I know that I would receive payment in kind, doubled and redoubled, stories of my own idiocies and misdemeanors that I could not deny. I suppose that writers' lives are not generally more sordid or dishonorable than those of some of their friends and neighbors, but I have to tell you that I would not care to have mine examined in public. I would feel more embarrassed, and with pretty good reason, than those sexually confused people who appear so compulsively on the television talk shows. Yet finally, I believe that a writer's private life ought to be made public. I have always tried to share the conviction of my compeers that one's work is what counts, that one's private life is irrelevant to his artistic aspirations and accomplishments, but I no longer feel entirely justified in doing so.

Please understand that I am not advocating that writers uncloset great bundles of their dirty linen and begin to soap it up. I am only trying to approach the vexing problem of the writer's relationship to his community. I believe very strongly that a writer has a duty to belong to his community and to join in actively with its concerns as time and opportunity permit. And if one of the stages toward communal acceptance is the admission and demonstration that writers are only poor mis-