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CONRAD RICHTER'S OHIO TRILOGY: ITS IDEAS, THEMES, AND RELATIONSHIP TO LITERARY TRADITION

by
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CHAPTER I

CONRAD RICHTER: NOVELIST AND PHILOSOPHER

In 1936, Conrad Richter--then forty-six years old--published a collection of his Western short stories in a single volume entitled Early Americana. This publication marked the beginning for Richter of a lengthy and distinguished career as a writer of short stories and novels about American backgrounds. For the past quarter of a century, Richter has quietly and stubbornly forged for himself a respectable place in American literature, and his twelve major works of prose fiction (I exclude from consideration nearly a score of short stories which have appeared chiefly in The Saturday Evening Post and Atlantic Monthly) represent solid achievement, particularly in the genre of the historical narrative.

In addition to Early Americana, he has written four novels also set in the Southwest: The Sea of Grass (1937), one of the best Western novelettes about the historical conflict between the cattleman and the dirt farmer in arid New Mexico; Tacey Cromwell (1942), a moving and realistic tale of a reformed prostitute; and The Lady (1957), which Carlos Baker has praised as a most "memorable novel, fully worthy of a distinguished author." Richter's later novels of the wilderness frontier, set in the pioneer times of Ohio and Pennsylvania,

include the Ohio trilogy--The Trees (1940), The Fields (1946), and The Town (1950)--and two less successful novels, The Free Man (1943), and The Light in the Forest (1953).

But Richter is not limited to fiction of the frontier. Three of his more recent novels are set in the time of his youth and young manhood: Always Young and Fair (1947), The Waters of Kronos (1960), and A Simple Honorable Man (1962), the last two part of an unfinished autobiographical trilogy. For currently he is at work on a sequel--not necessarily in chronology, but certainly in theme--to his latest two novels. Their favorable reception indicates that Richter is far from the twilight of his strength as a novelist, that the powers of his creative imagination are as yet undiminished. Indeed, there is reason to believe that his latest trilogy, when completed and viewed in its proper perspective, may stand as one of his most remarkable achievements.

Richter's literary accomplishments have not gone unnoticed. Particularly has his historical fiction won for him distinctive honors. In addition to various medals for literary achievement, and an honorary Litterarum Doctorate, he has won the Pulitzer Prize for The Town, and the National Book Award for The Waters of Kronos.[1]

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[1]In 1942 he received the Gold Medal for Literary Achievement from the Society of Libraries of New York University. Susquehanna University awarded him an Honorary Litt. Doctorate in 1944, and in 1947 he received the Ohioana Library Medal.

To win literary prizes is, of course, not always a reliable index to literary merit. In my opinion, the novelists who have received the Pulitzer Prize have not always

This is not to say that Richter's works have been best sellers. He has told me in private correspondence that his novels have not sold well (perhaps most novelists share this complaint), and although A. A. Knopf cannot release its current publication statistics, the total number of copies of the trilogy sold at the time The Town was awarded the Pulitzer Prize made it clear that the trilogy would not set any startling publication records.[2] At the same time, Richter's fiction scarcely represents a commercial failure. The demand for his novels has been, if not large, at least steady (The Trees had reached its twelfth printing by 1959), and every one of his major works is still in print, including the twenty-six-year-old Early Americana. This is a record some novelists might envy.

Winning awards and keeping in print obviously are no real clues to a novelist's enduring merits and significance.

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received it for their most significant works. Willa Cather's One of Ours and Louis Bromfield's Early Autumn are cases in point. Of the trilogy, The Trees is probably the most deserving of literary recognition. It is the novel which Richter himself feels is the most alive. As a Pulitzer winner, Richter joins such good company as Edith Wharton, Pearl Buck, John Steinbeck, Ellen Glasgow, John Hersey, James Gould Cozzens, and Ernest Hemingway. I might also note that the Pulitzer committee's choices over the years have included five of the six American Nobel Prize winners: Sinclair Lewis (although he refused the Pulitzer Prize), Pearl Buck, William Faulkner, Ernest Hemingway, and recently John Steinbeck.

Winners of the National Book Awards for fiction include such novelists as Nelson Algren, William Faulkner (twice), James Jones, Saul Bellow, and John O'Hara.

[2]In the first eleven years, The Trees had sold 21,536 copies; in five years The Fields had sold 16,757 copies; and in one year The Town had sold 13,436 copies. (Publishers Weekly, May 12, 1951, p. 1960).

My thought in mentioning the above data was simply to present some notion of Richter's general status as a professional author. More important for our consideration here is Richter's reception by the critics.

Reviews have not only been favorable, but they have been generally perceptive of Richter's chief skills and talents as a novelist. His favorable reception began with Early Americana. The early reviewers perceived that here was an "admirably trained intellect with fine perception of character reproducing impressions of life," an artist at transforming historical materials, who showed promise with his "finely drawn studies of character" against a background of "skillful atmospheric restraint."[3]

As his fiction grew, critics came to realize his talents were not restricted to Western stories. Richter is "limited neither by one region nor by one fictional type," writes John T. Flanagan.[4] The publication of the Ohio trilogy, of course, insured Richter's literary status. These are "rich and satisfyingly earthy books," says Edward Wagenknecht. "They pulse from beginning to end with the passion of the land, the

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[3]See J. C. Finger, "The Old Southwest," Saturday Review of Literature, August 8, 1936, p. 7, and E. L. Walton, "Pioneer Tales from the West," New York Herald Tribune Books, August 2, 1936, p. 6.

[4]"Conrad Richter: Romancer of the Southwest," Southwest Review, XLIII (Summer 1958), 190. Note: Flanagan believes Richter can be compared to Willa Cather. He finds Richter's novels of the Southwest to be "romance in the Hawthornian sense: while not encouraging a false picture of the human heart, nevertheless allowing the writer to mellow, deepen, enrich the atmosphere in any way which would contribute to the desired goal" (p. 190).

flesh, and the spirit."[5] The general approval these novels evoked is expressed by Dorothy Greenwald's review of The Trees: "No detail is out of place, no word jars, no episode seems forced or ill-considered. Language, incident, character, mood--the writer's imagination has fused them all. The result is whole and complete, a serene, beautiful and moving book."[6]

Fellow novelists, too, have seen much to admire in Richter's fiction. Louis Bromfield writes:

> I doubt that any one writing today in this country is closer in understanding and treatment of its pioneer life than Conrad Richter. . . He has that gift--the first and most important in a novelist--of creating for the reader a world as real as the one in which he lives, a world which the reader enters on reading the first page and in which he remains until the last.[7]
>
> Not one of [his] characters is dull, for the author has that power of good novelists which finds interest in everything, so that he is able to make even the bore an illuminating study of boredom.[8]

Walter D. Edmonds, speaking of The Trees, says, "Nothing very grand happens in it, but when you finish it you will have lived in its time . . . I would have given an arm to have written it myself."[9]

Richter's most recent fiction has continued to be warmly received. The Waters of Kronos, although criticized by

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[5] Cavalcade of the American Novel (New York, 1952), p. 437.

[6] "Forest of Ohio," Boston Evening Transcript, March 2, 1940, p. 1.

[7] "A Fine Novel of Pioneers in Ohio," New York Herald Tribune Weekly Book Review, March 31, 1946, p. 3.

[8] "Another Volume in Mr. Richter's Fine Frontier Saga," New York Herald Tribune Book Review, April 23, 1950, p. 5.

[9] "A Novelist Takes Stock," Atlantic Monthly, CLXXII (July 1941), 77.

some for being too portentous and privately mystical, has been enthusiastically welcomed. Coleman Rosenberger writes, "Conrad Richter remains too little recognized for what he of a certainty is--one of the finest creative talents in American fiction. . . I know of nothing comparable to The Waters of Kronos among American novels."[10] And A Simple Honorable Man, in the words of Richter's publishers, "has had magnificent reviews."[11] David Dempsey writes of it, "A paean to goodness, this is a tender and beautiful book."[12]

Critical attention to Richter's literary accomplishments, considering the remarkably consistent welcome and praise his novels have received from well-qualified reviewers over the years, has not, in my opinion, done complete justice to his talent. The few really scholarly essays on his works have been perceptive, and remarks such as Bruce Sutherland's that Richter is "one of the greatest of . . . modern humanists" to write historical fiction,[13] and such as Orville Prescott's that Richter is one of America's "most rewarding contemporary writers,"[14] show that in some quarters he is highly esteemed. Most critics who have cared to consider him seriously have

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[10] "Mr. Richter's Magic Touch," New York Herald Tribune Book Review, April 17, 1960, p. 1.

[11] Correspondence to me, May 16, 1962.

[12] "In the Footsteps of the Nazarene," Saturday Review, April 28, 1962, p. 19.

[13] "Conrad Richter's Americana," New Mexico Quarterly Review, XV (Winter 1945), 413.

[14] In My Opinion (New York, 1952), p. 145.

been impressed by his simple and compelling realism, by the careful artistry of his tales, which are characterized by classical condensation and emotional restraint, and by his talent for writing pioneer novels packed with homely, realistic detail integrating character, action, setting, language and style.[15]

Nevertheless, the canon of criticism on Richter is extremely small. The fact that Richter's best works are historical novels partly accounts, I think, for the critical neglect he has endured.[16] For the historical novel itself as a literary genre has suffered considerable neglect, and unfortunately there persists a form of literary prudery which disdainfully treats the historical novel as the unwanted miscegenatic bastard child of history and fiction.

First of all, there has been no real appreciation of the unique achievement of the Ohio trilogy in exploring the theme of the evolution and growth of a community from the wilderness to a mid-nineteenth-century industrial city--unique not only because of the trilogy's artistic transmutation of historical materials, and its suggestive mysticism, but because

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[15]Frederic I. Carpenter, "Conrad Richter's Pioneers: Reality and Myth," College English, XII (November 1950), 78; and Dayton Kohler, "Conrad Richter: Early Americana," English Journal, XXXV (September 1946), 364-65.

[16]I should mention that the picture is brightening. Edwin W. Gaston, Jr. is currently writing a book on Richter for Twayne's United States Authors Series, and Marvin LaHood, at the University of Notre Dame, has recently completed a doctoral study of Richter's fiction entitled "A Study of the Major Themes in the Work of Conrad Richter and His Place in the Tradition of the American Frontier Novel": See American Literature, XXXIV (November 1962), 451.

its theme of community growth is related to a note of social protest that has meaning for our own times.[17]

In addition to being considered as nothing more than a historical novelist, a skilled craftsman in a limited field, Richter has suffered at the hands of those critics who have not perceived his philosophical and spiritual motives. Dayton Kohler's estimation of Richter's achievement is worth noting in this connection:

> Conrad Richter's novels give the impression of definite achievement within a limited field. Alfred Kazin, however, has recently pointed out the importance of the minor writer in an age of crisis like our own. It is more difficult today to do what the novelist has done in the past, to create a real human scene whose meanings are revealed in terms of character and story, than it is to imitate the great novelists who have struggled with language, fable, and symbolism to find new forms for the novel and a new concept of man and history. The imitative form of much modern fiction, the concern for world values, are symptoms of a new provincialism which uses the loose structure of the novel to write political doctrine, battle reports, biography, private mysticism. Richter works within a recognizable and authentic folk tradition. He is an example of Kazin's minor novelist, the traditional story teller.[18]

The trouble with this view is not that it is totally inaccurate, but that it is myopic; it fails to appreciate what

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[17]According to John T. Flanagan, only three novelists of the midwest--O. E. Rolvaag, Herbert Quick, and Conrad Richter--have written trilogies around the theme of community growth. "A Half-Century of Middlewestern Fiction," Critique, II (Winter 1959), 16-34. Note: it should be pointed out that Flanagan overlooks Booth Tarkington's significant trilogy entitled Growth (includes The Magnificent Ambersons, The Turmoil, and The Midlands), which is a story of a city's emergence from the time of mere ruts on the prairie to the time it becomes an industrial city. The family chronicles, all set against the socio-economic background of Indianapolis, reveal a strong sense of historical movement, and are not unlike the temper of the Ohio trilogy in their criticism of the uglier aspects of industrialization and urbanization.

[18]Kohler, p. 368.

Richter was really attempting to do, for instance, in the Ohio trilogy. As far as technical innovations are concerned, it is probably true that Richter is not destined to be one of America's "great" novelists in the sense that Hemingway and Faulkner, for example, are great. I have no intention of making extravagant claims for Richter's significance. He is a minor novelist, but an important one. Nevertheless, it is a mistake to consider him as nothing more than a "traditional story teller" within a "recognizable and authentic folk tradition." Such an appraisal does not really perceive the use Richter is making of the historical novel to present a distinctly philosophical way of looking at man and at history. His novels are not doctrinaire, but they do originate from a more profound way of looking at life and at human destiny than Kohler allows.

In all honesty it must be pointed out that Kohler's evaluation was made before the publication of The Town or The Mountain on the Desert; it is not until the last book of the trilogy is read that the philosophical pattern of Richter's narrative and its explicit social criticism can really be discerned. Kohler's evaluation is valid enough considering when it was made, and he certainly could not have been expected to have anticipated Richter's final intention. Still, no one has ever corrected this premature "typing" of Richter; no one has yet bothered to come to terms with Richter's philosophical and social implications in the Ohio trilogy, his finest achievement.

Critics have not realized how seriously Richter has pursued for the past forty years a personal philosophical inquiry into the mystery of human nature and human destiny, nor have they realized that Richter has introduced as one level of meaning in his fiction certain spiritual conclusions arrived at as a result of this philosophical inquiry. We read novels to discover truths about ourselves and our destiny which we had not known before. Richter attempts to reveal to us a deeper reality that transcends the appearance of things, so that we may discover a fresher, more profound awareness of the possibilities of life.

It is most significant to note that Richter's first two published books were not fiction at all, but serious philosophical treatises, which attempted to arrive at an understanding of first causes, and to explicate his peculiar theories of human vitality, of the relationship of mind and body, and of creative or purposeful evolution. The first of these works has the unlikely title of Human Vibration; the Mechanics of Life and Mind.[19]

In it, Richter set for himself the difficult task of defining the "scientific" basis for what he observed to be the pattern of life. This strange book attempts to describe the "primary life elements," the nature of the living cell and its bio-electric vibrations, and the complex mechanics or natural laws by which the human organism (body and mind)

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[19](Harrisburg, Pa., 1925).

obtains and builds up energy for "creative" or evolutionary growth only in the presence of "inharmony"--i.e., hardship, suffering, pain, and adversity.

The reception of the book was enough to delight any author. Not that it attained a wide reading public, but certain prominent scientists and authors, whose opinions commanded respect, were quite enthusiastic in their acclaim of Richter's attempt. Dr. Joseph Collins, who reached a large reading public with his popular "The Doctor Speaks" series, wrote, "Human Vibration is a gold mine."[20] Stewart Edward White, already a well-known novelist and nature enthusiast whose own philosophical work, Credo, appeared the same year, said, "I am immensely interested and stimulated." Thomas L. Masson, for years the editor of the humorous magazine Life, commented warmly, "It expresses the whole human process clearly, and is so much more a work of literary art than Kant's Critique." In a personal communication with Richter, Masson wrote, "For many years my life has been ordered on the principles laid down in your little book."[21]

The famed naturalist Luther Burbank was extremely encouraging: "I am convinced you have discovered some of the fundamental principles of life which have never before been

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[20]The following comments on Human Vibration appeared in various sources including personal correspondence to Richter. Unless stated otherwise, they all appeared on the back cover of his privately circulated book, Principles in Bio-Physics.

[21]Correspondence to me, July 4, 1961.

understood." Although Professor William Lyon Phelps generally encouraged fledgling writers, it is still significant that he had nothing but praise for Richter's thought-provoking work: "Human Vibration is full of challenging ideas. I have read every page with interest and profit. I never had it explained so well as here." And the reviewer for The Bookman wrote, "Mr. Richter's book is one of the most suggestive and instructive since Alexander's Space, Time and Unity [sic] . . . .[22] One gets more from the second reading than the first."

Encouraged by this reception, Richter immediately set to work on a second book with the awesome title, Principles in Bio-Physics; the Underlying Processes Controlling Life Phenomena and Inner Evolution,[23] which he circulated privately two years later. This work is smaller, a more concentrated attempt to condense and refine the conclusions arrived at in Human Vibration and to present them in a symbolic language to facilitate discussion of the difficult principles.[24]

This book, too, evoked encouraging responses from men whose opinions were well worth having, and served thus as an encouragement for Richter to continue in his line of thinking.[25]

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[22]This should be Space, Time and Deity.

[23](Harrisburg, Pa., 1927).

[24]Richter now considers the book badly named and a "crude record" of his past thinking, an effort to set down empirically some of the explanations that came to him at the time (correspondence to me, September 22, 1961).

[25]See Foreword to The Mountain on the Desert.

To give a single instance, Lee Wilson Dodd, then a well-known novelist, wrote Richter that he had observed in himself some of the processes set down in Principles in Bio-Physics.[26]

It might be well at this point to clear up an issue concerning the existence of a third book supposedly written by Richter and published in this early period. Some critics have mentioned a book entitled Life Energy, which apparently they believe was published after Human Vibration.[27] Indeed, the book is listed in United States Catalog, Books in Print, 1928,[28] under Richter's name and bearing this title: Life Energy; the Key to Life and Its Phenomena.

Richter, however, disclaims writing such a book.[29] The Library of Congress has failed to turn up a book by such a title in its library-survey service, and it is apparent that Life Energy is an academic fiction which, if nothing else, suggests that Richter's early works have not been carefully assessed by those scholars who have, supposedly, consulted them.

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[26]Correspondence to me, July 4, 1961.

[27]E.g., Carpenter, p. 78; Sutherland, p. 416.

[28](January 1, 1928), p. 2412.

[29]"So far as I can recall there is no book of mine called Life Energy. Several correspondents have mentioned it . . . but it remains a mystery to me. If such a book was ever published, I should like to see it and restore a lapse in memory. Many years ago I did do a manuscript called Energy Management but Dodd Mead rejected it and I don't think I showed it further It is still only a manuscript somewhere in the attic" (correspondence to me, September 22, 1961).

Only two critics, Frederic I. Carpenter and Bruce Sutherland, have attempted to make meaningful connections between Richter's early philosophical works and his later novels. Both have rather summarily dismissed the former after only a superficial consideration, finding them to be merely curious relics out of Richter's past, an unimportant mixture of physiological, psychological and philosophical reflection and conjecture having little relationship to his later writings.[30]

It was, doubtless, a surprise to all who knew of Richter's early works--especially those who had discounted them--when he recently published yet another philosophical work, The Mountain on the Desert.[31] In this book, Michael, a rug-weaving hermit, takes four college students on a philosophical journey across the New Mexican desert and attempts to relate to them his intuitions of the primal relations of man and his environment, of the mysterious life force within the human organism that explains man's behavior, his compulsions and drives. Essentially, the book is a

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[30]Sutherland, after summing up briefly Richter's assumption concerning the mechanical nature of the human organism and the importance of inheritance from countless ancestors in determining man's actions and reactions to stimuli, concludes, "This reasoning may be neither scientific nor philosophic,but it helps to explain Mr. Richter's deep interest in those people out of whose present the future of America was being formed" (p. 416). Carpenter, after citing Richter's early works, writes, "Of course, these failed and might well be forgotten, but they make clear that his mind has always sought to analyze and to explain human phenomena through conscious symbols and that he has always rejected the simple philosophy of mechanistic naturalism" (p. 78).

[31](New York, 1955).

continuation of Richter's early theories, presented in dialogue form with each psycho-energic principle illustrated by examples and dramatic situations. But most importantly, its publication revealed that Richter's perception of the pattern of life, and the underlying causes of this pattern, had not changed. The thirty-year interim had been devoted to continued observation, which to Richter's mind had only confirmed his early theories:

> I became aware of Michael's theories in the early 1920's. In 1927 I timidly printed and circulated in private a small paper-bound account of them. The response encouraged Michael to develop his ideas further and me to try to express their sometimes difficult meaning more clearly. I also considered the ambitious undertaking of building up, if possible, a reading public that might in all fairness examine such a work.[32]

Unlike Human Vibration and Principles in Bio-Physics, this work has been widely discussed--but with considerable reservation, if not undisguised disappointment. Critical reviews are at most only lukewarm. "Not easy reading," says Virginia Kirkus, "but for those seeking a new approach, worth the effort."[33] M. L. Barrett writing for the Library Journal says, "Recommended wherever Richter is well-liked; also to religious and psycho-physical collections."[34] The Wisconsin Library Bulletin is equally non-committal: "Richter's readers will easily recognize the style, the quiet sincerity, and the unhurried delineation of character. Certainly most libraries

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[32] The Mountain, p. ix.

[33] Bulletin from Virginia Kirkus' Service, XXIII (March 1, 1955), 195.

[34] Library Journal, LXXX (April 1, 1955), 787.

will want this piece of nonfiction."[35] Others are more blunt. "With all the good will in the world," writes J. H. Jackson, "I'm afraid I found myself puzzled--even embarrassed--by the vaguely expressed concepts that Mr. Richter here puts forward." He grants Richter sincerity and honesty in his views of the key to man's relationship with himself and others, but these ideas elude the reader at "the very moment he thinks he is about to understand them."[36]

Such notions as the existence of vital energy and built-in energy-lack "sometimes serve the author well when they enable him to perceive the limitations of orthodox scientific theories," observes Joseph Wood Krutch; "unfortunately the truth of his own assumptions is not demonstrable by either metaphysical or scientific procedures."[37]

Richter himself acknowledges the difficulty of expressing these ideas, and it has been a disappointment for him to see his theories misunderstood and his attempts at communicating them less than successful:

> Perhaps I should mention my disappointment that although some intelligent men and women have read and commented warmly on these theories, few of those I talked to in person appeared to understand them. I must admit them difficult, tangled and disguised in life, thought and being. Only in certain states of mind can I perceive and follow them clearly myself. Often I have tended to doubt their existence and to suspect my own

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[35] O. T. Blackshear, "Recent Adult Books," Book Notes: A Supplement to the Wisconsin Library Bulletin, LI (May 1955), 2.

[36] San Francisco Chronicle, June 22, 1955, p. 19.

[37] "In the World of a Hermit," New York Times Book Review, June 5, 1955, p. 18.

> extravagant imaginings and fantasies until some situation in good light reveals them operating nearly exactly as noted before, and I am convinced once more that one day when rightly presented and perhaps corroborated by delicate measuring instruments of energy flow, they may be more widely understood, discussed and accepted.[38]

If Richter's first philosophical works based upon his observations and studies of man had been merely an early flexing of the intellect as some have thought, we may well have disregarded them. With the publication of this last philosophical work, however, Richter has made it clear that he considers its content an important continuation of the theories underlying all of his fiction, a more precise statement of the principles that explain, at least to his satisfaction, the pattern of life, the reality beneath the appearance:

> These principles do support the use by the universe, and perhaps those unknown factors behind the universe, of hardship and discipline to individual progress, bad means to a good end, a practice which infuriates most of us, and of a natural law insuring that where self discipline breaks down, the forced discipline of adversity takes over sooner or later.[39]

The Mountain on the Desert, he points out, is not another of his novels (despite the force of dramatic presentation), but is "a continuation of the philosophy that underlies them, particularly the trilogy, The Trees, The Fields, and The Town." Not that he has written the book to explain or further develop his novels. Indeed, it "is and was quite the other way around."[40] It should be made clear, however, that his

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[38] Correspondence to me, July 4, 1961.

[39] Ibid.

[40] The Mountain, p. ix (italics mine).

novels were not intended to serve as "test cases" for his theories; the complicated processes of what Richter calls psycho-energics--particularly the process of creative evolution--are too subtle and complex to illustrate clearly in the kind of dramatic situation demanded by the art of realistic fiction. Rather, the role of psycho-energics in his fiction, and especially in his trilogy, is to provide a basis for its philosophical overview and mystical undertones. The Mountain, on the other hand, is an attempt to use dramatic situations to explain in detail the working of his philosophical precepts, and to relate the basic postulates of his Weltanschauung.

It is when Richter attempts to explain in detail, as he did in The Mountain, that he encounters difficulty in communicating his ideas. He realizes that somehow the specific details necessary to make his philosophical and mystical ideas concrete get in the way and obscure the message that he wants so earnestly to present. Because of this, he has realized that the medium of fiction may be most successful in enabling him to present his ideas; for in fiction the concrete details of psycho-energics can be inobtrusively hinted at--i.e., symbolically and cautiously suggested in the unfolding of the action, and in the form he imposes on his imagined world to achieve the illusion of reality.

Consequently he has directed his energies toward the writing of a new trilogy which will prove to be, he hopes, a more illustrative way of presenting his theories:

> As mentioned in the foreword to Mountain on the Desert, these theories have never let go of me. On the contrary they still hound and allure. The present projected trilogy of which Waters of Kronos is the first volume, means simply another assault by them and me on the mind of man. The first book lays down the family, and fleshly and spiritual roots of the seeker. The next volume . . . , A Simple Honorable Man, is the story, life and spiritual concepts of one who devoted his life to religious service. It is fiction but based on my father, done in about the same length and solid approach of The Trees and The Fields. The third book, if and when written, will purport to be the life story and progressive concepts of his son, the seeker, the unfolding of hidden processes that torment him, their compulsions, together with the spiritual conclusions of the central character. In this latter book I hope not to make the mistake of The Mountain in expounding and explaining, but to present as suggestions and symbols in life. The original manuscript of The Mountain so treated the matter but my publisher didn't like it and I tried to express the philosophical and mystical in the concrete and romantic, in which I failed.[41]

It is clear that Richter has been, and is, more dedicated to the task of presenting his readers with a philosophical and mystical interpretation of the meaning of life than many have suspected or perhaps allowed. His philosophy of psycho-energics has become for him an idée fixe, and his compulsion to make known his view of purposeful evolution has been no passing whim but a life-long moral obligation. His ideas have been a grievous burden on him, he writes, "a tiger by the tail demanding to be harnessed and demonstrated before a skeptical world."[42]

In view of the importance Richter attaches to his theories--and especially in light of his pointed reference to

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[41] Correspondence to me, July 4, 1961.

[42] Ibid.

The Mountain as a "continuation of the philosophy that underlies" his novels, particularly the Ohio trilogy--it seems to me that we can no longer discard them as fanciful notions having little relationship with his fiction. The salient question is this: to what extent has his unique philosophical and mystical point of view informed his fiction and contributed to, or impeded, his art? He has pulled back the curtains on life's stage to reveal a cosmic drama working out man's fate for good; but what, exactly, is the modus operandi in this drama that permits nature to become the mystic arbiter of human destiny?

This essay fulfills a need to give closer attention to Richter the philosopher and Richter the social critic in order that we may better understand the full contribution to American literature of Richter the novelist. Although it will be the practice here to consult freely any of his fiction whenever it seems advisable to do so for the sake of illustration, my main concern will be with Richter's best achievement and the one most closely related to his philosophy, the Ohio trilogy.

Chapter II is a close analysis of Richter's theories of psycho-energics to show the basic postulates underlying his conception of a purposeful existence in this universe. I do not have sufficient scientific training to appraise fully the scientific validity of his biological assumptions and his psychological postulates; but it will be possible for me to come to some conclusions regarding Richter's status as a philosopher by suggesting his relationship to the tradition

of philosophical naturalism. If it seems that I have gone into too much detail in my analysis of Richter's specific psycho-energic theories, I can only confess my inability to present them in a further condensed form without making it impossible for us to follow them logically. The only real justification in analyzing his philosophical tenets, of course, is for the light they throw on his fiction. His philosophy may not be worthy of our attention, but his fiction most certainly is, and anything that will help us to see it clearly and to see it whole is worthwhile.

Chapter III takes up the discussion of Richter's notions of cosmic destiny which emerge from his philosophy, and his conception of the role of hardship and discipline as a means of grace. From the analysis of Chapter II we will have a basis for understanding Richter's preoccupation with the configuration of life's pattern as an organizing principle in his fiction, and for understanding the origin of his social criticism--particularly his protest against the cult of comfort. Chapter III will also show how his theories of psycho-energics have led Richter to study the past, to advocate pioneer values, and to pay tribute to a vanished way of life through the medium of historical fiction.

Chapter IV is concerned with Richter's relationship to literary tradition, particularly in light of his philosophical and mystical notions. It establishes his commitment to primitivism and his relationship to the tradition of transcendentalism, and further shows how the Ohio trilogy

follows closely in the regionalist tradition of the novel of the soil which takes up the problem of the rooted vs. the rootless. Chapter IV concludes with a discussion of the art of the historical novel and attempts to show how Richter's special skills and talents make of the Ohio trilogy a unique contribution to the genre.

In this essay I hope not only to clarify the philosophical basis for Richter's mystical appreciation of those forces that have shaped our ancestors, but also to show that his rethinking of the historical novel as a medium for philosophy and social protest has resulted in a significant contribution to American literature. In the course of this study I have enjoyed a long and fruitful correspondence with Mr. Richter (I have received nearly 12,000 words of personal correspondence) which will enable me to present certain refinements of his philosophical ideas not available elsewhere. From the first Mr. Richter has generously answered my questions and patiently explained his theories when I challenged his postulates. Use of this correspondence should add to my critical study some of the values of a source book for future students of Richter.

CHAPTER II

RICHTER'S THEORIES OF PSYCHO-ENERGICS: A NATURALISTIC PHILOSOPHY OF PURPOSEFUL EVOLUTION

1. The Mechanical Nature of Man

When Richter began around 1912 to study seriously the nature of man in an effort to provide a reasonable and factual explanation of the eternal enigmas, he was determined to keep his feet well planted on the substantial earth. Even as a very young boy he was unable to digest in toto the Christian supernatural dogmas, a state of affairs which resulted in heated arguments with his Lutheran clergyman father. His aversion to certain of the Biblical rites and practices of his church grew so strong that he was actually repelled by them, and the thought of attending church and Sunday School often made him physically ill.[1] Only respect for, and fear of, wounding his father and mother prevented him from anything like open rebellion.

He recalls reading as a child an account of the feats and miracles performed by a holy man of India. "It struck me that he had as strong, devout and proven a faith in his religion as my grandfather did in his, yet each called the other's deity and beliefs false."[2] As his mind matured, Richter continued

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[1]Correspondence to me, September 22, 1961.

[2]Ibid.

to wonder if there could be an explanation and justification for divergent spiritual phenomena, such as faith and belief, no matter what the particular creed or doctrine. In short, faith and belief must be a means, not an end. But a means to what?

The explanation of life's mysteries in terms strictly of the supernatural held little appeal for his inquiring mind, and so by the age of thirteen or fourteen when he declined a scholarship that would have taken him through preparatory school, college and seminary on the condition that he become a Lutheran clergyman, he was not involved in anything like a conflict between religion and science.[3] Rather, his convictions grew that any interpretation of the meaning of life must be grounded on fact, and it was more in the spirit of the seeker than the lost that he turned to the new knowledge of science to help him explain the mystery of being.[4]

This is not to say that he rejected the mystical and spiritual aspects of life. The philosophical system he builds is based on mystical and teleological assumptions. The mechanistic and evolutionary processes he attempts to define

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[3]Correspondence to me, September 22, 1961.

[4]In a letter to Richter, I suggested his philosophy represents his effort to reconcile science and mysticism rather than science and religion. His reply is worth noting: "When you say my effort was to reconcile the scientific and the mystic rather than the scientific and religious, you express it well, but I would rather say that the effort was to provide a reasonable and sensible explanation of some of the eternal enigmas. These to me lost some of their mystery when the understanding of my theories was applied" (correspondence to me, September 22, 1961).

are unhesitatingly attributed to a "plan," a "design," to the "Engineers of this world," to the "Creator," to the "Powers-that-be," to the "Supreme Intelligence," to the "Great Inventor," and to other nouns denoting a controlling hand in the universe.

The answers to the problems that plagued him, he felt, were no more to be found in traditional philosophy than in organized religion. For philosophy inevitably becomes so entangled in the metaphysical and speculative, to the neglect of verifiable facts, that its conclusions are suspect. On the other hand, scientific knowledge, which treats of verifiable facts, too often neglects the major matters.[5] It was thus Richter's desire to answer the big questions of philosophic thought, within the framework of scientific facts, that led to his readings in histology, physiology, and physics, and his subsequent familiarity with generally accepted notions concerning the construction and make-up of the living cell, the evolution of living organisms, the atomic structure of matter, the principles of electricity and related aspects of physical and biological science.[6]

Richter does not document from scientific works to show the extent of his readings, and herein lies one of the difficulties in determining the scientific validity of his

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[5] Human Vibration, p. 9. (Hereafter referred to as Vibration).

[6] Despite Richter's rejection of traditional philosophy because of its metaphysical speculation, his own line of reasoning quickly departs from the empirical to the speculative, and, as we shall see, he is actually working within a well-defined philosophical tradition.

basic postulates. His reading has been extensive and perceptive; but since his theories of the electrophysiological make-up of man were not derived from first-hand laboratory research, he might have validated his assertions with documented references to reveal, at least, his acquaintance with current research in the disciplines of physiology and psychology.[7] He does refer in Principles in Bio-Physics[8] to the one scientific publication which stands as the best justification for his basic notions of energy--the work of George Washington Crile entitled A Bipolar Theory of Living Processes.[9] However, Crile's theories "appeared to be based on a purely mechanical philosophy," writes Richter, "and my thought in mentioning them was to convey to the reader that

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[7]It is significant to note, however, that Richter's interest in bio-physics and electrophysiology coincided with--and perhaps was the result of--a renewed interest among scientists to explore the electrical basis of life. The following articles selected from scientific and literary periodicals of the time reflect this interest: G. Hucky, "Human Body as an Electrical System," Scientific American, LXXXII (July 1, 1916), 2-3; L. H. Hyman, "Suggestions Regarding the Causes of Bioelectric Phenomena," Science, XLVII (Nov. 22, 1918), 518-24; "Electric Theory of Memory," Scientific American, CXXVI (April 1922), 249f; E. P. Cathcart, "Energy of Expenditure," Scientific Monthly, XXI (November 1925), 508-510; D. C. Seitz, "Life Maintained by Electricity Within the Body," Outlook, CXLIII (Aug. 18, 1926), 540-42; "Birth of the Mind," Literary Digest, XCIV (July 9, 1927), 24; G. W. Gray, "Measuring the Divine Spark," Atlantic Monthly, CXLVIII (November 1931), 605-614; and "Tracing Life Force to Electricity," Literary Digest, CXXI (Feb. 29, 1936), 30.

[8]Hereafter referred to as Principles.

[9]Ed. Amy F. Rowland (New York, 1926).

the electric basis of energy wasn't something dreamed up by me."[10]

Richter's reading in scientific sources coincided with a general acceptance among scientists, and some philosophers, of a reductive view of phenomena. Scientists were trying to reduce physical and biological phenomena to their basic qualities of matter, motion, and energy, and naturalistic philosophers were attempting to reduce mental phenomena to the same basic categories. Thus, for Richter, the search for truth, on the one hand, led him to a reductive interpretation of human phenomena:

> After thirteen years of reluctant concession to nature, I have become convinced that the only fact or truth we know is mechanical. All that exists in life and matter is but the effect of mechanical, that is to say, natural laws.[11]

All phenomena of life, including the intricate and vastly complex phenomena of man's mental and spiritual behavior, operate on principles of law and order. "The primary elements of man are material--not philosophical. They can be tested . . . more easily than electrons, atoms and other supersensible objects admitted by science."[12] This is the basic assumption that underlined his effort to "invent backward" the mechanism of the human body and mind.

On the other hand, Richter could not rest content in a purely reductive view of human nature. A mechanistic

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[10] Correspondence to me, January 1, 1962.

[11] Vibration, p. 15.

[12] Ibid., p. 22.

interpretation of human nature does not negate man's higher attributes, or deny the reality of a Supreme Power:

> That truth or fact is mechanical does not imply there is no Supreme Intelligence, no immortality, no higher beings than we. It simply means that there is no mystery, only mechanical laws which we have not as yet grasped.[13]

We should understand, however, that Richter's conception of natural law is heavily tinged with the notion of numenic forces. Phenomena can be explained in terms of mechanisms, but behind the mechanism, there is a final cause, whose natural laws are superintended by "higher beings."

The "designer of the Universe" has provided natural laws that control and account for every petty detail of our lives. Indeed, Richter continues, the Creator has provided mechanistic processes to insure the growth of our highest human attributes--benevolence, sympathy, and understanding. The earth we tread on is "a huge intelligible machine, turning out individuals of various sorts and refining them eventually to the point of caring mechanically for the well being of each other." We are, he avers, human automatics; and it is a mechanical fact that

> some of these human automatics in moving about their orbits are made to catch the unhappiness, suffering or trouble of other human automatics and to pause and try to relieve it. This to me is the greatest mechanical marvel on earth. . .[14]

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[13] Vibration, p. 24.

[14] Ibid., p. 26.

This conception of man's mechanical nature guided Richter's postulates in his first two works. However, in his refined theories of psycho-energics as expressed in The Mountain, the mechanism of mind and body as an "energy-providing and spending instrument" is regarded as even more complex and intricate than Richter had earlier thought. The mind and body, he writes, are not something

> "limited, crude or mechanical but of infinite and sensitive capabilities. . . . If I ever use the term 'mechanism,' it doesn't follow that it's purely mechanical. By mechanism I mean that it uses energy, its physical parts, its so-called mental parts, and any possible finer instrument connected with it whose substance and purpose are unknown."[15]

Beginning with his assumption that the nature of man is mechanical, Richter's first task was to discover to what mechanism the life impulse could be traced.[16] This mechanism, he felt, must be related to some natural law that provided for purposeful evolution. This natural law he came to designate as the processes of psycho-energics.

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[15] The Mountain on the Desert, p. 13 (Hereafter referred to as The Mountain).

[16] By life impulse, I refer to that vital force which accounts for both physical energy and psychical energy. The problem of the relationship between physical and psychical energy has never been solved, despite the research in bio-physiology and bio-psychology. It has long been known that "changes in the energy of the mind are closely paralleled by actual correlated changes of physical energy which take place in the cells of the brain," writes A. G. Tansley, The New Psychology (New York, 1922), pp. 70f. Since the exact locus of the innate actuating or impelling force in living beings--especially the psychical vital impulse--has never been positively determined, no one can categorically reject Richter's basic postulate.

2. Energy: the Basis of Life and Its Phenomena

Michael, the rug-weaving philosopher of The Mountain, had jotted in his notebooks two basic postulates: (1) the distinguishing feature of life is limited energy, and (2) the basic primal motive is energy hunger.[17] These two postulates go to the heart of Richter's theories. But before they can be understood, it is necessary briefly to examine his conception of the nature of energy, and how energy operates in the living cells of the human organism's nervous system.

Modern science had shown rather satisfactorily that matter, which was once thought to be stationary, is actually made up of supersensible units of motion. The differences in forms of matter could be accounted for by the differences in vibration rates of the elements composing the matter, i.e., figuratively speaking, the rotation of satellite electrons around a nucleus in the miniature solar system of each element of matter. The more complex the matter, the swifter or more intense the vibration rates; animate matter--the cell of living tissue--is characterized by vibration rates in its molecular make-up which greatly exceed in speed and intensity those of inanimate matter. Furthermore, the vibration rates of very complex animate cells--like the cells of the human brain--are higher than those of simple life forms like the amoeba.

The conclusion Richter drew is that energy must be considered the basis of all life phenomena if all matter,

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[17] The Mountain, p. 7.

whether that of a chunk of uranium or of the brain of man, is characterized by an ascending scale of motion or vibration rates. By analogy, Richter theorized that the primary life element of the countless millions of microscopic cells in the human organism can be considered a bio-electric life energy, which accounts for all complex activity in the nervous system. Furthermore, such complex phenomena as we observe in human behavior, must have its corresponding vibration rates of physical energy in the nervous system: the more complex the behavioral phenomena (such as man's higher passions), the greater the energy vibration associated with those phenomena.

His conception of this minute life unit is analogous to the energy unit of electric current. The nervous system (the psycho-energic instrument), therefore, is conceived to be a sort of electrical apparatus permitting the instantaneous flow of energy throughout the organism. In these theories, he drew heavily from the infant fields of electrophysiology and bio-physics, in contrast to classical physiology with its more conventional explanation of vital processes in terms of chemistry and glands.

For our purposes here, it is only necessary to understand that Richter considers the human organism (mind and body) to be somewhat like a bio-electrical dynamo. It depends on the energy it can produce and refine in the psycho-energic instrument, whose chief function seems to be the further development of inherited and acquired energy patterns by building up vibration rates and energy flows.

Through the endless mortal network of nerves, the recording matrix of which is the brain, the vibration of one cell group (which stands for inherited and acquired experiences) can be picked up by that of another group having similar rates, much as the plucking of one violin will make another of the same pitch vibrate:

> Now when we see an object there are set off in us cells associated with aspects of that object which strike our eye at about the same time. Each cell thus animated by the object through our eye sets off its own series of associated cells we call a cell group.[18]

Thus, in human experience, every association is characterized by vibration rates in the nervous cells which stand for that association in the brain. Pleasant associations are characterized by low vibration rates (harmony), whereas unpleasant associations are characterized by high vibration rates (inharmony). By means of the law of sympathetic vibration, a number of cell groups representing pleasant associations can combine to produce energy flow to relieve the high energy needs of a single unpleasant association. Once this combination has been formed, the general level of vibration rates in the organism remains at the higher rate demanded by the inharmonious sensation.

The sum total of the numerous energy rates and flows representing the memory of infinite blends of sensations, both inherited and acquired, makes up the psycho-energic instrument or "realman." The realman represents the essential being of each person, and controls him "as effectively and accurately

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[18] Vibration, p. 127.

as the tuning in of a radio receiver selects the wave length that may come through it."[19] It not only represents his personality, his temperament, his drives and compulsions, but it represents his contact with destiny, for it is the one aspect of man that partakes of immortality or survival.[20]

The most curious thing about this psycho-energic dynamo is that it cannot produce enough energy to supply the need. It is always in want, consciously or unconsciously hungering for energy night and day. The human organism, therefore, must learn to obtain energy for the continual energy deficits that are a part of its natural state. To do this, man has evolved and invented "release processes," which bring relief to the high vibration or "expenditure rate" of one dominating cell group (which stands for consciousness) by tapping or robbing energy from another cell group or group combination, whose vibrations are similar and whose needs are not so desperate.

> "In reality, thought and physical action are sequences of such release processes built up by instinct and experience, one needy cell group setting off another for the benefit of its energy flow. . . Energy release processes are being touched off all the time and their power charges

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[19] Principles, p. 23.

[20] Richter's notions of survival reveal his peculiar kind of scientific transcendentalism. If survival is real, it is not to be considered immortality in the Christian sense, but a continuity into future realms of being, where further refinement takes place in the "realman" until at last it reaches those ultra-high vibration rates and energy flows which represent the Original Source. Richter makes it clear that he is only speculating about this; he is more convinced of survival than of what exactly happens in the "future crisis of existence" (correspondence to me, September 22, 1961).

> appropriated and spent. Often two, or three or more of our cell groups are active simultaneously."[21]

The release process never ends, simply because the plan of life insures a continual energy deficiency for purposes of evolution. Furthermore, the release process helps define for Richter the basic mechanism of the life impulse:

> ". . . consider this psycho-energic definition of life impulse--the basic hunger of primary cell groups for more energy and their consequent incitement of secondary groups to spend energy so the primary groups can get hold of some of it."[22]

Release processes, whether conscious or unconscious, govern our lives. Whenever we bite our lips, grind our teeth, brace our shoulders, utter a prayer, cling to a belief, or relieve the suffering of our fellow man, we are, in the physiological realm, setting off energy flows to be appropriated by the current inharmonious group.

3. Creative Growth: The Purpose of Being

It has been the aim of Richter's philosophical writings to show the purpose of life in raising man up the evolutionary chain of being, away from the animalistic and toward the spiritual level. The laws of inner evolution have a message about the purpose of life, he asseverates, and that purpose is the "raising of expenditure rates and flows" and the "multiplication of them in groups," the physiological prelude

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[21] The Mountain, pp. 24-25.

[22] Ibid., p. 30.

to the growth in our sympathetic understanding of our fellow man.

The basic physiological process involved in the inner evolution of the psycho-energic instrument is exceedingly complex. For our purposes here, it will only be necessary briefly to outline the fundamental psycho-energic principle, which Richter terms "Expansion and Contraction of Energy Expenditure" (E C E), in order to show the role of pain, conflict, or inharmony for evolutionary growth.

The expansion of energy rates is always accompanied by pain or sensations of inharmony, and the contraction of energy expenditure is accompanied by pleasure or sensations of harmony. One of the basic postulates of psycho-energics is that energy flows aroused by release processes to meet the expansion of energy subside more slowly than the demand, resulting in sensations of harmony. Life is a continual sequence of inharmony and harmony. Nature, of course, is a vast storehouse of experiences that elicit this process in man: storm and clearing, night and day, confinement and liberation, sickness followed by health, fatigue followed by rest, loneliness followed by reunion, and on and on.

A look at the psycho-energic basis of music and beauty may help illustrate the working of the E C E process. Music is one of man's release processes, which releases energy "according to the flows established by our inheritance and experience with music and life." Music symbolizes life:

> "I mean we can't hear anything without energy rates and flows being set off in us. Life is a continuous sequence of such rates and flows and their effect upon our conscious and unconscious well-being. Now music is a setting off of these same rate-flows of life. They may be unrecognized in us but are there. These symbols of the energy rate-flows of life give music its infinite resources and explain how from only a relatively few notes there can be all the vast literature of music." [23]

Violence in music, when followed by movements of peace and beauty, elicits the E C E process. The violence in the musical score suggests or awakens expenditure rates of inharmony; as soon as the sounds of violence subside, there are released energy flows (which subside more slowly than the expenditure rate) bathing the "softer more melodic parts of music with the harmony of surplus energy." The subtle reflection of life's processes--such as suggestions of hunger followed by food, being tired followed by rest, the gloom of a dark hallway followed by the brightness of airy sunshine--is what gives music its meaning and beauty. Thus, in one sense, beauty always has pain in it. The beauty the common man sees in a pleasant still life or landscape painting may be the result of the obstruction he has encountered during the day--high expenditure, for example, from hard work, financial problems, or boredom with the hustle and bustle of life.

The important thing to note here is the physiological necessity for pain in the psycho-energic scheme. Pain, Richter believes, is the "mother of psycho-energic growth":

> "Simple nonexistence of pain isn't sweet in itself. It's only when some E C E process has released energy to the

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[23] The Mountain, pp. 95-96.

> cell groups in question that the lack of pain becomes delectable. So the harmony of today is the direct product of the inharmony of yesterday. The Creator's purpose appears to be the raising of our expenditure rates and energy flows for our increased power and our appreciation of good and beauty, the multiplication of our groups to give us wider experience and understanding, and the establishment of more transfer points to enable us to resolve our own deficit problems."[24]

The method of creative growth, then, is the process of increasing expansion of energy expenditure. When expansion occurs, that is, when circumstances of inharmony (hardship, suffering, privation) evoke higher energy rates, these new rates are permanently established in the nervous system with greater volume and longer duration than the previous highest rates were capable of. These rates, once established, can be set off again to release energy for new, greater expenditure demands.

The higher the rates and flows, the closer man approaches to the Original Source, and the more his energy streams are connected with the spiritual side of life.

> "Now our concept of the Creator is of a being of infinite power not only in energy resources but in the scale and sensitivity of His energy spending. Therefore a process that establishes a higher rate of power in us we might loosely call a process of creative growth, for it tends to make us more like our Creator."[25]

It should be pointed out that the mechanism of man does not instinctively want evolutionary development. The blind urge within the organism is to provide energy flow for energy

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[24] The Mountain, p. 214.

[25] Ibid., pp. 193-94.

deficits. One way to supply this flow is to avoid circumstances of inharmony which increase expenditure, and to seek only circumstances which evoke harmony. In his first book, Richter calls this blind urge "desire," an unintelligent force that wants energy, not evolution.[26]

However, desire itself has undergone its own peculiar evolutionary development. One of the most significant developments in evolution has been the emergence of desire "not only for the reduction of one's inharmony but for the reduction of the inharmony of another." If this has been worked out by an Intelligence, Richter remarks, "it appears as though that Intelligence knew us well enough to take no chances on us and so wisely tied up our happiness with the happiness of others."[27] The real mark of evolutionary growth is this sympathy and understanding of the suffering of others.[28]

The scale of existing mankind represents a vast range. At the bottom of the scale there is the primitive, brutal, totally self-centered man, calloused and indifferent to the feelings of others (i.e., the man whose total rates and flows are extremely low). Above him, in what for convenience may be called the "intermediate class," one finds the compassionate

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[26] Vibration, pp. 83f; Principles, pp. 37f.

[27] Vibration, p. 93.

[28] Cf. ". . . the sharing of one's substance for the welfare of others is a characteristic of what is called spirit, increasing in intensity and intelligence as the spiritual scale rises" (The Mountain, p. 218).

and sensitive man, whose painful awareness of the suffering of others may cause him in unreasoning sympathy to try to relieve his fellow man of those burdens which seem cruel, but which in actuality are raising the victim's rates and flows. This may sound like a paradox, but until experience teaches him differently, the man in the intermediate class works against the creative plan when he permits himself to be overcome by his own sympathy.

Above those who "feel overwhelming another's distress and rush emotionally to remove his burden, even the beneficial burden," are the most highly advanced. At first glance, the most highly advanced may seem cold and removed; in actuality, they have come to the painful realization that suffering and pain are instrumental in evolutionary growth. "the higher man goes, the farther he can see, the grander his view of the over-all picture, the greater his interest not in helping his fellow beings stagnate in too much relief and pleasure but in freeing them from the wheel of fate."[29]

The more highly advanced men will be manifestly more spiritual; their greater "energy flows appear connected not so much to pleasures of the animal world as to things of what we roughly call the spirit."[30] Those persons of sensitive spirit who have evolved the greatest "understanding" depend on those higher release processes such as love, imagination,

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[29] Correspondence to me, March 8, 1962.

[30] The Mountain, p. 229.

and especially, the denial of the reality of pain and evil. To one who understands the function of pain in evolutionary development (or spiritual growth), Richter points out, evil is recognized to be nothing more than an illusion. Once we obtain "surplus energy to the cell groups representing the problem, there's actually no evil, only pleasure and stimulation."[31]

Three of the most advanced release processes for the spiritual sensitives are (1) belief in a higher power and respect for providence ("What a man believes in depends on his mental and spiritual evolution. But at every stage of that evolution, the energy stream of a powerful belief can support him and clear his deficit groups for his well-being");[32]

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[31] "There is no universal thing such as evil, only a relative evil. That is, it appears evil to us individually because it is not harmonious to our individual organisms. As John Fiske put it, 'Moral evil is simply the characteristics of the lower state of being as looked at from the higher state.'

This is not philosophy. It is mechanical fact" (Vibration, p. 159).

Note: One of the most interesting aspects of Richter's philosophy is its preoccupation with the problem of evil. I once asked him if his persistent attempts to justify the role of evil in the universe, and to attribute pain to a benign plan of the Creator, did not make of The Mountain a theodicy. Here is his reply: "The Mountain . . . may well be a theodicy although I would not go so far as to assert that God can be the author only of goodness--let us say eventual goodness--or that my attempt was to prove his divine attributes. I hope the former may be true; I believe it but I do not actually know except in part. In my case the explanations, the theories came first and the removed goodness of God followed as the evil dissipated, became unreal, a contrived illusion" (correspondence to me, September 22, 1961).

[32] The Mountain, p. 182.

(2) prayer (supplication for energy from the highest creative power the mind can conceive); and (3) personally identifying oneself with the creative power in the universe (arousing powerful energy in the psycho-energic God-concept by saying and believing, for example, that "I and the Father are One").

It is most important to understand, however, that real understanding, the mark of the most highly disciplined, obtains in those spiritual sensitives who, like Christ and Gandhi, have consciously cultivated the higher release processes, and repudiated the lower release processes.[33] Furthermore, at this stage of man's evolution, there are very few who reach the spiritual status of a man like Christ. Most persons will be a mixture of traits and drives, a blend of a few high release processes and groups of low release processes.

We see that in Richter's philosophical scheme, the spiritual aspect of life is based on the evolved and developed physiological make-up of man. On the one hand, the spiritual life is a naturalistic relationship with the powers-that-be behind the universe. On the other hand, this relationship is unmistakably mystical and supernatural. In his effort to reconcile the mystical and spiritual cravings of his mind with science, Richter has erected a philosophical system which yokes the mechanical and the spiritual. Psycho-energics, he insists, is the basis for all human mental and spiritual phenomena: "It has no water-tight compartments. Religious,

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[33]Correspondence to me, March 8, 1962.

philosophical and psychological fields are human aspects of the same psycho-energic principles."[34]

4. Cooperating With Destiny

Since the business of the universe is the creative growth of man, and since this growth is accomplished by expanding rates and flows in the psycho-energic instrument, Richter would have us understand the function of those circumstances which evoke the E C E process in order that we might participate in the creative process. Problems, burdens, hardships, obstruction--i.e., any inharmony which is brought on by natural events, fate, or destiny--trigger creative growth.

But man may participate directly in his own creative growth and "remove himself from the stratagems of destiny established in his own evolutionary behalf."[35] By practicing self-discipline, Richter theorizes, we might by-pass the harsher blows slated by fate or the inevitable consequences of a weaker course.[36] When we attempt to encourage our own creative growth by practicing self-discipline, we are only cooperating with natural law by providing situations which help build up the expansion of energy flows. "To the Universe," such a practice "has the advantage of graduating a student to a higher and more intelligent method of growth."[37]

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[34] The Mountain, p. 183.

[35] Ibid., p. 204.

[36] Correspondence to me, January 1, 1962.

[37] The Mountain, p. 204.

The ability of man to participate directly in his own evolution presupposes a freedom of the will, an ability to choose and direct one's own destiny. This brings us to a knotty problem in Richter's thought: how can man, who is an automatic mechanism physiologically responding to natural law, be said to have a will of his own? Man may choose any course of conduct he pleases, but since his desire to secure inner-organic harmony is the motivation of his thought, it must be admitted that his choice, in one sense of the word, is determined for him by his psycho-energic instrument (or more specifically, by his current energy deficits).[38]

At the same time, Richter writes, man enjoys a "higher freedom to direct and order certain parts of his whole."[39] This higher freedom of volition thus permits an individual to bargain with fate, and to participate in the destiny laid out for him by choosing to practice self-discipline. If this freedom of will is not exercised, fate will administer natural adversity to insure creative growth.

5. Richter's Relationship to Philosophical Naturalism

It is not to be supposed that Richter's formal philosophical writings have had any important influence on American philosophy. Our purpose in analyzing them has chiefly been to illuminate his fiction. By reducing his philosophical system

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[38] Vibration, p. 131.

[39] Correspondence to me, September 22, 1961 (italics mine).

to its essential postulates, we are better able to define his conception of the cosmos, and thus better able to understand the source of those philosophical undertones in his novels, and the philosophical basis of his social criticism. At the same time, the analysis we have made of his thought does help to place him in the tradition of philosophical naturalism.[40]

Naturalism as a movement has experienced several important changes since coming of age late in the nineteenth century. The complete story of this history has been told elsewhere.[41] For our purposes here, it is necessary to trace only in broad outline the three phases which define this change in order properly to relate Richter to a specific variety of naturalism: (1) "evolutionary naturalism," whose influence and greatest expression came with the works of Herbert Spencer and John Fiske, but whose influence continued for three decades into the new century; (2) "reductive naturalism," whose beginning

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[40] Naturalism is not so much "common agreement on specific ideas as in general attitudes," writes Y. H. Krikorian. It does not represent a body of doctrine or a specific set of beliefs, but rather, a set of somewhat broad tenets that provide a common ground. Most importantly, man is treated as part of the nature of which he is a part. His career and his destiny, his mental and spiritual attributes, are explicable in terms of natural phenomena; his mind is a manifestation of the existential and causal primacy of organized matter in the executive order of nature. See Naturalism and the Human Spirit, ed. Y. H. Krikorian (New York, 1944), p. vii. Note: several essays used in the following discussion are contained in this work.

[41] See particularly Harold A. Larrabee, "Naturalism in America," Naturalism, pp. 319-53.

can be traced to the positivism of Auguste Comte, but which coincided with, and extended beyond, evolutionary naturalism; and (3) "constructive naturalism," which is a reaction against reductive theories, and which represents the most recent expression of philosophical naturalism.

Harold Larrabee has shown that the evolutionary naturalists have played a leading role in the history of American naturalism. The writings of Edward L. Youmans, John W. Draper, John W. Powell, J. A. Thomson, and John Fiske have done much to shape the movement in its beginning.[42] A keynote in the writings of the evolutionary naturalists is their attempt to mediate between science, theology, and philosophy by showing that "evolution 'properly understood' only confirmed creation and design 'properly interpreted.'"[43] Although man's behavior and spiritual growth could be understood in terms of natural law and mechanistic or physical principles, there was, believed the evolutionary naturalists, a final cause beyond mere mechanism, which gave purpose and direction to man's evolution. Their evolutionary systems thus took on the undertones of the deep ethical purpose they discerned in the universe.

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[42] Since Richter was acquainted with the writings of Thomson and Fiske, it might be helpful to mention their principal works: J. A. Thomson, The Outline of Science (New York, 1924), Concerning Evolution (New Haven, Conn., 1925), and Darwinism and Human Life (New York, 1917); John Fiske, "Cosmic Philosophy," The Miscellaneous Writings of John Fiske, I-IV (New York, 1902).

[43] Larrabee, p. 348.

Reductive naturalism rejected this mystical and teleological emphasis in evolutionary naturalism as unscientific. John H. Randall defines reductive naturalism as

> . . . a body of beliefs founded on a reductive analysis of all processes to the motion of masses, on the materialistic dogmas of nineteenth-century physics, and on the materialistic metaphysics which regarded the scientific enterprise as the simple discovery of the physical and biological laws 'governing' events.[44]

The "old," or reductive, naturalism, later naturalists charged, was oversimplified and too mechanistic--in short, too willing to reduce all aspects of human experience, including man's religious, artistic and spiritual achievements, to "nothing but" chemico-physical relationships of matter, motion, and energy. Such a naturalism is much too reductive, and, as John Dewey points out, it tends to cultivate a pessimistic attitude toward man's career and destiny, reducing all "distinctly human values, moral, aesthetic, logical, to blind mechanical conjunctions of material entities--a reduction which is in effect their complete destruction."[45]

Naturalists, claims William Dennes, have been transforming their naturalism from the "old" to the "new" by abandoning as basic categories "matter," "motion," and "energy," and adopting such basic categorical terms as "events," "qualities," and "relations."[46] By escaping from the blind alleys

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[44] "Epilogue: The Nature of Naturalism," Naturalism, p. 360.

[45] "Antinaturalism in Extremis," Naturalism, p. 2.

[46] "The Categories of Naturalism," Naturalism, p. 271.

in which the reductive naturalists were leading naturalism--reducing man's higher phenomena to nothing-but-physics in a blind-chance universe--the constructive naturalists hoped to build philosophies which would not minimize all of human experience. "The world as a whole," writes Randall, "the sum of all natural processes, is to be understood as making living and knowing possible, as furnishing the materials for the organization of the Good Life."[47]

Richter has certain things in common with both reductive and constructive naturalists. With the former, he shares the belief that the vastly complex experiences of physical and mental phenomena can be reduced to a few basic bio-physical laws that govern events. Thus, language, art, and even religion are, in a sense, nothing but modes of releasing energy for an organism which constantly experiences energy hunger.

Yet Richter never shares their pessimistic attitude that man is struggling in a world which seems intent on his destruction. Man's aesthetic, intellectual, and spiritual experiences may have aspects which are nothing but bio-physical relationships of matter, motion, and energy, but this does not deprive them of their profound spiritual significance.

For like the new naturalists, Richter has rejected the reductive spirit in favor of a constructive spirit that looks with hope to man's higher achievements, and to the emergence of higher attributes. Like the new naturalists, he does not

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[47] Naturalism, p. 361.

minimize the physiological and psychological basis for the spiritual life. In view of his profound respect for the higher human vision that sees the value of love, religion, and art for man's biological and mental well-being, it would seem that he shares the constructive spirit of modern naturalism. However, his optimism is grounded also on a belief that is not acceptable to either the reductive or the constructive naturalists--the belief in an infinite power and final cause.

The new naturalism, writes H. T. Costello, has "one reductionist or liquidationist thesis: There is no 'supernatural.' God and immortality are myths."[48] Richter, of course, is in fundamental opposition to such a thesis:

> I want to make sure that nothing I have said might be taken to misconstrue my fundamental belief in the infinite capacities of God and to a lesser extent of those unknown beings that must be nearer him. One can't face the facts of the magnificent universe with its countless stars and worlds without becoming convinced of a tremendous unseen organization of superior beings, some looking after the vast mechanical problems, some after the staggering numbers of inferior beings struggling along the complex paths. Where the mechanical influence of the Creator's network of laws and processes ends and where the personal influence of superior beings begins, none of us can accurately say.[49]

Richter's mysticism and his conviction that what exists in the universe is not a product of a final mechanism, but rather something beyond which goes toward explaining that mechanism, clearly relate him to the tradition of evolutionary naturalism. It is significant to note that in Human Vibration,

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[48] "The Naturalism of Frederick Woodbridge," Naturalism, p. 295.

[49] Correspondence to me, January 1, 1962.

he quotes two of the leading evolutionary naturalists, J. A. Thomson and John Fiske.[50] Like Thomson and Fiske, Richter is preoccupied with the problem of locating the source of psychic energy and establishing the mind-body relationship, with the problem of emergent evolution and the generic growth of sympathy and the higher passions, and with the problem of determining the role of pain and suffering in the evolution of man.[51]

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[50]Richter reports that he has not blindly followed their theories, but rather he has reinforced his own conclusions with their opinions (correspondence to me, January 1, 1962).

[51]Fiske is quite fascinated by the problem of "evil" from an evolutionary point of view. Note the following observation which appears in his essay, "The Mystery of Evil": "To be delivered from evil, we must avoid the maladjustments of which evil is the consequence and the symptom. Hence, while to the aboriginal man malevolence was the only conceivable source of suffering, the reverent follower of science perceives the truth of the paradox that the infliction of pain is subservient to a beneficent end. 'Pervading all nature, he sees at work a stern discipline, which is a little cruel that it may be very kind. . . .' Thus with Michelet, we come to regard pain as in some sort the artist of the world which fashions us with the fine edge of a pitiless chisel, cutting away the ill-adjusted and leaving the nobler type to inherit the earth" The Miscellaneous Writings of John Fiske, IX, 249-50. For other striking parallels with Richter, see II, 187, 241, and 243; III, 206-207; IV, 305; and IX, 263-66.

CHAPTER III

COSMIC DESTINY: THE ROLE OF HARDSHIP AND DISCIPLINE AS A MEANS OF GRACE

1. The Configuration of Life's Pattern

> Much of his life John Donner had pondered that which secretly governed man and determined his destiny. Where did it come from and where in him did it reside? It could be found, he had observed, in the grossest of flesh and in the most sensitive and quivering. Seldom could he lay hands on it but it could lay hands on him. Never could he see it naked, revealed and labelled in the broad light of day. Sometimes he had caught a glimpse of it in a man's eyes, a snatch of it in his voice or its shape and pattern in what he did, and then in a burst of unwarranted confidence had called it life, spirit or soul, not knowing what he said, and finding out later that, however he named the unnameable, it remained elusive, formless and past his finding out.

In this opening paragraph of Richter's latest novel--the second of an unfinished trilogy which attempts to explore further the psycho-energic make-up of man--we find a statement of the concerns that have occupied him as a novelist since the publication of The Sea of Grass. It reflects his attempt to show in his fiction that man is a complex entity secretly governed by some mysterious force, and his attempt to relate this mysterious force to a conscious cosmic destiny appearing on the surface harsh, cruel, and unjust, but emanating from the most benevolent of motives.

His novels have been indelibly stamped with those spiritual conclusions he has drawn from his theories of psycho-energics. He realizes that his hypothesis of the formulation and operation of the "realman" can only be suggested in broad outline if he is not to subordinate realism to doctrine, art to thesis. But certain major themes central to the thesis of psycho-energic law emerge again and again as part of an over-all life pattern; the meaning of Richter's novels is related to his psycho-energic interpretation of this pattern.

The configuration of life's pattern, he believes, reveals the use by the universe of hardship and discipline for individual progress, bad means to a good end. Where self-discipline breaks down, there is a natural law insuring that the forced discipline of adversity takes over, both individually and nationally. By imposing this pattern on the details and circumstances of life contained in each episode of his novels, he is able to introduce form to his subject-matter, to impose a well-defined order on the experiences of life.

The implications he draws from this life pattern account for Richter's preoccupation with a few recurring themes that run like a refrain through his fiction: the themes of hardship and discipline, of the warning against the "cult of comfort," of the growth of higher intelligence wrought by experience, and above all, of the perception of a cosmic destiny ordering the affairs of men.

2. The Cult of Comfort: Modern Man's Nemesis

One of the most frequently recurring themes of protest in Richter's philosophical writings and his fiction is the theme that modern man is stifling his own creative growth by fostering a life of ease and by eschewing all forms of hardship. As a specific to this modern degeneracy, we should, he tells us, rescue certain values from the past. To the extent that this theme emerges in his fiction, Richter can be considered a social critic in the primitivistic tradition. But his criticism of modern attitudes and beliefs must be related specifically to his theory of emergent evolution, for it is from this theory that he derives his own philosophical justification for his protest; and it is this theory which elevates his criticism above a merely nostalgic, conservative reaction against innovation and change.

Moderns,[1] complains Richter, have misguided concepts of progress, particularly the concept of the most progressive society as the one promising the most security, welfare, and comfort. Hardship of any kind--that is, activities demanding a sustained summoning up of energy--have latterly been shunned, a practice contributing to the stagnation of evolutionary growth. The expansion of energy expenditure is always

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[1] "Moderns" is the noun Richter uses to denote contemporaries who partake willingly of the "modern spirit," i.e., who have scoffed at and rejected certain historical values in the name of progress and enlightenment.

accompanied by pain and suffering for a time, making it unpopular and against the organism's will:

> "Today the Western world calls much of this process evil. Modern progress and science do their best to conquer it. They're confounded when it springs up more terrible than before in the very ashes where they thought they had destroyed it. What they don't realize is that it is apparently an integral process of the Creator and that the cards are stacked against those who try to destroy it."[2]

Since the mandates of the universe cannot be thwarted, he argues, a land flowing with milk and honey and reclining in ease and luxury will inevitably find itself faced with adversity imposed by natural law. Some form of obstruction such as overpopulation, famine, sustained droughts, or the plague of war will in some fateful hour visit the people who, had they practiced self-discipline, would have been prepared to withstand the suffering.

Manifestations of the cult of comfort, Richter believes, are everywhere apparent, particularly in the general attitude that anything ugly must and should be avoided. Work is disliked, considered a necessary evil. And since "democratic man is resolved to stay ease-loving man as long as possible," he will select for leaders "candidates promising ease, security, and plenty in some scheme guaranteed to get around the laws of the universe."[3]

One of the most alarming evidences of the decadent spirit in this age of decline is the reliance on the efficacy

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[2] The Mountain, p. 194.

[3] Ibid., p. 213.

of education to teach moral character. Modern educators believe they can teach charity, tolerance, kindness, generosity and other of the higher virtues. It is a fundamental postulate of psycho-energic law, however, that understanding is developed through experience. Beliefs and virtues taught are but superficially learned if there has been no creative growth in the psycho-energic substance.[4] "Both the educated and uneducated who respond to character education," writes Richter, "have the needed qualities already born in them or sharpened by their early lives, or both."[5]

By implication in his fiction, and explicitly in his philosophical books and essays, Richter is severely critical of current psychological dogma; for one of the most dramatic evidences of the cult of comfort, he charges, is the widespread lack of moral restraint. Today, thanks to popular theories of mental "science"--and especially Freudian psychology--moderns have relaxed moral codes and values in the name of science and mental health.

One of Richter's chief preoccupations has been to locate the source and causes of mental disease in light of psycho-energic theory. Chapter eight of The Mountain--"The Energy Basis of Neuroses"--is devoted among other things to a stinging criticism and refutation of Freud's theories, which have done so much, Richter fears, to bring about

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[4] The Mountain, p. 202.

[5] Correspondence to me, March 21, 1962.

inadvertently the atrophy of moral fiber in people today.[6]

For despite certain gains made by Freudian psychology,

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[6]It is extremely interesting to note that Richter's analysis of Freud's obsession with, and "messianic complex" to preach the gospel of, his sexual theory as the explanation of psychic behavior remarkably anticipates C. G. Jung's own criticism of his former mentor and long time associate. Richter is dissatisfied with the dogmatism that Freud's postulates assumed in his own mind, and with his consequent authoritarian or totalitarian insistence on this dogma as "scientific truth." Freud's cause, Richter suggests, was weighted "with what to honest scientists would have been an embarrassment of inducement and seducement; . . . scientific caution and honest reservations . . . were gradually swept away by the grants of largesse and personal power that most revolutions bring. . . ; the whole [Freudian] movement bears a strong resemblance to the totalitarian movement. Both employ a myth-exposing, white-is-black technique. Religion, honor to parents and conscience are analyzed and discredited. Both movements call it liberating. It's also significant that the leaders of both movements hoped to convert mankind. Such a world-conquering messianic complex that ignores the unfavorable results of their own doctrines could be rationalized only by men of either great credulity or ambition or both" (The Mountain, pp. 113f).

In his soon-to-be-published Memories, Dreams, Reflections, Jung describes the great split in the early history of psychiatry which began with his distrust of Freud's doctrinaire obsession with sexual trauma as the cause of all repression, and his observation that Freud began to put "personal authority above scientific objectivity." Freud's refusal to grant that "factors other than sexuality could be the cause" became "highly unsatisfactory" to Jung, and he came to see that Freud's "sexual theory was enormously important to him, both personally and philosophically. . . . There was no mistaking the fact that Freud was emotionally involved in his sexual theory to an extraordinary degree. . . [Freud had begged Jung] '. . . never to abandon the sexual theory. That is the most essential thing of all. You see, we must make a dogma of it, an unshakable bulwark.'. . . First of all, it was the words 'bulwark' and 'dogma' that alarmed me; for a dogma--that is to say, an indisputable confession of faith--is set up only when the aim is to suppress doubts once and for all. But that no longer has anything to do with scientific judgment, only with a personal power drive. . . One thing was clear: Freud, who had always made much of his irreligiosity, had now constructed a dogma; or rather, in the place of a jealous God whom he had lost, he had substituted another compelling image, that of

irreparable harm has been done by people who believe it is "scientific" to shed "abnormal inhibitions" and "restrictions or repressions of normal" and "adjusted" behavior. The scientific and progressive endorsement this doctrine enjoys has resulted in a return to a less-demanding animalistic existence and has thus hampered man's spiritual growth. "Conscience is exposed as an ugly evil called guilt. The wonders of God's creation and of man and his works are seen not from the brain or the heart but from the blind sack of the genital gland."[7]

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sexuality. It was no less insistent, exacting, domineering, threatening, and morally ambivalent than the original one. . . . Freud [was] trying to outdo the church and to canonize a theory." See "Jung on Freud: the Dogma of Sex," The Atlantic Monthly, CCX (November 1962), 48-51.

[7]The Mountain, p. 119. Note: Richter's rejection and dissatisfaction with Freudian psychology was one of the chief motives behind his writing of The Waters of Kronos. The man John Donner who returns to Unionville, the home of his youth, has a neurosis that has weakened him and driven him back to his ancestral home so that he may be near the source, and so that he might understand what it is that has filled him with a nameless malaise. He is, in short, a man suffering from an acute energy deficit, and by revisiting the scenes of childhood through his imagination he is brought into touch with his energy stream at levels nearer its source and before it has been lost in the coils of mental experience.

Specifically, Richter is trying to show the inadequacy of the Freudian Oedipus complex (son-hate-father legend). It is Richter's contention that Freudians think they have cured something by naming it, by practicing their methods of releasing energy by the intricate and endless manipulation of the sexual theme device.

The Freudian analyst postulates an inner conflict near the surface of the ill person's subconscious mind which is analogous to a kind of dark, mysterious and seemingly evil beast rising like Proteus from the sea and alarming the patient. Such a descriptive word picture of a symptom state is given as a cause or explanation. It is a very suggestive and formidable picture, admits Richter, but both doctor and

The relaxing of restraints is perhaps the most serious symptom of the degeneracy accompanying a life of ease. Moderns, Richter charges, have fallen under the spell of "relieving," and have thus little respect for disciplining their indulgence in desires, wants, sex, pleasures, and most "so-called compulsions." "It is," writes Richter, "a process of lowering the evolutionary and manly standard that our ancestors so laboriously built up."[8] The modern panacea is "escape," but it is, he fears, escape up a blind alley.

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patient think the cause has been determined simply because the illness can be understood in terms of analogy.

Such a false analysis of "anxiety states," Richter suggests, is the Oedipus complex. According to Freud, there is a time prior to the emergence of the phallic period in which the boy loves his mother and identifies with his father. The boy's love for his mother becomes more incestuous as his sexual urge increases, and he becomes jealous of his father, considering him as a rival. Richter rejects the sexual basis for this explanation of the state of affairs in which the boy (or the man) feels warmer towards his mother and antagonistic towards his father. In The Waters of Kronos John Donner confronts and speaks briefly with himself as a youth. Through a series of small incidents he is at last able to discern the meaning of his antagonism toward, and estrangement from, his father: "It was the great deception practiced by man on himself and his fellows, the legend of hate against the father so the son need not face the real and ultimate abomination, might conceal the actual nature of the monster who haunted the shadows of childhood, whose name only the soul knew and who never revealed himself before the end when it was found that all those disturbing things seen and felt in the father, which as a boy had given him an uncomprehensive sense of dread and hostility, were only intimations of his older self to come, a self marked with the inescapable dissolution and decay of his youth. Even the creator of the hate-against-the-father legend must in his bitter later years have guessed the truth" (p. 161).

[8] "That Early American Quality," Atlantic Monthly, CLXXXVI (September 1950), 30.

A most regretful and debasing product of the cult of comfort is the attitude it engenders. The modern American is frightened, cowed, bewildered, "beaten down by life, and running with the sheep." He is dependent, bored, searching for happiness in material things, and above all, he lacks vitality and fortitude. A nation's greatest fundamental quality is its men, Richter observes, and man's greatest fundamental quality is manhood. "You can build understanding, culture, and progress on manhood," he writes, "but you can never build manhood on mere intelligence, culture and progress. Character strength and manhood are from within."[9] It is, then, the loss of manhood that Richter charges modern society with. We have become emasculated and dissociated, and he lays these evils to the cult of comfort and the modern philosophy of benefaction.

3. The Evolution of the Spiritual Sensitive and Anti-Welfarism: The Paradox of Psycho-Energics

There is apparent in Richter's theory of emergent evolution--the cornerstone of his Weltanschauung--what would appear to be a paradox, if not a contradiction. In man's evolution upward (as described in the psycho-energic scheme) from the primordial beginnings and toward the "Original Source," there are three recognizable classes of man: the brutal and self-centered; the sensitive altruist who in his desire to share his substance for the welfare of his fellow creatures (a spiritual act), is often led by his unreasoning sympathy to try and do

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[9]"That Early American Quality," p. 28.

away with the misery and hardship in the world; and the highly advanced man of understanding whose intelligence is equal to his passion and who therefore wisely refuses to interfere in the destiny of his fellow man for fear of interfering with those natural processes which make for the higher advancement.[10]

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[10]". . . the higher man is found on the scale, the more compassionate he is for other men's lives and the more passionate to share his substance, but this very substance may include the joys of higher advancement, and man must reach that advancement first, all of which means the sufficiently evolved and intelligent man would be unlikely to rush to remove those of man's burdens by which he himself attained his higher rates and energy flows" (Correspondence to me, March 8, 1962).

Even the highly advanced, like Christ of the New Testament, ". . . was moved by those who came to him in suffering or by his dead friend. Yet, although many Christians claim him as God, he did not, as would be easily possible for omnipotence, lift the suffering of those masses who through no fault of their own had never heard of him or met him, living in other parts of Palestine and the world. It is possible that even such a compassionate figure reaches the higher impersonal state only after separation, changed surroundings and perhaps freer energy supplies the painfully high expenditures of another's suffering, all of which may result in patience and understanding rather than emotional action. . ." (Correspondence to me, March 8, 1962).

Problems that seem desperate to us would not appear so to the Creator and powers that be: "the Creator, having abundant energy to meet and resolve the high expenditure rates set off by observing our small burdens, feels no sense of fear, pain, calamity or evil for us and as a consequence no compulsion to rush to our aid" (The Mountain, p. 210).

Michael's ambivalent feelings on the function of pain in growth and his compulsion to relieve pain when he can is a valuable index to Richter's own position. Michael says, "What I tried to show was that the pain of higher expenditure of energy is the mother of psycho-energic growth. In most cases I can see it's very good. We would be nothing without it. . . Just the same even in those cases where the end is undeniably good, the means troubles me. . . . I am the weak one who acknowledges the brilliant engineering of the Creator's process of obstruction and suffering for our own benefit, but who holds back painfully from using it in any living thing but himself" (The Mountain, p. 111). Later Michael confesses that when he sees some poor soul suffering his convictions turn to water. "Their suffering may be for their eventual benefit psycho-energically, but I'm not satisfied with that. I can only think

Thus, the sensitive's sympathy for others is a sign of spiritual evolution; and yet his zeal for the welfare of his fellow man which may prompt him to campaign against any manifestation of what the world calls misery (disease, slums, hunger, ignorance, and so forth) may paradoxically cause him to interfere with the laws of the universe. To Richter, this is not a paradox but one of the riddles of existence that has to be accepted. The temptation before any sensitive in the "intermediate class" will be to covet for his fellow man happiness. But it becomes a mark of higher advancement when the sensitive is given the understanding to resist this temptation; the man who has reached this stature is rare and he is sure to be misunderstood.

Michael, Richter's alter ego in The Mountain, is one of the most highly advanced characters psycho-energically that Richter has delineated; and yet he is in the "intermediate class" and his happiness is dependent in part on the happiness or well-being of many wretched and unfortunate people: he "couldn't be really content while they were suffering, in distress or committed on fatal roads."[11] Yet, inasmuch as he is able, he refrains from such interference in natural law and although he is moved to aid those sorely distressed he is

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of their tragedy in human terms, and pray for their relief from the wheel of fate" (The Mountain, p. 223). In private correspondence to me, Richter admits that Michael's prayer for a "milder and gentler evolutionary system, for a good means to a good end" (p. 223) is his own (Correspondence to me, March 8, 1962).

[11] The Mountain, p. 110.

decidedly against broad programs of benefaction which have as their goal the removal of want. It appears that Richter does endorse acts of personal benevolence reasonably justified; but impersonal acts of benefaction, even when they spring from a man with the warmest intentions, are suspect and contrary to the laws of nature.

The basic laws of the universe, Richter writes, cannot in either matter or spirit come to terms with modern artificial society.

> Physical laws remain unchanged. They are not considered by scientists nostalgic superstitions of the past. All scientists must work with them. They cannot be ignored. Psycho-energic and human evolutionary laws enjoy the same permanence. To say that a knowledge of the values of discipline and hardship is incompatible with an evolutionary growth in sensitivity, that such a view is paradoxical and would attack the benefit of efforts against child labor, ignorance, disease, hunger and slums, is hasty oversimplification. It doesn't take into consideration the necessary corresponding growth in intelligence in the sensitive that the physical scientist employs in matter, an intelligence aware that unintelligent sensitivity and artless assumptions do harm. It includes an open mind, patient willingness to be wrong, a cold hard approach to one's own starry-eyed hopes and a lack of blind defense for the easy belief that an evolutionary advance in character, sensitivity and intelligence can be bought by benefactions instead of by a constant shrewdness that administers sympathy only with wary understanding. Whatever one can accuse the Almighty of, he cannot say that Fate or God is naive.
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> I am not a sociologist or politician but certainly ignorance can be attacked not with untried political and social expedience but in open trial of what the modern may call nostalgia, oldfashioned or superstitious. . . .
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> [If] there ever was a contradiction in the seeming plan of the Creator, it is resolved by intelligence, and when modern expedience without intelligence closes its eyes to realities, hardship and discipline appear on their own.[12]

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[12]Correspondence to me, March 21, 1962.

There is, then, to Richter's way of seeing things, a distinct philosophical basis for his distrust of modern social welfare tendencies; for the general assumption of welfarism is that improved conditions should be planned for mankind, and the central aim of conventional welfare policies is to remove "want." But in Richter's cosmology ultimate planning is removed from the hands of man and placed in those of the powers-that-be behind the universe; and these powers are continuously seeing to it that all "wants" are not removed from our life here.

Even if one is generous enough to grant all of Richter's philosophical precepts, however, he is sooner or later faced with the question of how far individual man can, and should, plan his own fate. Certainly the pioneers who journeyed into the wilderness were taking their destiny into their hands, planning improved conditions for themselves and their children. Surely Richter would admit that it is desirable to remove <u>some</u> wants. But how does a man know when he has gone too far? When can a rational thinker know when his own planning may not be in the interest of his own welfare? Sweepingly to condemn social planning even on psycho-energic grounds poses certain problems of degree that, it must be admitted, are not clearly answered in Richter's philosophical writings.

Because of his philosophical convictions, there runs through Richter's fiction a persistent criticism of

"political do-gooders" or "professional noisy do-gooders,"[13] whose policies or programs have popular appeal, but which have adverse effects on character education. There is an unveiled hostility toward State Planning and the traditional indifference of Big Government to the rights of the private individual in many of Richter's stories. Although his conclusions derive from a distinct philosophical premise, they inevitably align him in principle with the social conservative.

4. Themes of Protest in Richter's Time-Fantasies

In one of his most unusual, and perhaps least effective, short stories, Richter experiments with a time fantasy in the genre made famous by Orwell's 1984 and Huxley's Brave New World. "Sinister Journey"[14] is an eschatological thesis story, a glimpse into the future derived from a perception of how our time may end if man dedicates himself to the ideal of social welfarism: the ultimate removal of all want. The story is deficient artistically and its only value here is for its clear illustration of Richter's protest against the philosophy of benefaction.

Douglas Creel, a noted musician and champion of "planned improvement of conditions for mankind," has mysteriously disappeared. His close friend, Michael, is portentously

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[13] Richter's own terminology.

[14] Saturday Evening Post, CCVI (Sept. 26, 1953), 36-7+ (all references to "Sinister Journey" will refer to the Post version).

translated into a future dimension of time in which he finds himself in the planned state of Millennia where Creel, too, now lives.

In the State of Millennia, Richter depicts a world in which public claims destroy the possibilities of private life. The dwarfish, neutral Millennians have sacrificed their human personality to become a function of a process they are never allowed to understand or control. They have lost their imagination and capacity to apprehend reality, and in return they have accepted a life of euphoric comfort and security. The cardihal principle of the State of Millennia is freedom from want. Millennians "tolerate no hunger, ugliness or shabbiness, no poverty or housing shortage, no illiteracy or ignorance, certainly no medical or other lack that interferes with the peace, contentment and security of our people."[15]

The only values the Millennians possess are based on this cardinal principle, and by a strange contortion of logic, the only freedom admitted is freedom from want. Privacy and independent opinions are scorned as subversive of the State maxim, and transgressors of the spirit of freedom from want are given "Benevolent Instruction" and training in "Benign Common Weal." Through such devices Richter shows his distrust of the false morality that predicates humanitarian projects imposed by the State for the common good at the expense of an individual's freedom to dissent from the "benefits" of these

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[15]"Sinister Journey," p. 99.

projects. He goes to great detail to outline life in this futuristic state, showing that "nothing has been left undone in the way of planning for plant and human welfare."

Creel, as it is to be expected, has radically changed his mind about his social ideals after living in Millennia. He has learned, above all, the effect of freedom from want on man's spiritual consciousness; for the biggest tragedy in this synthetic imitation world is that where nobody wants for anything, there is no need of God; his Name and Idea are forgotten. Creel, who was an agnostic before sojourning in Millennia, now in a statement of faith presents the thesis of the story:

> "Oh, I've learned a lot of respect for God from his absence. Back home as a boy I was told everything good came from God. They didn't tell me that lack of good may be God too. I mean what makes you work and pray for something you don't have. Now I believe that's more of God than the other because it lifts you up and develops you while monotonous goodness makes you stagnate like a frog in a swamp."[16]

In 1950 Richter experimented with another time fantasy entitled "Doctor Hanray's Second Chance," (original title before changed by editors was "The Boy That Was").[17] This short story is the immediate ancestor of his award-winning novel, The Waters of Kronos. In it he explores the theme of a man permitted the portentous privilege of returning in person to his youth so that he might confront his parents and himself and discover the source of a mysterious malaise that has come

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[16]"Sinister Journey," p. 102.

[17]Saturday Evening Post, CCII (June 10, 1950), 22-3+ (all references to "Doctor Hanray's Second Chance" refer to the Post version).

over him. Hanray, the protagonist, is an eminent atomic scientist who carries an enormous burden of guilt for his part in creating the atomic bomb. Revisiting the village of his youth he finds it has been vacated by the government so that a military atomic weapons processing plant may be installed there.

As in the later Waters of Kronos, the protagonist suddenly finds himself confronting his family in the past. He recalls the shame he had felt at his medical father's Christian humility and unprofessional manner; for although his father had been a doctor, he had always prayed for his patients to recover, an act which to his son was a betrayal of the science of medicine. The son, now grown wiser after a lifetime of experience, realizes that he had been calloused and immature to condemn his father's faith.

The youth aspires to be a scientist, but now the physicist the youth has become tries to convince the boy not to follow science. "What he must do is prepare for a life like yours. . ." he pleads with the boy's father. "Make him see the great opportunity in medicine, the salvation of going around doing good like you."[18] The request is an impossible one to make, however, and the physicist is brought back to the present, but not before he somehow makes peace with his youth in some mysterious way not made clear to the reader.

The story is a symbolic rejection of the modern complacent acceptance of science and progress as inevitable and

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[18]"Doctor Hanray's Second Chance," p. 107.

good. As a youth, the lad's dream was to serve mankind through science. The result of his devotion to scientific knowledge, however, is his collaboration in the invention of a hideous weapon which destroys, not aids mankind. The burden of guilt Dr. Hanray carries is shared generally by modern man, who has blindly followed the leads of science, permitting it to be the arbiter of values, while the humble values personified by Christian charity are scorned.

The story is also clearly a protest against Big Government's cold-blooded attitude toward the former residents of the village and valley, who were evicted from their ancestral homes and dismissed as "casualties of the war" by bureaucratic statisticians in the planning offices of Washington. Richter is calling into question the modern utilitarian ethic which demands that the will of the minority bend and give way for the good of the majority. The tragic irony here, of course, is that the "good of the majority" has resulted in the creation of a reservation on which to manufacture monstrous weapons invented by science, weapons which threaten some day to obliterate even the majority.

Richter uses the same device in The Waters of Kronos to protest against the utilitarian ethic of government "planners," except in this case it is the building of a huge dam that has caused the government to preempt the entire valley and small town in it. When John Donner returns to the scene of his youth, he is already aware of what has transpired; but he is still shaken by the sight of the waters of the huge dam:

> He had warned himself he must expect modern progress, must realize that the turbines down in their concrete power house together with the giant lines that rose in huge steps over the mountains benefited humanity. Of all people he should be able to look at it in a large way.

On the surface, the dam represents a good step forward for mankind; but its murky waters become for Donner a symbol of something else:

> And yet he couldn't shake off the feeling that under his feet he had come upon something frightening. He had had a glimpse, small as it was, into an abyss whose unfathomable depths were shrouded in mist, a bottomless chasm that he had known existed, if only in the back of his mind and in back of everyone else's mind, but which he had never seen face to face or directly looked into before. Perhaps one had to be old as he to recognize what one saw, to understand first how man had struggled up so painfully and so long, and then with that sad knowledge to come upon one's own once living, breathing people swallowed up in the abyss, given back to primordial and diluvian chaos.[19]

The "something frightening" is seen in two overlapping motifs. First of all it is Donner's painful awareness that this project planned "to benefit humanity" came at an incalculable loss to the valley residents. The government guard in describing the former valley residents' hatred of the dam reveals the dialectic of social humanitarian thinking in his complaint that the people treat him and the government as the "enemy." "You'd think we were making a ruin and shambles out of their valley instead of a wonderful lake to stop floods and light up half the Eastern Seaboard."[20] The fact is, however, that the valley, as far as the former residents are concerned,

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[19] The Waters of Kronos (New York, 1960), p. 7 (Hereafter referred to as Kronos).

[20] Kronos, p. 10.

is made into a ruin and shambles. When in the name of a "larger humanity" we turn from personal acts of kindness to great humanitarian "projects in behalf of mankind," Richter suggests, the sense of personal benevolence is replaced by an abstract, almost indifferent kind of social morality that is difficult to translate into human terms.

In his sympathy with the valley residents, Richter is suggesting the importance of roots and tradition, the need to feel an attachment to something permanent in a world whose chief characteristic is change. He is criticizing the modern attitude that looks upon the preservation of the old and familiar as sentimental and anachronistic. At the same time he is giving expression to his own resentment at change and loss of youth--a resentment which undeniably gives the novel an undercurrent of nostalgia.

The most important significance of the symbol of the waters is its suggestion of the dangerous path man is now trodding. For eons of time man has evolved painfully up from primordial and diluvian chaos only to reach an era in which he unwittingly tries to side-step the hardship that has brought him to his present level. For the dam, to which Donner refers as his worst enemy, signifies a monument to planned progress--a mammoth project that puts under man-made control the natural elements that represent the energy of nature, a symbolic interference in natural law.[21]

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[21]Richter warns against going too far in controlling natural forces, but it is difficult to see where he draws the line. Once again, we are confronted with the problem of degree.

5. Pioneer Values: The Acceptance of Hardship and Discipline as Providential

Richter's highest achievements as a novelist are due to his familiarity and sympathy with the pioneer times, in which he finds certain values sorely needed today. The great example for moderns by which we may regain our vitality and fortitude is the Early American, and more specifically, that Early American quality. This explains in part his lifelong devotion to historical fiction.

The opposition of the wilderness developed the hardy and vigorous American pioneer, who is perhaps the best exemplification of the value of conflict for character growth:

> "The greater the difficulties of the pioneer, the more did his hardship, insecurity, danger and discomfort establish strong energy flows in him so that when resolved by hope in and effort toward eventual victory over them, the released energy of these hardships gave pleasure, not pain. The idea of pain wasn't in the pioneer so much as in modern people with fainter energy flows who look back on the pioneer and invent tales of his suffering and despair to cut him down more to their own size."[22]

What Richter has tried to define in his researches into the Early American character is the source of that quality which he believes was unique. The pioneers had in common a "kind of hardihood and vigor beside which most Americans seem soft and squeamish today." There was, he insists, a dynamic vitality in their lives. In contrast to the emasculated modern character, the Early American had about him a "manliness"--not physique, but a quality that made for an "independent crabbed

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[22] The Mountain, p. 200.

hardihood that stood up for its rights and took you on at all odds," writes Richter. "It was a quality of mind and spirit rather than of body, still more of creed and belief."[23]

Richter's chief admiration of the Early Americans, then, is for their common sense philosophy, which accepted the need for opposition and inharmony; they had "a greater value and respect for the establishment of expanded expenditure, however painful." The older generation accepted life's misfortunes and adversities as "the wise dispensation or discipline of the gods."[24] They did not rail at life or denigrate the mysterious Fate that placed them time and again in cruel circumstances.

Richter's conviction that the Early Americans had somehow divined life's pattern, and had learned through experience the folly of rejecting Providence, or cosmic destiny, goes far toward explaining why his pioneer novels are his most vigorous and alive. "The sustained summoning of effort and energies built up in some mysterious way the spiritual and physical reservoirs of men and women [and] produced that breed whose record so dwarfs us spiritually and physically today."[25]

By turning his efforts toward the frontier era, Richter hoped to contrast the positive qualities then so much in evidence against the negative or emasculated qualities that early began to vitiate the American spirit. The emergence of a higher

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[23]"That Early American Quality," p. 27.

[24]The Mountain, p. 199.

[25]"That Early American Quality," p. 30.

standard of living concomitant with the spread of industrialism in the mid-nineteenth century marked the beginning of a cultural loss. "No one can long study the early days in America," he writes, "without witnessing the strengthening of character under hardship and its weakening under ease and high living standards."[26] His purpose as a historical novelist is to illuminate the meaning of certain changes in the human condition brought about by cosmic destiny.

Richter, in his first novel, The Sea of Grass, tells the story of a people and land which are ravaged by years of conflict and change. It is a story of change, writes Bruce Sutherland, which destroys and builds at the same time, a story of the past which succumbs to the present and of the personal tragedy which attends the tide of progress.[27] Sutherland, however, has failed to place his finger on the exact meaning of the novel; for the true significance of The Sea of Grass is its illustration of cosmic destiny ordering the affairs of men, and its illustration of the values of hardship, discipline, and intelligence gained from experience with the issues of life. The tragedy is not Colonel Brewton's inability to adjust to the tide of progress; the tragedy is in the blind, unreasoning worship of progress and change displayed by "political do-gooders" like Brice Chamberlain, and in the fact that so few people can learn the painful lesson of what results when one attempts to outwit Fate.

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[26]Correspondence to me, July 4, 1961.

[27]Sutherland, p. 418.

The story begins with a statement of personal nostalgia that suggests the sentimental aspects of Richter's primitivism: "That lusty pioneer blood is tamed now, broken and gelded like the wild horse and the frontier settlement. And I think that I shall never see it flowing through human veins again as it did in my Uncle Jim."[28] The conflict in the novel is between Colonel Jim Brewton, baron of a huge cattle empire, and Brice Chamberlain, a lawyer recently from the East and self-styled champion of the immigrant dry land farmers who want to settle on government claims. The hate between these two is heightened when the conflict becomes personal; Chamberlain seduces Lutie Brewton, fathers a child (whose hereditary compulsions and desires ultimately lead him to a tragic death), and then induces Lutie to run off with him only to leave her stranded in a distant rendezvous city when he fails to summon up enough courage to follow.

"In The Sea of Grass," writes Richter, "the reader may glimpse a nobility of character and practical intelligence of the hard disciplined colonel over those of the political do-gooder who seduced his wife."[29] Brewton is described as a man not arrogant or disdainful, but nevertheless proud, whose presence emanated will and power. "Remember, boy. . ." he tells his nephew, "there are times in your life you've got to be hard. No man respects you for being soft to him today and

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[28]The Sea of Grass (New York, 1946), p. 11.

[29]Correspondence to me, March 21, 1962.

letting him ruin you and himself tomorrow."[30] His hatred for the nester derives not from personal greed, but from his knowledge of what the nester "wanted to do with the land." The Southwestern range country, Brewton knows, is more than seven thousand feet above the sea; and his experience in that arid land tells him plows will only kill the grass, for the rains will not support crops.

Chamberlain, on the contrary, has a blind, unreasoning worship of change and innovation. He is a devotee to "civilization" and represents planned progress rather than that organic process which unfolds at the will of the cosmos. Weak in his own person, he relies on political connections to get appointed to a Federal judgeship so that he might impose his will on Brewton. He stands for the power of Big Government to enforce--or attempt to enforce--a planned economy on the environment. The narrator reports that more than once he had caught Brice Chamberlain's eyes measuring Colonel Brewton and seeming to say:

> "You're of the past generation now. Your time is soon over. We will run the world from now on, not you." And to Lutie he openly and eloquently boasted: "Civilization is moving west fast. It will be here soon. And when it comes, the fertile plains around this ranch house will be dotted with farms and schoolhouses."[31]

On the surface Chamberlain appears devoted only to "justice" for the nester, and to compelling Brewton to share his land with the farmers, his "unfortunate fellow men." The

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[30] The Sea of Grass, p. 52.

[31] Ibid., p. 30.

question is moot, however, whether Chamberlain stands for the sympathetic sensitive in the intermediate class Richter has spoken of, or whether he is like several "professional do-gooders" Richter has known whose

> . . . vocal interest in the good of certain others was born not from having reached the intermediate class . . . , but from a feeling that the world did not readily furnish them with the standard of living, attention and prominence they felt they deserved, and [whose] protests for others might . . . readily be protests for themselves.[32]

Undoubtedly his defense of the settler is partly to compensate for his failure to be faithful to Lutie, and partly to vindicate his own good name from the inevitable scandal that would have attended his leaving.

Although Chamberlain, backed by legal authority and the cause of "justice," forces Brewton to permit homesteaders to file claims, the destiny of the people and of the land is not so readily shaped to correspond to man's planning. After two or three exceptionally wet years, the arid Southwestern land returns to its normal climate; hot winds kill the crops and drive most of the settlers off the land, robbing them of their dignity as well as their livelihood, and leaving only a "wasteland of barbed wire and bare ground." The nesters call it a "drought" and bewail the evil misfortune that has befallen them; but Brewton and the other ranchers know it is only "normal old-fashioned New Mexican weather."

Brewton's nephew, the narrator of the story, expresses Richter's view of the cosmos as he reflects on the fate of Chamberlain's nesters:

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[32]Correspondence to me, March 8, 1962.

> At that time I thought it only the way the cards happened to fall. But when I look back on it now, it seems immutable and fixed as a chapter out of Genesis or Exodus, with the nesters safe on their Promised Land; with my uncle pushed back with his cattle on a thousand hills; with Brice Chamberlain in the seats of the mighty: and all the time the red eye of God watching from the burning bush, not to see that what was to come would be humane and sweet and according to progress, but it should be cruel and just and true according to the book of destiny which blinds man from properly reading it until those who would dictate it are dead and fifty or a thousand years have passed.[33]

The same cosmological pattern of life that gives depth of meaning to The Sea of Grass also underlines the plot of Tacey Cromwell,[34] a novel that deserves more attention than it has so far received. "In Tacey Cromwell," writes Richter, "more intelligence in bringing up children is found in the once Western sporting house woman than in the soft loving mother brought up in luxury and ease."[35] Tacey, because of her past, is forced to give up Seely, an orphan girl she had befriended for three years, a girl in whom Tacey instinctively recognizes many of the same traits, drives, and desires that she herself had had--desires which had caused her to throw away her life and become a professional prostitute.

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[33] The Sea of Grass, p. 61.

[34] (New York, 1942).

[35] Correspondence to me, March 21, 1962 (Richter adds: "In this connection Will Keleher, the most authoritative historian of New Mexico, once told me this was the book he would have written if I hadn't, not in fiction but a document on the character of such women who later became respectable wives and mothers all over the West. Having seen the worst, they turned out to be the most careful and successful mothers of their children.")

Miss Rudith, daughter of a wealthy Senator, forms a committee to rescue Seely and the other children from the "corrupting influence" of an "immoral" woman. Miss Rudith herself adopts Seely and tries to bring her up as a proper young lady. Indulgently the girl's every whim is pampered, but her moral character is neglected. Increasingly Miss Rudith holds Tacey's early influence responsible for the tempestuous nature Seely displays, but the irony is, of course, that Tacey--understanding Seely's temperament because of the suffering of her own life--could have saved Seely from herself had it not been for the well-meaning but ill-advised interference of Miss Rudith.

Destiny had brought Seely to Tacey in the first place, but the planning of the Bisbee moral reformers interrupted the Greater Plan. In the soft and undisciplined environment of the Watrous mansion, Seely's moral character education is neglected to the same extent that she is pampered and protected from the world. In time natural adversity takes over; after the humiliation and suffering of two broken marriages and after her baby dies at childbirth, Seely is once more placed by destiny back into the hands of Tacey, the only one who can really salvage the life of the young girl.

After the publication of The Sea of Grass, Richter came more and more to use a woman as his protagonist. In addition to Tacey Cromwell we should mention Sayward Wheeler, protagonist of the Ohio trilogy, Lucy Markle, the central character of Always Young and Fair, Doña Ellen of The Lady,

who found a wonderful and terrible triumph even in disaster, and the heroines of short stories that appeared in the Post.[36]

In A Simple Honorable Man, Harry Donner makes an observation about women that gives us a clue to this development:

> Of all God's creation, the preacher thought, His finest work had been woman. She was, when you reflected on her, a most divine and marvelous invention, one that could feel tenderness for the weak, pity for the suffering, could delight man, make his bed and supper, not to

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[36]Any number of stories might be mentioned including some that were collected and published in Early Americana. As an example I might mention "The Iron Lady," Saturday Evening Post, CCXXX (July 13, 1957), 20-1+. In this story Richter celebrates the hardihood of a pioneer woman who saved a youth's life by putting "iron" in his soul. The story is told from the point of view of an old man, an ironmaster who is reputed to have a secret source of iron. The iron he has spoken of is symbolic, however, for he refers to an experience in the wilderness frontier when Marry Harris, a settlement woman, and he, a child of eight, were captives of renegade Indians. The woman, knowing the only chance for the youth's survival depended on his ability to endure (she saw her own son cruelly murdered for whimpering), taunts him when he cries and beats him mercilessly to his feet when, during the ordeal of their escape through the forest, he falls to the ground exhausted. "You always got to fight something in this life," she said to him. "If it ain't Injuns, it's something else" (p. 90). Throughout his life the youth who endured that hardship drew strength from the great example of the "iron lady." "He'd never forget her. She was the one to put iron in a man's soul" (p. 90).

In another short story remarkable for its anticipation of the plot of the Ohio trilogy, "The Rawhide Knot," Saturday Evening Post, CCX (Jan. 1, 1938), 18-19+, Richter describes an old woman's dissatisfaction with modern life and her reminiscence of her strange frontier wedding. The wedding episode reappears in The Trees, but the significance of the story lies in the old pioneer woman's criticism of modern life. For the first time we are introduced to Sayward Wheeler whose characterization later gives substance to the Ohio trilogy. On her death bed, she muses bitterly on the false sophistication of her children and the town she had seen grow from a settlement to an industrial city. "The way people talked today, this was the golden age," she complains to herself. "The way they acted, it had been a little indelicate and uncivilized, to have lived seventy and eighty years ago when she did" (p. 19). The trouble with the country was its "downright civilized refinement."

> mention her astounding gift to conceive and perpetuate her kind. . .
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> There were exceptions, of course, but all through life Harry Donner had noticed that women could endure more than their husbands.[37]

Something about the nature of woman--intuitively instructed perhaps by such things as the joys of motherhood after the pain of childbirth--fits them for the role as the exemplars of the stoic virtues championed by Richter: self-restraint, self-control, and self-discipline.

6. The Ohio Trilogy: A Tribute to the Pioneer Philosophy

Richter's greatest tribute to the pioneer philosophy, and his highest achievement in the genre in which he finds his best expression, is the Ohio trilogy: The Trees, The Fields, and The Town.[38] The pioneers about whom Richter learned in his diligent research into historical documents were "unaffected by so-called progress" and his affection, admiration, and appreciation for these people were among the chief motives that prompted him to write the trilogy.[39]

The first two novels lay down the fleshly and spiritual ties of Sayward (Luckett) Wheeler, the protagonist, and her family, and describe in realistic and compelling terms the epic theme of frontier settlement and the growth of community: the penetration into the forest, the clearing of the trees for fields, and the eventual growth of a well-defined settlement.

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[37] A Simple Honorable Man (New York, 1962), p. 159.

[38] These three novels are acknowledged by Richter to be the most closely related to the philosophical precepts set forth in The Mountain on the Desert (See Foreword to that work).

[39] Correspondence to me, July 4, 1961.

The novels are largely episodic in structure (several of the chapters appeared earlier as short stories) with each episode stressing the need for courage, hardihood, and self-reliance concomitant with frontier living.

One of Richter's chief intentions is to show that steady conflict with wilderness adversity and rigors, which forced the pioneer to summon up all his energies for survival, incessantly annealed mind and body and acted as the persistent catalytic agent for moral and character growth.

The medium of awareness (or growing consciousness of the configuration of life's pattern) in the trilogy is, of course, Sayward, whose development teaches her and the reader that nothing can substitute for the wisdom, sympathetic understanding, and intelligence gained by experience. Slowly and painfully through the years she catches a glimpse of the cosmic destiny that reveals a benevolent force behind the apparent hostility of nature, a hostility symbolized by the forces of the wilderness itself (particularly the trees) and the operations of fate in pestilences, famines, and personal tragedies.

Her conflict with the trees takes on the proportions of a spiritual battle and becomes intensely personal. She is equipped with a "woodsy's" mind and a "woodsy's" imagination; and thus in her early years beneath the sea-green ocean of trees, she perceives a power in the woods that seems openly hostile and predatory. The settlers, and particularly Sayward, think of the trees as dark and sentient beasts. Jary is the first "victim" to the forest, and Sulie, who is swallowed up

by the "cruel trees," is the second.[40] Genny, during her harrowing night-long ordeal with the "painter" trying to come down the chimney on her lonesome cabin, temporarily loses her mind and insists it was "the night trees" trying to get her. Even Sayward believes the wild trees "hated to see Genny get pulled out of their clutches. They thought they had had her fast like they had little Sulie."[41] The battle against the unnameable evil in the forest is waged constantly, always near the surface of Sayward's mind. "Oh, it had evil things in the woods that were older than the oldest man," she observes. "The woods shut you in and fought you while you lived, and sucked up your flesh and blood with its roots after you died."[42]

This near-sentient power--"the Wild Thing without a name that followed you in the deep woods, and no man knew whether it was flesh or spirit"[43]--gives mystical overtones to the conflict between Sayward and the "everforest"; in her imagination the battle against the monstrous butts is in some inexplicable way a battle between the forces of good and evil, and she is constantly summoning up strength and energy, both morally and physically, not to be overcome by her adversary, fearing yet respecting her foe:

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[40] The Trees (New York, 1940), pp. 65, 179.

[41] The Trees, pp. 257-60.

[42] The Fields (New York, 1946), p. 35. Note: The indefinite pronoun "it" refers to no antecedent; it is a part of the folk idiom Richter captures in the pioneer language.

[43] The Town (New York, 1950), p. 152.

> Oh, the big butts were a hard foe for humans to fight, a race of giants with arms thicker than any other beast around, and body weighty as the river bed. There they stood with their feet deep in the guts of the old earth and their heads in the sky, never even looking at you or letting on you were there.[44]

Years later when the forest has disappeared before the hand of man and she is compelled by some strange and mystical desire to plant around her town house trees which she had once "hated like poison," her act is more than a gesture of nostalgia. For the trees come to stand for a vanished way of life that has succumbed before merciless change. The tremendous energy expenditure built up over the years in her personal conflict with the trees and the Aweful Presence they stood for has now found "contraction," and her hatred gives way to love. What she had once thought "evil" is now, from a later perspective, seen to be part of a general plan.

Not only have the trees become for her a symbol of mysterious plan inherent in the natural order, but Sayward's change of attitude toward them is instrumental in causing the reactionary Chancey to consider seriously the merits of his mother's philosophy. At her death bed he discovers her now great love for her one-time enemy, whose leaves she can faintly hear rustling at the window, and Chancey is moved to reflect:

> Was there something deeper and more mysterious in his mother's philosophy than he suspected; something not simple but complex; something which held not only that hardship built happiness but which somehow implied that hate built love; and evil, goodness?[45]

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[44] The Fields, p. 107; see also, pp. 12f, 30, 33, and 107f.

[45] The Town, p. 432.

The theme of cosmic destiny runs throughout the trilogy, helping to unify the three novels into a continuous whole. Like the surface ripples that reveal a swift undercurrent, it suggests that what happens is permitted to happen by a controlling power in the universe, a natural ordination, which is ironically set off against the puny efforts of man to have final control in the destiny of things to come. And when man does interfere in the destiny of others, Richter shows us, the results can be tragic.

Sayward learns this lesson painfully, and as she does, she gains increasing respect for Providence, that power in the universe ordering the affairs of men. Even death, the most hated of "evils," must be accepted as a natural process of being and in the control of the powers that be. "There was one thing, it looked like, that could stand off Death. If your time hadn't come yet, it made you slick as an eel and Death couldn't hold you."[46]

Related to the theme of cosmic destiny, and Richter's injunction against interfering in this destiny, is his theory of inherited traits and drives ("rate flows" and "energy deficiencies") which play a leading role in that "which secretly governed man and determined his destiny." Sayward discovers she must accept man for what he is naturally, for what he must be because he is what he is. Although in possession of a will to order certain parts of the whole, to direct the single event and shape the single day, man will think and act in

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[46] The Trees, p. 132.

correspondence to the inherited psycho-energic "realman" which, though always susceptible to being tempered by experience, still accounts for his compulsions and drives. In The Town, Rosa, the bastard child of Portius and Miss Bartram, comes to her own realization of this truth:

> Wasn't it a strange thing about people in this world, why they were themselves and why you were the person you were? When she tried to think who it was that stood here in her flesh living and thinking she seemed to be blown away and lost far back in her mind. . . Wasn't it the saddest thing in this world that you always had to be yourself, that you couldn't be somebody else. . . ?[47]

In the trilogy Richter can trace the recurrence in three generations of certain racial and familial traits peculiar to Sayward's blood-line. The hunter strain runs deep in Worth and Wyitt and reappears in Guerdon and even Chancey, although with each generation it is thinned and manifested differently. The same strain predicates the dark, primitive, and impetuous behavior in Achsa and later in Huldah. Worth himself has Monsey Indian blood, which accounts for his primitive nature, his restless spirit, and his hunter instinct.

The same drives reappear in his son Wyitt. Sayward stoically accepts the inevitability of Wyitt's some day following his father into the forest. "He'd grow up a hunter like his pappy, following the woods, moving on with the game. If it was in him it would come out. There was no stopping such kind."[48] Wyitt himself had fought the instinct, trying to

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[47] The Town, p. 221.

[48] The Trees, p. 236 (italics mine).

accept the life of the settled and established. "He'd knock the wildness out of him, he said, if it was the last thing he did. He had done his dangest to kill the ever-hunter in him, but it wouldn't stay killed. It was his Monsey blood, he reckoned. It would never say die."[49]

The same inherited characteristics Sayward sadly observes reappearing in some of her own children, and her motherly desire to protect causes her at times foolishly to interfere. The son most like Wyitt is Guerdon, who hated schooling and restlessly flitted from job to job. "Oh, Sayward knew what was the matter with him. It was his Monsey blood that wouldn't let him be, the same as Wyitt and Worth before him."[50] When Guerdon announces his intentions of leaving home to work at "bridging" in a distant town, Sayward acts quickly to keep him home. She convinces Portius that Americus needs a bridge to replace the ferry and thus she is instrumental in providing Guerdon with his "bridging" work right in Americus and near her protection.

She is repaid harshly for interfering in his destiny, however, for Guerdon meets a cheap waterfront girl while working on the bridge and secretly marries her. Guerdon, prior to the birth of Chancey, is the least fitted of Sayward's children to stand up for himself in life and would let others impose on him until "something in him would snap. He lacked

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[49]The Fields, p. 82.

[50]The Town, p. 91.

the staying part and balance the others had."[51] Later, Guerdon, true to his nature, kills a man he finds sleeping with his wife and runs away from Americus never to return. This is a most graphic lesson to Sayward and a rhetorical illustration to the reader of the danger of interference, no matter how honorable the intentions:

> Well, she was getting paid back for pushing the bridge before its time, she reckoned. In her heart she knew she had done it mostly for spite and cowardice, spite against King Sam and cowardice to let her second boy go off from home a bridging. Now she could see what you got for putting your nose where it wasn't wanted.[52]

Wiser from the painful experience, Sayward later reluctantly refrains from interfering when her daughter, Sooth, plans to marry a much older Frenchman. Sayward's first impulse is to forbid the marriage, recalling the tragedy of Genny's union with Louie Scurrah. But when it comes to mating, she has learned, the human will cannot be counseled. "Humans were free as wild pigeons in the woods."[53] It may be, she concludes, that marriage was directed by some power above man. "Why always had opposites to pull each other? She reckoned it some wise plan of the Lord to keep the pretty from getting prettier and the homely homelier, the sweet sweeter and the mean meaner."

Sooth, one of her most innocent and naïve daughters, has never yet faced any real sadness or tragedy, but Sayward fears that her interference in the marriage may result in even worse hardship if not retardation of Sooth's natural education:

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[51] The Town, p. 99.

[52] Ibid.

[53] The Trees, p. 154.

"what sort of mam would she be to try and stop her? Not always could she be here to fend for her child, to try and save it from harm and hardship. Better had it find out about life at the beginning than at the end."[54] Although Sayward seeks guidance in prayer, she knows she will in the end rely on her common sense respect for Providence and fear of interfering to the detriment of the one she would protect:

> No, unless the Lord spoke to her strong and plain, she would fall back on her own good sense. That sense told her that the hand of the Almighty might be a little slow but it was more knowing than hers. Once she had reckoned to save Guerdon from life by tying him close to home. All that came out of it was spilled blood, and sending him away from home for good.[55]

Other incidents show in good light the theme of cosmic destiny and the danger of interference in the plan of the Almighty.[56] Chancey's own adult weakness, self-pity, his vindictive and soured nature, can be traced to the family's interference in his natural growth--by their good-intentioned but ill-advised coddling and over-protection. Sayward particularly carries a burden of guilt for her part in this interference, for her too compassionate resolution to "be strong for him" and make up the deficiencies in his strength with strength from herself.[57]

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[54] The Town, p. 170.

[55] Ibid., p. 171.

[56] For example, the ill-fated attempt to re-establish family connections with Sulie who forty years after her disappearance is found to be alive and married to an Indian. At the meeting Sayward realizes it was a mistake to seek Sulie out; the Lord had had a destiny planned for Sulie, and she was no longer a member of the family but an Indian. One had to take the life one got and live it the best he could.

[57] The Town, pp. 307f.

Not only human destiny but the planning of towns is not entirely in the hands of man. The speculator, Major Tate, in order to attract settlers to his land so the value might increase, lays out a complete townsite and attempts to attract Sayward to the growing village (he wants no competition from her own attractively situated land). Although she is tempted to move to an easier and more secure life in the village, she refuses, knowing she would "feel ashamed to run off and be licked by the trees."[58] The town of Tateville does attract settlers, but on Sayward's own property emerges a settlement, which eventually grows into a town (becoming in time the county seat and a greater and larger industrial city than Tateville), and Sayward learns to respect the slow pace of Providence. The Fields ends with this cautious observation:

> Now who would have reckoned, Sayward asked herself, that all the time this dark, choked-up river bank under the big butts and tangled vines here by the Moonshine Church was a townsite just waiting for its time in God's Almanack to come around?[59]

The growth of the town brings a new and disturbing tenor into the trilogy, for it is predicated by a different species of man than was the village settlement. A new spirit of change and of progress creeps into the village as its inhabitants become more and more conscious of "bringing civilization," and as the late-comers, merchants, and speculators, begin to exude an air of propriety and decorum and a disapproval of the crude and primitive.

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[58] The Fields, p. 177.

[59] Ibid., p. 288 (italics mine).

Richter's protest and warning against the cult of comfort and "so-called progress" heightens considerably as the grist for his mill increases. The protest is manifest in two main threads that weave together the plot of The Town. The one is Sayward's growing awareness and uneasiness at the unhealthy spirit being fanned by the growth of the industrial city, and her general distrust of it which solidifies ultimately into open protest against the modern belief that any change which makes for a higher standard of living, and which makes for economic prosperity, is progress.[60]

The second thread is the career of Sayward's youngest son, Chancey, and particularly the barrier between Chancey and Sayward (initiated and augmented chiefly by the son), which personifies the conflict between the old spirit and the new. Both threads constantly interweave in the novel.

The scenes in which Sayward and Chancey are brought into direct conflict are among the most illustrative of Richter's themes within the novel. At times, indeed, the heated exchange of views becomes a bit rhetorical and contrived. Chancey grows to maturity unable to understand or accept his mother's philosophy of life. He stands for the typical modern attitude that scoffs at the pioneer's celebration of old-time values as nostalgic and the fallacy of "the good old days." The pioneer's way of life represented to him only a "harder way to live and do things," and he

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[60] The Town, pp. 52f, 183, 238f, 271ff.

genuinely believes the "good old days" to be legendary, "a dream, the self-made illusion of a rude and primitive race back there in the twilight of the forest."[61]

Chancey becomes a representative of the welfarist intellect; his early rebellion is fed by Robert Owens's theories of relieving mankind of evil and unhappiness through a philosophy of benefaction. Chancey comes to believe that, through conscious planning, society can progress and in time can do away with all toil and ugly labor.

Sayward can only argue from common sense and experience. All humanitarian theory is on the side of Chancey, but all experience supports Sayward. Work and hardship, she insists, can never be avoided; and the "good Lord lets man sink or swim in his own troubles."

Chancey is extremely sensitive to the problem of evil. He can see no justice in suffering; he is especially embittered by the tragic fate of the innocent Rosa Tench, whose suicide withers something in his own soul. His own sense of destiny is antithetical to that of his mother; full of self-pity, he has a pervading sense of being victimized by a cruel Fate. Part of his attraction to Rosa is due to his belief that she was "like he, wronged by the stars, caught in the blind machinations of birth and life."[62] He persistently attempts to account for things as the workings of blind chance.

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[61] The Town, p. 424.

[62] Ibid., p. 302.

He feels a "sense of anger against his father and mother, against preachers and priests, philosophers and pioneers and all the rest who saw any good in the unjust and meaningless torment of life."[63] In an effort to campaign against hardship and evil he goes to Cincinnati to become editor of The New Palladium, which champions social reform. His sensitivity, of course, is one mark of evolutionary growth; but, writes Richter,

> . . . he was not intended as the most advanced of characters but rather one of those who, given a sensitive nature and lack of understanding of the facts of life, suppose the world can be turned into paradise and its people into saints or at least worthy and happy citizens by the elimination of hardship and the administering of largess and plenty. What such see are present troubles, not the greater troubles their easy prescriptions could bring on, since they do not attempt to change inequalities in evolution in the people except by education alone which, if it could be successful of itself we would suppose the Higher Intelligence to have employed instead of the tool of suffering.[64]

After years of rebellion, Chancey is brought up short by the specter of Civil War, which made him realize that man, in all his modern enlightenment, could not avoid adversity. "Did it mean," he wondered, "that the need for strength and toughness was to be always with them; that the farther they advanced, the more terrible would be the hardship that descended upon them, and the more crying the need of hardihood to be saved?"[65] Chancy has taken the first step toward

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[63] The Town, p. 370.

[64] Correspondence to me, March 8, 1962.

[65] The Town, p. 431 (italics mine).

answering the question by his willingness to face it. The novel ends before he repudiates his earlier convictions, but no doubt is left in the reader's mind that Chancey has found the truth.

In setting forth the idea that we are eternally fated to encounter struggle and hardship in this universe, Richter follows to some extent the Stoic conception that we cannot reject destiny. If man is to triumph, he must first submit to the demiurge that controls his fate; he cannot triumph over destiny, but by an act of will he can be triumphant in it. For man has the power and the freedom to work with the limits of destiny, to shape the single day and the single event, and even to bargain with Fate.[66]

The repeated recurrence in Richter's trilogy of the conclusions he derives from his cosmic scheme serves to give it a note of urgency. This is not to say that Richter's theory of emergent evolution as it gives direction to his novels makes of them ideological tracts disguised as fiction. Wellek and Warren have shown that art and idea are not really opposed to each other. "Serious art implies a view of life which can be stated in philosophical terms, even in terms of systems. Between artistic coherence . . . and philosophical coherence there is some kind of correlation."[67]

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[66]"I do not hold with Euripides when he writes of Fate, 'Thy heart is cruel and never came pity anigh unto thee,' and I do hold that the humble and willing can intercede and perhaps even bargain with Fate by intelligent discipline for that laid down for him. . ." (correspondence to me, March 8, 1962).

[67]René Wellek and Austin Warren, Theory of Literature (New York, 1949), p. 27.

Part of the novelist's art, Richter well realizes, is to associate and to make clear a moral purpose with each story. The moral purpose of the Ohio trilogy is, broadly speaking, to suggest the workings of a cosmic destiny, and to disclose the role of hardship and discipline as a means of grace. He presents characters and episodes that do more than provide a framework for the story; they represent large and broad issues that he has observed in his experiences and readings, and that he believes are related to a teleological natural law of emergent evolution. Thus the surface narrative of the trilogy is connected with a background meaning. He is interested both in the broad outline of human destiny, and in the source of man's desires and compulsions, his strengths and weaknesses of personality. The pattern of life he has discerned imposes order on his fictional world. It gives the Ohio trilogy unity of theme and determines the selectivity of details, enabling Richter to co-ordinate structure and moral meaning.

CHAPTER IV

RICHTER AND LITERARY TRADITION: PRIMITIVISM, TRANSCENDENTALISM, THE NOVEL OF THE SOIL, AND THE HISTORICAL NOVEL

1. Primitivism and Progress

Richter's commitment to primitivism--derived both from his psycho-energic principles, and a deep strain of nostalgia inherent in his view of the past--is the clue to his relationship with transcendentalism and the tradition of the novel of the soil, both of which share a common attitude toward progress. It is important in understanding Richter's fictional world to assess his attitude toward progress and his commitment to primitivism, both of which may seem incongruous in one who holds forth a doctrine of evolutionary growth. For a doctrine of emergent evolution implies above all else a faith in the desirability of a future state of being, a movement from imperfection toward perfection.

The evolutionary naturalists, with whom Richter has been shown to have a great deal in common, had rationalized historical change through the idea of progress into a benevolent developmental process. They assumed that social, political, and economic institutions were inevitably evolving in a desirable direction toward the goal of happiness and perfection. Such a

pleasantly deterministic view of progress, the assumptions of which were widely held by most Americans in the middle and late nineteenth century during the great eras of westward expansion and economic growth, has in the twentieth century been considerably vitiated; progress, in the nineteenth century sense of the word, is no longer an inevitable law to those who think seriously about it at all.[1]

Western man of the twentieth century, Arthur O. Lovejoy has pointed out, has become increasingly skeptical concerning the myth of progress and "increasingly troubled with misgivings about the value of the outcome of civilization thus far, about the future to which it tends, and about himself as the author of it all."[2] Richter, although basically embracing a teleologically optimistic philosophy of growth, has also called into question certain popular conceptions of the inevitability of progress. So strong is this current of thought in his writings that the temper of his fictional world is at times more regretful than hopeful, more backward-looking than forward-looking, despite the ultimately inevitable triumph in his cosmology of natural law in its task of bringing mankind up the scale of being and toward "the source." One of the dominant keynotes in his philosophical observations we have seen in chapter III is his protest against certain aspects of modern civilization--

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[1]Arthur P. Dudden, "Nostalgia and the American," Journal of the History of Ideas, XXII (October-December 1961), 515-30.

[2]Arthur O. Lovejoy, et al., A Documentary History of Primitivism and Related Ideas, I (Baltimore, 1935), xi.

i.e., the welfarist intellect and "so-called progress," or the equation of progress and economic growth--for their betrayal of the evolutionary growth of man.

It is not necessarily a contradiction in terms to hold to a theory of evolutionary growth while at the same time to attack prevailing notions of progress, however, since organic progress in the human condition and what passes for progress in our institutions and more advanced way of life need not be the same. At the same time it must be admitted that Richter's nostalgia for the past, his regret for the passing of the established and the traditional, when yoked to his trust in natural and ordained organic growth may seem, if not contradictory, at least ambivalent.

On one level this co-existing belief in progress and an intense nostalgia for the past relates Richter to what Arthur Dudden has described as a peculiarly American view of historical change. Dudden has convincingly suggested that in the history of the American people there has lain adjacent to the idea of progress a deep-running tide of nostalgia, a welcome vision of the future with an underlying feeling for popular resistance to novelty and uncertainty, a not-to-be-denied preference for stability and a yearning to "recapture fleeting conditions and former circumstances."

Such a longing for the past, Dudden continues, can "easily be disguised paradoxically as a forward-looking restorative impulse."[3] This retrospective homesickness and

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[3]Dudden, p. 517. (Note: "Each of these attitudes, the bright belief in progress or the despair of nostalgia,

restorative impulse is often reflected in our literature as dissatisfaction with the present and preference for the past. "We find ourselves as Americans," wrote Robert Gorham Davis, "by seeing ourselves imaged in a kind of past which--in the character we give it, at least--is largely denied by the material and social circumstances in which we live."[4] Such literary expressions of a belief in the superiority of a past era or condition to what now exists or lies ahead we have come to identify as one of the impulses of primitivism.

Primitivism, according to the most authoritative studies, is a recurring idea in the history of thought that can be traced back to Greco-Roman antiquity.[5] As reflected in literature, philosophy, religion and ethics, it begins with serious misgivings about the direction of civilization, misgivings which characteristically are accompanied by wistful backward glances in time to a better age in which the most

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reflected both opinion and understanding about the trends of the times. . . . Both attitudes powerfully suggest the instability and fluidity of existing circumstances. The historical present in each instance was understood as a transitory stage between past and future, pessimistically or optimistically as the situation or mood of its holder decreed. From the anthropological standpoint, both the withdrawal impulse of nostalgia and the hopeful vision of progress represent conceptual structures erected and extensively entertained by the people in the United States amidst fluid social conditions in the face of the certain passage of time. From the standpoint of history, both the idea of progress and the mood of nostalgia reflect underlying theoretical explanations for the historical process itself" p. 528).

[4]Quoted by Dudden, p. 526.

[5]E.g., Lovejoy; George Boas, Essays on Primitivism and Related Ideas in the Middle Ages (Baltimore, 1948); Chauncey Tinker, Nature's Simple Plan (Princeton, 1922).

ideal conditions of human life supposedly must have occurred (chronological primitivism), or wistful glances from a highly complex and "over-civilized" level of acculturation to a far simpler and less sophisticated life, i.e., a culturally primitive phase of human society (cultural primitivism). To these two traditional varieties may be added a third--modern or psychological primitivism, whose idealized domain is the natural processes (drives or needs) of the human psyche as imbedded in the subconscious or inner man.

Primitivism has found philosophical justification in the concept of "nature" as the expression of the standard of human values in "the identification of the good with that which is 'natural' or 'according to nature.'"[6] The primitive life is thus extolled as more amenable to the state of nature, or things as they should be, as the medium in which nature is permitted its most unrestricted function. Inherent in this concept of nature is a practical anti-intellectualism, "the view that intellectual pursuits are in themselves a sort of abnormality and that the progress of knowledge has not made man happier or better, but rather the reverse."[7]

2. The Problem of Nostalgia and the American Experience

Before Richter's relationship to the three varieties of primitivism is clarified, particularly with reference to the

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[6] Lovejoy, p. 12.

[7] Ibid., p. 14.

Ohio trilogy, it should be shown that his own very human emotional nostalgia, quite apart from ordered primitivistic notions, does much to heighten the nostalgia inherent in a primitivistic philosophy. It is probably impossible to say just how much a primitivist's views are born of his wistful desire for the good old days and his regret at the loss of his youth (The last two novels he has written--The Waters of Kronos and A Simple Honorable Man--are autobiographical and set in Richter's childhood). Certainly there is a suggestion in his novels that his keen sense of nostalgia threatens to carry him to an uncritical preference for the past. But if he himself is aware of the distinction between the purely nostalgic and the well-ordered philosophic convictions in his motives, he should at least be counted as something more than a mere sentimentalist.

One of the chief motives behind Richter's fiction, and this is restated time and again, has been his desire not so much to recapture, as to pay tribute to a way of life vanishing before the apparently inevitable spread of industrialism, which has attended the twentieth century, and the increasing reliance on centralized government to order the affairs of men at greater cost to their individuality and independence. This is sincere regret at change, a funeral oration for a way of life that must give way before the crushing logic of numbers and space.

The passing of the West, the last great frontier now fenced in, domiciled and domesticated, is feelingly lamented

in Early Americana, The Sea of Grass, and The Lady. Scenes from small town life of the 1900's are affectionately preserved in Tacey Cromwell, Always Young and Fair, The Waters of Kronos, and A Simple Honorable Man. His motive in writing Always Young and Fair holds equally true for the others: in it, he tells us, he has attempted to "show my feelings for a vanished way of life" in his home town as he knew it in his youth--a place he recalls as an ideal village, full of "individualists refreshingly different from each other," a town once sought out as a refuge by harassed city dwellers from Philadelphia. Now, he relates sadly, the "beautiful trees have been cut down to make way for progress," its "peace daily broken by the roar of coal from the mines to the north," its charming covered bridges torn down to make way for common concrete ones, its once beautiful creek now "black as the hinges of hell" with industrial soot and filth.[8]

Regret at rapid change has been, in one sense, a peculiarly American reaction to the enormous acceleration in the rate at which the present is superannuated and retired as the past. Born late as a nation, America lacks the sense of continuity with the past and tradition that has acted as a stabilizing force in Europe. The sense of continuity from one generation to the next has always been in conflict with a feeling of alienation, for the differences in the way of life between generations are too vast, too graphic, too

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[8] "This Once Ideal Village," Saturday Evening Post, CCXIX (Oct. 12, 1946), 4.

closely tied to the swift changes in this growing country. This underlying regret at rapid change has not been strong enough to try to decelerate the rate of change; however, it has become what one might call a conservative impulse in the American psyche.

A large part of the appeal of the Ohio trilogy lies in just this masterful recreation of the pace of change. During the life span of one woman, a savage wilderness is settled, the wild game wiped out, the trees removed, farming country established, a town born, an industrial city raised, and--naturally enough--one generation alienated from another (epitomized in Chancey's alienation from Sayward). It is the story of the American experience, enacted and re-enacted on a continuously Westward moving frontier, its last scene not closed even today. It has always staggered the American imagination. In the trilogy, Portius reflects this in his speech at the coming of the railroad: "When I think of all these stupendous and undreamed of changes, all within the span of one short life, speech fails me and my power of astonishment is almost exhausted"; and Sayward, too, senses this quickening pace of change when one day she "could feel for the first time in her life the old earth rolling to the eastward, turning under her, pushing against her feet and carrying her along."[9]

The Ohio trilogy, then, is not only an autobiographical expression of Richter's regret at the rapid pace of

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[9]The Town, pp. 378, 380.

change; it is a biography of the American experience, a record of our astonishment when we behold the bewildering speed at which we descendants of the nineteenth century are carried down the stream of time. In the hands of a less skillful novelist, this acute sense of nostalgia might well have emerged as maudlin sentiment; in the hands of Richter, it is an accurate record of our sense of loss, an explanation for that underlying nostalgia and conservative impulse in the psyche of America.

3. Primitivism in Richter's Philosophy and Fiction

In clarifying Richter's specific commitment to primitivism, one should begin by acknowledging a certain obliqueness in his attitude toward cultural and psychological primitivism. He shares with the modern primitivists (e.g., Eugene O'Neill, Sherwood Anderson, or D. H. Lawrence) the conviction that the impetus for being and doing is the primal self, the inner man, the buried thing within the mind (what Richter calls the inherited and developed psycho-energic instrument).

According to this view, the conscious mind, that which stands for the faculty of rationality, is really only a small part of our psyche; beneath or within the dark recesses of our mind is the subconscious, whose impulses not only trace back to racial and familial memory, but are also connected to a vast storehouse of experiences that have been accumulating since birth. Since the subconscious mind represents the

natural, instinctive, or "mechanical" processes which govern and control thought, it should, so goes the argument, be given its proper freedom to direct and order that which is in its domain.

Implied in such a view is the concept of "nature as norm" with its implications for human conduct, as well as underlying assumptions that intellectual pursuits and the progress of knowledge have little to do with the real stuff of life. If the primitivist holds forth a rigid teleological doctrine, as does Richter, this concept may give birth to a fear that the conscious mind with seemingly rational good intentions may actually interfere in the domain of the subconscious or mechanical (inhibit, warp, deprive of energy, and so forth)--in short, may interfere in the destiny of the individual as set forth by the powers in the universe working through natural, instinctive, or "mechanical" law.

With the exception of Richter's teleological doctrine, up to this point he and the modern primitivists may be said to share a common ground. But in their interpretation of the basic energy impulse in human nature, they differ radically, and their primitivistic conclusions differ correspondingly. The modern primitivist owes his start to Freud. "It is the primitive that Freud found in the realm of the unconscious," writes G. A. Borgese, "in endless conflict with the later impressed and repressing patterns of society and law."[10]

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[10]G. A. Borgese, "Primitivism," Dictionary of World Literature, ed. Joseph T. Shipley (Paterson, N. J., 1960), p. 319.

Conventional psychological primitivism inevitably becomes tinged with nihilism, ranging from the self-destructive urges noted in D. H. Lawrence to the downright inhumanism and cosmic pessimism of Robinson Jeffers.

Jascha Kessler has defined modern primitivism as a

> philosophical derivative of the strife in man's mental constitution between what Freud called the forces of Eros and Ananke. Perhaps the best way to differentiate the modern from the various historical forms of primitivism is to note that while masquerading as social criticism it is actually speaking for those impulses in humans which seek to compass only self destruction. For this reason . . . it attacks historical truth and manifests a tendency to psychological retrogression. . .[11]

Psychological primitivists therefore denigrate modern civilization because of the artificial limitations and inhibitions it has imposed upon the nature of man. And since the edifice of their thinking has been built on a foundation laid by Freud, their protest is largely against those ethical inhibitions that have frustrated the natural sexual drives in man to the perversion of his personality. To remedy this maladjustment they call for a return to a healthy life yielding to the impulses and for a realistic reappraisal of ethical standards.[12]

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[11] Jascha Kessler, "Ashes of the Phoenix: A Study of Primitivism and Myth-Making in D. H. Lawrence's The Plumed Serpent" (unpublished Doctoral dissertation, The University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 1957), pp. 67-68.

[12] Such a view relates the psychological primitivists to "soft" cultural primitivism. They would be sympathetic to escaping from the demands of a highly civilized society to an easier, more leisurely primitive existence, a life less burdened with civilized apparatus, the innumerable restrictions, sexual taboos, rules, regulations and conventionalities that attend a high level of acculturation.

Note: One should at this point distinguish between Freud's postulates and the popular interpretation--or

Richter, we observed in chapter three, is hostile to the basic concept of Freudian psychology and its implications for relaxed codes of social morality. The popular acceptance of Freudian notions, he fears, may account for the common lack of restraint and the sexual license of today. His dissatisfaction with Freudian theory is due of course to his rejection of

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misinterpretation--of these postulates. For one cannot unqualifiedly identify Freudian theory with the psychological primitivism that can be derived from that theory.

To illustrate, the sort of Freudian primitivism indulged in by D. H. Lawrence arises from an oversimplification of Freud's attitude toward the restrictions or inhibitions imposed by civilization and culture. It is true that, according to Freud, neuroses can be traced to a too-severely imposed ethical standard which treats as taboo certain of our natural instincts. And certainly Freud sees no justification for the lengths to which segments of civilized society will go to deny as well as to curb sexual desires. But he does not condemn civilization; indeed, quite the contrary. In Civilization and Its Discontents (trans. Joan Riviere, London, 1957), he makes this observation: "Sublimation of instinct is an especially conspicuous feature of cultural evolution; this it is that makes it possible for the higher mental operations, scientific, artistic, ideological activities, to play such an important part in civilized life. . . It is impossible to ignore the extent to which civilization presupposes the non-gratification (suppression, repression, something else?) of powerful instinctual urgencies" (p. 63; Note: following quotes are also from this book). Thus the growth of culture is contingent upon the raising of barriers against both the sexual and the aggressive instincts of man.

Freud does not consider this general condition of cultural evolution to be undesirable, although he is understandably concerned about the "sense of guilt as the most important problem in the evolution of culture" (p. 123). Indeed, Freud finds "amazing" the point of view which holds that "our so-called civilization itself is to blame for a great part of our misery, and we should be much happier if we were to give it up and go back to primitive conditions" (p. 45). He rejects the notion which we identify with the psychological primitivists that "men become neurotic because they cannot tolerate the degree of privation that society imposes on them in virtue of its cultural ideals," and the consequent belief that "a return to greater possibilities of happiness would ensue if these standards were abolished or greatly relaxed" (p. 46).

Freud's insistence on the necessity of interpreting behavioral patterns pretty largely in terms of instinctive sexual and aggressive drives. To locate the psychical source of energy in the "blind sack of the genital gland" seems to Richter much too reductive and restricted to account for the innumerable behavioral responses to be observed in the human psyche.

The popularized interpretations--and misinterpretations--of Freudian psychology which we associate with the modern psychological primitivists would strike Richter as an evolutionary regression, a lowering of evolutionary standards and evolved ethical requirements to a more primitive view of life, but primitive in the brute-like sense of the word. For according to psycho-energics, the ethical requirements that have emerged in the course of evolution are instrumental in building up higher energy rates for those moving upward on the scale of being:

> "We know that civilized life calls for a great deal more expenditure of energy than animal life. Civilized man must furnish energy to be spent in inhibitions, in religious obligations and those of conscience, in sex restrictions, in permanent duty to parents, family and many other requirements that the animal doesn't know. We call them standards."[13]

On Richter's conception of the scale of being, it will be recalled, those at the bottom are the strong egos with simple, primitive energy needs easily met. In the Ohio trilogy, the most primitive types are not the most admirable; rather the most primitive are more likely to be brutal or selfish. For example,

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[13] The Mountain, p. 119.

those with the hunter instinct possess more of the primitive ego and thus have the least developed sense of social responsibility. Worth Luckett blithely sheds all parental obligations when he "lights out" for untamed country; Jake Tench finds enjoyment in sadistic jokes and once won the admiration and respect of the Settlement Indians by gleefully skinning a live wolf; Louie Scurrah, after maltreating his wife, Genny, abandons her and runs off with her sister, Acsha, who is herself a primitive type.

Although Richter accuses the Freudian primitivists of betraying the grand plan of evolution by their deliberate retrogression to a more primitive energy level, and thus fostering primitive types, he has his own serious criticism of the debilitating effects of civilization's restrictions on the physical and spiritual well-being of man. But where the Freudians rebel at ethical standards which to them seem artificial and inhibiting, Richter is chiefly critical of materialism fostered by an energy-wasting preoccupation with trivialities detrimental to modern man's evolutionary growth and present state of happiness.

To offset the increasing love for comfort Richter champions "hard" cultural primitivism, which accounts for his admiration for certain aspects of Indian life, chiefly its spartan simplicity and Stoic values elicited by a hard environment. In The Mountain, Michael gives expression to this view:

> "Civilized man feels superior to the savage. . . . But when some of our civilized explorers live the savage life, they tell us that the savage knows life more fully

> and feels it more richly than we do. One reason is that his energy is less diffused over the wide range of civilization's knowledge and experience. Instead, it's concentrated on simple things: on just living, seeing and feeling. His energy isn't dissipated, wasted by so many pawns. In psycho-energics we know that what counts is never pawns, what we call things, but the energy connected with them in our nervous system."[14]

The nearest Richter comes to finding an ideal in the noble savage is in his small novel, The Light in the Forest,[15] in which he treats with great sympathy and insight the Indians' point of view and attitude toward white man's civilization. "In The Light in the Forest," he writes, "may be found the superior appeal to youth of the hard primitive Indian life and character over the civilized and artificial of the white man."[16]

Although one of the main purposes in writing the novel was to present an historically accurate and objective picture of the forced repatriation of a white boy to his real parents after having lived for a decade with the Indians, a more significant motive was "to point out that in the pride of our American liberties, we're apt to forget that already we've lost a good many to civilization."[17]

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[14]The Mountain, p. 152.

[15](New York, 1953).

[16]Correspondence to me, March 21, 1962. An interesting autobiographical comment illustrates how Richter's own experience and romantic temperament color the primitivistic thrust of the novel; The Light in the Forest "really came out of my own painful experience as a boy, having to give up at an early age a boy's world and take on the joyless toil and responsibilities of civilization as the Indian captive in the narrative had to submit to the same after the wild joyous freedom of the natural world" (From John K. Hutchens, "Pine Grove to Pulitzer and Back," New York Herald Tribune Book Review, April 22, 1962, p. 11).

[17]The Light in the Forest, p. viii.

John Butler, whose Indian name is True Son, provides the point of view through which we see the contrast between the unrestricted, natural life of the Indian, and the artificial and restrained life of the civilized. Three overlapping themes point up the superiority of the primitive life: (1) the theme of confinement (e.g., True Son's rebellion against clothing, barns, houses, schools, churches, fields, fences); (2) the theme of the close spiritual relationship of the Indian with the Great Spirit behind the universe (e.g., the abundance of Indian names for attributes of the Godhead, the Indian's sense of familial relationship with the forest, sky, streams, animals, and so forth, the reliance on providence, the spontaneous religious joy in moments of thanksgiving, unhampered by theological and doctrinal niceties); and (3) the theme of the Indian's stoicism and acceptance of hardships as a necessary function of life (e.g., inculcation of the primitive stoic values such as self-discipline, courage, endurance, honesty, loyalty, hunting skill, and acceptance of material "want" as a disciplining force in nature).

In his attempt to tell the story from the Indian's point of view, Richter overdraws the primitivistic virtues of the Indian's life. His treatment of the Indian in the majority of his narratives is less idealistic. Several of his best short stories describe or intimate the brutal atrocities committed by Indians against the pioneers.[18] In

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[18]It is True Son's realization that his own tribe would scalp innocent children to get revenge which unsettles his loyalty. His inability to go through with the decoy ambush alienates him from the Indians' scheme of values and brings about his banishment from the tribe.

the Ohio trilogy, the Indian, although he plays an exceedingly minor role, is transformed from a potential and terrifying enemy to a subdued, pitiful, and often ridiculous figure, as completely tamed as the forest, easily beguiled and victimized.

There is, then, in Richter's commitment to cultural primitivism--with the exception of The Light in the Forest--no sustained idealistic vision of the noble savage per se. What Richter idealizes is the hard environment. He sees clearly that a primitive environment is instrumental in eliciting those Stoic virtues necessary for survival. In the Ohio trilogy he repeatedly permits Sayward to recognize the importance of primitivistic values for desirable character development.

On one occasion, to cite an instance, Little Turtle, who is being represented in court by Portius, offers to take the sickly Chancey, raise him like an Indian, and thus restore his health:

> "Little Turtle make um run. Take um long march. Make leg hard. No give anything eat one day, two day, three day. Make belly hard. Make um sleep on ground summer time, winter time. Make um sleep on snow. Him get hard then, hah. Like iron. . . . Make um heart like stone. Won't die. But if die, go to Great Spirit. Great Spirit make him over better next time."[19]

Portius is amused at the Indian's naiveté, but Sayward, having overheard, is profoundly influenced by Little Turtle's proposed regimen for her son. She can see both the good and the bad in the primitive life, and she endeavors to make part of the Indian philosophy her own despite Portius's scornful

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[19]The Town, p. 64.

remark that "the Indians practiced the philosophy you mention, and you know how far they got with it."[20]

Richter's commitment to chronological primitivism is predicated by the same psycho-energic principles that lead him to endorse cultural primitivism. The wistful backward glances he casts toward the era of frontier expansion indicate, from his point of view, a forward-looking restorative impulse.

In Richter's theory of growth the emphasis is on ascent. Thus, the least excellent time of being was at the beginning. There is a line of continuous progress, but this is offset by recurring periods (although not necessarily cyclic) of decline. The ascent is often arrested when man, in an attempt to outwit the harsh realities of natural law, avoids--or tries to avoid--the painful and the difficult. These periods could be called "eras of the cult of comfort." Some harsh reality, however, inevitably makes it clear that pain and discomfort cannot ultimately be avoided; man therefore will see the wisdom of embracing a regimen calculated to help him withstand adversity, and he will voluntarily--or by nature be forced to--return to the enduring Stoic values inherent in the primitive life.

The discussion above in chapter III concerning the nemesis of the cult of comfort shows clearly Richter's notion that "that early American quality" of manhood flowered most profusely in the wilderness frontier experience, an era in our history in which, psycho-energically speaking, of course,

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[20] The Town, p. 311.

the evolution of man (creative growth) was least hindered by the cult of comfort and high living standards. Sayward herself is his most noble embodiment of that theme.

Despite the strain of nostalgia characteristic of Richter's fictional world, these backward glances and idealizations of the past--and this is particularly true of the Ohio trilogy--are meant to be practical, not sentimental. For Richter is persuaded that if we can be shown the configuration of life's pattern and the role of hardship and suffering as a means of grace, if we can grasp the immutable natural law behind the scheme of things in the universe, then we can learn best to cooperate with cosmic destiny in our migration upward toward the source of all by embracing a primitivistic regimen.

4. Transcendentalism

The thrust of Richter's social criticism deriving as it does from a teleologically oriented primitivism relates him to the tradition of American transcendentalism. With the transcendentalists he protests against the reliance on the profit motive and economic progress as the source of values, and with them he exposes the threat to self-reliance and individualism posed by the increasing materialism. And with the transcendentalists he suggests that a simple life closer to nature and in contact with the powerful influences behind nature has definite healing virtues for modern spiritual ailments.

If Richter is less overtly and self-consciously mystic than the Concord transcendentalists concerning the operation of the Divine Spirit in man and nature, he is nevertheless a mystic, and certain that every movement of man is made in accordance with teleological law; for in Richter's cosmology, natural law represents the constant attendance of spiritual forces in the universe whose purpose it is to raise man's spiritual consciousness to a higher relationship with the creative power behind the universe. He can with Emerson say every trifle bristles "with a polarity that ranges it instantly on an eternal law. . . ; there is no trifle, there is no puzzle, but one design unites and animates the farthest pinnacle and the lowest trench."[21]

Emerson and Thoreau in a complaint against the society of their own time accused their contemporaries of emasculating the human spirit, of discarding manhood. "Man is timid and apologetic," wrote Emerson, and at fault is the gross conformity of society:

> Society everywhere is in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members. Society is a joint-stock company, in which the members agree, for the better securing of his bread to each share-holder, to surrender the liberty and culture of the eater. The virtue in most request is conformity. Self-reliance is its aversion. It loves not realities and creators, but names and customs.[22]

In modern society, goes the transcendentalist argument, liberty and freedom have been sacrificed to the tyranny of the

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[21]"The American Scholar," The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson, I (New York, 1903), 111.

[22]"Self-Reliance," Works, II, 49-50.

populace, whose standards are mercilessly imposed on the individual. Even benevolence and philanthropy are imposed on the individual by societal pressure. "Do not tell me," Emerson said indignantly, "of my obligation to put all poor men in good situations."[23] He considered every dollar given to the "thousand-fold relief societies" as wickedly spent. Thoreau, too, distrusted the easy benevolence of philanthropy: "Philanthropy is not love for one's fellow in the broadest sense."[24]

The ideal Emerson, Thoreau, and Richter hold in common is that of self-reliance. Theoretically, self-reliance to a transcendentalist means reliance on the indwelling over-soul or God-power within, or in Richter's case, on the ordained destiny of man as it is imbedded in his inherited and developed psycho-energic instrument. But practically, it means to reject the mediocrity and standardization of mass-morality; it means to rely on common sense, and on self-initiative.

The signal spiritual failure in modern man, according to transcendentalist criticism, is his total preoccupation with material things. Men are slaves to what they own, and they fill their lives with anxiety and trouble to obtain the "necessities" of life. Where they go wrong is in their total misconception of what is really necessary. "It would be some advantage to live a primitive and frontier life, though in the

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[23] "Self-Reliance," Works, II, 49.

[24] Walden, ed. Brooks Atkinson (New York, 1950), p. 67.

midst of an outward civilization," wrote Thoreau, "if only to learn what are the gross necessaries of life and what methods have been taken to obtain them. . . . For the improvements of ages have had but little influence on the essential laws of man's existence."[25]

The transcendentalists and Richter favor a return to the simple, unregimented life close to nature, a return prompted by two principal motives, the one spiritual, the other physical. The ugliness of modern life, said Emerson, is its "dislocation and detachment from the life of God."[26] Because the designer of the universe constructed man to perform according to natural law, man must permit himself to function naturally, and not to interfere with his nature. The false complexion of civilization has obscured the true nature of man, however; but since the transcendent power of the Supreme Being is immanent in nature, man may regain his spiritual sensitivity by living closer to nature.

Thus, one of the healthiest influences on the mind and spirit of man is that of a natural environment as the unrestricted function of the creator's purpose. When man voluntarily places himself in a primitive environment he can return to reason and faith, and nature can repair the disgraces and calamities of life. Richter's love for, and twenty years' sojourn in, the hardy climate of New Mexico was

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[25] Walden, pp. 10-11.

[26] "The Poet," Works, III, 18.

predicated partly by this desire. To live in a hard, primitive environment is "to escape to reality from the standardized American scene." In the New Mexican mountains and desert places, celebrated by Michael in The Mountain on the Desert, men can "shake the contaminations of civilization from their souls" and "hide from everyone except God." The primitive environment with its unconquered primeval elements helps the sensitive man to "shed his false, modern artificial self" and become once again a "creature of the mesas and deserts." The ancient land with its primeval soul, writes Richter, restores a "primitive delight in being alive," and stirs up man's slumbering vitality, releasing energy for full enjoyment of life.[27]

In the Ohio trilogy, it is not until the hard primitive environment has disappeared that Sayward realizes her deprivation of its spiritual influences. As a child of the forest she had grown to maturity without benefit of religious training; when organized religion does come into the settlement, Sayward finds her spiritual feelings to be broader than any doctrine.[28] Her consciousness of a Supreme Power behind the

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[27]Richter, "Three Towns I Love," Holiday, XIV (December 1953), 55, 56, 104. Note: Richter reveals the romantic side of his nature in his affectionate description of the older sections of Albuquerque, Santa Fe, and Taos, with their primitive, unplanned order. The streets are dusty, the houses jumbled, the "whole effect careless, unkempt and unimproved. But to those drawn here, this very neglect and the apparent disorder are one of the chief charms. It's the unstudied naturalness of old-time Mexican village growth. The appeal is inner, symbolic. It suggests a more simple, unregimented life, freedom from some of the demands of modern living" (p. 94).

[28]The Town, p. 33.

phenomena of the forest is arrived at intuitively, not doctrinally, and as she gains wisdom from her experiences with life she comes to what may be called a more transcendental conception of evil. Human causes and inevitable destiny account for what in the temporal sense are tragedies; but one can never "blame the Lord" for evil.[29]

The physical advantages of the primitive environment are no less important to the transcendentalists, and in Richter's case, the rugged living conditions play an even more vital role in the evolutionary growth of man. Richter's chief criticism of contemporary society, we have seen, is the unabashed love for comfort. Emerson and Thoreau, too, attacked the increasing reliance even in the mid-nineteenth century on modern conveniences and machines on the grounds that they weakened the physique of man. It is a sure sign, said Emerson, that though society constantly changes from the barbarous to the civilized to the scientific, this change is not amelioration. "For everything that is given something is taken. Society acquires new arts and loses old instincts." The savage has fewer things but more health and strength: "it may be a question whether machinery does not encumber; whether we have not lost by refinement some energy . . . , some vigor of wild virtue."[30]

Thoreau carried Emerson's criticism and theories a step farther and, as Richter was later to do, he put into

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[29] The Fields, p. 66.

[30] "Self-Reliance," Works, II, 84, 85.

practice the ethics of austerity he had been preaching. The record of his economic retreat from the city to a cheaper, simpler life in the country is, of course, contained in Walden. The great refrain in Thoreau's prose is "Simplicity, simplicity, simplicity!" or better yet, the imperative "Simplify, simplify," an injunction quite in accordance with the conclusions Richter reaches in his theories of psycho-energics.

> Our life is frittered away by detail . . . Simplicity, simplicity, simplicity! I say, let your affairs be as two or three, and not a hundred or a thousand. . . . Simplify, simplify. . . The nation itself, with all its so-called internal improvements, which by the way, are all external and superficial, is just such an unwieldy and overgrown establishment, cluttered with furniture and tripped up by its own traps, ruined by luxury and heedless expense, by want of calculation and a worthy aim, as the million households in the land; and the only cure for it, as for them, is in a rigid economy, a stern and more than Spartan simplicity of life and elevation of purpose. It lives too fast.[31]

This passage might well have served Sayward in her vigorous arguments with Portius and Chancey. Portius as an ambitious lawyer is a chief advocate of progress in the economic and material sense. When a grain mill is set up in the wilderness, Portius is amused at Sayward's stubborn refusal to patronize it:

> "I was just going to say," he mentioned, "that when enterprising men fetch labor-saving machinery into the wilderness, I think we should encourage and patronize them."
>
> "I'm for keepin' up to the times when we kin afford it," Sayward said.[32]

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[31] Walden, pp. 82-83.

[32] The Fields, p. 137.

It is not merely an impulse toward frugality that prompts Sayward's reply; her conservatism is resistance against the change-for-change's-sake view of life. "So long as the old works," she said, "I don't believe in throwing it out for the new."[33] One of Sayward's chief complaints in The Town is that against the unqualified acceptance of any and all "improvements."

Her attitude toward the proposition that all "internal improvement" is necessary and beneficial to all the citizenry is highlighted in her conflict with the canal company. It was agreed by the merchants and civic leaders that Americus stood in desperate need of one of the new "navigable canals" to keep alive local commerce and compete with the other industrial cities in the state. Sayward is incensed when she learns that the canal route decided on would traverse her hard-earned land; but after a brief struggle she acquiesces, realizing that it is impossible to "fight the whole state and town to boot." Sick over the mutilation of her beloved land, her crops trampled down by the celebration crowd, Sayward sits through the fourth of July commemoration speeches and toasts to "internal improvements" with a bitter taste of defeat in her mouth. Yet even in her bitterness, she is amused at the expansionist devotion to progress and internal improvement revealed in the commemoration toasts. The first toastmaster stands with raised glass and solemnly speaks:

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[33]The Town, p. 92.

> "The Fourth of July. The worthies of the Revolution on this day commenced the system of Internal improvement by breaking ground on the line of our Political Independence."
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> So that was it, Sayward told herself. Before they got through, they would have God Almighty making the first canal with his flood and Noah a building the first canal boat. . . Even Washington, she told herself, was not the father of his country anymore. No, he had to be the Father of Public Works and Internal Improvement.[34]

The final irony comes not too many years later when those who had supported the canal as the ultimate in commercial transportation turned their support to the incoming railroad. In time the canal, an ugly scar across Sayward's land, is hopelessly out of date, but not before it has permanently drained the beautiful creek that formerly graced Sayward's farm. Progress may be important and essential but it profanes much of what it touches.

Sayward's motives for resisting what the party of progress believes to be beneficial to mankind are seldom understood. To the townsmen she is a selfish anachronism, and even her youngest son's first published poem is a broad lampoon called "The Frog's Petition," which cruelly satirizes her, for her refusal to permit the city to drain her Beaver Gats so that the industrial area could be extended. "When she wanted her land drained, she said, she would drain it herself." But her rugged individualism is ridiculed and Chancey turns against her the refrain which satirically calls for a

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[34] The Town, p. 133.

"Return unto the status quo
of forty, fifty years ago."[35]

An ethics of austerity is one of renunciation. Thoreau and Emerson, as did Richter a hundred years later--and Sayward of the trilogy--perceived that the decay of modern life may have many causes, but one of the chief ones was, and is, the spirit of commerce, the growth of industrialism, and the preponderance of the utilitarian ethic in centralized government. Thoreau spoke for Richter when he said, "That government is best which governs least." But the most alarming effect of the growth of the spirit of commerce is the subordinating of all values to those of economics and progress. "The idea that if a thing is good for a few people it must be better for a great many has taken over," writes Richter, "an idea dear to American progress and so fatal to beauty and charm."[36]

But it must be remembered that when the transcendentalists and Richter criticize the leveling and standardization of modern economics, their criticism derives in part from a mystical and philosophical super-structure and is something more than mere sentiment and resistance to change. For change, Richter admits, is in large part inevitable and chances are

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[35] The Town, p. 314.

[36] "Three Towns I Love," p. 58. Note: Richter comments sadly that even the cities of the Southwest are falling victim to the rush and change of modern economic progress. Albuquerque has sold its atmosphere for a few pieces of silver: "Big Government couldn't resist the macabre impulse to set down a huge, modern atomic establishment, Sandia Base, in such an old-time, idyllic spot. Thousands not particularly interested in the Southwest for its own sake, but rather in making a living or a profit, have flocked in."

that "modern economics will probably win." Yet by an act of will, by the acceptance of healthy primitivistic values and an ethics of austerity, we still have a "choice between beauty and economics, charm and decay." This is part of the meaning in the Ohio trilogy which, because of its philosophical undertones, is related to the tradition of primitivism and transcendentalism.

5. Novel of the Soil

One of the most significant literary traditions to which the Ohio trilogy is related is that of the novel of the soil, a regionalist tradition characterized by an affirmation of primitivist and transcendentalist values, and a consequent criticism of a false conception of the good life. It is not the purpose here to show that Richter is consciously working within this tradition. Rather, the purpose is simply to show that part of the literary value of the Ohio trilogy derives from its relationship to a well-defined literary tradition; and by showing this relationship, we can better place Richter in the mainstream of American literature.

Although the term "novel of the soil" was used in literary criticism during the agrarian reform to define a particular kind of protest in literary regionalism, it is a term that needs clarification. The novel of the soil has been defined as "a special kind of regionalism in the novel in which the lives of people struggling for existence in remote rural sections are starkly portrayed" in the manner of realism or

naturalism.[37] This definition unfortunately tends to restrict the type to such novels as Ellen Glasgow's Barren Ground, O. E. Rolvaag's Giants in the Earth, or Elizabeth Madox Roberts's The Time of Man, in which the struggle with the stubborn earth nearly overwhelms the reader with a sense of tragic futility and pessimism, even though he is led to see that this struggle elicits from the characters the integrity, self-respect, and strength needed to endure and triumph in the face of the bitter ordeals on the land.

But the temper of a novel of the soil such as the Ohio trilogy is more optimistic to the same extent that it is more primitivistic. It shows how life in a natural environment (in the case of the trilogy, the pioneer, rural, and village community of Moonshine Church) creates and indelibly marks the people living in it. The rural environment is symbolic of the natural order in the world, that is the example of a universe in which an infinite number of independent forces concur so as to produce an order behind which can be detected the presence of an intelligent power.

This awakens in man the true stoic conception of amor fati: love of the order of the world. True stoicism, Simone Weil reminds us in her remarkable book, The Need for Roots, is based on the conception that the universe in which we find ourselves is above all perfect obedience to the will of the creator. Thus,

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[37]William Flint Thrall and Addison Hibbard, A Handbook to Literature (New York, 1960), p. 325.

> The order of the world is to be loved because it is pure obedience to God. Whatever this universe accords us or inflicts on us, it does so exclusively out of obedience. . . . All that happens to us throughout the course of our life, having been brought about by the total obedience of this universe to God, places us in contact with the absolute good formed by the divine will; in virtue of this, everything without any exception, joys and sorrows alike, ought to be welcomed with the same inward attitude of love and thankfulness.[38]

Whenever a man-planned, man-made, man-operated environment intrudes into the natural environment, the sense of a natural order is necessarily obscured or diminished.

The environment is therefore more than a mere background; it becomes a key actor in the human drama. It participates in the action as a physical force making a distinct impression upon the mind and sensibilities of the characters, and as a total way of life--a set of values and manners and a frame of mind--which molds character and destiny.

One of the most important themes in a novel of the soil, therefore, is the vital relationship of man and nature. When man lives a life close to the earth, that is, facing

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[38]Simone Weil, The Need for Roots: Prelude to a Declaration of Duties Toward Mankind, trans. Arthur Wells (Boston, 1952), p. 289. Note: I am indebted to Weil's book for its keen insight into the problems of an over-centralized society, and for its theory of man's eternal need for roots, a theory that is germane to the central concept of a novel of the soil. It is Weil's thesis that once the notion of inalienable rights has been replaced by that of obligation related to need, we can see what justice demands. The physical needs of man are obvious, but the non-physical needs, or what Weil calls the needs of the soul, are not so obvious though just as important. She lists the following as among the vital needs of the soul: order, liberty, obedience, responsibility, equality, hierarchism, honor, punishment, freedom of opinion, security, risk, private property, collective property, truth, and most of all, the need for roots which includes a sense of continuity with the past.

nature directly and trusting her for a physical means of life (which means accepting her on her own terms and likely as not implies some form of constant, but satisfying, struggle), he has bred into him a spiritual contentment with work and life, and a kinship with nature that cannot be easily obtained in an urbanized environment.

The pioneer, the peasant, the farmer--i.e., anyone in personal contact with the elemental life--thus becomes the elemental figure, the symbol of man at his best, in direct and immediate intimacy with the creative power of reproduction and growth. When men are drawn into natural association one with another under these circumstances, there then occurs the organic growth of true community from the soil.

In addition, of course, the novel of the soil treats of other equally primitive and what may be called regionalist themes, most of which are overlapping: the superiority of the simple life, the spirituality of work and its value for happiness, the love of independence and self-reliance, the lack of deference to materialism and the profit motive, and the importance of roots as symbolized by attachment to the land, respect for tradition, and reverence for the past.

The concept of rootedness in the novel of the soil cannot be overstressed; Weil's belief in the importance of rootedness as a vital need of the human soul comes close to defining this concept:

> To be rooted is perhaps the most important,and least recognized need of the human soul. It is one of the hardest to define. A human being has roots by virtue

> of his real, active, and natural participation in the life of the community, which preserves in living shapes certain particular expectations for the future. Every human being needs to have multiple roots. It is necessary for him to draw well-nigh the whole of his moral, intellectual, and spiritual life by way of the environment of which he forms a natural part.[39]

The values listed above, then, including the need for roots, are affirmed. But at the same time the novel of the soil implies a judgment of what is not of the soil. In short, it is a protest against those forces that would uproot man and deprive him of important primitive and traditional values. It is thus an implicit and explicit protest against the sterile pretensions of urban civilization.

Because of this protest, the novel of the soil takes on added social significance. It is almost a commonplace to recite the problems which the twentieth century has forced on the artist: man's dissociation and loss, the sterility of love and religion, the breakdown of tradition and the forces of convention and ties to family and community, the impact of the machine age and the crass materialism of modern life. Yet most contemporary fiction worthy of its calling as social criticism has been, and will probably continue to be, concerned with these same problems. Blanche Gelfant tells us that "The comprehensive theme of city fiction is personal dissociation: the prototype for the hero is the self-divided man. Dissociation is a pathological symptom which results from, and reflects, a larger social disorder."[40]

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[39]Weil, p. 43.

[40]Blanche Housman Gelfant, The American City Novel (Norman, Oklahoma, 1954), p. 21.

A recurring theme in the regional literature of economic and social protest--which includes the novel of the soil--has been rebellion against the economic motives of modern industrialism which regionalist critics have felt to be the chief source of this larger social disorder reflected by the dissociation of modern man.[41] Donald Davidson charges in The Attack on Leviathan that cosmopolitanism and industrialism--toward which American life has long been tending--have been marked by one signal defect: they "abstracted the economic function from its old place in the complex of human activities and made it the chief, and

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[41] It is hardly necessary to point out that the most significant concepts in regionalism were first articulated by the Southern agrarians (a Southern literary movement represented in the symposium, I'll Take My Stand) who redefined Jeffersonian principles and set forth a set of cultural and economic preferences to offset the growing system of large-scale industrialism. They believed that Communism and Fascism were the twin evils to which industrialism led unless its progress were arrested by decentralization and redistribution of means of production to people through individual ownership of small farms and community ownership of factories. In the present study, however, the term regionalism should not be construed as a rigid economic theory of agrarian capitalism, or as a well-defined cultural-historical approach to national integration like that advocated by Howard W. Odum and H. E. Moore in American Regionalism (New York, 1938). Nor is Richter anywhere near so comprehensive as Donald Davidson. Yet Davidson's conception of regionalism, marked as it is by a high degree of nostalgia and hostility toward progress, is closer to defining the regionalist temper to which Richter relates. "What all are seeking is a definition of the terms on which America may have both the diversity and the unity that gives soundness to a tradition. . ." wrote Davidson. "They are learning how to meet the subtlest and most dangerous foe of humanity--the tyranny that wears the mask of humanitarianism and benevolence. They are attacking Leviathan" (The Attack on Leviathan, p. 12).

Richter is not necessarily calling for a return to an agrarian way of life, but to the individualism and stoicism inherent in agrarian values. Whether or not one can inculcate agrarian values without an agrarian way of life is another question.

almost the only important, member of the hierarchy of social functions."[42]

It is true that this devotion to economic purpose has given man a higher standard of living; but, continues the regionalist argument, there is evidence that this has been accomplished at great cost to man's humanity and self-respect, ripping him from his roots and destroying his natural ties with tradition and the past, standardizing his mores by the sheer driving power of economic motive alone.[43]

As art, the novel of the soil can be a powerful expression of primitivistic ideals, and as such, a compelling force in literary regionalism. By regionalism, of course, is meant--besides its implications for social criticism--something much more than local color in fiction. It implies not only that the artist must look at life from the vantage point he knows best, that is, through his own traditions, heritage, and experience, but also that he has a preference for certain aspects of this heritage and tradition which he fears is being challenged or endangered by some change in the human condition.[44]

Regionalist artists, Davidson has pointed out, were among the first to come to this realization:

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[42]Donald Davidson, The Attack on Leviathan (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1938), p. 73.

[43]Cf. Weil: "Money destroys human roots wherever it is able to penetrate, by turning desire for gain into the sole motive. It easily manages to outweigh all other motives because the effort it demands of the mind is so very much less" (p. 44).

[44]Richter's fondness for the simpler life of rural or small village communities is heightened by his own firsthand

> . . . some of the dilemmas of an industrial civilization may be downed or avoided by reaffirming ties, local and native, which were once only shackles to be cast off. In its undeniable nostalgia this sectionalism contains a realistic answer to the question "Whom shall my soul believe?" Worn out with abstraction and novelty, plagued with divided counsels, some Americans have said "I will believe the old folks at home, who have kept alive through many treacherous outmodings some good secret of life. . ."[45]

Regionalism in the novel of the soil, then, denotes the recreation in fiction of those social reactions characteristic of rural, village, and small town communities with a sustained suggestion that in these communities we may discover certain enduring values which are well-nigh becoming extinct elsewhere. But the emphasis is partly on the destructive elements of city life and is an indictment of modern progress for which the city has become the social expression and place of culture. In the twofold thematic structure of affirmation-protest, the regionalist codes of ethics and behavior are set off against those prevailing in the more cosmopolitan or urbanized centers. The rooted are set off against the rootless.

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knowledge of what an industrial life is like. Much of his youth was spent in the coal-mining regions of Pennsylvania. For a time he worked as a clerk in the mammoth Westinghouse plant in Pittsburgh. Later he worked as a reporter on the Pittsburgh Dispatch, and his knowledge of the industrial life in the steel capital of America is not superficial. Nor did his experience as a member of the industrial community win his allegiance to the economics that underline big business.

The modern detail-filled life is somehow personally unreal to him; the deeper reality exists in a life closer to the past and to the natural world: "In all life, nothing is quite so pleasant to the soul as forgetting the banalities of politics and the artificialities of book learning to lose oneself in an older and realer world concerned with such things as the sagacity of horses and oxen, the natural cunning of wolves, the loyality of dogs, the value of tanning with hemlock and rock-oak bark. . . ," "Pennsylvania," Holiday, XVIII (October 1955), 108.

[45]Davidson, p. 11.

One way to highlight the Ohio trilogy's relationship to this regionalist tradition is briefly to show its thematic correspondence to one of the really great novels of the soil, and one which may well serve as a prototype, Knut Hamsun's Growth of the Soil.[46] In almost Biblical simplicity and power, in the idiom of the region, both the trilogy and Hamsun's novel describe the development of a homestead out of the wilds and trace the growth of that alliance which develops between nature and man when he faces her directly, receiving spiritual and physical strength from his foothold upon the earth.

Growth of the Soil is divided into two books, the first providing the basis of values to be affirmed, the second describing the threat posed to these values by a commercial way of life. The meaning of the novel is implied in the contrasts between, on the one hand, those characters whose values and way of life are shaped by the land, and, on the other, those who represent the destructive influence of an urbanized environment. This meaning is made more explicit by Hamsun's profuse editorial comments, and by the critical evaluation of one of the characters, the perceptive but rootless Geissler.

The true tillers of the soil such as Isak and his son, Sivert, and Isak's wife, Inger (except for her partial dissociation following her sojourn in the city) embody the affirmative themes. Life in the wilds of Norway is constant activity, the

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[46]Knut Hamsun, Growth of the Soil (1917), trans. W. W. Worster (New York, 1921). Hereafter, referred to as Growth. Note: Hamsun's peasant novels are mentioned by Davidson in The Attack on Leviathan (p. 71), as examples of a growing literature of protest against cosmopolitanism.

work hard, and survival made possible only by developing a stoic conception of amor fati, and by practicing the simple virtues of frugality, simplicity, self-reliance, integrity, faithfulness, and honesty. These characters' relationship with nature awakens within them a spiritual sensitivity and provides adumbrations of something beyond. Sivert exemplifies the growth of this sensitivity by his felt kinship with the animals:

> He knew the wether from the day when it had been a lamb, he understood it and was one with it--a kinsman, a fellow creature. Once, a strange primitive impression flickered through his senses: it was a moment he never forgot. The wether was grazing quietly in the field; suddenly it threw up its head, stopped munching, simply stood there looking out. Sivert looked involuntarily in the same direction. No--nothing remarkable. But Sivert himself felt something strange within him; "'Tis most as if he stood looking into the garden of Eden," he thought.[47]

In time the community of settlers increases as others are attracted to the wilds, but the keynote is independence, even within the sense of community kinship. Isak's felt responsibility to his family, his animals, and his land developes out of an attachment to a way of life and a set of values that grow with the soil.

In the Ohio trilogy, The Trees and The Fields constitute Richter's affirmation of the primitivistic values elicited by the frontier and agrarian environment. To recite the common problems and hardships which draw the settlers into a close-knit group is to recite the major episodes of the novels (e.g.,

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[47] Growth, I, 167.

the collective sense of need expressed in the building of Moonshine Church, the drought which sends the fathers and sons to Kentucky for food, the community's sympathetic involvement in Sulie's disappearance, Guerdon's snakebite, and Jude MacWhirter's death, the cooperative spirit expressed in the cabin-raisings and log-burnings, and so forth).

Our attention is always drawn to Sayward or some immediate member of her family, however, since the narrative is told from her point of view as well as from theirs. Sayward, as the representative pioneer, stands for the others in the growth of her spiritual sensitivity. She becomes conscious of the cosmic destiny working in the affairs of men and nature, and she thus develops the Stoic conception of obedience to the order in the world (e.g., her conception of Providence and her fear of interference in the destiny of others). Her knowledge of, and respect for, the transcendent power behind nature we have seen to be the result of her immediate contact with the forest and the earth, and the dominant note of the story, like that of Hamsun's, is quiet and patient strength, the will and the ability to endure, triumph in the face of adversity, and spiritual and cultural autonomy.

The second part of a novel of the soil is the protest which highlights the affirmative values by juxtaposing them against the debilitating effects of an urbanized and commercial way of life. Hamsun's protest is directed against the demoralization of character and dissociation of personality

that takes place in the city. First this is traced in Inger's change after her eight-year prison stay in Bergen (symbolically, she has been a prisoner of the city). Soon after her return Isak notices the change: "Inger--was she really grown so different in her heart through living among folks from the towns? The fact was that Inger had changed a good deal; she thought now less of their common good than of herself."[48] Inger has not only become self-centered, she is now physically weaker, lazier, given to gossip and idleness, unfaithful, and impressed with social rank as measured by wealth and the accumulation of material goods.

Inger has been corrupted by the urban community in Bergen, but slowly she is restored to her former scheme of values by the subtle influences of the land. "No one can live in the depths of the wilds and have time for such foolishness," Hamsun comments editorially. "Happiness and nonsense are two different things."[49]

The second most detailed and graphic portrayal of character degeneration, this time irrevocable, is that of the oldest son, Eleseus. When Eleseus's small talent with letters is encouraged by a telegraph company engineer, Inger persuades Isak to let the boy go to town and study to be a clerk. But Eleseus's long sojourn in the city during his formative years proves disastrous. He becomes a cheat, a spendthrift, shallow

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[48] Growth, I, 229.

[49] Ibid.

and lazy, and is described as a town dandy and fop with no depth, no grip, and no originality--in short, he is badly dissociated: "His town life had wrought a schism in himself, and made him finer than the others, made him weaker; he began indeed to feel that he must be homeless anywhere."[50] Eleseus is a failure and Hamsun tells us plainly the reason for this failure. The boy had started well enough but had been turned into "an artificial atmosphere, and warped, transformed":

> Something unfortunate, ill-fated about this young man, as if something were rotting him from within. The engineer from the town, good man--better perhaps, if he had not discovered the lad in his youth and taken him up to make something out of him; the child had lost his roothold, and suffered thereby. All that he turns to now leads him back to something wanting in him, something dark against the light. . .[51]

The contrast between the rooted and the rootless is sharply focused when commercial mining operations begin in the area, a contrast which is highlighted by the juxtaposition of diametrically opposed value systems, the one based on a self-sufficient agrarianism and the other on a delicately balanced economic system.[52]

To those who embrace commercial and cosmopolitan values, money is the object most in demand. Aronsen, a man

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[50] Growth, II, 19.

[51] Ibid., 231.

[52] Cf. Davidson: An industrial system "must depend upon a scheme of correlations and balances vast in extension but delicate and complicated in their inner workings. Without pure devotion to economic purpose at every point in the gigantic scheme of manufacturing and distribution, the whole thing may break down, like an automobile stalled on the road by the failure of some minute part" (p. 73).

who formerly owned a small village fishery, comes to the community with dreams of wealth. To realize these dreams he opens a store which caters to the needs of the miners, and not only their needs, but their whims (the miners show little discretion about what they purchase, being overcome quite readily by what glitters and dazzles). But Aronsen's reverence for the power of money is a source of amusement to the local farmers. For example, his unsuccessful attempt to buy hay from one of the farmers who really had none to spare is recounted mirthfully:

> "'Ho, d'you mean you don't want to make money?' said Aronsen. Thinks money's everything in the world, seems like. Puts down a hundred Krone note on the counter, and says 'Money!' 'Ay, Money's well enough,' says I. 'Cash down,' says he. Ay he's just a bit touched that way, so to speak. . . ." [53]

Aronsen's business flourishes for a time, but his affluence depends upon the only commercial enterprise in the area, the copper mine. When the mine folds and later reopens on the other side of the mountain, he is forced to follow it and set up another store, which later also fails when the second mining operation abruptly closes down. The mine is forced to close when it cannot meet the competition of lower prices from the copper mines in another part of the world. Villagers, who are fairly content before the coming of the mines, neglect their land for the more lucrative mining jobs; but when the shutdown comes, they, like Aronsen, are left with no way to maintain the high standard of living they have come to expect as their

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[53] Growth, II, 118.

right in the world, and they become disgruntled and unhappy. The followers of the commercial enterprise are thus shown to be subject to the instability of world markets, victims of forces beyond their power or comprehension.

Hamsun's chief critic of the rootlessness inherent in the commercial and urban way of life is one who ironically is caught up in its tangled web--Geissler, the land speculator who is always on the move, attending to his projects in Sweden and Norway (and particularly his investments in the copper-rich land on Isak's farm). Geissler, although profiting materially from it, detests his way of life. Modern man, he points out, having "learned all the Jew and the Yankee can teach," is quick like lightning; but lightning by itself is barren. The lust for wealth is like a disease, crippling the soul; and when life crushes them, modern men complain against it. Life should not be raged against, however: "Not be stern and strict and just with life, but be merciful to it, and take its part. . . ."[54]

To Sivert, Geissler, in Hamsun's most eulogistic passage, sets forth his belief in the efficacy of a life on the soil:

> "Look at you folk at Sellanraa, now; looking up at blue peaks every day of your lives; no new-fangled inventions about that, but field and rocky peaks rooted deep in the past--but you've them for companionship. There you are, living in touch with heaven and earth, one with them, one with all these wide, deep-rooted things. . . Look, Nature's there for you and yours to have and enjoy. Man and Nature don't bombard each other, but go together;

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[54] Growth, II, 246.

> they don't compete, race one against the other, but go together. . . You've everything to live for, everything to believe in, being born and bringing forth, you are the needful on earth. . . What do you get out of it? An existence innocently and properly set towards all. . . Nothing can put you under orders and lord it over you."[55]

The tiller of the soil, affirms Hamsun, is a "ghost risen out of the past to point the future. . . ," a man who has his powers above, his independence, his dreams, his loves, and his wealth of superstitions.[56]

In the Ohio trilogy, the protest begins quite naturally in the third novel, The Town. We have already examined Richter's criticism of "the cult of comfort" and "so-called progress" from the viewpoint of his psycho-energic theories. But Richter, as did Hamsun, realizes that the real enemy to traditional values is the inflated importance economic theory wins in our modern scheme of values. Thus the protest in The Town begins with Sayward's dissatisfaction with, and sense of alienation from, the "town breed," particularly because their scheme of values is predicated by economic motive alone.

During a meeting held at the Wheeler cabin to decide on a new name for the growing town, Sayward is struck by the contrast of its planning, businesslike air with the meetings of the past. In the old days, because of the sense of community kinship, the thrust of the meetings--even those called for taxing purposes--was social; and when the meetings were

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[55] Growth, II, 243-44.

[56] Ibid., II, 252.

over your "insides warmed and your hearts stretched" and "you felt like a brother and sister to all."

> Now these men tonight at Moonshine Church were different, town bodies, reckoning town things. Figures of money and time and such entered in their talk. Hardly one spoke that he didn't mention so many dollars or hours and days it took to do something or so many boats tied up last week at one time and how many tons they carried. They were good enough folks and friendly to her and Portius . . . but they weren't the settler folks she and Portius used to know in the woods in the old days.[57]

In another conventional, although delightful, scene the old ragged hunter, Worth Luckett, is the voice of protest. When complimented by Portius's Eastern sister, Cornelia, for opening up the country, he angrily retorts that he never would have, had he known what the Easterners would do with the land:

> "And what do they want with it? Why, they want to make it just like the country they left back East. Already they've put in flour mills and wool mills and saw mills and fullin mills and all kinds of mills. . . !" He was hollering now. "Money, that's what they're crazy about. Money!"[58]

Of course the old hunter speaks as a woodsman who hates the farmer as much as he does the townsman and therefore he cannot fully represent Richter's sympathies. Nevertheless he is permitted to articulate for the author his sensitivity to the motive behind what the townsmen call the "progress of civilization"--i.e., the profit motive.

Portius, unlike Sayward, lacks any moral referents by which to judge the growth of the town. A native of Massachusetts, already a growing industrial state, he apparently has

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[57] The Town, p. 52.

[58] Ibid., p. 238.

seen towns and factories grow and has accepted without question the idea that growth was invariably good. Sayward, on the other hand, has begun to see the social and personal implications of the machine age.

Although she tries to live above the commercial spirit of the town, she is constantly galled by the necessity to give way little by little to the growth of the industrial city. The town swiftly becomes a crowded metropolis, filled with laborers who staff the increasing number of industries: the packing houses, looking glass works, cotton factory, comb factory, shipping houses, and others.

In time she finds herself ailing from a malaise which she finally traces to her deep dissatisfaction with the townsmen. It was "the pride and greed and great shakes of these town bodies that bothered her. Nothing was good enough for them anymore."[59] She chafed at the catapaulting taxes which went for services she had not solicited. But her main source of annoyance was to see her beautiful old residential square, once spacious and tree-filled, transformed into an ugly market place by the merchants. (Her own mansion she stubbornly refuses to sell to be cut up into shops.) "They even tried to buy the old cemetery and put up a new bank and hardware store on the graves," writes Richter. "Nothing could stop progress, they said, not even 'Mrs. Wheeler's mother's bones.'"[60]

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[59] The Town, p. 272.

[60] Ibid., p. 273.

Nothing is too sacred for the townsmen to profane if by doing so they can realize a quick profit.

Chancey, like Eleseus in Growth of the Soil, represents the dissociated and rootless youth produced by an urban way of life. Chancey is over-protected and mollycoddled because of his weak physical condition, a circumstance which Richter shows to be a serious hindrance to his development. Reliant on others, resentful of work which he felt degrading to mankind in general, and unbecoming to one in his social position in particular, Chancey grows into adulthood openly skeptical of, and hostile to, his mother's scheme of values. He is blind to his own self-pity and lack of depth and grip which have resulted from his deliberate and hostile rejection of the traditions, wisdom, experience, and teaching of the older generation; he is oblivious to the fact that he has cut himself off from values that are essential.

Not only does he reject the spiritual heritage from the past that his mother could have given him, but he also religiously tries to bury his heritage.[61] In an impassioned speech to important conservative leaders of the infant state of Ohio, he tells them bitterly:

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[61]Cf. Weil's observation: "Uprootedness is by far the most dangerous malady to which human societies are exposed, for it is a self-propagating one. For people who are really uprooted there remains only two possible sorts of behavior: either to fall into a spiritual lethargy resembling death . . . , or to hurl themselves into some form of activity necessarily designed to uproot . . . those who are not yet uprooted, or only partly so" (p. 47).

> "You gentlemen speak of the past. But the past is dead and gone. Soon you old men who belong to it will be gone, too. Only youth will be left. The old can never understand the problems of the youth. Only youth itself can. Youth is the native of its own times and carries with it the key to its own salvation."[62]

But all his attempts to "plough . . . these stick-in-the-muds loose from their earthy roots" fail, and he remains until his partial recovery at the end of the novel a pathetic example of the rootless, dissociated man who has experienced the breakdown of community and family ties; he reflects that ineffectuality of both love and religion which undeniably are symptoms of a larger disorder in our society.

Richter is criticizing the tendency of the present to hold the past in contempt. In our devotion to progress in the materialistic sense, he is suggesting, we have lost respect for the past as the record of providential purpose. An eternal chain of duty links the present generation with the past and the future, and we have no right irrevocably to alter the shape of things, or--in contempt of our ancestors and the rights of posterity--to ignore a spiritual heritage long in building. Deliberately ignoring the past will condemn us to repeat its mistakes. "Loss of the past, whether it be collectively or individually, is the supreme human tragedy," writes Simone Weil, "and we have thrown ours away just like a child picking off the petals of a rose."[63]

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[62] The Town, p. 387.

[63] Weil, p. 119. Note: Weil further observes: "It would be useless to turn one's back on the past in order simply to concentrate on the future. It is a dangerous

Richter's criticism of our neglect of the past, and hence of the spiritual treasures accumulated by the dead, has an undeniable validity, yet one must recognize the danger of going too far. To recall the past too often, if it is turned into a unique source of comfort in the face of present instability and misfortune, is no more than escape and can do a great deal of harm. Desire to preserve a vanishing past, when it is motivated by such a deep strain of nostalgia as Richter possesses, leads to his idealizing it, and "the past for the sake of the past" can arrest genuine amelioration in the human condition and be as dangerous as the equally fallacious commitment to "progress for the sake of progress."

As in all questions of good judgment, a proper balance must be struck, and the importance of Richter's criticism is that his nostalgic reaction does call attention to the weakness in our modern predilection both to consider the past as dead and useless for the present, and to favor change for the sake of change. Certainly there is very little danger that our society is guilty of broadly idealizing the past to the neglect of the present, and Richter's reaction is a healthy reminder of our debt to our heritage.

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illusion to believe that such a thing is even possible. The opposition of future to past or past to future is absurd. The future brings us nothing, gives us nothing; it is we who in order to build it have to give it everything, our very life. But to be able to give, one has to possess; and we possess no other life, no other living sap, than the treasures stored up from the past and digested, assimilated and created afresh by us. Of all the human soul's needs, none is more vital than this one of the past" (p. 51).

As a writer, Richter's purpose is to communicate a personal discovery about his world, a discovery which he articulated first in his psycho-energic theories of creative evolution. But the implications of those theories, we have seen, have led him to affirm conventional and traditional primitivistic values, and have provided him with a particular historic image and point of view.

As a social chronicle with a distinct thematic structure of affirmation-protest, the Ohio trilogy does place certain of today's social problems in an historical perspective, and it does explore their development over a period of time in an attempt to trace cause and effect. By contrasting the rural and the urban and by showing the progressive breakdown of traditional values that has accompanied the growth of urban values, the Ohio trilogy as an historical novel of the soil reaches a high achievement in recreating the historical process of change by which the pioneer village becomes an industrial city. It also offers an interpretation and judgment of this rapid historical change--particularly of its by-product, the rootlessness of modern man.

6. The Historical Novel and the Art of Fiction

Richter's literary reputation rests in large part on his remarkable achievement in the genre of the historical novel. Critics and reviewers have long acclaimed his skill and craftsmanship in his fictional recovery of the past.[64] But the genre

[64] E.g., Carpenter, pp. 77-83; Kohler, pp. 363-68; Prescott, pp. 133-45; and Sutherland, pp. 413-22.

of the historical novel has long admitted of many levels of achievement; its perennial popularity has caused numbers of untalented and unskilled craftsmen to turn out scores of inferior novels, a state of affairs which has done much to bring the genre into ill repute.

It would seem advisable, therefore, to conclude this chapter by briefly defining the kind of historical fiction to which Richter's trilogy relates. For the Ohio trilogy is within a newer tradition of historical fiction which has, in the past three decades, captured the attention of the critics and won for itself a more respectable place in modern American literature. It is neither feasible nor necessary to trace in detail the emergence of the more significant historical novel; it will be enough to set forth the broad requirements of the genre, and to suggest briefly the essential characteristics which distinguish the inferior and commonplace historical novel so much with us from the real thing, and thus to gain an understanding of how Richter's craftsmanship and special talents combine to make of the Ohio trilogy a significant contribution to the genre.[65]

It is important to realize that the good historical novel is subject to the same demands made of all good fiction. But it is no less important to understand that it is subject to special requirements. The most general technical

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[65] I am especially indebted to two studies of the historical novel for the discussion to follow: Ernest Leisy's The American Historical Novel (Norman, Oklahoma, 1950), and R. M. Bertram's doctoral essay, "The Novel of America's Past: A Study of Five American Historical Novelists, 1925-50," (unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 1954).

characteristic of the genre is the concept of past time in the sense of identifiable time, place, and historical agent (such as a person, an event, or a clearly recognizable social, political, or economic phenomenon).

The action must be laid in the past anterior to the novelist's personal experience so that for knowledge of that past time--its authenticities and details, its cultural patterns and social climate--he must rely on research into the documents of the era. Although he is dealing with facts gleaned from these sources, it is understood that the novelist is free to take certain liberties with them in order to create that sustained illusion which is the essence of fictional truth. It is his responsibility as historian not to violate historical fact; but it is his responsibility as novelist to inform historical fact with a significance derived from his own observation of basic human truths.

It has become customary to divide the historical novel into three categories: the historical or costume romance (in the complete tradition of the romance), the period novel, which is more concerned about background details than the whole of life, and the historical novel proper, which integrates character and setting and strikes an artistic balance in blending historical fact and fiction.[66]

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[66]Cf. Leisy, p. 18. Orville Prescott goes even further in dividing the genre into five categories: In My Opinion (New York, 1952), p. 128. Note: One of the significant defects of Leisy's classification of the historical novel, Kenneth Murdock has pointed out, is Leisy's failure to

If such a classification seems too arbitrary, a more reasonable division would simply be to differentiate between the earlier--and still extant--tradition of the historical romance, and the more recent tradition of the serious and realistic historical novel which self-consciously, although not always successfully, seeks to avoid the excesses of romance while subjecting itself to the more rigid requirements demanded by the art of fiction. Within this newer tradition, three distinct types may be defined: fictional biography, fictional accounts of great events with recognizable historical personages, and the realistic historical narrative peopled with fictional characters who, set apart from the noise and thunder of specific historical events, are preoccupied only with living their own lives from day to day, and whose significance is thus self-contained.

The majority of the historical novels, unfortunately, follow in the tradition of historical or costume romance.[67] In historical romance the emphasis is on action, on exciting

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distinguish "between tales in which the emphasis is on the depiction of the historical past and those in which it is on the development of a philosophical theory, the analysis of a mind or a moral dilemma, or the presentation of characters and occurrences as symbols of values and issues not limited by time" (Review of Leisy's American Historical Novel, American Literature, XXII (January 1951), 527.

[67]Earlier examples of the historical romance would include the adventure stories of William Gilmore Simms, Maurice Thompson's Alice in Old Vincennes, Charles Major's When Knighthood Was in Flower, and those romances of the Revolution and the Civil War by Winston Churchill. More recent novelists in this tradition include Ben Ames Williams, Kathleen Windsor, and Thomas Costain. Its tendencies, of course, can be seen in novelists of considerable achievement such as James Boyd and Kenneth Roberts.

narratives of adventure and love. Characters are usually accurately costumed, but for the most part they are wooden puppets, and unrealistically made to serve the action.

Historical romances are marked by the strong tendency to turn to improbable, melodramatic, and often cheaply sensational plots which may or may not be based on extensive research. As costume romance, of course, they have a certain appeal: i.e., for their pageantry, for their adventure, and for the escape they provide from the problems of a troubled present into an enchanted past where all conflicts are resolved. But seldom if ever are they triumphs of art and realism: the plots sprawl, the narratives lack compactness and cohesion, and the styles lack either grace or distinction.[68]

The shift away from historical romance to the more serious historical novel cannot, of course, be neatly pinned down. It began with those novelists who turned to the study of the past for other reasons than to exploit it for adventure and action, or to glorify and to sentimentalize it. Bertram has shown in his study of five novelists of America's past that more serious and competent craftsmen are turning their attention to the study of history for fictional materials on

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[68] Historical romances continue to be marked by these general faults. For a discussion of the structural deficiencies, prolixity, sensationalism, and brutality that still prevail in the modern historical romance, despite its "greater fidelity to psychological truth and more scientific documentation of material to guarantee historical accuracy," see Harlan Hatcher's "The New Vogue of Historical Fiction," English Journal, XXVI (December 1937), 775-84.

the assumption that the people and the problems of the past were much like those of the present, and with the conviction that the present generation should learn from their predecessors the importance of studying itself and meeting its obligations with courage and realism.

The shift to a more mature historical fiction is, from a literary point of view, extremely encouraging, especially as the novels become increasingly oriented toward realism. Historical writing, Bernard De Voto has pointed out, is following "the preference of the time for realistic writing, psychological inquiry, and social judgment in fiction."[69] Leisy comes essentially to the same conclusion in his study of the American historical novel.[70]

In treating historical materials according to the tenets of realism, novelists are first confronted with the problem of creating the sense of contemporaneity, that "indeterminateness, fluidity, and precariousness" characteristic of the flow of time in the present, while working with characters, details, experience and incidents that clearly belong to the past.[71] This is no small task. The realistic novelist

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[69]"Fiction and the Everlasting IF," Harper's Magazine CLXXVII (June 1938), 42.

[70]Leisy, p. 216: The historical novel has "followed the tenets of realism in psychology and in social awareness."

[71]The historical novel, says Bertram, "reintroduces the dramatic 'if' among the accomplished facts of history, shows how narrowly success is distinguished in its making from failure, and recreates the errors, mischances, and coincidences that have had their part in the making of today. Historical fiction, joining a sound knowledge of the present and of the

strives to create the illusion of life-as-it-is-happening so that we seem to share the experience of the characters rather than simply to view them as actors who appear on stage to perform the historical roles assigned them. The historical novelist has become increasingly aware of his responsibility to recapture the spirit and flavor of an age as revealed in the everyday relations of the people; to this end he has come more and more to rely on the documents of social history.

The introduction of the realistic method, of psychological insight, and of themes of social judgment has not necessarily enabled historical novelists to escape from the influence of historical romance, however. Novels recreating the past in terms of recognizable historical personages or recognizable historical events are too often impregnated with romance. Fictional biographies such as Howard Fast's The Unvanquished (1942), Washington in the Revolution, Citizen Tom Paine (1943), and The American (1946), biography of John Peter Altgeld, or Kenneth Roberts's recreation of great men and great events in stories with fictional heroes and heroines such as Arundel (1930), Rabble in Arms (1933), and Northwest Passage (1937), are cases in point.

Although fictional biography has participated in the trend toward realism and the more serious attempts to weld subject and form into artistically satisfying wholes, the

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timeless truths of human character and motive to a careful assessment of past history, introduces indeterminateness, fluidity, and precariousness into the past and so transforms it momentarily into the present" (p. 9).

very nature of its subject matter poses serious problems for the novelist. John T. Flanagan, in his survey of the middle western historical novel, detects a significant shift away from the fictional treatment of heroes: "Particularly healthy is the tendency to get away from fictionalized biography of heroes and to democratize the novel by choosing the ordinary citizen as protagonist."[72]

But even so, the novel which makes use of purely fictitious characters drawn from the ranks of ordinary citizenry to tell the story of well-known historical events tends to partake of the romantic tradition. The great historical personages may fall into the background, but we are not permitted to forget that they are present, just off-stage, and shaping events which will embroil the fictional hero. The story is usually told from the viewpoint of some private citizen caught up in a moment of public action, usually a national crisis destined to change the course of history. James Boyd's Drums (1925), and Marching On (1927), and Kenneth Roberts's Oliver Wiswell (1940), illustrate this type of historical novel.

Long ago Paul Leicester Ford expressed the opinion that the historical novel's appeal lies in the conviction of truth which the mention of real persons, places, and events convey to the mind of the reader.[73] In a superficial way this

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[72]"The Middle Western Historical Novel," Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society, XXXVII (March 1944), 46.

[73]"The American Historical Novel," Atlantic Monthly, LXXX (December 1897), 721-28.

may be true. But in point of fact, it is difficult to subdue the myths that have grown around historical characters and events, and any treatment of them cannot escape what Lytle calls their "preterit quality."[74] The dialogue invented and episodes imagined to fill out the "full" story of actual historical personages and events, and the motives inferred to explain the behavior of key participants, tend to tax our willing suspension of disbelief and to put a strain on the illusion the author strives to create. It often gives us the uncomfortable feeling that this is, after all, conjecture, only one of the possible explanations, only one of the ways it might have been; in short, we are made too conscious of the fact that this is nothing more than the novelist's ingenious synthesis of historical fact and imagined probability. There is a constant tension between the fact-fiction synthesis and the feeling for the myths and legends surrounding the personages and events that we inevitably bring to our reading experience. The materials, when concerned with recognizable men and events, do not readily permit of the necessary detachment for imaginative truth.[75]

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[74]Andrew Lytle, "Caroline Gordon and the Historical Image," Sewanee Review, LVII (Autumn 1949), 560.

[75]Cf. John T. Flanagan, "A Half-Century of Middlewestern Fiction," p. 22: "In most of the novels which deal with [national celebrities] the fame of the man dwarfs the art of the writer. The novelist has difficulty in avoiding genuflections before the imminent greatness of his hero and is equally troubled by the need to humanize him. The usual result is stiff and unconvincing portraiture."

Many historical novelists try to overcome this obstacle by the most exhaustive research and documentary and factual accuracy possible, assuring authoritative raw materials and leaving as few of the actually recorded details to the imagination as possible. Kenneth Roberts and Walter D. Edmonds both exemplify this painfully keen literary conscience.

Roberts's methods of research for his sequence of American historical novels are well known. He read, studied, collated, annotated where possible, all available source materials, made copious notes and detailed summaries, drew or collated extant battle maps and battle plans, studied maps to trace with precision the exact routes traveled by armies, and even visited for firsthand observation the terrain dealt with in his novels.

One of his typically documented novels is Northwest Passage. His use of accurate details, his knowledge of just what Rogers's Rangers wore, what jokes they told, how they made their camps and cooked their meat--when they had it--make for an authentic and convincing realism. But the effect is unevenly sustained. "Roberts's best truth and best art," Bertram observes, "are in those taut scenes which describe a few nameless, ragged men going somewhere."[76]

Roberts is too preoccupied with fidelity to historic detail. The minutely detailed mapping out of Rogers's exact route, for example, borders on tedious antiquarianism. Despite

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[76]Bertram, p. 165.

Roberts's extensive documentation to insure realism, he often fails to achieve an artistic blending of fact and fiction. Nor does his realistic approach camouflage his intention to vindicate or condemn a person or a cause.

Edmonds perhaps more than Roberts is devoted to historical fact and to the minutiae of factual historical detail. His best known novel is Drums Along the Mohawk (1937), the action of which takes place within a seven-year span (the Revolutionary War) in a recognizable valley peopled both with imagined characters and actual personages whose recorded experiences make up part of the novel's action. Edmonds relies heavily on the "authenticity" which comes of using people who actually lived during that period of American history. (He is careful to list his fictitious characters in an Author's Note.)

As a chronicler of daily life, Edmonds reveals a canvas crowded with people busy doing just what the records tell him people were doing between 1776 and 1781 in the Mohawk valley. In his Author's Note, he even tells us that the snow storms, floods, and rains are historically accurate. Although the numerous scenes rendering the minutiae of daily life are usually colorful, Edmonds simply reports too many banal and dull details; he is overcome by the historicity of his materials, and achieves no perspective or foreshortening in his predilection to treat every object with the same emphasis.[77]

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[77] Bertram, p. 176.

A new kind of historical novel has recently been emerging within the genre, which reflects an attempt to avoid the weaknesses of fictional biography and fictional accounts of recognizable historical events. For want of a better term, this new type may simply be called the realistic historical narrative. The best of these narratives, such as A. B. Guthrie's gritty and lustily realistic The Big Sky (1947), and Conrad Richter's Ohio trilogy, are no less documentary than the novels of Roberts and Edmonds. But it is documentation of a different kind. Guthrie and Richter are both astute students of history. Richter particularly relies on historical materials; but he does not place himself under the obligation of being "historically accurate."[78] And yet no historical novelist has been held in higher esteem by the historians themselves.[79]

Richter's purpose in the trilogy is to shun the names, dates, and events that, because of their sensational or spectacular aspects, have found their way into the history books. The trilogy, he writes, is about those pioneers "whose names never figured in the history books but whose influence on their own times and country was incalculable." If the trilogy

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[78] Harry R. Warfel, American Novelists of Today (New York, 1951), p. 354.

[79] E.g., Oscar Handlin, an eminent Harvard historian, reveals with what respect Richter is held as a chronicler of social history. "Social history puts a greater strain on literary expression and the sense of balance than any other kind. . . . [Historians] need to improve their human perception as well as their literary style if they expect to be the teachers of social history that, for instance, . . . Conrad Richter is." "History as a Literary Art," Harvard Guide to American History, eds. Oscar Handlin, et al. (Cambridge, Mass., 1955), p. 47.

has had any other purpose than to tell some of their story, he continues,

> it has been to try to impart to the reader the feeling of having lived for a little while in those earlier days and of having come in contact not with the sound and fury of dramatic historical events that is the fortune of the relative, and often uninteresting, few, but with the broader stuff of reality that was the lot of the greater majority of men and women who, if they did not experience the certain incidents related in these pages, lived through comparable events and emotions, for life is endlessly resourceful and inexhaustible.[80]

Richter does not stress the role of the individual as hero; in his narrative the common man gets the center of the stage, and the individual is subordinated to the family group.

A careful student of the idiom and speech patterns of the pioneers, Richter, like Guthrie in The Big Sky, tells his story in the language of the settlers.[81] His remarkable feeling for the authentic pioneer idiom and figures of speech does much to translate us almost bodily into the past to accomplish his purpose of making us feel we have "lived for a little while in those earlier days." The narrative description, the thoughts of the characters, and the realistic dialogue are of a kind; there is never the jarring shift back and forth between the literate narrator and the illiterate characters, no self-conscious solecisms of dialogue so characteristic of the typical pioneer tale. The speech patterns are natural, at times lyrical and possessed of a Biblical simplicity. Nothing

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[80] The Town, p. ii.

[81] Cf. Prescott, In My Opinion: "But, in contrast to Mr. Richter who comes close to poetry in his use of archaic speech, Mr. Guthrie is harsh and gritty and violent" (p. 141).

reveals Richter's grasp of the peculiar qualities of time and place obtained through the documents better than his skill with the use of the pioneer's language.

Richter's careful research into documents, journals, letters, diaries, newspapers, and social histories to insure the authenticity of material is well known. The acknowledgments of the trilogy reveal the great extent to which he has gone to inform himself of the cultural patterns and social climate of the past.

In a recent interview, Richter revealed that the chief work which "set him on the road" to the Ohio trilogy was "Howe's Historical Recollections" published in the 1840's."[82] A close reading of this rich and monumental work on early Ohio has indicated something of Richter's technique in freely availing himself of historical materials for his authentic fictional recovery of the past. In this one work alone Richter obtained nearly a hundred specific and identifiable details, anecdotes, and incidents which he incorporated into the narrative structure of the trilogy. A representative selection of these historical materials gathered from Howe has been included in an Appendix for further reference, and to give some idea of the "documentary authenticity" of Richter's material.[83]

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[82]John K. Hutchens, "Pine Grove to Pulitzer and Back," New York Herald Tribune Book Review, April 22, 1962, p. 11. Note: The title of this work is Historical Collections of Ohio; the interviewer apparently inadvertently added the prefix "Re-".

[83]In this study, the two-volume edition of Henry Howe's Historical Collections of Ohio (Cincinnati, 1907) is used.

It is significant to note, however, the kind of historical material available in Howe which Richter did not avail himself of. For example, Howe's Collections is filled with references to, and accounts of, the following: (1) violent and bloody Indian raids on isolated settlements;[84] (2) the bloody wars which erupted in Ohio in the late seventeen hundreds when Pontiac and Tecumseh united the Indian nations--with British backing--against further encroachments by the whites (including accounts of St. Clair's defeat and Wayne's victory over Tecumseh);[85] (3) incidents related to the War with England in 1812, the military implications of which touch much of Ohio's history (e.g., the fleet Commodore Perry built on Lake Erie and the naval battles fought off Ohio's shores); and (4) accounts of notables like the famous Indian fighter, Lew Wetzel, and the heroic Betty Zane.

The typical historical novel abounds in such events.[86] Indeed, such material could have supplied Richter with action

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[84]To be sure, Richter never lets us forget the Indian lurks just in the background, a frightening figure and potential menace. But Richter's intention is to avoid the sensational, and to reveal, rather, that undercurrent of tension and restrained emotion felt by the early pioneers, who well knew the constant possibility of Indian harassment.

[85]There is one offhand reference to Wayne's army. Louie Scurrah recounts his experiences when he kept Wayne's army supplied with game during a long seige by hostile Indians. The emphasis, however, is not on Scurrah's participation in the heroic event, but rather on his description of his ingenius "coal-pit fire," and how he shot and skinned deer while avoiding discovery by the savages (Scurrah's account is based on solid fact; see Appendix, B, 2).

[86]John T. Flanagan in his survey, "The Middle Western Historical Novel," shows the popularity of these same materials which have long proved irresistable to historical novelists:

of the most dramatic possibilities; but he carefully avoids this kind of action so aptly suited for heroic deeds.[87] There is never that pervading sense of sensational history-in-the-making caught by those novelists who, in order to establish authenticity of time and place, feel impelled to touch on such historically significant material. Richter finds Howe's Collections a veritable gold mine, not for outstanding facts of history, but for the simpler details of a "broader reality," apart from the "sound and fury of dramatic" historical fact.

Richter defines a story as the record of human achievement; his first task in delineating that achievement in the historical trilogy was, of course, to collect volumes of homely and picturesque details and anecdotes which he could arrange, order, and synthesize to create a background of authenticities on which to weave his narrative.[88]

These are the small authenticities without which life would not have been life on the Ohio frontier: the feeling of solitariness evoked by the forest; the way log cabins were

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e.g., James B. Naylor's In the Days of St. Clair (1902), Under Mad Anthony's Banner (1903--Wayne's campaign), and The Sign of the Prophet (1901--Tecumseh); Burton Stevenson's The Heritage (1902--St. Clair and Wayne); Emerson Bennett's The Pioneer's Daughter (1851--St. Clair); Thomas Boyd's Shadow of Long Knives (1928--Wayne); Robert S. Harper's Trumpet in the Wilderness (1940--Perry's Fleet); and Zane Grey's Betty Zane (1903--Lew Wetzel and Betty Zane).

[87]Cf. Kenneth J. Barnard, "Presentation of the West in Conrad Richter's Trilogy," Northwest Ohio Quarterly, XXIX (Autumn 1957), 232.

[88]See Appendix, B, 1-13.

raised and furnished; how trees were "ringed," felled, and "niggered off the land," and how the stumps dotted the town streets; the way corn was planted and how the Indians conducted their trading at the post; what the pioneers did to "over" the ague and fever and what they took for rattlesnake bites; what their superstitions were, what made them laugh and sing and cry, and how they welcomed the first circuit rider to bring religion to the settlement; what they did on Independence day and how they fought over the location of the county seat.

The details of setting are not simply described or allowed to accumulate for a total effect; rather they are dramatized as inner experience and by exposing them, opening them to us, Richter thus permits us to enter the lives of his pioneers with greater emotional immediacy. For example, rather than externally describing the dense and terrifying forest of the Ohio wilderness which nearly overwhelms the Lucketts at their arrival, Richter dramatizes as inner experience the confrontation of the scene and thus suggests almost poetically the impact on the family's imagination of the "monstrous butts." He accomplishes this inner dramatization by a sustained metaphor, equating the strange, dark, green subsurface world of uncivilized wilderness to the bottom of the sea.

> For a moment Sayward reckoned that her father had fetched them unbeknownst to the Western ocean and what lay beneath was the late sun glittering on green-black water. Then she saw that what they looked down on was a dark, illimitable expanse of wilderness. It was a sea of solid tree tops. . . . As far as the eye could reach, this lonely forest sea rolled on and on till its faint blue bellows broke against an incredible distant horizon.[89]

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[89] The Trees, p. 8.

The feeling of looking out over a sea, experienced on the hill from where Sayward receives her vision, soon gives way to a sensation of being "down under the ocean of leaves," and Jary, her mother, views the dark forest as a huge well at the bottom of which the family is trapped.

When Richter makes use of recorded detail, he often changes it only slightly. The following account recorded in Howe of a pioneer woman making tea and cakes in one kettle, for example, is lifted almost bodily and fleshed out by Richter to blend it into his narrative:

> A year or two after we arrived, a visit was got up by the ladies in order to call on a neighboring family who lived a little out of the common way. The hostess was very much pleased to see them, and immediately commenced preparing the usual treat on such occasions--a cup of tea and its accompaniments. As she had but one fire-proof vessel in the house, an old broken bake kettle, it, of course, must take some time. In the first place some pork was tried up in the kettle to get lard--secondly, some cakes were made and fried in it--thirdly, some shortcakes were made in it--fourthly, it was used as a bucket to draw water--fifthly, the water was heated in it; and sixthly and lastly, the tea was put in and a very sociable dish of tea they had.[90]

In Richter's hands, the anecdote serves to point up the essence of frontier privation and the matter-of-fact "make-do" spirit it engendered in the self-reliant pioneer women. Sayward is visited by a new neighbor lady, Mrs. Covenhoven, and for the first time in her life she is called upon to entertain a guest and to serve refreshments.

> "Well," she said, "I'll start a gittin' you some tea--if it's all the same to you."

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[90]See Appendix, B, 1.

"Oh, I don't want you to go to any trouble," Mrs. Covenhoven told her.

"It's no trouble," Sayward said. "My big kettle has soap in it. But I ain't a usin' the other."

"I could loan you one," the pock-faced lady offered.

"Oh, I kin do all I want with one."

Sayward took the small kettle and used it the first time to fry out bear's bacon for shortening she would need later on.

"Almost warm enough for a body to wash their hair," she said.

She used that kettle a second time to bake sour dough biscuit in, after she had poured the shortening in a gourd.

"You and your man have a mess of poke yit?" she made talk again. "It has plenty around."

When the biscuits were done, she used the kettle a third time to fry the shortcake in, first working the fresh shortening in the dough until it was ready.

"Pap got such a nice silver fox last winter," she said. "I wish you could a seed it."

Now she took the kettle a fourth time and used it as a bucket to draw and fetch water from the spring.

"I heered your man's a puttin' up a double cabin?"

"Not that one room isn't big enough for us," Mrs. Covenhoven explained modestly.

"No, one room's got plenty room for the six of us," Sayward agreed.

When the kettle started to simmer, she used it a fifth time, as a teapot, putting in a lick of dittany and sassafras root shavings. Then she poured out a pair of steaming wooden cups and set them with her two bread-stuffs on the trencher. . . .

"Tea's done," she said gravely. "You kin draw up your stool."[91]

Richter borrows freely from much larger actual incidents and humorous anecdotes to provide the basis for significant episodes--sometimes the external action for whole chapters--in his trilogy.[92] For instance, Captain Peirce's account of the "great Hinckley Hunt"[93] provides Richter with the complete physical action for chapter six in The Fields

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[91] The Trees, pp. 106-108.

[92] See Appendix, A, 1-12.

[93] See Appendix, A, 7.

("His own Man"). The chapter describes the organization of a great hunt to wipe out the wolves and bears which have been preying on the farmers' sheep and pigs. Numbering over five hundred men, armed with everything from muskets to butcher-knives mounted on poles as lances, the army of hunters forces hundreds of wild animals into a natural conclave of brush and timber and there they kill great numbers of the entrapped beasts. After the hunt, the men celebrate by holding an unprecedented Bacchanalian feast of barbecued bear and straight whiskey.

Peirce's account and Richter's adaptation of it are almost identical down to the exact number of wolves, bear, and deer killed. But whereas Peirce's description of the hunt is characterized by a preterit quality and a dry matter-of-fact brevity, Richter has used his creative imagination to bring the scene to life: he has filled the air with the shouts and laughter of excited men, the sound of dogs and hunting horns, the sharp crack of rifles and the smell of gunsmoke, the loud cries of terrified beasts in the last moments of the carnage; he has captured the tension and contagious excitement that charged the air with an electric current, and he lets us smell the burning logs and barbecuing bear meat, lets us hear the murmur of low voices as the evening settles down into serious story telling and the swapping of tales.

But more importantly, Richter introduces the element of conflict into the scene--not the external conflict of man and beast, but the tumultuous inner conflict of the young

Wyitt here in his moment of truth. For the hunt is merely a background for Wyitt's time of decision "to be his own man," and to follow the "everhunter" instinct to his destiny somewhere in the forests of the West. Like his father before him, Wyitt cannot forsake his primitive level of evolutionary development; he has learned the meaning of the hunt and can no longer deny the "Monsey Indian blood" which would "out" despite his attempts to resist it. It is the achievement of the chapter that the action of the hunt moves quickly into the background, while in the foreground we are made aware of Wyitt's emotional upheaval. Once again, the details of the hunt are not described; they are dramatized as inner experience.

Richter also draws freely on humorous anecdotes told about remarkable people in Ohio's history in order to delineate his own imagined characters as infused with the spirit and essence of the age.[94] Richter's dissatisfaction with conventional interpretations of the early American character is due to the tendency of contemporary historians and writers to dress up people of today in the costumes of yesterday, forgetting, or unaware, that the early American had a peculiar quality of character strength and manhood elicited by the frontier environment. The problems of meeting life and death are the same; but the way the pioneers faced up to these problems reveals, Richter maintains, that they had a "crabbed" hardihood, self-reliance, and love for independence quite conspicuous for

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[94]See Appendix, C, 1-3.

their absence today.[95] He finds the temper of those early times imbedded partly in the keen sense of humor possessed, for example, by the many lawyers and judges described in Howe's Collections, the anecdotes of which furnish Richter with material for his delineation of Portius Wheeler.[96] His reliance on such authentic detail insures that the characters, in their own experiences, motives, actions, and understanding, are more authentically kept within the immediacy of their own moment of time.

It should be made clear that Richter finds himself under no obligation to maintain factual accuracy. Portius Wheeler of the trilogy helps draw up the bill that made Ohio into a State; but no document listing the representatives to the constitutional convention at Chillicothe in 1802 will give his name. Neither the county of Shawnee, nor its county seat, Americus, has ever been or will ever be on Ohio's maps; they have existed in a hundred counties and in a hundred county seats, but they have never existed in themselves. Resolve Wheeler, eldest son of Sayward, rises to become governor of the state, but the honor roll of Ohio's governors has never held his name; for he is a mythical governor, and as such Richter can attribute to him anecdotes told of many governors.[97]

Richter, in his attempt to create the illusion of reality, takes great liberties with factual detail but never

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[95]"That Early American Quality," pp. 26-30.

[96]See Appendix, C, 1.

[97]See Appendix, B, 13, for one.

with human truths; he concerns himself not with documenting a factual record, but with using the documents to create a believable record of human achievement. In this sense of documentation, few contemporary historical novelists are as thorough and representative as Richter.

The essential feature of Richter's use of detail is the quality of restraint achieved by his discriminating selection and his successful blending and integration of the details of setting with characters and action. Despite his heavy reliance on the documents for his material, Richter is never overcome by the historicity of that material. Bertram tells us that, when reading Drums Along the Mohawk, we are forever bumping into Edmonds armed with his documents; this is never the case when reading Richter's trilogy. The details are not only sharp and realistic; they blend into the story of human life with its frustrations and its triumphs.

The key to this artistic triumph is his selectivity. The mass of human experience he finds recorded in Howe and in the other sources for his narrative is bare of tidy demarcations. Richter's skill lies in the discipline he imposes over this bulk of authentic but raw materials; this disciplining process he describes by the phrase "Experience, Selection and Order in Writing," (and by experience he also means that mental experience which includes research and knowledge).[98] The form he imposes on his subject matter, the

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[98]Correspondence to me, May 16, 1962.

cosmological pattern which gives the materials their peculiar unity and clarifies their meaning, is the result of his skill in the art of selection and order.

> "That intense effort to condense and interfuse in a single story stream all the thousand and one details of theme, ideas, background, color, character, incident and dialogue in the back of my mind--these things for me have to come out in their proper order and extent. Order to me is one of the most important elements in fiction and generally over-looked by the amateur and the verbose professional."[99]

The method of the trilogy is episodic; therefore it is doubly important for Richter to exercise rigid selectivity. He focuses on the revealing situation or crisis in the lives of his people, the illuminating episode which compresses and suggests so much of the meaning of life. Richter has learned the important literary truth that "the art of rendering life in fiction," as Edith Wharton once said, is to disengage "crucial moments from the welter of experience."[100]

By skillful and selective use of historical materials to get the most out of them for his realistic narrative, by creating a sense of contemporaneity void of antiquarianism, and by delineating believable characters from the ranks of common men and women--characters who reveal no knowledge transcending their own time and place apart from their perception of enduring human truths obtained through experience--Richter has made a significant contribution to the genre of

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[99] Quoted in Hutchens, p. 11.

[100] Quoted in Orville Prescott, In My Opinion, p. 254.

the historical novel. His grasp of the cultural pattern transcends the notebooks so that he illuminates this pattern with something like the emotional power of the poet.

But this is not the trilogy's only achievement. The narrative is framed by an historical and philosophical overview that adds an extra dimension to the story. The chief importance of using the past, writes Andrew Lytle, lies in its creating the "illusion of the contemporary within a context of historical perspective, so that while an action is taking place it is rendered in terms larger than those of its immediate appearance."[101]

Thus while we are watching the action take place, we are also aware that the actors reveal the essential meaning of their time. The value of the past for us, Richter believes, is that we can see from our present post of observation the pattern of a cosmic destiny operating in the affairs of men. This pattern, we have seen in chapters two and three, reveals the operation of natural laws in the universe which insure the eventual evolution of man through natural adversity and self-discipline.

The meaning of the trilogy as a historical novel rests on our perception of the beginning of a cultural loss which resulted when these natural laws were ignored or overlooked by man; and this loss is measured specifically by the disappearance of those values cherished by the hardy, self-reliant and

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[101]"Forest of the South," Critique, I (Spring 1958), 4.

stoic pioneers, and the substitution in their place of those superficial values deriving from the mercenary and comfort-seeking materialism of an industrial age.

We witness the story as a contemporary, but at the same time we are made aware of the philosophical undertones of the author's point of view. We see those forces which elicited that peculiar quality of inward strength in the pioneers; and we see how these characteristics give way before the worshippers of progress who, unaware of the "laws" of the universe, have created an environment which robs them of their integrity of character, emasculates them, and threatens their evolutionary development. That Richter enables the trilogy to carry the weight of this social judgment without subordinating the realistic narrative to thesis must be counted as a remarkable achievement in the genre of the historical novel.

CONCLUSION

Although Richter's long and distinguished career as a novelist of American backgrounds has been generally recognized, his role as a philosopher and social critic has been neglected or overlooked. With the publication in 1955 of The Mountain on the Desert, he made it clear that his philosophical and mystical theories of psycho-energics define a well-ordered philosophy underlying all of his fiction, particularly his masterpiece, the Ohio trilogy. By determining to what extent he has informed his fiction with a philosophical view of man and his destiny, it has been possible to clarify the mystical and social implications of the Ohio trilogy, and more clearly to assess its contribution to American literature.

Richter's readings in science, his observations of human personality and behavior, and his philosophical and mystical speculation were, and are, an attempt to locate the first cause of what he has observed to be the distinguishing features of the pattern of life. His conviction that a philosophy of life must be grounded on observable fact, and that spiritual forces must operate by means of mechanical or natural law, led him to conclude that man's inner evolution--i.e., the generic emergence of the spiritual temperament in man--could be explained in terms of teleological natural law

operating in the growth of mind. Richter's attempt to reconcile the implications of a reductive science with the spiritual and mystical cravings of his mind by defining the mechanism of purposeful evolution relates him to the early tradition of philosophical naturalism.

Building on the theory of modern science that energy is the basis of all life phenomena (including mental and spiritual behavior), he sets forth two postulates: the distinguishing feature of life is limited energy, and the basic primal motive of the human organism is energy hunger. Richter's rather complicated electro-physiological theory of emergent evolution is based on the assumption that natural law insures a constant state of "inharmony" in the organism by continually providing circumstances (pain, hardship, suffering, struggle, privation) to induce ever higher energy needs in the psycho-energic "realman." The physiological process of building up energy flows to meet the persistent energy hunger of the "realman" is the core of inner evolution and the prelude to moral strength and spiritual growth.

Thus, Richter would have us understand the role of inharmony in the plan of evolution; for, according to the postulates of psycho-energics, a man may cooperate with destiny and participate actively in his own physical and spiritual evolution by stoically embracing hardship and a regimen of self-discipline. In so doing, he may remove himself from some of the harsher stratagems of fate.

Richter's psycho-energic theories of emergent evolution explain his attempt in all his fiction, and particularly the Ohio trilogy, to show that man is a complex entity secretly governed by some mysterious force (the inherited and developed psycho-energic instrument responding to natural law), and to relate this mysterious force to a conscious cosmic destiny which determines the fate of man. On the surface this cosmic destiny appears harsh, cruel, and hostile; but we are permitted to see that it emanates from a benevolent motive.

The moral ambiguity in Richter's philosophy obtains in two paradoxes. The first, that "evil" or pain is the sine qua non of a benevolent evolutionary process, has long been accepted by evolutionary naturalists as an unavoidable truth inhering in an ethical interpretation of natural growth through adversity. At the same time, Richter's thesis derives a certain validity from its commerce with the classical biological theory of the struggle for survival. It is a generally accepted scientific truth that, in a protective environment, all creatures appear to lose their versatility and ingenuity. The pattern of struggle is apparently so deeply ingrained in the processes of life in this benevolently hostile world, that the removal of obstacles serves only to atrophy the drive to survive.

The obstruction we encounter in our environment, on the other hand, keeps us alert, strong, and self-reliant; we are made tough and resourceful by adversity as we struggle forward. Such a universal truth, perhaps, is more compelling when expressed as mystical and poetical suggestion than as a scientific

postulate. Certainly, Richter's mystical adumbrations in his fiction of this truth are more convincing and meaningful than his specific and detailed interpretation of it in his psycho-energic philosophy.

The second paradox is that man, as he ascends the scale of evolution, passes through an intermediate phase in which his evolved sympathy and desire to relieve the suffering of others is not balanced by sufficient understanding and developed intelligence. Such is the case of Chancey Wheeler in the trilogy. The welfarist intellect, even though deriving from genuine altruistic motives, may paradoxically work against natural law by attempting to remove all circumstances of inharmony (the "beneficial burdens") through conscious social planning.

It is only through experience with the issues of life that the sensitive altruist realizes the need to proceed cautiously in planning for human welfare if he is not to interfere in the cosmic destiny. It must be admitted that in this interpretation of spiritual growth through adversity, we are confronted with the problem of degree, which is not clearly answered in Richter's social criticism. It is apparent, however, that the implications for social behavior to be derived from such a philosophical theory relate Richter in principle and practice to the social conservative.

Richter's psycho-energic postulates provide the rationale for his social criticism in his philosophical writings and his fiction. Contemporary society, he believes,

is characterized by a cult of comfort causing the atrophy of moral fiber and the emasculation and dissociation of moral character and personality. There are four chief manifestations of this cult: (1) the belief that moral character and spiritual growth can be accomplished painlessly through education; (2) the attitude that anything ugly and unpleasant should be avoided; (3) the belief, supported by Freudian psychology, that it is scientific and progressive to relax restraints of conscience and of moral responsibility; and (4) the widespread devotion to economic materialism.

His criticism of the cult of comfort emerges as themes of protest in the Ohio trilogy and explains his reasons for re-acquainting us through historical fiction with our Early American heritage. Richter's respect for pioneer values as an antidote for the moral bankruptcy which has attended the modern cultivation of physical and spiritual comfort accounts for his lifelong preoccupation with the frontier experience as a source of literary materials. His study of the past provided him with an historic image: a change in the human condition attended by a cultural loss. He locates the beginning of this change in the historic transition from the rugged living conditions of the frontier community to the high living standards, but crass materialism, of the mid-nineteenth century industrial community.

The Ohio trilogy records this historic change in the human condition and points up the essence of the cultural loss by means of a thematic structure of affirmation-protest. The

Trees and The Fields represent his affirmation of pioneer values, and The Town represents his protest against the social conditions which bring about the destruction of these values. On the wilderness frontier, the steady conflict with natural adversity--symbolized by the hard work of clearing a virgin forest to make way for homes, fields, and a reasonable security--causes the pioneers in the community of Moonshine Church constantly to summon up their energies for survival. Sayward, her family, and her neighbors develop a unique quality of mind and spirit, a quality of hardihood and ethical courage.

The configuration of life's pattern, according to Richter, reveals the operation of natural laws which employ hardship and discipline for individual progress; where man's self-discipline is neglected, he is sure to be confronted by natural adversity which insures his physical and spiritual development. This pattern of life--which Richter explains in great detail in his psycho-energic theories--provides him with a principle of order in his fictional recovery of the past. Sayward and the pioneers, in their common sense philosophy, accept the need for hardship and discipline in their lives; for they come to consider life's misfortunes and adversities to be providential, the wise dispensation or discipline of the gods, and the means to moral development. Furthermore, they come to that painful self-knowledge that the issues of life must be embraced personally. The great lesson life teaches Sayward is that she cannot be strong for others without making them weaker, the natural consequence of interfering in their destiny.

The surface narrative of the Ohio trilogy is thus connected with a background meaning: the cosmic role of hardship and discipline as a means of grace. The theme of cosmic destiny gives unity to the three novels by providing a principle for selecting those experiences and details which enable Richter to co-ordinate structure and meaning. There is a definite correlation between the artistic coherence of the Ohio trilogy and the philosophical coherence of Richter's perception of the reality beneath the appearances.

The philosophical ideas, mystical overtones, and social themes of the Ohio trilogy clearly relate it to the traditions of primitivism and transcendentalism; and its thematic structure of affirmation-protest, which helps to order the realistic historical narrative, relates it to the regionalist tradition of the novel of the soil. The conclusions Richter derives from his theories of psycho-energics inevitably lead him to embrace the Stoic values of primitivism, and the spiritual values which inhere in a transcendent conception of the cosmos.

His commitment to primitivism, of course, is heightened by his personal sense of nostalgia and love for the frontier era--a nostalgia which threatens to carry him to an uncritical preference for the past. At the same time, his well-ordered philosophical convictions show that his preference for the values of the past transcends sentiment and becomes a serious indictment of the modern preoccupation with economic materialism as the means to progress in the human condition.

As an historical novel of the soil, the Ohio trilogy affirms enduring primitivist and transcendentalist values:

the growth of community from the soil; the superiority of a simple, unregimented life in a natural environment which evokes a spiritual sensitivity; the spirituality of work; the love of independence and self-reliance; the Stoic conception of amor fati, or love of the order of the world; and the importance of roots as symbolized by attachment to the land, respect for tradition and community ties, and reverence for the past. In a novel of the soil, of course, the rooted, whose values are affirmed, are set off against the rootless, whose values are protested. Thus the Ohio trilogy protests those social forces of an industrial and urban civilization--particularly the inflated importance of economic motive--which threaten to uproot man.

This distinct thematic structure of affirmation-protest enables the Ohio trilogy, as a realistic historical narrative framed in a philosophical and mystical overview, to place today's social disorders in an historical perspective. By means of a skillful and selective use of documentary historical materials to create, not factual accuracy, but a restrained, realistic illusion of life in an ordered universe, Richter effectively recreates the historical process of change by which frontier America became industrial America.

The trilogy offers an interpretation and judgment of this rapid historical change--particularly of its by-product, the rootlessness of modern man--in terms of the cultural loss which has attended our disregard for the past as a record of providential purpose, and our headlong flight after novelty, change, and materialistic progress. Richter's use of the

realistic historical narrative in the tradition of the novel of the soil as a medium for philosophy and social protest makes of the Ohio trilogy a significant contribution to the genre of the historical novel, and to American literature.

APPENDIX

The following is a selective list showing the kind of factual details, anecdotes, and incidents Richter appropriates from Henry Howe's Historical Collections of Ohio for background authenticities, extended scenes of action, and delineation of character in the Ohio trilogy.[1]

A. Incidents and humorous anecdotes providing the basis for significant episodes (sometimes whole chapters).

1. A man travels miles through the wilderness to procure flour to make "real" bread for a sick and ailing wife. (Howe, I, 551 : cf. Trees, Ch. 5, "Bread," pp. 43-57--Worth does this for Jary.)

2. Ague, fever, the swamp pestilence; frequency of attack; symptoms; deadliness; doctors forbid water to patients; how one patient crawled from his bed to a nearby stream to quench his thirst. (Howe, I, 536-37; II, 725-27 : cf. Trees, Ch. 11, "Corpse Candles," pp. 122-32.)

3. Small girl lost in the woods; separated from the cows; sensation of being lost in the forest; reaction of neighborhood; large search party organized, led by veteran hunter; clues found : play house, pieces of calico, footprints; search abandoned. (Howe, I, 417-18, 490; II, 133, 850-51 : cf. Trees, Ch. 14, "The Little Tyke," pp. 159-81--Sulie's disappearance.)

4. Unusual frontier wedding; jovial but mischievous group propose a match between a reluctant bachelor and a willing but timid maid; prospective groom primed with whiskey, restrained by force; long happy married life of the principals. (Howe, I, 353 : cf. Trees, Ch. 29, "It Came a Tuesday," pp. 263-86--Jake Tench proposes match between the "solitary"--Portius Wheeler--and Ida Tull; Sayward steps in and marries Portius herself.)

5. Special mode of clearing the virgin forest; "ringing the trees," and "niggering the butts," log-burnings and log-rollings. (Howe, II, 207-208 : cf. Trees, Ch. 20, "Black Land," pp. 287-302.)

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[1]Henry Howe, Historical Collections of Ohio (Cincinnati, 1907).

6. The "Great Hinckley Hunt"; clearing the woods of varmints. (Howe, II, 203-206 : Fields, Ch. 6, "His Own Man," pp. 69-83.)

7. Account of the famine; settlers reduced to six kernels of corn apiece; young men go to Pennsylvania for corn; account of a plucky pioneer woman who kept her family alive by searching the mattresses for grain kernels, and by painfully stalking a lone turkey with only one shell for the gun. (Howe, I, 266, 528 : cf. Fields, Ch. 7, "The Fleshpots of Egypt," pp. 84-105--famine in the settlement; men leave for Kentucky; Sayward searches bed ticks for grain; stalks and shoots turkey to keep family alive.)

8. Two small boys alone in the woods; one bitten on the finger by a rattlesnake; chops off his own finger to save his life. (Howe, I, 923 : cf. Fields, Ch. 13, "The Nettle Patch," pp. 188-200--Guerdon's snakebite; chops off his own finger.)

9. Competition for the County Seat; use of political cartoon showing a man carrying off a court house in a wheel-barrow. (Howe, I, 695; II, 424 : cf. Town, Ch. 6, "County Seat," pp. 57-71--conflict between Americus and Tateville.)

10. Opening of the Ohio canal; celebration. (Howe, II, 72 : cf. Town, Ch. 11, "The Two Diggings," pp. 128-35--Ohio canal goes through Americus.)

11. Parents discover after thirty or forty years that their daughter, who had been captured by the Indians, is still alive and married to an Indian in the western part of the territory; tragic reunion; daughter refuses to leave husband and family, or to return to white civilization. (Howe, I, 297-98, 408; II, 451 : cf. Town, Ch. 22, "Ant Sulie," pp. 255-70--Sulie still alive, won't return.)

12. Competition between neighboring towns reflected in famous sleigh-ride war; hundreds of sleighs behind a flag depicting a thumb-to-nose gesture invade town; invasion returned. (Howe, II, 424f : cf. Town, Ch. 27, "Winter In," esp. pp. 329-35--sleigh war between Americus and Tateville.)

B. Smaller details and humorous anecdotes appropriated for background authenticities.

1. Making cakes and tea to entertain guest; how one kettle does the work of six. (Howe, I, 566 : cf. Trees, Ch. 9, "A Noggin of Tea," esp. pp. 105-108.)

2. Indian fighter, Josiah Hunt, keeps Wayne's army supplied with game when Wayne's fort is under seige; description of "coal-pit fire," techniques for hunting and skinning deer in hostile Indian country. (Howe, I, 699 : cf. Trees, pp. 145-46.)

3. Detailed description of building and furnishing a log schoolhouse. (Howe, I, 534 : cf. Fields, Ch. 11, "The Laurel Hut," esp. pp. 161-64--building the "Academy.")

4. Description of Fourierites, phalanxes; Cincinnati the cultural and publishing center; gathering place for all causes. (Howe, I, 420 : cf. several references throughout The Town; Chancey attracted by phalanxes, goes to Cincinnati to edit radical paper.)

5. Detailed description of pioneer day and Independence Day celebrations; cabin raising; speeches. (Howe, I, 662, 885; II, 375, 729-30 : cf. Trees, Ch. 16, "Public Day," pp. 198-215; Town, esp. pp. 287-91.)

6. Description of eccentric Johnny Appleseed (John Chapman), his peculiar dress and manner, his Swedenborgian religion. (Howe, II, pp. 485f : cf. Town, pp. 368-70--Chancey comforted after Rosa's death by Johnny's Swedenborgian sentiments.)

7. Anecdote of the ignorant Mormonite who left his country because of the vision he had seen in the sky; the clouds had spelled F-A-M-I-N. (Howe, II, 195 : cf. Fields, p. 87, Luke Peters's vision.)

8. At pioneer celebration, humorous song:
   (women) "Oh, for a man; Oh, for a man; oh! for a mansion in the skies."
   (men) "Bring down sal;--bring down sal;--bring down salvation from above."
   (Howe, I, 885 : cf. Fields, p. 117--sung at first religious meeting.)

9. Reading Virgil's Aeneid; at the point in the narrative where Aeneas tells Dido he must leave by the mandate of Jove, two agitated backwoodsmen in the audience leap to their feet and heap censure on a man who would concoct such a tale just to run out on a woman. (Howe, I, 290 : cf. Fields, pp. 168f--Jake and Billy hear Portius read.)

10. Indian offered whiskey; after hesitating and quoting white preacher who had warned him drinking whiskey would send him to hell, the Indian concludes the preacher probably "tell damn lie," and gratefully accepts the cup. (Howe, I, 582 : cf. Town, p. 61--Portius and Little Turtle.)

11. Important pioneer who operated a tavern and a ferry nearby was known for his fiercely democratic sense of sovereignty; he earned the nickname "King Charley," for kicking Louis Philippe, afterwards the famous king of France, out of his tavern when that worthy monarch complained of his accommodations during his travels as a refugee in America. (Howe, I, 481 : cf. Town, p. 85--"King Sam" Sloper, operator of tavern and ferry, enjoyed the same reputation.)

12. Description of Women's Temperance Crusades; anecdote of one young man who finds himself trapped in a saloon by a group of crusaders among whom are his sister, sweetheart, mother, and mother-in-law-to-be; escapes out the back door. (Howe, I, 428, 916 : cf. Town, pp. 302f--Chancey trapped in Red Mule, escapes out the back.)

13. A French Duke, traveling in America, wants to pay a visit of state to the Ohio governor, Jeremiah Morrow; he stops to ask a common laborer in a nearby field where the governor could be found and is flabbergasted to learn the laborer is himself the governor. (Howe, II, 756 : cf. Town, p.428 --told of Resolve.)

C. Humorous anecdotes appropriated to facilitate characterization.
   1. Portius Wheeler
      a. Accounts of hermits

         (1) An eccentric person named Jones, who dressed in deerskins and lived a solitary life in the wilderness; his background mysterious, but probably banished from the East for his intemperance. He was a scholar who had brought with him many books and was fond of reading poetry aloud. (Howe, I, 291.)

         (2) Wadsworth was a graduate of Yale, but for some mysterious reason had come to the wilderness to be a recluse. He had rich relatives in Boston who occasionally pleaded in vain for his return. (Howe, I, 490.)

         (3) William Hewit had left his Virginia home where he had been a man of wealth to become a hermit in the wilderness. His background mysterious, but generally believed to have been a victim of misplaced love and faith. (Howe, II, 430.)

         (Portius Wheeler, trained for the bar, was known as the "solitary," and the "hermit." He had been mysteriously banished from the East where he had apparently been a member of a wealthy family.

Reduced to wearing buckskins; scholarly and fond of poetry, he was often seen wandering up and down in front of his wretched log hut, reciting Greek and Latin poets, and reading from Shakespeare. He was inordinately intemperate. After marrying Sayward he is rescued from his solitary ways, but when letters arrive from Boston bidding his return, he refuses, preferring to stay in the wilderness.)

b. Humorous anecdotes about various frontier lawyers. The majority of biographical sketches in the Collections are about early day lawyers.

(1) Ben Tappen, chagrined that one of the presiding judges was late returning from court recess, piled the tardy judge's saddle bags (which contained lawbooks) on the bench in front of the judge's seat, and addressed them in absence of the judge. (Howe, I, 972 : cf. Town, p. 69.)

(2) A man appearing before a pioneer judge in common pleas court, paid his fine for beating a man caught stealing his pigs. He was threatened with contempt for bragging in court how he beat the "damn hog thief," which action caused the defendant to yell at the judge: "If you'd steal a hog, damn you, I'd whip you too." (Howe, I, 696 : cf. Town, p. 70.)

(3) Nicholas Longworth, lawyer and man of wealth, was famous for refusing to give money to organized charities. The "Lord's poor" are well cared for, he claimed. "But I will help the 'devil's poor,' the miserable drunken dog that nobody else will do anything for but despise and kick." (Howe, I, 819 : cf. Town, p. 391--sentiment attributed to Portius; defines his temperament.)

(4) A copy of the Arabian Nights, bound in black, was mistaken for a New Testament and used to swear in witnesses. (Howe, I, 698 : cf. Town, p. 399--Portius, a skeptic, did this for his own private amusement.)

(5) Numerous accounts of ostentatious brick mansions built by lawyers. : cf. Portius's desire to have the biggest mansion in town.

(6) Numerous accounts of lawyers advocating the new canal policy and championing "progress." (e.g., Howe, I, 650 : cf. Town, pp. 128f.)

2. Jake Tench

   a. Accounts of ruffians and rowdy backwoodsmen.

      (1) The rowdy group who plan wedding between non-courting bachelor and old maid (see A, 4).

      (2) Description of the "Fighting Funks," the most notorious of whom was Jake. They loved whiskey and brawls. One of the Funks once skinned a pig whole to get a wineskin to carry home his whiskey in. (Howe, I, 603 : cf. Trees, p. 297.)

      (3) Jamie Shaw was a religious enthusiast fond of rolling on the floor at the height of his religious ecstasy. Once a rowdy urchin dropped a bullet in his mouth when Jamie was in a supine position and he nearly choked to death. (Howe, II, 269 : cf. Fields, p. 29--Jake does this to Scovel Harris.)

      (4) John Driskel, a rowdy and belligerent man, bit off a man's ear in a fight; the victim, watching his chance, leaped on Driskel and bit off the man's nose in exchange. (Howe, II, 839 : cf. Town, pp. 217-18--Jake loses an ear but gains a nose.)

3. Chancey Wheeler

   a. Anecdote of Jeremiah Reynolds; Jeremiah and his step-brother were known as "Job's Oxen," and at a log-rolling, Jeremiah was unable to hold up his end of a log. In fun a by-stander said "One of Job's oxen was a calf." (Howe, I, 431 : cf. Town, "The Off-ox," p. 289.)

   b. Anecdote about Rev. Armstrong. At a log-rolling Armstrong found his end of the log too heavy. When his partner said "More handspike?" (meaning to lighten Armstrong's load), the Rev. misunderstood and quickly said "No more stick for me; I have already as much as I can carry," much to the amusement of those about. (Howe, I, 697 : cf. Town, p. 289--part of the same incident involving a. above.)

   c. Account of William Gallagher's poem, "Fifty Years Ago; a Song of the Western Pioneer," (which ends with the refrain, "In the days when we were pioneers, / Fifty Years ago"), and of his poem "The Spotted Fawn," about a beautiful Indian princess who with her lover was slain on her wedding day by cruel white hunters. Howe includes a parody of this ballad which paralleled the

fate of the Indian maiden with that of a young frog stoned to death by boys. (Howe, I, 712-14 : cf. Town, pp. 313-14--Chancey writes a broad lampoon attacking his mother for her refusal to permit the city to drain her Beaver Gats. Entitled "The Frog's Petition," it is inspired by the satire on Gallagher's "The Spotted Frog" and his poem "Fifty Years Ago." Every verse calls for a reasonable--from a frog's point of view--return to a way of life more suited to a frog's needs. Each verse ends with the refrain, "Return unto the status quo / Of forty, fifty years ago.")

D. Details which tend to define Richter's point of view toward his materials.

1. Howe's attitude toward pioneers; e.g., the following account of John Welch: "His history illustrates the pluck of that early race which started in life when Ohio was a wilderness. Beginning with battling with the trees, and conquering them so as to give the ground a fair chance for the sunbeams, they went forth into the battle of life among their fellow men regarding them somewhat as 'trees walking.' Success was of course assured." (Howe, I, 287.)

2. Attitude toward trees and forest.

a. Trees described as "angry," "threatening" the settlers. (Howe, I, 317.)

b. Accounts of famed trees left standing as a reminder of the old days, finally to be overcome by a storm. (Howe, I, 545.)

c. Accounts of terrible and frightening grandeur of the forest, and the indescribable feeling of "solitariness" experienced by the first settlers. (Howe, I, 193f.)

3. Social equality of pioneers.

a. Consciously democratic; no aristocratic distinctions. (Howe, I, 555.)

b. Spirit of sharing and brotherhood; hostility toward mercenaries and speculators. (Howe, II, 245.)

4. Contrast between past and present; nostalgia of pioneers.

a. Settler complains that modern materialism and affluence have destroyed the sense of gratitude and joy at living, at being supplied with life's necessities. (Howe, I, 317.)

b. Old timer looking back bemoans loss of that "primitive simplicity!" and regrets the animosities brought on by increased wealth. (Howe, I, 566.)

c. Settlers regret afterwards that they hadn't left a few more trees standing. (Howe, II, 855.)

d. Howe's repeated observation that the individualistic olden days made it possible for every village to have its colorful characters whose individuality provided "moral entertainment." (Howe, II, 269, 448.)

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