

TOUCHING PITCH:
A READER'S GARLAND FOR EDWARD DAHLBERG

by

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Abstract

The work of Edward Dahlberg has not greatly been studied. One book about him exists, another one or two (that I am aware of) are in preparation. Too few book reviews, the other criticisms of his efforts, are interred in the pages of various literary periodicals which date back to 1930. In presenting his own appreciation of Dahlberg, Jonathan Williams writes, "God knows, I do not have the prodigious knowledge of classic literatures clearly necessary." Nor do I. Before I commenced this essay I was bidden to "cover the ground". This year, Mr. Dahlberg published a book which I received in the mail after I had completed my work. Of course, no critic with a soul, or a grain of sense, feels that his work is ever done, or that he has done is definitive. Whoever does feel this contributes mightily to the plague of cultural lockjaw which mortally endangers the free expression of all honest men everywhere. This present work is tentative, necessarily. I offer here for it few excuses but rather an intent to expand and (hopefully) improve it, later.

I presume that in his search for his identity -- he might say, in his hunt for what to write and for how to write it -- Edward Dahlberg has had near him always the advice tendered by Sir Philip Sidney's muse: "Fool...look in they heart and write." Dahlberg's earliest works were autobiographical novels, written in what he much later referred to as the "abominable tongue" (BD, p. iv), the proletarian rudeness made fashionable after World War One and especially in the 1930's, too often truant from learning and a slave to its own moment. Following the autobiographical sketch Dahlberg has placed in a letter to Robert M. Hutchins (EOOT, p. 22), we see that what was to hand (or to ear) for these apprentice books did not suffice to inform our author who he must be. Josephine Herbst has written,

[Bottom Dogs'] limitations set hardened boundaries beyond which Dahlberg was fated to pass or to lose his integral vision in the meaningless violence of typical American fiction. But more like a European writer than any American, he was willing to go down to rot, if need be, in order that he might come up again in a rebirth more central to his vision of an imaginative beyond. (BD, p. vi)

Do These Bones Live was published in 1941, after Dahlberg had been silent seven years. (This volume was twice revised -- first in England in 1947 -- where it was called Sing O Barren: and again in New York in 1960, under the title Can These Bones Live.) His style had changed utterly during that time. His concerns had become more universal than personal and perhaps for that, more immediate; his cadences were richer, the better to focus upon what had had come to realize must hold his attention -- his Origins. These he came to understand culturally, the Old World heritage the New World had too easily sloughed away.

The more Dahlberg searched for himself among the records of the long past, the more resonant with them -- as in The Flea Of Sodom (1950) -- his style became. What could be more simple? "Le style est l'homme même." Origins of Americans, whose feet should touch this inContinent, are as much "savage" as "civil". Novelist of himself, as Ortega says man is, Edward Dahlberg proceeded to discover in The Sorrows Of Priapus and The Carnal Myth both the epical annals of the Europeans who revealed the New World to the Old and also the legends of the Indians, they who were first to contact their white "discoverers", who first shook them with the brute fact of terra incognita.

Except for the very obvious change in styles between his first four novels and Can These Bones Live, I have found it appropriate to treat all of Edward Dahlberg's work as one great book. (This has meant eschewing dates of publication in the process of quite an odd sort of cross-reference; the ideas in Truth Is More Sacred had likely been brewing in Dahlberg's mind for thirty years -- it is an unavoidable historical accident that they saw daylight in

1961. Said the Russian poet Fet:

I know not what I myself shall sing,
But only my song is ripening.)

"A novelist is always writing the same book; for he is born to make the perfect poem or novel." (LA, p. 17) My assumption explains why this essay is not entirely lineal -- quotations from one book illuminate dark questions posed by another.

Timidly, I might also say that some of Dahlberg's books are in part less essential to his development than others (I hesitate to say categorically, "his progress," for Dahlberg has consolidated or rather fructified his ideas and opinions; he has rarely changed them). The most important works are Can These Bones Live, The Flea Of Sodom, The Sorrows Of Priapus, The Carnal Myth, and Because I Was Flesh. But this is total conjecture and beyond a few phrases of explanation, my assertions would get lost and frozen in a semantic blizzard. What is cause and effect? Dahlberg's two books of essays (Alms For Oblivion, The Leafless American), some of the poems in Cipango's Hinder Door, his critical exchange with Sir Herbert Read (Truth Is More Sacred), and his aphorisms -- Reasons Of The Heart -- certainly could not have been done apart from the other books listed earlier. However, Dahlberg's mythography is more central to him -- and this, I repeat, is naught but the most elemental and dangerous hunch -- in that it provides a base of self-knowledge that facilitates that secondary activity which is a more conventional and recognizable literary and social criticism.

After years of study and many hazardous forays into the jungle of the public print, Dahlberg returned to himself (and to his mother), prepared at last with his adjunctive assurance about that part of him which uttered habitually the wisdom of the millenia in the periods of the seventeenth century, to tell the

story of his own person. As always, it was an inevitable act. "...I have come to that time in my life when it is absolutely important to compose a good memoir although it is also a negligible thing if I should fail." (Because I Was Flesh, p. 4)

My composition has a plan. Think of a man in a whirlpool: the centre of it is himself yet he is surrounded by a vortex of alien matter which closes upon him steadily. He must free his body from the workings of the funnel, must thrash his way up and out of its constrictions. Yet his contact with it is the only means he has to disengage himself from its whorls, which work counter to all his efforts. Does it not greatly behoove him to learn its processes, to understand its duplicities as quickly as possible, so as to overcome (or try to overcome) its attempts ever to suck him down?

I have arranged in chapters my account of the work of Edward Dahlberg and this has been its scheme: an Introduction about the impossibility of criticism; Chapter One -- some words of a kind concerning an epistemological problem and its solution, the process of metaphor; Chapter Two -- literary criticism (those authors and attitudes to whom Dahlberg first travelled to find himself, and also those past whom he had to fight his way); Chapter Three -- sociopolitical criticism; Chapter Four -- the diligent search for the myths of peoples of the Old World and the New; Chapter Five -- the memoir of the body; a Conclusion, in which (among other matters) alternate ways of approaching the subject are suggested. In fine, the "whole body and intelligence" described at the start of Chapter Two is tracked throughout and is freed by Chapter Five. The knowledge of self is inextricable, at last, from the knowledge of others. The tale of that process/proposition in terms of the life and art of Edward Dahlberg is the burden and (if indeed there is any) the progression of my essay.

I mentioned in my tiny description of the first chapter of this essay that

it concerned an epistemological problem -- indeed, my entire composition, because of the nature of its subject (and because of what I hope is my sympathy for that subject) is concerned with an epistemological problem. Which way does the cyclone/anti-cyclone revolve? How does man make his what is all around him? How does man know himself best; by heart, by head? Must he seek to move or to cease whirling, so that he may learn? What leavens him, merely that which fetches him? Does he do what he desires? What is movement, choice, stillness, action? How does he know?

Everything comes in twos, good and evil, pleasure and asceticism, life and dying. Hermes is the god of eloquence, and this winged courier brings the right words to the mouth of the poet, and he also tells him when he is to die. There is no writing, or life, or teaching that is good that is not also heavily impregnated with death. (CM, pp. 21-22)

The vorticist is Edward Dahlberg, the struggling and anguished Western man, indestructible Laocoön by virtue/vice of his own skin, senses, organs, blood, and bones (and those of the quivering World around him), fervently desiring tranquillity and ever chary of (it as?) the Void.

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The great majority of references in this essay are to the works of Edward Dahlberg; I have avoided a plethora of footnotes by parenthesizing page numbers and title abbreviations at the ends of quotations plucked from Dahlberg's books. (Full bibliographical information appears at the end of the essay.) Here is a list of Dahlberg's works and the abbreviations I have used for them.

1. <u>Alms For Oblivion</u>	<u>AFO</u>
2. <u>Because I Was Flesh</u>	<u>BIWF</u>
3. <u>Bottom Dogs</u>	<u>BD</u>
4. <u>Can These Bones Live</u>	<u>CTBL</u>
5. <u>The Carnal Myth</u>	<u>CM</u>
6. <u>Cipango's Hinder Door</u>	<u>CHD</u>
7. <u>The Edward Dahlberg Reader</u>	<u>EDR</u>
8. <u>Epitaphs Of Our Times</u>	<u>EOOT</u>
9. <u>The Flea Of Sodom</u>	<u>FS</u>
10. <u>From Flushing To Calvary</u>	<u>FFTC</u>
11. <u>The Leafless American</u>	<u>LA</u>
12. <u>Reasons Of The Heart</u>	<u>RH</u>
13. <u>The Sorrows Of Priapus</u>	<u>SP</u>
14. <u>Those Who Perish</u>	<u>TWP</u>
15. <u>Truth Is More Sacred</u>	<u>TIMS</u>

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Introduction

"The Open Letter" (Frank Davey)

One thing I have made up my mind to do is never to solve or solder impossible contradictions on paper that cannot be mended or put together in life. And my book is full of that. I know it and it bothers me, terribly. I don't believe too much in the "superstition of progress"; yet I believe just as man from day to day must create his own atmosphere and fiction of free will and speak in demonic absolutes or be dumb, so must he act as though man were not an eater, and as though the most planetary and remote and ridiculously foolhardy ideals could be established. One has two choices, either to be Jesus or the Ass upon which he sat as he rode into Jerusalem. I prefer to be both and am reasonably certain that I can carry a divine burden as the Ass rather than as the Jesus. (Edward Dahlberg, Epitaphs Of Our Times, p. 16)

The poet Allen Tate has dared to ask in an essay the following outrageous question: "Is Literary Criticism Possible?" Mr. Tate protests that he cannot define literary criticism or "the humanities"; his essay first assumes their existence and then tries to forge links between them. The humanities and their lessons, as Tate misunderstands them, are a sorry clogged harbour full of all the detritus the natural and social sciences have no use or time for. The humanist is interested in man simply as he is, and places no limit on his functions.

"Whatever criticism may be, we should perhaps do well to keep it with the humanities, where it can profit by the sad example of Hilaire Belloc's Jim, who failed 'To keep ahold of Nurse / For fear of getting something worse.'" ¹ The sole method of the humanities today is unsatisfactory; it is to offer the past en bloc to the Lockean mind of the student. If he "accepts" it sufficiently, and repeats it as offered, he is said to be "educated". At times, he even becomes capable of making correlations between various sections of what has been poked at him.

The arts of rhetoric (and, says Tate, their forerunners, grammar and logic), have been neglected. Without them language, the medium of humanist studies,

cannot be comprehended, much less employed. Even the poet who throws off these disciplines for those he regards as more important is a charlatan unless he is aware of the significance of what he rejects.

Tate considers that criticism occupies an impossible position right between the works of the imagination and the activity of teaching. He limns this relationship with four rhetorical questions: can a work be taught without criticism; does teaching necessarily precede criticism, which is then the "understanding" tacked on; can criticism be precedent, understood, and glued to the work as it is taught or read; is teaching a jungle gym upon which the critical faculty may create its own routines which are independent of literature? Obviously, says Allen Tate, the meaning of "criticism" is by no means simply posited. (The same problems arise, of course, when we try to define "literature".)

"The three kinds of critical discourse are as follows: acts of evaluation of literature (whatever they may be); the communication of insights; and the rhetorical study of the language of the imaginative work." ² None of these exists by itself. The first two, says Tate, cannot be taught; the third has been demolished by the systematization of criticism.

Insights can only be presented in the hope that, despite all evidence to the contrary, those to whom they are presented will match them with parallel insights of their own. Tate cites Longinus, who considered that one of the functions of intelligence is industry. Discipline is therefore justified. An aesthetic experience, though it have a verbal analogue, is yet private and ineffable. Evaluation is at last, says Tate, impressionism which, in its most pernicious form, is the historical seclusion of literature. "All reading is translation, even in the native tongue; for translation may be described as the act of mediation between universals and particulars in the complex of metaphor." ³ Without training in the rhetorical foundations of language, the student of lit-

erature founders. "It is futile to expect him to be a critic when he has not yet learned how to read?"⁴ Rhetoric will not be taught for we do not now believe that words are important vehicles of truth. Here not only the student of literature, but also its teacher, stumbles before the Babel perversions of the pragmatic tongue.

How may we talk of Literary Criticism apart from teaching it, is Tate's next question. It can never be totalitarian without betraying its identity, let alone that of the work which it purports to elucidate. Even when the critic in his insupportable position between philosophy and literature erects a system which in its coherence appears to exceed that of the work at hand, he is in danger of idolatry. Art is long, criticism is short; it is the buffer between the languages of the mind and of the body, and navel-string which keeps them from flying apart.

"The critic's rhetoric, laid out in his particular grammar, is the critic's mind."⁵ If we understand the critic well, we should not, Tate warns, suppose immediately that his is the position of a genius or a dolt. Criticism is humility before literature, which is the lined Human Face of things.

"IS LITERARY CRITICISM POSSIBLE?" Allen Tate queries. There is a noble despair in this question and those who refuse to ask it are pragmatic "porkers in tears." That we do not know what we think we know is no quibble; it is the tragedy of man endeavoring to attain knowledge that is beyond the powers of his feeble intellect. Let me...admit that I am a Sisyphean failure, for whatever words I may roll up the Cordilleras will fall down on my head again.

...

Once the critic assumes that it is possible to define pleasure or truth, or what Tate would call the "machine of sensations," he is erecting an epistemological Babel. Since knowledge is chimerical, the academic stench is more horrid when the cabala of grammar is passed off as metaphysics. This pinchbeck diction comes, as Tate views it, from the "critic's own intellectual pride." The good and just use of words fires our entrails and hopes, while wandering phrases which cannot explain themselves make cowards of us. How many have lain in the dust after perusing the jargon of aesthetics? The critic, having a niggish skill with words, and pretending that the buskined gait of the tragedian is contemptible, adopts the mock elevated style of the philosopher and scientist. As Tate remarks: "The philosophical language in which

he...expounds the insight may seem to reflect an authority that he has not visibly earned." (AFO, pp. 143-4)

Edward Dahlberg's essay about the criticism of Tate, whom he calls "The Forlorn Demon," is in part his own confession of his general ignorance and of his distrust in method. Again, what is literary criticism, though professors neigh continually into the busy ears of herds of students? Dahlberg does not have any great faith in anyone's ability to be coherent. He quotes admiringly the distressed candour of William Hazlitt: "If I am assured that I never wrote a sentence of common English in my life, how can I know that this is not the case?" (AFO, p. 163)

I think that the reader of my essay should bear in mind the strictures of Tate and the fact that Dahlberg agrees with them mightily. The composition which follows is consistent in that many of its non sequiturs are naked and undisturbed. (They are instead disturbing, and to no one more than to me.) My criticism is not often paraphrasing, digestion, explication, apparent digression, gloss, evaluation, placing in context -- none of these, I surmise, can do without the others. Usually, I am unable to distinguish these elements of form (style plus content), either in my own work or somebody else's. In theory, I take this to be no fault.

I shall cite an anecdote about Sir Thomas More which is to be found in John Aubrey's Brief Lives.

In his Utopia his lawe is that the young people are to see each other stark-naked before marriage. Sir William Roper, of Eltham, in Kent, came one morning, pretty early to my Lord, with a proposal to marry one of his daughters. My Lord's daughters were then both together abed in a truckle-bed in their father's chamber asleep. He carries Sir William into the chamber and takes the Sheete by the corner and suddenly whippes it off. They lay on their Backs, and their smocks up as high as their arm-pitts. This awakened them, and immediately they turned on their bellies. Quoth Roper, I have seen both sides, and so gave a patt on the buttock, he made choice of [Margaret More], sayeing, Thou art mine. Here was all the trouble of the wooeing. 6

I put my reader in a position akin to Roper's. Edward Dahlberg considers that all knowledge is carnal; my criticism of his work has, I feel, followed it (closely, I hope) in spirit and in letter.⁷ What I say, then, is bound to have the flaws and sottishnesses that the body has; my hope is that it possesses also some of the body's beauty and vigour.

Chapter One

"The Metaphysics of the Belly." (Norman Mailer)

We are always pining for the first and aching because we are the last, for all things old and new are skulled and dead, and never lived because there is no is or was -- there is only the mocking image. We handle nothing from birth to what we name death and imagine that it is something. (RH, p. 109)

This is a passage from Reasons Of The Heart, Edward Dahlberg's recent book of piths and gists. It contains connections to the very centres of Dahlberg's interest. Establishing these connections will let us follow the course of his study of how we know or fail to know our selves and our universe, and the truth or falsehood of what we know.

The mood of the pensée just quoted is also that of Koheleth the Preacher, Ecclesiastes. (That sentence's metaphor was weak but germane.) Metaphors wreck time and Edward Dahlberg sets out to do just that, though he die trying. A metaphor is "the mocking image". In The Defence Of Poesie, Sir Philip Sidney admits poetry is a feigning that masks nature's chaos. "Her world is brasen, the Poets only deliver a golden," he says, and notes that Orpheus charmed the ears of beastes, "indeed stony and beastly people."²

The process of metaphor or "mocking image" by which Dahlberg effects contemporaneity with (say) Orpheus, Koheleth, Sidney -- with any moiety of his primogeniture -- is simply that of white magic. The poet's power over appearances lies in his faith to believe (and to make us believe, by our faith in the power of his word-spells) in his own namings of identities over the copulative bridge.

In proportion to the existence of these faiths, the implied antecedent and commentary to such a statement as

There was a man named Walt Whitman,
An Old Testament Balaam was he,
And as lickorous as the angels
Who parted the thighs of the daughters of men. (CHD, p. 45)

is "Let Walt Whitman be (etc.) -- and lo! he was." Like the Elizabethans, Edward Dahlberg sees man as living the same myths wherever in place and whenever in time he happens to exist. Paul Carroll calls the appreciation of this vision "one of the commonplaces of modern criticism,"⁴ but Dahlberg's unflinching tenacity to it has probably been a main reason he has been reviled or ignored for so long.

It is best never to take any one of Mr. Dahlberg's announcements and claim it to be his firm opinion unless that claim is based on a diligent search to make sure no obverse announcement exists elsewhere in his work. Bertrand Russell remarks in a discussion of Locke, that a philosophy is either consistent or credible.⁵ Edward Dahlberg is a very credible writer. The passage quoted earlier from Reasons Of The Heart does indicate that time is a chimera and that our ability to know is only our ability to symbolize.

However, Dahlberg does reckon that knowledge is either myth or dross and the quotation under discussion is only about that knowledge which is dross, perceived by what Coleridge called the Primary Imagination, or what Blake called "Single Vision and Newton's Sleep."

In Can These Bones Live, a book of apocalyptic criticism which heralded the arrival of his mature style, Dahlberg discusses Don Quixote at length. He shows us the Knight of the Sorrowful Countenance as the artist, who must, if he is to survive, look upon the world with transforming chivalry. The Man of La Mancha inspires Sancho Panza, whom Mr. Dahlberg likens to the critic. Although

Sancho accepts his Master's tragedy, the enchantments and the madness; he grieves that inns, poor Johns, whores and sheep are not castles, trout, ladies and armies; Sancho will look with enough optical valour and knight-errantry to swear that they are, and must be, if the agony is to be borne; but he will not reject their necessary and natural forms. (CTBL, p. 110)

The key to that sentence is the word valour. It is just the lack of valour

notes in man in the aphorism mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. There is no valour also in the whole dull world which Don Quixote, and all artists and prophets, constantly assail. What disingenuous cowardice to tell Spenser that we do not believe in the land of Faerye; to wonder how Jesus turned the Cana water into wine; to scoff at the magician Merlin, who educated the young Arthur by turning him into a goose, a badger, a falcon, a perch, and a pismire; or to be didymus Merchants of Toledo and demand evidence that Dulcinea del Toboso is indeed the paragon that Don Quixote has claimed! Dahlberg quotes Don Quixote's answer, the reply of all faith to all doubt: "If I did show her to you, what mastery were it then to you to acknowledge truth so notorious?" (CTBL, p. 111)

Such talk is outrageous and Don Quixote's quests are practically the merest folly. His strength and madness are exhausted at last and he dies in good taste, his opinions in good order, his pate savaged into undeception. That the Man of La Mancha repents him and dwindles, on his deathbed, to become only Alonso Quijano the Good, is not the final point of Cervantes' great morality. Sancho, weeping, urges Don Quixote to arise again:

...let us go out into the fields clad as shepherds as agreed to do. Who knows but behind some bush we may come upon the lady Dulcinea, as disenchanted as you could wish. 6

Sancho is made an heir by his lord who, while he decorously declines, is given every attention.

[Sancho Panza] was in good spirits; for this business of inheriting property effaces or mitigates the sorrow which the heir ought to feel and causes him to forget. 7

Sancho is not craven or callous; he is Sancho Panza, whipper of bushes, studious minder of his own belly, wise governor. Were he Irish, he would dance at Finnegan's Wake. His unchanging nature is, for Edward Dahlberg, a key to the mystery of the universe. The Sorrows Of Priapus, part of which is a critique of the absurdities of the body, is Dahlberg's ironic tribute formed to such

Panzan sagacities as these:

God gives the wound and God gives the salve; and nobody knows what may happen. (CTBL, pp. 116-7)

The guts uphold the heart, and not the heart the guts. (CTBL, p. 115)

To introduce The Sorrows Of Priapus I will cite a few phrases which characterize it most aptly:

...the penis...has its own disposition;...though the spurious owner wants to think, it wants to urinate...;...it is only given to us as a loan or is leased to each one....A man may want to study Mark, or Paracelsus, or go on an errand to do a kindness to an aged woman, but this tyrant wants discharge itself because the etesian gales are acerb or [because] a wench has just stooped to gather her laundry. The whole matter, when one thinks of it reasonably, is bizarre. The head is so obtuse as to go absolutely crazy over a pair of hunkers, which is no more than a chine of beef. Of course, the whole of human appetitenis ridiculous.... (SP, p. 29)

"...in every case we must be upon our guard against what is pleasant, and pleasure," Aristotle writes. Plato said that extreme pleasures and pains produce madness. Delights make men rave....No one knows anything and can only surmise that his knowledge is no more than the rock of Sisyphus which rolls down from the peaks each day. If it did not men would be more tyrannical than they are. 8

The blatancy of the former quotation is refreshing today. Malcolm Muggeridge, Norman Mailer, and various and transitory and fundamentalist preachers are usually the only people who dare utter anything remotely like it in English; and their fulminations are puny beside the scope and power of Dahlberg's castigations.

A revealing Hebraist-Hellenist literary tiff occurred between Robert Duncan and Edward Dahlberg over The Sorrows Of Priapus. It is worth reporting because it is what Blake called the "consolidation of error"; it establishes at least one of the contraries without which he reckons there can be no progression (although it is perilous to affirm Dahlberg's belief in progression). Mr. Duncan apparently gave Dahlberg a low leg for his book and thereafter astounded its author by his comment upon it in Poetry -- the review is a determined attempt to

shred the book and cast it and its author to the four winds.

Duncan sees shrewdly enough that he is Dahlberg's antithesis:

"the wisest and best men in the world," Dahlberg writes, "are those who are ashamed. The conscience of Augustine and Tolstoy came from their shameful parts." But Blake tells us that "Shame is Pride's cloke." There are those then, perhaps not wisest and best, who hold a contrary doctrine. 9

He derogates Dahlberg for being so rude as to publicly dislike the skittishness of the human organs and their appetites:

...that flow from the heart of which Lawrence spoke, flowing in thousands of little passionate currents often conflicting, has its trace in a poem in the flow of measures and rhymes through the body of a poem; those little currents of feeling lie at the edges of a sensuality that adores them, and the life of a poem reflects a nature that has a faith in the organic and a desire for beauty. The Sorrows Of Priapus is...a sad garbled effort to emit Cantos of a Song to express a loathing for the ear, the mouth, the hand who must take part in the making. 10

Mr. Dahlberg confronted Mr. Duncan in a bookstore thereafter and requested,

"Tell me, do you understand life?"

"My God, no," replied Duncan. By attacking Dahlberg entirely on alien terrain, Duncan loses the skirmish.

What is at stake is the validity of the transcendentalist aesthetic as it is proclaimed by such stupendous artists as Lawrence, Crane, Thomas, Ginsberg, Duncan, and Paul Goodman. Yvor Winters has described Crane in terms that are, I think, applicable to the others; they all believe, more or less, in "the divine origin of impulse¹¹and...its trustworthiness." Now it is no accident and no special pleading that enables me to list among this group of writers two suicides and three pederasts. The agonizing truth about transcendentalism is that, if prosecuted honestly, it provides no method for the judgment of experience. Ginsberg, for example, must judge as equally worthy the manifestly polar experiences that resulted in his poems "Message"¹² and "Mescaline".¹³

The transcendental aesthetic opens wide the door of the will to the acceptance,

at least possibly if not probably, of colossally uncreative influences and behaviour, which cannot, by even the most flimsy definition, be consistently the cause of great art. The final aesthetic judgment -- "That is attractive" -- is not necessarily synonymous with the final moral judgment -- "It's good."

The argument I am subjectively and tortuously pursuing is circular. As Dahlberg considers all knowledge to be chimerical, my attempts to say why I agree with him beg their own questions. It is, I believe, eminently foolish if not wicked, to embrace a philosophical or artistic credo which does not, theoretically, plump for even the illusion of some guarantee against the limitation of vice. (A practical transcendentalist -- for which read Hart Crane -- is simply not of this world.) De gustibus non est disputandum. (As Yvor Winters has written in another context, "I am fully aware that these remarks are heretical.")¹⁴

A last warning: it is not to be supposed that it is easy to think and act this way, the way Dahlberg has thought -- for so long, so publicly, and so unreservedly. A cursory reading of his letters shows that the neglect he has experienced has been intense and that the scant attention paid him has primarily that of the pillory. He has been so unrelievedly penniless and has suffered such sicknesses, it is marvellous he has not yet stepped into the earth, to say nothing of his increasing ability to burst into ironically mirthful print.

It is to Duncan's discredit that he is so peevishly intent on bringing to earth the moralist in The Sorrows Of Priapus that he almost totally fails to notice that his game is dressed in cap and bells.

Each person has a deity in him which is ravaged by a frump. (SP, p. 4)

No matter how we long for virtue who wants to be a spado? (SP, p. 6)

Nature advises the frog far better than man... (SP, p. 20)

Man is unreasonable, and his sanity hangs by the thread of Ariadne. Doing wrong is one of his daintiest satisfactions, and harming another is as exquisite an ecstasy as coition. Man cannot endure his own vices in others, and he cannot overcome himself enough to pardon a friend whom he has injured.
(SP, p. 52)

Straight-faced Edward Dahlberg's Swiftian book has a shocking lack of congenial and conventional idealism. Nowhere are the mystery and glory of sex venerated. Mr. Dahlberg's theory, simply enough, is that absurdity and foolishness are man's necessary portion. To prove this, Dahlberg must be allowed to utter, without impunity, every sort of barbaric fact. If, like Duncan, we presume to quibble, Dahlberg has only to throw burden of disproof back upon us to maintain his position. We are unable to cite against him anything other than the behaviour seen conventionally, from which Dahlberg has so recently and readily stripped convention. Were we rational, the satirist would not exist and the universe would not be the Emperor's clothes.

The only way to 'scape hanging is join Lear's Fool in the admission of madness, which is the first faltering step on the stony road to sanity. Then in reading Dahlberg it becomes clear that accepting all he says is at best but a pinch more useful than accepting none of it. His purpose is to make us realize that by striving we accomplish nothing but our fates (which is, however, slightly or infinitely "better" than just their accomplishing us; they can do that without our help). Whatever is, must, for no obvious good or evil reason, be. The knight-errant has finally the same measure of virtue as the virile, patient, and bucolic Patriarch Enoch, who "walked with God and...was not, for God took
15
him."

Cry unto the universe, spring up, O ye seeds, but it is thy
peril and ruin. (LA, p. 105)

The style of The Sorrows Of Priapus is distinctly oracular, as much of Dahlberg's has been since 1941. His avoidance of the vernacular is so determined that it is odd to find even in his letters a contracted verb. Minimizing identification with objects of scorn, and making infinite the forms of objects of admiration, this late style is uncompromisingly adult. Mr. Dahlberg's peculiarly erudite sense of humour (as well as his sense of myth) resides in his hab-

itually making trivial things seem important by speaking of them in words, phrases, and allusions which are, though appropriate, often so recondite they narrowly miss dipping in the inkhorn. (I can find no instance in which Edward Dahlberg has been guilty of the Joycean sin of deriving humour from making important things seem trivial.)

The Mohammedan of the old order wipes his buttocks with his left hand since he uses the right one to handle food, plant vines or to greet people. A Moslem woman can divorce a man with reeking breath, a fault unknown among the natives of Otaheite. Modern man rushes to the water closet, and after the most summary ablutions, extends his hand to the first person he meets. The ancient Essenes had strict tenets regarding defecation and its burial in secret places. Man at present dungs in his own house and considers himself a delicate creature. (SP, p. 16)

Of course laughter is of the gods, and it is a fatuity to separate them.

The Sorrows Of Priapus, according to its "Author's Note,"

is a legendary book, using geography, the beasts in the earth and in the sea, and voyages, as the source of maxims, mirth, and an American myth....This is a book for brave readers and poets. (SP, p. vi)

Chapter Two

"You ought to be a literary bigot." (Edward Dahlberg)

I look for a whole body and intelligence in a man's work, and if a bad person, or a savagely mediocre one, like Eliot or Pound, has done a few scattered lines, that is not enough for me to excuse the basilisk influence he has had on an infernal generation of zero minds, made so in part by polysyllabic liars. You say I scream, so did Ruskin, and Jeremiah, and Unamuno, all of whom I have read for years, and aside from the defects of my own identity, I must have learned to shriek from them; but the eagle does so too, and lives in a mountain eyrie where I pine to nest, and sorts of truthful books are noises of one sort or another. Coleridge was hardly a quiet man, and Hazlitt was waspish. No more; what I am saying is that I have certain didactic principles that I must abide by, to my peril or not. (EOOT, p. 279)

This warcry Edward Dahlberg wrote to Stanley Burnshaw in 1961. It is an excellent introduction to his critical "attitude". The phrase "whole body and intelligence" is explained by Dahlberg in another advisory epistle to Burnshaw. He does not insist that all of an artist's work be of equal value; but rather that even the lesser work be the product of someone the reader can trust. Even if it is only conditionally proposed, this ad hominem criticism is presently heretical. However, Edward Dahlberg has been vigourously unhorsing orthodoxy for too long to fret over his lack of critical propriety or method. Sir Herbert Read calls Dahlberg's criticism "concrete,"¹ but at once realizes his friend would think even this adjective too abstract and aesthetical.

His preference is to speak of auricular and sensual pleasures, and literature must first and foremost satisfy his "goatish appetite" for such phenomenal fodder. The pose is Gargantuan, and Rabelais is undoubtedly one of our author's monitors. Like Rabelais [or the Jonson of the Drummond conversations], he will list a hundred particulars, but never risk a generalization. It is not possible to define pleasure or truth. "Since knowledge is chimerical, the academic is more horrid when the cabala of grammar is passed off as metaphysics." Since Mr. Dahlberg despises so many academic ideals -- definition, analysis, syntax, the scientific method itself -- it is little wonder that he is not honoured in Academe, which is to say, not in any hall of renown, for nowadays they are all leased to pedants.

To Edward Dahlberg, the fetish of "aesthetic distancing" is a lie and an act of criminal insanity. For him, the style can in no way avoid being the man. Therefore in his ad hominem criticism he often draws from his treasure of personal reminiscence or uncommon erudition some astounding fact about a writer which either frees that writer from much obloquy or accurately accounts for some grievous fault in his work.

Being unwilling and anyway unable to slough his own mind or body as he reads, Mr. Dahlberg has decried for years the consistent lack of love, bawdry, good food, good humour, myth -- "the whole body and intelligence" of Nature and Mankind -- in much modern literature, especially that written in America. (He energetically condemns, however, the prevalence of all perversion and totalitarian sex, which at last is nothing but friction and an exchange of muck.) Dahlberg feels that to deny these and maintain that great art and a good polity can yet result is to see through a glass darkly. The usual excuse of the critic who admires works containing such faults is only that they accurately display current depravity. Dahlberg's rejoinder is not to be disputed; who but the artist will be Moses and Joshua and lead the Israelites out of Egypt and into the Promised Land? And how will he lead them if his vision be no less piecemeal or smutted than their own?

Mr. Dahlberg is not specially pleading for artists to be recognized as a conventional élite; his letters and his autobiography show that he finds in himself most, if not all, of the faults of his age. Sir Herbert Read says, "He himself has always preferred to live simply, and his dwellings have been like the hermit's cell."³ Therefore, in art (as in life), "what is overcome is good, for man has a negative conscience, the monitor or dæmon in Sokrates which pre-⁴vented him from doing wrong, but did not compel him to perform what is right."

"Overcoming" necessitates for Dahlberg the literary, educational, and social critic, a close and reforming attention to the vigour continually available

in "our own remarkable colonial annals and the ancients". (EOOT, p. 22) In his ad hominem mood Dahlberg repeats himself:

Great lives are moral allegories and so soon become deniable myths because we cannot believe that such good men could have existed in such an evil world. So we doubt the existence of Christ, the profound human heart logic of Tolstoi, the miracle and wonder of Walden. (CTBL, p. 25)

The first chapter of Can These Bones Live is devoted to proving Dahlberg's thesis that truth, good and evil are inseparable. Among the works and men our author discusses is Hamlet, who is gentle and ruthless by turns, and whose savagery exists to placate a ghost! Hamlet's tragedy, says Dahlberg, is his inability to find the cure for his and the world's sickness -- he is no forgiver. The play's plot, Hamlet's history, eats him alive. Hamlet's rapacious and kindly actions and his soliloquies are necessarily futile and thus desperate raids on the limits of the cosmos. So that he may commit them, he is, tragically, a man -- no more, no less.

Dahlberg notes the incredible coexistence of (1) the Machiavelli who wrote from exile that he spent his days pastorally in reading great poetry and gossiping and dicing with local boorish tradesmen; and (2) of the Machiavelli who spent the evenings of those days writing The Prince. "...beast and man are sewn together with threads of heaven." (CTBL, p. 9)

It is Timon of Athens and the cave who finishes the first chapter of Can These Bones Live, providing impetus for all of Dahlberg's criticism. "...in Timon the anthropophagous acts of man become the terrible Sermon on the Mount of hate. Timon cannot hate without eating himself and thus making his own tomb." (CTBL, p. 9) The chapter's total implication is of course that "Criticism is an act of creative faith..." (CTBL, p. 52) The eternal, necessary and impossible task of the critic -- impossible since artists and critics are only human and necessary because this is not enough; all life is incontinent -- is

to harvest the ripe wheat and tares of an artist's nature and work, and to make available his good grain by separating it from that which is to be cast with no ado into the furnaces of denunciation.

Edward Dahlberg is one of those inspired lunatics who really presumes to act on the belief that art is able to show mankind how to grapple with himself and with the universe. Dahlberg further believes that man will wallow until the day he turns to art for the demonstration of its truths. Can These Bones Live is his cry to the human earth to stop groaning and let itself be delivered, or deliver itself. A good place to commence the notation of Dahlberg's cry is ~~also~~ with his description of the Puritans -- we can go forward and backward in time from them to develop more fully our appreciation of his critical ideas.

D.H. Lawrence says early in the Studies In Classic Literature that it is more necessary to see the Puritans as bursting from Europe rather than to America. At the end of A Preface To Paradise Lost, C.S. Lewis, defending the epic, claims that since we live in Middle Earth it is necessary to have middle things. The English commonwealth, he notes, abolished the maypole and the mince-pie and the ultimate result was not a continuing city of piety but the lewd Restoration. The Massachusetts elders were rudely surprised when the New World afforded them cranky savages and succubi in addition to the soil essential to the generation of God's Kingdom Upon Earth.

The Puritans tilled New England furiously and beat back Indians, Quakers, Thomas Morton, and (overtly) their own sexuality. Covertly, Freudian inversions riddled the handling sins of these holy inquisitors:

The colonial farm house, rooted in and winging upwards from the soil, bespeaks the miracles of growth, life, birth, procreation and marriage. The Puritans' churchly slaying of the sexual organs, like the dismemberment of Osiris, was a furtive and diabolical worship of seedtime, spring and copulation.

The Puritan walked and meditated with Orion, dogwood, the birch, and furtively knew the nakedness of his body as Ham knew Noah. (CTBL, p. 56)

From the Old Testament the Hebraical Puritan took a garbled Jahweh, added to it an inclement, Atlantic Christ and a devil, and of these made witchcraft New England -- the allegory of Adam, Eve, the Serpent and Cotton Mather. (TIMS, p. 103)

All of the Puritan fantasies were unholy libidinous quests for the WONDERS of the INVISIBLE WORLD....the concupiscent WONDER of the Privy Teat, escutcheon of Cotton Mather's witch.
(CTBL, pp. 121-2)

One of Dahlberg's most astounding observations follows directly -- the artists who succeeded the Puritans did not see through their facade! "Almost the whole of American Literature has been a deep refusal of men." (CTBL, p. 56) The real nascence of American letters in the middle years of the Nineteenth Century was, at its best, an appreciation of corporate Nature; a dualistic idolatry of disembodied friendship parading in the Emperor's clothes of cosmic sexual identification; a glorification of the purest consciousness -- a marine or an abstracted diabolism. Maimed from the beginning, Thoreau, Whitman, Melville, Hawthorne, Dickinson, and Poe committed their errors as an ineffective, mis-directed revolt against that enslaver, "Mather's Shade." (CTBL, p. 122)

Henry David Thoreau was the author of some of the most peaceful and charitable words ever written. The anger in "Civil Disobedience" is directed against bad thought, not bad men. (The same could be said of Walden.) Thoreau had an urgency to be catholick and companionable, so much so that Ralph Waldo Emerson grumbled that Henry lacked gumption and as soon captain a huckleberrying party as develop his considerable talents as a surveyor. Thoreau bore no animosity toward Emerson but did say of him that he, indeed, was not "'comprehensive' enough to trundle a wheelbarrow". (CTBL, p. 18)

The clue to Thoreau's life and work, as Dahlberg sees them, was that Thoreau had a sense of virtue that did not even let him make a vice out of it. Needless to say, Thoreau had no regular vices either. His being unprincipled would

never destroy him, let alone anyone he came in contact with. His proposal of marriage was epistolary, ethereal, and was rejected. He once offered to eat a living woodchuck to overcome his disgust at bodily lowliness. (He did not suggest that anyone else should do the same.)

"A visionary democrat, Thoreau was not too democratic, not too common, nor too clean." (CTBL, p. 18) As a result, he was no Transcendental cultist; he also eschewed the cults of work, the state, and organized religion. He was neither a town mouse nor a country mouse. It is Dahlberg's guess that Thoreau's ability to be honest about the contradictions in his nature kept him from flatulence. As he wrote in "Civil Disobedience", "A man has not everything to do but something; and because he cannot do everything, it is not necessary that he should do something wrong." ⁵ Therefore, notes Dahlberg, Thoreau "went wherever life sent him and made no credo out of his private experience.

He recorded it beautifully, and, if we have eyes, we can profitably read and pursue our own private follies, tintured by his. Walden is not a Manual of Conduct, but a Chanticleerian ode. Thoreau lived it and sang it and, when he grew tired, he entirely forsook it. (CTBL, p. 19)

Both Thoreau and Dahlberg realize that Walden owes much to the predominantly Oriental ideal of non-attachment. "Walden...is the "Bhagavad-Gita" of the moods and seasons of Conscience...a poet's rather than a law-giver's prayer...know it and none will raise his hand against another, none will be poor, and none go to war." (CTBL, p. 23)

Despite his personal squeamishness, Thoreau could see Natural New England with a single eye unclouded by any Puritan cast. Looking around him at Walden Pond, he observed, not unredeemable Indians spoiling the view by epitomizing a fallen world (although his description of warring ants was quite analytically grisly), but baby partridges trained by their mother to be so still in camouflage that when "one accidentally fell on its side, it was found...in exactly

the same position ten minutes later." 6

Thoreau, Whitman, Melville, Poe, Hawthorne, Miss Dickinson -- before whom, none; and between whom and the rest of America, let alone each other, slim bonds indeed. They chewed and spat loneliness or an energetic and asexual camaraderie. Had Thoreau married, the effects on his work and his life would probably have been ruinous. Ellen Sewall was apparently made of flesh and bones and to love her would have played havoc with Henry's theories about the ideal affinity that is friendship and the unspeakable necessities that are love. "Love is the profoundest of secrets. Divulged, even to the beloved, it is no longer love." ⁷ Edward Dahlberg mentions that it was entirely alien to Thoreau to prate, as Whitman did, about his orgasmic potency when he looked upon the universe. Albeit Walt Whitman was, as D.H. Lawrence puts it, "an old Chuffer", in art he at least tried to carve the sexual totem the Puritans so long avoided.

It is so easy to guffaw at Whitman, who panicked and was witless when the strapping widow of Alexander Gilchrist, Blake's definitive biographer, proposed a tête-a-tête with him, simply because she had enjoyed reading Leaves Of Grass. There is no evidence his behaviour towards Pete Doyle, his favourite street-car conductor, was anything but proper and grotesque, although it once produced the following sentiment: "O mother, the doctor says that Pete will soon be better."

But there is much more to do with Whitman, Dahlberg feels, than snigger at his erotic caperings. His bravest lies were in his work, which simply took much of Plato literally. Walt made the human body a res publica and declared his unabashed sexual union with all of it. The truth to this lie is that the state is abstract -- everlastingly -- and if the body is to become the state, the body becomes alike abstracted -- as in Whitman's poetry -- from all its dimensional organization, propriety, and movement. In a word, despite Whitman's earnest claims, it becomes dead.

Of a drab, mammon-fed America, with a middle-class, infidel Cross,

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Of a drab, mammon-fed America, with a middle-class, infidel Cross,

a Laodicean Church of Democracy that was neither hot nor cold, he created an amative Saviourism. Whitman's Leaves, a lyric manifesto on anatomy and hygiene -- "heart-valves," "sexuality," "maternity," -- like Marx's Kapital, fails as myth and tragic ideal. They are canons of physiology, or a class-conscious invocation -- "Give us this day our daily bread" -- that never become poems for man in upheaval. (CTBL, p. 145)

It was no accident, says Edward Dahlberg, that aqueous bachelor Whitman came of pious Quaker stock. "Celibate Shaker women, married Quakeresses, Fruitlander wives, polygamous females at Oneida, all wore the Puritan bonnet, the nunnish lace-cap, the soap-scoured bloomers." (CTBL, p. 145) Rational perceptual Whitman democratized vice, sex, punishment, retribution, salvation, death, and life and thereby, says Dahlberg, robbed them of their significance.

By taking original sin out of Hebraic Christianity, Whitman disavowed pitiable human folly -- how Absalom loved his locks, how base Caiaphas and Pilate were, how weak Peter was -- and so annulled redemption. He annihilated the Saviour, the Word, the Image, without which the world becomes an insensate medley of hideous flying atoms: the mock monstrosity and mass of a sinister machine and a transfigured rabble. (CTBL, p. 148)

Herman Melville has always fascinated Edward Dahlberg and is the occasion of much discussion in Can These Bones Live, Epitaphs Of Our Times, and a long and revelatory and vituperative essay in Alms For Oblivion. Melville was the American writer of the Nineteenth Century who tried hardest to come to terms with the body. Riven by solitude, he also failed. Dahlberg bears no love for the present, but he prefers it to Melville's pinched era, when Moby-Dick was construed by one reviewer only as "a whale of a book." Melville could not manage married life; he could not make sneaping Nathaniel Hawthorne pity his loneliness; he sought friendship with sailors and it did not last; he made a pilgrimage to Judea, victimized himself to Christ, and found no rest. What could this artist do but pour his misery into his greatest book?

Incapable of loving female flesh, Melville created "isolatoes", some of whom pined a little for landlocking woman, and some of whom practised a delicate homosexuality, while they all harrowed a sacral whale to their own destruction!

Style is the absolute limit of man's character and bad writing shows a lack of love; its most malignant symptom is delay....Melville deferred action until the last few pages of Moby-Dick....The whaling craft is similar to Zeno's paradoxical arrow, which, though hurled through space, is at rest in different places. (AFO, p. 118)

Velleity is the principal reason for human perversity. (AFO, p. 126)

Dahlberg's denunciations of Ahab are accurate -- the man is really not evil (unless the devil is an ass), he is a bore! Melville permits Ahab to repeat himself for most Moby-Dick; unlike Macbeth, Ahab, does not interest us by demonstrating his monomania. He is a quarterdeck fugitive from a decadent Elizabethan revenge tragedy and his rant and his purgation are incredible because they are never really tied to their object until we have grown weary with hearing them and about them. For too long Ahab talks a good whale chase.

The thoughts we have are only the words we use. Melville's sentences, however, are always to the windward, so that the reader is worn out by the heavy, ululant blasts of his fraudulent blank verse. Form is the real food of the imagination; facts are the stepdaughters of the muses. (AFO, p. 129)

With apologies for his numerous citations, Dahlberg demolishes Moby-Dick by showing that it is, for the most part, badly written. Adjectives and attributes are endlessly repeated. It is an open perjury to praise the technical chapters as ballast for the plot; for there is almost no plot. Sir Herbert Read is convinced by Dahlberg's iconoclasm, and points out that "he makes concessions to the style as well as to the social relevance, but in the end there is no escaping the conclusion that Moby-Dick is 'a book of monotonous and unrelenting gloom.'" ⁸

To Dahlberg, the worst fault Melville commits in all his work, and especially in Moby-Dick, is that of misplaced emphasis. "Water is vice, retribution, and Ham; the spermal whale is Priapus who has deprived Ahab of his phallical leg." (AFO, p. 141) The book is an unnatural falsehood for there is no female in it -- except the occasional lady whale -- Ocean here is no mother:

The human race perished in the Great Inundation, according to Talmudic Cabalists, because of the intellectual and sexual perversions of mankind. When the body is false unto itself, the intellect is a liar. Moby-Dick is a Hamitic dream; water and meditation are forever married, says the author, and nocturnal visions are damp. (AFO, p. 124)

Melville claimed after he had finished Moby-Dick that he had written a wicked book and felt as spotless as the lamb. Alas, this was the merest vanity, although it was perhaps necessary since Melville wished to keep his sanity.

Herman Melville had committed sodomy, as it is meant in the Old Testament; in his mind he had connection with a beast of the deep. Take woman from man and he will yearn for an angel, a porpoise, a whale. This starveling became a hunter for profane and nether flesh, dolphins, sharks, leviathan, and man, whatever could ease those clinkered, lava lusts. Unable to be consumed in the flames of Troy for Helen, he was cindered in the fires of Sodom and Gomorrah. Read his last work, Billy Budd, a piece of inverted mariolatry, for it is the virgin boy, Budd, the name of a maiden, who is his Mary. (AFO, p. 139)

When citing evidence to the reader of his essay on Moby-Dick, Edward Dahlberg is honestly apologetic when he realizes that a row of quotations may be soporific. I reach that situation myself and since I agree with what Mr. Dahlberg says about the great writers of the Nineteenth Century, I am going to use a sort of Occam's razor to cut short my detailed explication of his treatment of them. Discussions of discussions of essences are not to be multiplied without cause. In Can These Bones Live Dahlberg establishes (thoroughly) the same points about Poe, Hawthorne, and Emily Dickinson, as he makes concerning Thoreau, Whitman, and Melville -- they were great artists, to be sure, but they were too much led by their tragically fissured existences and their artistic production was stunted and perverted into praises of death, nature, and the spirit only; they could not will life, humanity, the body deeply and consistently into their works. It is a blessing they were able to write as well as they did.

Great art cannot exist without great criticism and Edward Dahlberg assigns some of the responsibility for the flaws of the American literary genius to its bad critics. Of course, some great writers have had to be their own critics or "brave readers," as Dahlberg says; perhaps the dearth of criticism in the Nineteenth Century would not have mattered so much had more of the writers been prone to read at all or to understand what they did read. Poe flayed the whey-talented Boston Brahmins for plagiarism; but Edward Dahlberg laments that Poe himself was not much of a borrower. "The fetish of originality is our curse," (AFO, p. 49) he writes.

The Nineteenth Century American was still the vaßsal of that Puritanic Beelzebub, Cotton Mather, the father of the Christian homosexual. What else could be the result of Thoreau's celibacy, Hawthorne's inclement identity, Whitman's ambiguous bachelordom, or Poe's and Melville's misogyny, but the contemporary Pauline invert? Not one of these unusual men could produce a seminal poem or a great confession like Saint Augustine's. Born to sin because we have genital organs, we live to confess our faults, and that is scripture and literature. (AFO, p. 117)

Contemporary criticism, Dahlberg contends in Can These Bones Live, continues to derelict its duty and presumes to analyze literature and discover its significance according to the canons of such spurious or irrelevant disciplines as aesthetics, political philosophy, psychology, or the scientific method. To Dahlberg, who believes with Allen Tate that "the literature of the past began somewhere a few minutes ago and that the literature of the present begins with, say, Homer",⁹ the critic who approaches literature behind these disciplinary masks is not only a coward but also a eunuch.

All is relative, murmurs the poltroon. True! Now that this is granted, have we not the right to demand what the critic feels and sees, Absolutely, in this tragic, fleeting and relative world? We thirst for the absolute, as Dante anguished for Beatrice; that She does not exist has nothing to do with our hunger, love and pursuit of the infinite. We are all FOOLS, we pray, as Don Quixote was; let us not be ashamed and furtive about it, and slink behind the errors of science, philosophy or metaphysics.

...
 Enough of this man is split, that poet is mad, and that novelist is class-conscious. What need had the artist to make himself whole, were he not split? Poe, like Lazarus, comes to us from the grave in each tale, poem and line. (CTBL, p. 53)

William Blake thought that one of the functions of time was to consolidate error. Edward Dahlberg has noticed that in the literature of America this has indeed been true. In the Twentieth Century, for reasons we have mentioned, American writers, have been committed, for the most part, even more ferociously to the same mistakes as their forebears and have even given them new names. At best they have struggled indecisively with their limitations and at worst they have submitted to them with great relish. That a few of them have succeeded in singing thin songs is unlucky and little thanks is due their Brutus critics, who vie for the right loudest to call them honourable men.

Edward Dahlberg considers either that Ernest Hemingway and William Faulkner, for example, have achieved a sort of nadir of acquiescence to depravity or else he believes that they simply do not merit any great attention. In all his published work he denounces them for no more than a couple of pages. What he says about them is, however, noticeable in their works, although the evidence adduced by Dahlberg is scant.

Faulkner inverts the functions of life so that consciousness passes from man into rotting nature. Faulkner's usually unattractive people are either brutal or ineffective.

Violence induces in [Hemingway] a dreamy rhapsodical tenderness and he will pause just before the orgiastic spell, to describe an aureole of spring rain falling upon the heads of six cabinet ministers about to be executed, or caressingly linger to paint the ecstatic and willowy quiver of a dying deer or limn the throbbing Goya-like flesh wound of a gored horse. (CTBL, p. 77)

Hemingway is incapable of creating "doubt, sorrow and thought;" when he tries, his prose stumbles.

The whole human fabric has collapsed and man has fallen from

the grace of good and evil into ordure. Remorse has been superseded by the kidneys, the prostate gland and the digestive tract. The old masters are no more, the eternal tragedies are concluded. The noble problems of man, love, anguish, evil and death, are done -- aye, Madame Bovary and Manon Lescaut, the Camellias and Consumption, have had to give way to the realism of sublunary decaying Matter, to sputum, to vomiting spells, to The Sun Also Rises.

In the Puritan Christian cosmogony spirit was not rooted in flesh, just as now matter performs and behaves as though mind were not of it. The demented dervish of MATTER goes on without a past, a tradition or a memory. (CTBL, pp. 77-8)

Such statements necessitate a gloss if not an apology; they are heterodox.

If we read Faulkner's Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech about the endurance of the human spirit and then look at his characters who endure, such as Dilsey and her family, or Sam Fathers, troubling questions arise. What do they endure for, a richer life? Against whom or what do they endure? Is there any evidence that they will make a richer life for themselves? Surely the milksops whom they coddle and whose function in life it is to bully them will never have resources to give them anything. Can their nobility exist independently of their stations as protectors? Would a black South be as exotic or as significant a subject for fiction as the South Faulkner defines?

In Hemingway's work society is almost always perverse or non-existent. Action starts, takes place, and ends in a vacuum; relaxation and tedium are unheard-of. Were one to read nothing else but Hemingway one could assume that men and women flower fully-armed from the sown teeth of the dragon.

The immediate counter to such objections, is, of course, that what Faulkner and Hemingway have done is to create the South/Yoknapatawpha, Michigan Speech, big-game hunters, the Lost Generation, the Spanish Civil War. If it be argued that Hemingway and Faulkner simply told what they saw, Edward Dahlberg shrugs -- the contradiction is apparent. Either a writer faces and then transcends his Age of Iron by the use of myth or he submits to it and, in Dahlberg's eyes, ceases to merit the distinction of his calling. Do artists believe in and act

according to their powers and responsibilities or do they not? If so, why do they eat more, and why do they give us more to eat, than the peck of dirt Thoreau said was man's portion?

The touchstone of the "ratiocinative" novel is mimicry, not utterance. The American writer does not express the world, but copies it and lets it sieve through him. There is no more dismal misconception of creation, or de-energizing act, than this sieving of the times.

The Greek word mimesis does not mean imitation; the mime or actor who put on a mask, the "skin of a beast or the feathers of a bird," as Jane Harrison writes in Ancient Art and Ritual, did not do so "to copy something or someone who is not himself, but to emphasize, enlarge, enhance his own personality, therefore he masquerades, he does not mimic." (CTBL, pp. 70-1)

The mimic substitutes size, time and place for consciousness. Lacking the intuitive dimension, the mimic paints things and people instead of uttering them. He is the conventional outside artist who gives us the most "realistic" clothes, streets, dialects. He paints, adding to what is not deeply imaged upon his brain....

The artist who cravenly submits to time, place, and space confesses his own limits. The oracles knew not time; the poet's testament is the oath of the angel in the apocalypse that there will be no more time.... We know the inward size of an artist by his dimensional thirsts, the gigantic windmills of Don Quixote....

Locality and consciousness have never co-existed in the American novel....

We have laid Being in a small plot of ground called American Place to sob with the fanged worms. Listen to Edgar Poe: "The consciousness of being had grown hourly more indistinct, and that of mere locality had usurped its position. The idea of entity was becoming merged into that of place. The narrow space immediately surrounding what had been the body was now growing to be the body itself." (CTBL, pp. 79-81)

Theodore Dreiser and Sherwood Anderson were good friends of Edward Dahlberg. His respect for them as men is not as artists has always been great. The faults Dahlberg describes in the passage just quoted are very obvious in such works as Sister Carrie, An American Tragedy, or Winesburg, Ohio. What mitigates them in Dahlberg's eyes is the fact that their authors are not given to hiding the flesh. They may lament its foolishness but they do not turn from it.

Dahlberg's criticism of Dreiser and Anderson is primarily reminiscence. As

usual, he attempts to account for their work by reference to whom they had to be. Dreiser, for example,

who was in temperament an anarchist, may have become a communist because his mother was an Indiana Mennonite, a member of a religious communistic sect that had its origins in Martin Luther's Germany. We have a Mother literature, and the male parent in our verse and novel is very weak....

Dreiser, Stieglitz, Hartley were fatherless men, without the essential masculine force to love people. Dreiser had a hard, craggy apathy toward people.... (AFO, pp. 12-13)

Possibly what Dahlberg says of the Hoosier he called "the autocrat of our novel" (EOOT, p. 170) is true. Certainly from what little I have read of his work, he did not often create characters that love each other and he did not create characters that inspire the reader's affection. The strongest emotion his people arouse is pity.

Writing to Josephine Herbst in 1963 Dahlberg is shamed by his inability to overlook the "Gargantuan stupidities" of Dreiser's style; "He had a strong physical prose style. Now we have the epicene, or just the neutral sort of syntax, very nauseating, and boring. It takes a man to create a woman and Dreiser was such a person." (EOOT, p. 170)

Edward Dahlberg says that Dreiser had a canny nose for the charlatans of the art world, one of whom visited the novelist and found him seated on a chair on a dais. Still, Dreiser had a sort of sympathy for such writing Ishmaels as Dahlberg, whom he taught to read Shakespeare, maintaining "that all the plays were man-eating parables, and that life rather than the poet had written the tragedies." (AFO, p. 12) (This is the interpretation of Shakespeare to be found in Can These Bones Live.) It is the opinion of Dahlberg that Dreiser, like all authors, knew far more than he wrote and that the watery part of his nature made him timid about his books and hindered him from writing into them many of the thoughts he had about "the Gospels, or the poet of Coriolanus, and Lear and Timon of Athens." (AFO, p. 33)

Theodore Dreiser is pre-eminently the novelist of the futility of American money/lust and of the big rough money cities that are the expression and fate of the ambitious men and women who make and inhabit them. His style is robust and clichéd and Dahlberg notes that even his flaws were "large and fertile". Comparing his work to that of F. Scott Fitzgerald (which he calls "peopleless fiction"), Dahlberg says Dreiser and the other naturalists wrote

a bluff barbaric vulgate which was sometimes very nimble and very manly. Their words, deriving from the old, manual occupations, are far more masculine and energetic than the lymphatic ones that come from advertizing and from inventions that are emasculating the human faculties. A word that arouses some sort of contemplative or physical faculty is good, and one that does not is base....Dreiser's definition of virtue in Sister Carrie as caring for others, is a sane credo for writing; a book weak in human affections and which nourishes effeminacy and apathy, not caring for other people, is baneful. (AFO, p. 70)

"The temporal conception of literature is false," (EOOT, p. 275) then, as is the solely cartographic one. To Dahlberg, however, the latter is preferable to the former. He believes the art of Sherwood Anderson is not great because it is too subject to "the corn fields, the harness shop, and the asparagus beds of Ohio." (AFO, p. 71) What sets it beyond the riveted Chicago boredom and savagery of (say) Studs Lonigan is the saving grace of Anderson's quality.

As usual, Dahlberg finds and records the connections between the artist's works and days. Edward Dahlberg calls Anderson the erotic visionary created by Whitman in Leaves of Grass. "He told me one day Edgar Lee Masters' fiancée came to him weeping, 'Edgar won't marry me,' and that he put his arms around her and said, 'Don't cry, darling, I'll wed you,' and he did." (AFO, p. 10) The Ohio populist was no great intellect, Dahlberg says; "His aching skin took the place of what we others call mind, but which is much more important than the human brain, because it is infinitely more loving." (AFO, p. 10) Ander-

son was even more unsure of himself than Dreiser, whom he greatly admired. As a result of their insecurity, neither writer was liable to be put out by visitors. Anderson made a point of conviviality and of being unhurried.

Anderson had a manual intelligence: he had large, animal hands, like a peasant's, and all his wisdom was in his fingers. That is why he hated the machine, which can make the hands stupid and morose. A workman turning a wheel all day long in a factory will lose patience with ordinary life; indeed, much of human kindness comes being casual and slow. Anderson was no hurried man; he had time to shake hands, make friendships, or engage in a mettlesome argument. (AFO, pp. 17-18)

It was a distinct advantage for Anderson to have roots, says Edward Dahlberg, who does not see Winesburg, Ohio, nostalgic though it may be, only as a moon-calf yearning for a ruined past. It was also a prophecy of the devastation of soon to take charge of the American small town with the growth of the large cities. As Mr. Dahlberg points out, Winesburg is not a town of thinkers. Many of the people there dither on or regretfully over the brink of an innocence not entirely of their own losing. They are offered chances to serve at the sacraments of their own becomings. They often shirk these opportunities but whether they shirk them or seize them, they tremble continually.

In "An Awakening", the bartender Ed Handby and Belle Carpenter, milliner daughter of a bookkeeper, love each other. Anderson afflicts both of them with typical Winesburgian incoherence.

The affair between Ed Handby and Belle Carpenter on the surface amounted to nothing. He had succeeded in spending but one evening in her company. On that evening he hired a horse and buggy at Wesley Moyer's livery barn and took her for a drive.

The conviction that she was the woman his nature demanded and that he must get her settled upon him and he told her of his desires. The bartender was ready to marry and to begin trying to earn money for the support of his wife, but so simple was his nature that he found it difficult to explain his intentions. His body ached with physical longing and with his body he expressed himself. Taking the milliner into his arms and holding her tightly in spite of her struggles, he kissed her until she became helpless. Then he brought her back to town and let her out of the buggy. "When I get hold of you again I'll not let you go. You can't play with me," he declared as he turned to drive away. Then, jum-

ping out of the buggy, he gripped her shoulders with his strong hands. "I'll keep you for good the next time," he said. "You might as well make up your mind to that. It's you and me for it and I'm going to have you before I get through." 10

Ray Pearson and Hal Winters are two hired hands in the story "The Untold Lie". The beauty of the Winesburg countryside intimates immortality to Ray. He is a sensitive man and he questions vexatiously the fate that has, he thinks, shackled him to a tedious married life simply because once, whimsically and long ago, he wandered into the nearby woods with a girl who worked for his father. When Hal Winters tells Ray he has gotten a local girl into trouble, Pearson hastens to tell his friend not to foolishly embrace mere convention as he himself has done. Hal has decided to do what may or may not be just that, however, and Ray's moment in the sun is over. Hal laughs at him.

"I want to settle down and have kids."

Ray Pearson also laughed. He felt like laughing at himself and all the world. As the form of Hal Winters disappeared in the dusk that lay over the road that led to Winesburg, he turned and walked slowly back across the fields to where he had left his torn overcoat. As he went some memory of pleasant evenings spent with the thin-legged children in the tumbledown house by the creek must have come into his mind, for he muttered words. "It's just as well. Whatever I told him would have been a lie," he said softly, and then his form also disappeared into the darkness of the fields. 11

These predicaments are typical of this fortunate book, written, as Edward Dahlberg points out, about the time just before rural America was depopulated, eviscerated, and done in by section farming, urban sprawl, asphalt, rubber, and neon. We shall speak later of Dahlberg's attacks on such features of modern "civilization".

The limits of Dreiser's and Anderson's work are, according to Dahlberg, those of the body.

Anderson and Dreiser never get much beyond the agitations of the genital organs; man throbs and breeds, but does not think....

There are planetary reaches and saturnine chasms in man unknown to the hedonist and the naturalistic Preacher of Pity.

Spikenard, cypress and the myrrh of Lebanon dilate the nostrils and free the aching pores; sated, the Epicurean sheds tears but has no ashy, cindery grief. The voluptuaries of the carnal body and the decaying flesh neither make "the sparks fly upward" to bind the Pleiades nor descend into the cracked and clinkered Hades of the Heart. (CTBL, pp. 82-3)

The great personal problem faced boldly by such writers as Sherwood Anderson and Theodore Dreiser was that, were they to try to practice their preachments, they would be thought at least eccentric and perhaps lunatic. Theodore Dreiser, says Dahlberg, was notable because, although a great artist, He was not a bohemian. He "dismissed Stieglitz as a crank because hair grew out of his ears."

He had vehement barbershop morals and, regarding my long hair with a merchant's suspicion, advised a haircut.

...

He had little patience with exaggerated or outré raiment, long, unbarbered hair, or affected sandals, ties, and suits. He came, like Aristophanes, just before an era of the wildest impudicities. (AFO, pp. 12, 32)

Sherwood Anderson's behaviour was notable because it came in blurts. His abrupt renunciation of wife and paint-factory is mythical. Talking once to Edward Dahlberg, Anderson admitted that he did not want to suffer like Dostoevsky. Dahlberg was not pleased with what he considered was this cowardice in his friend. It may have been, however, that Anderson's lack of assurance, even if it was tinged with pusillanimity, was what kept him from at least some of the excesses that eliminated a number of artists or pretenders, of his time and our own -- I am thinking specifically of such men as Hart Crane and Harry Crosby and Dylan Thomas.

Anderson's constant acknowledgement of his roots was likely to breed in him awareness of his unpredictability; he was wary of himself, slowly cautious, knowing that he might do anything, at any moment. Both Anderson and the tragic hero Crane had fingertip probity. I suspect Dahlberg admires Anderson more than Crane because Anderson did not make rootless, unstrung Crane's fatal mistake of self-reliance. (I do not discount Crane's disastrous parents and child-

hood -- the effect they had on him.) Dark Laughter and Winesburg, Ohio lack the metaphysical dimension. This is appropriate, if not heroic. Anderson "had the natural integrity of a fine elm, or a fertile sow, or a potato." (AFO, p.17)

The way to understand Anderson is not to read about him but to read him. Reading him, you find that all those working-hand words of his are redolent of hay and grass and midwest stables....All you need is a healthy nose, for we smell good and evil much quicker than we understand them. Remembering old-style American habits, the lumbering wagon hello, and the easy country-morning how-do-you-do, is enough to make one understand Sherwood Anderson's genius, which is a compact of goodness and of love and of a patient willingness to sit and talk with people. (AFO, p. 19)

In each person, unless he be God or Tolstoy or Goethe or Shakespeare or Socrates or some other well-knit nature, the elements war. The body and the mind (whatever they are) strive with one another, each seeking to turn the other into itself. Thoreau was a dry sage; indeed, to read him puckers the soul. With Dahlberg (or Anderson or Dreiser) the body wins, so if he (and whoever seeks to learn of him) is not to be stuporous Caliban, he must leaven the body's appetites with mind, which, instead of logic, is memory, custom, and legend.

It is an oddity for an American writer to be a good European and a good writer. Edward Dahlberg is such an oddity. He is, indeed, a heretic who once started a book with an exhortation to confess that to have gone across the Atlantic to America, or rather from Europe, was a mistake. Echoing D.H. Lawrence, he writes, in another context,

The Puritans ran away from the England of Spenser, Marston, Lyly, Jonson, they left the land of the Cavalier bibliophile, King Charles, admirer of Andrew Marvell, to live on sea-snails, mussels, pompions, gourds, and bear suet. (TIMS, p. 103)

To make more important mistakes than those of his early novels, Dahlberg ob-

viously had to look elsewhere than solely at the desolate world of the Jazz Age or the Depression for his inspiration. He was almost silent for more than twenty years after his fourth novel in 1934, publishing only two books and some poems and essays until 1957. Since then his imagination has truly flourished, issuing no fewer than ten books in the past decade. There were always problems for Dahlberg in getting back to a knowledge of Europe. Blocking his way were writers from England and America whose practices had long been anathema to him. It was not until 1961 that he found an opportunity to dispose of them, in Truth Is More Sacred, an epistolary forum with Sir Herbert Read. The authors defended and denounced in this book are Joyce, Lawrence, Pound, Graves, James, and T.S. Eliot.

The difference of opinion between Dahlberg and Read is often enormous. For Dahlberg, as we have noted, it is most important to ensure that artists themselves do not worship the Golden Calf. Contrarily, says Read, "we must recognize the true enemies of art, who are not a few cowards in our own ranks, but the barbarians outside the gates." (TIMS, p. 23)

Dahlberg's first letter is predictably incendiary, establishing his pattern in the book with a scorching blast against the contemporary cult of ignorance and bad art, using as his firesticks the wise bones of the past. Toward the end of his letter, Dahlberg particularizes:

Man is either epic, or hates the sublime; he invents chimeræ, harpies, eponymous giants, or he is scatophagous.... The Ulysses of James Joyce is the story of the scatological sybarites of the business world; it is a twenty-four hours' journey through ordure; a street-urchin's odyssey of a doddering phallus....

Joyce's Ulysses is the novel of epic cowardice; I do not blame him for divulging all the vices of men but for reducing them to unheroic dimensions. We must call wrath, dirt, lust, drunkenness -- Agamemnon, Thersites, Ajax, Nestor, or sink the giants into little everyday characters.... There is a labial failure in Ulysses similar to the confusion of the tongues of the people in the plains of Shinar; the noises in the belly and hawking of the throat take the place of the alphabet. (TIMS, pp. 18, 20)

Read is but half-willingly hurried into defending a sweetly reasonable orthodoxy:

Yes: a sick book, but a significant one. We must struggle for health, you say -- sense and health. But we must also diagnose our sickness. And that sickness is not literary: it is social.

...

The whole function of art is cathartic, not didactic.

...

...we must not look for our heroes in unexpected places, and Brooklyn Bridge is perhaps as good a locality as Troy...

(TIMS, pp. 25, 27, 28)

And so the book continues, with Dahlberg surprising Read by the virulence of his scorn, and with Read occasionally agreeing but usually damping his friend's fire with relativistic caveats. The rift between the two men widens climactically late in the book, when into a discussion of T.S. Eliot's poetry and ideas Dahlberg drops this little outrage:

You told me in New York that T.S. Eliot had been a friend of yours for above forty years. Now before you defend this mungrell versifier I must needs cite Sokrates who asserted that truth is more sacred than friendship. (TIMS, p. 169)

Dahlberg proceeds to reject Eliot and Pound and is answered sharply by Read, who has the last letter.

It is not my wish to temper criticism with kindness, but I have always held that sympathy is the beginning of understanding, in literature as in life. Your attack on Eliot and Pound is, I know, inspired by a passion for the truth, and if truth is indeed more sacred than friendship, then I must put all friendly feelings aside and answer you on your chosen ground. (TIMS, p. 209)

In his defence of Eliot and Pound, Read admits that as a literary critic he feels constrained to temper ambition and idealism. "I would prefer to be a modest and uncertain laudator temporis acti, content to elucidate where there is darkness, and to imitate in our human affairs the method of reasoning that Cusanus applied to divine things." (TIMS, pp. 221-2)

Dahlberg's criticisms of Eliot and Pound are precisely those which receive small attention today. He is in direct opposition to the academic and pub-

lishing lobbies and claims to be so disgusted with his subjects that he can barely bring himself to write of them. Eliot and Pound are both seekers after a renown not deserved, feels Dahlberg, and that they have obtained it is mere assurance that "Babel, the cult of sameness and the average, is universal....

A poet earns what he is in this world, which is not likely to ignore a bard of the petit bourgeois, and it is not amiss to add that a little Jew-baiting gives a man polite varnish in society and is of inestimable help to a poeticule. (TIMS, pp. 12, 172-173)

(For all Dahlberg's interest in biographical criticism, this passage is the limit of his personal animus towards any writer. The restraint he shows is remarkable; he is, after all, a sort of Jew.) 12.

I accuse these men of having betrayed the trust bequeathed to them by Homer, Hesiod, Theognis, Horace, Heraclitus, Propertius, Martial, Aristotle, Chaucer, Fletcher, John Webster and Shakespeare. I charge them, along with their dead myrmidons, James Joyce, and Wyndham Lewis, with having broken the Ten Commandments of the English language. (TIMS, p. 174)

Karl Shapiro, Kenneth Rexroth, William Carlos Williams, Josephine Herbst, Edward Dahlberg -- all of these writers have expressed their dismay at what Eliot and Pound have done with or to their mother tongue. Dahlberg considers that they "have set literature back a hundred years" (TIMS, p. 176) by trying so hard to be original. He derides their advice to younger poets, asking this question: what good is such advice, if it is shabbily couched itself? Certainly such an objection is appropriate, especially to Pound's ABC Of Reading and many of his letters, where learned chat is often taken for printable prose. Not denying his victims the good taste to have chosen for instruction such "venerable shades" as Dante, Villon, Massinger, Ford, Chapman, Edmund Spenser, and Gavin Douglas, Dahlberg complains, "...the real hurt comes of their not having enough force themselves to bray the Elizabethan quiddities of learning in a mortar, and give us their own brave conceits." (TIMS, p. 177)

Detailing Eliot's attacks on men with as great gifts than himself -- Ruskin,

Donne, Milton, Swinburne, Seneca, Hobbes -- Dahlberg reckons that "his incurable fault his his need to degrade genius." (TIMS, p. 183) Dahlberg would prefer to assume that genius is not to blame for the mediocrity of the critic, and he cites the three decades it took him to appreciate Saint Paul.

For all Eliot's prate of his affinity with Anglo-Christianity, where, wonders Dahlberg, do we find in him the healing influences of such giants as Saint Paul, Origen, Clement of Alexandria, Eusebius, Tertullian, or Pascal? Is Lancelot Andrewes a substitute? Is this humility on Eliot's part? And "Pound's own eccentric reading can be seen in his rejection of feeling, the whole Hebraic and Christian legend and learning in favour of Robert Browning." (EOOT, p. 97)

Where is T.S. Eliot, asks Edward Dahlberg. (The same question might be asked of Ezra Pound.) Dahlberg finds almost no locality in Eliot's work and further flays him for creating landless characters with no masculine force to combat their own puniness. "It is not Prufrock's chagrin with Aphrodite that withers the tumultary bones, but the mob verse in which it is divulged." (TIMS, p. 188)

Dahlberg opines that both Eliot and Pound do their best work when they are recognizably imitating somebody else; they stumble most ungracefully when they return to their own resources. To garble or reduce the great words of the long dead is, for Dahlberg, a sin as well as an admission of one's own lack of imagination. He cites the beginnings of The Canterbury Tales and The Waste Land as proof. "If I cannot praise Eliot or Pound, it is that I fear by doing so I am denying the encomia due to another poet." (TIMS, p. 195)

Dahlberg contends that both Pound and Eliot have no awe.

A mixture of puling, incoherent allusions, an unreasonable mention of names in literature, philosophy and myth is pictorial nihilism. Ezra Pound commits all the errors.... (TIMS, p. 200)

Eliot and Pound bait their hearers as though they were angling for mullets; they snare them with a morsel of Dante, a quotation from Marlowe's The Jew Of Malta, or from St. John of the Cross, or by simply mentioning Agamemnon, Odysseus, Menelaus or Clement of Alexandria; of course, the reader, starved for erudition, and elevated by a great poet or church father, swallows the citation and is caught. In "Sweeney Agonistes" the verse commences with a marvelous thought from St. John of the Cross:

Hence the soul cannot be possessed of the divine thought,
until it has divested itself of the love of created things.

Then, the poet himself continues:

Dusty: How about Pereira?
Doris: What about Pereira?
I don't care.
Dusty: You don't care?
Who pays the rent? (TIMS, pp. 202-3)

Pound's Cantos are the greatest hoax in the history of literature. The reader is asked to accept, on faith, a muckheap of allusions, names, and legends, that the author is unfamiliar with, and has not himself absorbed. (TIMS, p. 203)

Were it not that Eliot and Pound have been so influential, what they have done, says Dahlberg, would be a joke. As it is, they must be discounted, all the time. What if they have occasionally been irresponsible enough to say something that is not horrid and a shut door to the reader's desires for infinite forms? To whose credit is this good fortune? "...if a fusty writer blunder into a civil thought, his many baneful conceptions are the stygian reward for spending our miserable brains upon him." (TIMS, p. 204)

Answering Dahlberg's pillory essay, Read either defends exactly what Dahlberg condemns -- and for exactly the same reasons -- or overlooks Dahlberg's nodes of emphasis and condemns him for missing them.

What are we to say? Dahlberg is indeed shrill and he is not rigorous.. His answer to criticisms directed at him from this flank is contained in his essay on Moby-Dick, where he says, "For those who are reluctant to believe that dross is not the customary ailment of this novel, the best advice I can offer is, "Read it yourself, and see.'" (AFQ, p. 126) In The Leafless American he agrees

with Robert Burton, who stated, (approximately), "If you do not care for my book, go and read another." (LA, p. 42)

There is a danger in summarily dismissing Dahlberg -- or anyone else, for that matter. It is rarely possible for Dahlberg to be inexplicit. He would certainly agree with Confucius' notion (so lovingly quoted by Ezra Pound in his Guide to Kulchur) that accuracy in language is the primum mobile of civil harmony. That he believes modern art (for present purposes, as it happens to be focussed in the works of Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot) to be, for the most part, decadent, sinful, and of no account and that he differs in this belief from so many theoretical and practical experts may be an indication of Denmark's rottenness.

Dahlberg's lack of system and indeed, of thoroughness in his condemnations should occasion at least our curiosity to find out whether he is right or wrong. Whether he is at fault or not should be the question posed and answered after a thorough reading of him and of those whom he accuses. His extreme position is this: why spend time chastizing ninnies when one should simply and continually affirm great art against the dying of the light? In a letter to Sir Herbert Read about Read's book Education For Peace, Dahlberg tells his friend the work is ephemeral and sends him straightway to Tolstoy and to Plato's Laws, saying that he (Read) smacks overly of the world. (Charitably, I might guess that Truth Is More Sacred is out of print because (say) Pound and Eliot are straw men and one sinks, attacking them -- let alone praising them)

Allow me a personal digression which may explain the relevance of Dahlberg's position. I have been involved in "higher education" for almost ten years, and my slight experience has taken me to both ends of the classroom. Aside from Dahlberg's criticism of Pound and Eliot I have read nothing that scarifies these

authors with such potency and authority (I use the word "authority" literally). I confess, however, that I lack the erudition to determine accurately the cogency of his essay. Till lately, I had been feverishly buying many books by and about Pound and Eliot, which I could ill afford. I tried, with minimal success and usually with less reward, to read and to "teach" them and I have supposed myself to be both illiterate and insensitive. On reading Dahlberg, I found myself (whether justly or unjustly) in a position analogous to that of Sir Herbert Read, who had admired Moby-Dick and who admitted, after reading Dahlberg's essay about that book, "never was an illusion of mine so immediately
13
shattered."

Consider these local questions: were there many people in Vancouver to advocate the kind of ideas Dahlberg has about art and life, would as many students (and professors) enter, do, and leave our universities with but one attitude toward Pound and Eliot prevailing in their simple skulls? Would we be as likely to see an annual province-wide art exhibition won by a man whose submission was an inflated piece of grey vinyl plastic shaped like a vagina? Would we be as likely to issue building permits that result in our downtown streets' being flanked by phallic skyscrapers, clothed in desolate parking lots, cement lawns for an ugly fountain, or badly-maintained two-storey shops? Might we not boast of supporting more men of letters than our presently nationalized contingent of one and one-half, one of whom edits a distinguished literary quarterly guilty lately of a special issue of articles about Leonard Cohen?

Excluding most moderns (except as friends), Dahlberg finds his solace with a few of the great contemporary Continental writers -- he has written very briefly about such men as Pio Baroja, Miguel de Unamuno, and José Ortega y Gasset -- but he has commented explicitly and extensively on Cervantes, Dostoevsky,

Shakespeare, Moses, and Jesus (the last two are not exactly European literary figures). Short allusions to all European literature have seasoned his books since 1941.

Dahlberg discusses Moses and Jesus with about the same reverence as he affords to Don Quixote. He sees them all as Melville saw Shakespeare -- as gentle dreamers existing only by the necessary delusion that they can give ultimate love and receive it again. According to Dahlberg, Moses and Christ were, like Cervantes' hero, glorious failures. What but a "dying out of life" was the effect upon (say) American literature and communal utopianism of the Levitical admonitions to cleanliness or the excommunications of Judas? That the Puritans, or more especially the Shakers, Brook Farmers, Oneidans, Thoreau, Melville, and spinster Dickinson searched for knowledge and espoused and hymned a "purified" Nature or a Janussed doctrine of salvation is abundant proof to Dahlberg that "Life brings its own thwarting, grief, or light; nothing can be foreknown; the deepest natures are mysterious to themselves." (CTBL, pp. 96-7)

For Dahlberg, Moses was a gentler man than Jesus! He took humbly his laws from God, not daring to give them from his own authority. The laws for the Israelites who wandered in the desert like Lucifer were indeed attempts to give their souls and senses ease and to instruct them in pity, which is true piety. For having struck the rock for water instead of ordering it to flow, what was his lot? He viewed the Shēkinah, and was denied both entry into Canaan and burial by his kinsmen.

Of course the orthodox would say that Moses would prefer God's way for him, even unto the way of his death. And since he had lived at such a zenith, always close to God, Moses had great responsibilities -- to strike the rock rather than speak to it was an expression of impatience with the justice of God's creation.

The life of Jesus is crammed with lessons to the faithful and with foolish-

ness scorned by the sceptical. Dahlberg stands beyond them both; he is the neutral chronicler, puzzled to stupefaction. The Lord continually befuddled his hearers, especially his disciples, with his apparent contradictions -- He admonished everyone to love and told those who followed him that they must, if need be, abandon all human ties to do so; he denied the flesh's worthiness and called him self, his own body, the Bread and Wine of Life. "Man, not to raven upon his own bones and the world's, must eat and drink the beloved Image or Person of a Francesca, Beatrice or Jesus." (CTBL, pp. 97-8)

His disciples were, until Jesus called them, middling sensual men. While they were with him, their minds boggled; Peter cut off the ear of the high priest's servant. Jesus restored it and was betrayed by the kiss of Judas. After his Ascension the Apostles became what they had beheld, working miracles, propagating what was often to be a rapacious Church, dying their various martyrs' deaths.

"The Truth can never be told so as to be understood, and not be believed," said William Blake in The Marriage Of Heaven And Hell. And any evidence/truth believed and acted upon is a miracle. "Could men believe in one another there would be no sick, no blind, no poor; were not five thousand fed with five barley loaves and two fishes? Jesus would raise the dead [himself included] for those who loved him." (CTBL, p. 100)

Judas is said by spiteful John not to care for the poor but to be a thief. Jesus, claims Dahlberg, is unmanned by Judas, at once hating him and needing his ruining kiss. What then of Judas? After the betrayal he realizes his crime and either hangs himself or falls headlong in a field bought with his blood money, gashing his belly open and dying miserably. Jesus condemns him for suggesting, whether with an honest mouth or not, a moral use for the three hundred pence worth of spikenard. Is it moral, Dahlberg implies, to be beyond good and evil? Judas repents too late, but he repents. Jesus damns him before his act.

"Christ makes me uneasy," says Edward Dahlberg in a letter. The exegesis in Can These Bones Live reveal what differentiates his uneasiness from the foolishness of the Christian, who desires no sign. Dahlberg wonders why, if Judas is forecondemned, he is not the more deserving of pity. Why did not Jesus turn the other cheek to him? Both Blake and Milton thought only Satan to be incapable of salvation; and they placed the blame for this entirely on him. (Blake went so far as to call Satan "Non-Ens".)

The orthodox Christian, however, still understands the universe in a planar fashion, insofar as he understands it at all. Thus Judas does not know his fate, even though as man the Son of Man is capable of total knowledge (Christians still debate this thorny point, but it is safe and certain God the Father knows everything; obliquely, he is everything). God's cosmically detached foreknowledge is in order, that earthly error may consolidate itself. Then those that desire eyes to see will have them to see with, and joyfully shall act according to the authority of their vision. To the Christian, Judas deludes himself and must be permitted to hew to his temporal vice of covetousness so that, eventually, time may have a stop. Must Jesus accept the sinner who wilfully refuses to separate himself from his sin? He offers the sop first to Judas at the Last Supper. This honour is not appreciated by Judas, whose resolve is unaltered.

The Christian has to believe this dogma-- sometimes he enjoys doing so -- or be cast after death into time out of mind chaos, which is separation from God. Judas's alternative was also Satan's and Adam's -- freedom, wisdom, and joy through obedience and service. For the Christian, the Truth is, was, and ever shall be as simple and as difficult as that. (I confess I find it difficult to understand why Dahlberg does not accept this orthodox position, since he is forever concerned with the individual. But Mr. Dahlberg is a thorough-going determinist and considers the Church to be the death of God.)

Europe and the annals of his own ~~race~~ aided Edward Dahlberg in his attempt

to heal the fractured vision bequeathed him by the writers of his own land. He starts with this sentence the section of Can These Bones Live that talks primarily about the Twentieth Century American novel: "We think we are clean, but are we? What does the Holy Wormless Man beget but the horrible Worm, man?" (CTBL, p. 65) He proceeds to discuss the unhealthiness of denial of the flesh (refreshingly, without mentioning Freud), the result of which denial is "the great STINK" (CTBL, p. 66) that disgusted Gulliver and that was the endgame of Father Zossima. It is what the Europeans have been clamouring about for thousands of years. By comparison dunghill Job, Dahlberg notes, kept his integrity because though sorely and pestilentially and totally smitten with Satanic boils he does not generally revile man's troubled body (it being God's creature) but rather praises it, even while he attempts bravely to remedy his personal dilapidation.

Such questing foolish certainty is of course a Dahlbergian touchstone. As we have noticed, he finds it primarily in Don Quixote; but he also perceives it in Dostoevsky's superfluous underground clerk who says that two plus two equals four is a piece of insolence. "...an arithmetical art or literature never includes the more obscure resources of human experience," (CTBL, p. 69) says Edward Dahlberg. Saul, Macbeth, and (to a certain extent) Ahab -- all are heroes; though they fail, they are in a sense attractive because they force a demonstration of the potency of their fates.

The most grievous Puritan and American fault Dahlberg wanted to learn from Europe to avoid was the omission of woman from art and life. "A great deal of sodomy is just a dithering male who is too nervous and unsure of himself to take what is becoming the worst hazard today, entering a woman." (LA, p. 43)

Dahlberg notes with relief a few of the guises of woman in unAmerican literature -- servants and handmaidens to the Patriarchs; Homer's sly and sensual

tricksters; the kites and salvers of the tormented men of Shakespeare and Dostoevsky. In the Old Testament sex was not elaborate. Lust and perversion were duly owned and despised but were mentioned, at least summarily -- men "went in" to women, "lay" with them, or "knew" them, and they usually conceived. How refreshingly simple it was! "In Homer all love is aromatic. So sanely joyful were these guzzling Olympian gods that, whenever they took sexual delights in the beds or in a cuckold's, the dew that fell upon the whole earth was indistinguishably ambrosial." (CTBL, p. 160)

What was it that made Shakespeare create the awesome statist bitches Cleopatra, Regan, Goneril, Lady Macbeth? Who but Ophelia and what but the mistaken rage at what she has done prick Hamlet to utter his astonishing bawdry? Shakespeare created the benevolent and ultimately agreeable women of the comedies when he thought he knew what he wanted. Then he proved himself wrong. The Tempest, says Edward Dahlberg, is evidence Shakespeare knew not at last what to expect from woman and escaped from trying to fathom her incomprehensibility. Unforced by Caliban, pastoral Miranda is the abstract Christian virgin who is unparadoxical because she is no woman at all.

Dahlberg sees in the deeply philosophical and deeply Russian novels (in them locality and consciousness co-exist) of Dostoevsky an even louder admission of sexual misery than that which is heard from Shakespeare's poems and plays. He ascribes the degeneration of sexual harmony in modern European literature to Thoreau's old bedfellow, rational tedium. "The only men who can torment the sensual women of Dostoevsky are, if fops and varlets be lacking, epileptics and madmen; and only the insane and the lame are satisfying as excruciating self-abasement for the bedeviled men." (CTBL, p. 159)

The signature of the times to be found in the modern literature of Europe and America differs, for Edward Dahlberg, in this: such men as Shakespeare, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, with years of custom at their backs, knew how fatal it was to

negate the female. The Americans had no such assurance. It is very easy to forget even what keeps one alive. The ultimately uncomprehending reaction of such men as Ahab or Thoreau to tedium may be in the long run as destructive as that of the heroes of the great Russian novels. Dostoevsky and Tolstoy at least knew that woman had been misplaced and made great art out of man's valiant attempts to understand and remedy as well as to deny this cardinal sin. *Fleshly Woman* at least appears in their works, however maimed and estranged.

Man's neutralization and alienation of himself from his own sanity is directly proportional to his denial of the worth of Nature, his own body, and Woman. Dahlberg's literary criticism is devoted to the elucidation of this principle. When he finds the pastless art which denies this principle, that art he excoriates.

Chapter Three

"...the garage proletariat..." (Edward Dahlberg)

"How can we...become a utopia of wise readers?" (IA, p. 52) Edward Dahlberg's answers to this question occasion a number of essays on the relation between good literature and the good polity. In his essay about William Carlos Williams, Dahlberg is piqued by Williams' anti-intellectualism. "He thought that the ancient civilizations could not be seeded here, which is a frontier perversion." (AFO, pp. 25-6) To Dahlberg, Williams is vicious in the same American way as Ezra Pound; he craves to be original. To employ the intellect in writing is necessarily to approve a conscious moral judgment, since the intellect is the mind's classifying faculty. William Carlos Williams wrote only one book (In The American Grain) which took full (judgmental) account of the effect of the American continent on the rough white men who killed its first gods. The message of In The American Grain was houselessness. The American literary and historical genius has always been energetically cartographic, says Dahlberg, and not proverbial. "...Melville, Thoreau, Parkman, Prescott, and Williams are all river and sea and plateau geniuses, ranging a continent for a house, and all of them outdoors." (AFO, p. 27)

Dahlberg accuses Williams of being bridegroom to violence. Such action is, he considers, only to be expected from the American writer, whose work betrays no great desire to be quiet. The restless rush of the pioneers was always westward, and the rudeness of the land and the strangeness of its aborigines was reflected in the havoc the pioneers wreaked upon them. Of course Vietnam is the last frontier; it may well be that until some radical changes occur in the philosophy of history in the United States, the following curdling statement of Edward Dahlberg will be only too typical of that nation: "...we are so miserable in times of peace that we are always going to war as the substitute for the va-

nishing mesa, the distant buttes, the great Rockies, which are as remote in our lives as sunken Atlantis." (AFO, p. 71)

American ignorance, says Dahlberg, is manifest in errors of value judgment, particularly in literary matters. Theodore Dreiser once told him while they were out for a walk together, "What we need is not freedom of the press, but freedom from it." (EOOT, p. 190) Marx's dictum that quantity changes quality is certainly true of the printed word. Dahlberg has claimed he would stop writing altogether if he were assured that the printing-press would be abolished. This is an hard saying but I believe he means it.

Success is an abomination to Edward Dahlberg; it is to be distinguished from honour, which all good writers need and deserve, and which few enough ever get -- while they live. ("Writing is conscience, scruple, and the farming of our ancestors." AFO, p. 60) Writing is not trade, although good writers often live modestly or starve and bad writers are often comparatively luxurious. The latter Dahlberg considers more pernicious than capitalists; he blames them for eroding their audience's will to resist evil.

Bad writing flourishes like the green bay tree. This is a symptom that vigilant reading has all but vanished. Reviewers misconstrue good books or say nothing of them, while lauding pap. The diseased review is ubiquitous and is a sign, says Dahlberg, that we are divorced from the earth and from those who lie beneath it. America was not always so froward. The Bible nourished the Puritans; William Carlos Williams and Edward Dahlberg cluck in admiration at the erudition of Increase Mather. The Enlightenment Fathers of Independence drank deeply of Continental philosophy. In Emerson's Concord Shakespeare was popular. "Fourier, Essene doctrine, and Proudhon were avidly read by Shakers, Menno-nites, Oneidans..." (AFO, p. 63)

Dahlberg is truly virulent about the effect of reviewers on the commonweal. They are bad readers and bad writers combined and their prey is not only the

gullible reader and poet but also the publisher. Wicked reviewers infest the newspapers and critical periodicals. News is the touchstone of criticism today, not sound judgment. Dahlberg sees a literary sort of Gresham's Law in operation and notes that hacks are employed to evaluate seers. His only hope is that poets, readers, and publishers will revolt, demanding that scurrile reviews will change henceforth and "be honest and undouble about those books which are more than the raiment and meat." (AFO, p. 67)

It seems unlikely that this dream will be realized. Dahlberg himself has said that we dwell in a dark age of letters. The practice of reviewers Dahlberg calls "The Malice Of Witlings"; too frequently "Persons who cannot make a good book do not have sufficient understanding to realize it is impossible to compose a faultless one." (LA, p. 50)

The absolute truth is, says Dahlberg, that "Literature is politics, and the latter apart from the former, is demagogy." (LA, p. 50) When words are used pestilentially, it is idle to ask why the things they purport to name are no better.

We live amidst vulgar products and none can escape the evil effects they have on us. Handle a shoddy volume or stand eight hours rolling rubber tires down a noisome aisle, and who after that is not vacant and coarse? Let a man dote upon twelve sonnets and he will not be a drumbling fool in his amours. "Experience is in the fingers," says Thoreau.

How much longer can the American read pulp, fusty paperbacks, and listen to the commercial lullabies, those odious canticles sung to sell cleansing powders and mouth disinfectants, before we have a generation of simians ranging from the age of five to seventy. (LA, p. 52)

In North America, a free press is supposed to be a datum. Dahlberg's query is, what has been done with that freedom? Most typically, Time and Newsweek will demolish the first few works of a worthless or average writer and then, finding him thick-skinned and still squittering books, they will search for a way to accept or even laurel him. Is this not even more wickedly insidious

than the grotesque censorship trials authors suffer in Communist and Fascist countries?

Dahlberg has by no means escaped the stupidity of reviewers. Do These Bones Live and The Flea Of Sodom were abysmally misunderstood. An utterly fatuous appraisal of The Flea Of Sodom appeared in Poetry. A Cyclops called Edouard Roditi (whom James Laughlin once appointed his European editor) accused Dahlberg of adopting "fundamentally fascist, anti-rational or anti-humanistic concepts..."¹ Roditi so garbled his reading as to believe that Dahlberg considered rationality the flea of Sodom. "...our civilization has not suffered so much from being too rational as from a pseudo-rational itch....to appear more rational than it actually is and to rationalize its unconscious or intuition²al imperatives."

Dahlberg considered the mistake worthy of a correction, which has been collected in his recent book, The Leafless American. Dahlberg's points are well-made and they demolish the meager reader, Roditi. "What is more important than being original...is to learn what one is doing, and why one is doing it, and to say it without being perverse about it." (LA, p. 46)

As usual, Dahlberg is concerned with the connections between decadence in art and decadence in society.

When this scribbler calls me a fascist he means that I would rather eat olives, celery and citrous fruits and a barley bread with Aristophanes and Euripides than sit at table with Karl Marx, a good enough fellow in his own way. I am no working-class mystagogue who regards a riggish fruitdealer who sells carrots, peas and persimmons at four times their value as my benefactor, or the grubby grocer who changes his prices more often than Proteus his shape as my virtuous Cato....what is essential to me is honest workmanship, learning and human poetry. When costs are thievish, and that skulking Barabbas dough is called bread, insolence is everywhere, malice is swollen, amorous verse is dead and the state is despotic. (LA, pp. 42-3)

Roditi was careful to birch The Flea Of Sodom because of its spelling mistakes. Dahlberg disarms this criticism by admitting that not only are mistakes

present, but also that they are intentional. To Roditi's complaint that he is occasionally incorrect in his citations of authority, Dahlberg replies,

It has been the habit of the bursar Polonius in our colleges of lower learning to expose the ignorance of writers....Who would be troubled about it except quibblers, since the citations are marvellous, no matter whose they are....in the end, all sagacious homilies are anonymous. (LA, p. 42)

Edward Dahlberg's equation of literature to politics is matched in its simplicity and heterodoxy by his definition of politics itself. "Politics is what do you have to pay for a pig or a bag of grain." (EOOT, p. 31) It would be expected that the political authorities whose opinions he respects are also rather outré. Since there are few people who think like him, Dahlberg's political job of work is against what most people tacitly, if not explicitly revere -- the STATE.

Much attention is paid in Dahlberg's writings to such enemies of the State as Thoreau, Randolph Bourne, and the nineteenth century American communal utopists. Properly, the State is an abstract, an illusion. The result of language misused, the State re-presents an exploitative attitude common to a few people whose opportunity, profession, and pleasure it is to organize, according to a frequently vicious hierarchy, the operations of many others, in the sacred names of God, Country, Ideology, and, if appropriate, Monarch. Of course, those for whom gimcrack convenience of the State is supposed to exist abet it by their stupid and reliable desire to become "good citizens". Whenever I use the term "State" in this essay it should be remembered that I am the victim of a decayed terminology -- if you like, a police language. For example, it is obviously false to say that criminal activity is against the State, since the State supports its convicts more carefully than it supports most of its pensioners.

Dahlberg's chapter on Thoreau in Can These Bones Live was written as the U-

nited States of America was getting ready for World War Two. Its argument is that Thoreau's anarchic force was nullified by the simple expediency of his having been made a patron saint of American democracy. How quaint, how much like a summer vacation from the office, to cabin oneself with shrubs, phoebes, loons, and bugs near a New England slough! The process by which "well-governed Americans" achieve or accept this perversion of Thoreau's quest is elementary. The statist mentality is adept at abstraction. Thoreau is seen absolutely as a museum piece of "early American literature"; he is thereby robbed of present significance, since only those men and ideas congenial to the State are encouraged by it to be contemporaneous (and even that contemporaneity is often a sort of danse macabre -- witness the resurrections of the most obscure -- or most convenient historical events which gloss the pages of The National Geographic).

Until recently, the works of Thoreau were habitually either misread or lost in unknown anthologies. What else could be the fate in the United States of the calm sane man who wrote, "That government is best which governs least."³

"Thoreau was concerned only with the Orphic politics of the soul, the only politics for man -- no politics. Character must sculpt its own background and Fate, and emit its own historical aureole." (CTBL, p. 18)

When Do These Bones Live appeared, the pouchbacked short-lived American anarchist Randolph Bourne was even more obscured than Thoreau. Bourne considered that "the constitution was a coup d'état against the people..." He was full of such thoughts just before the United States intervened in World War One. One of Bourne's main themes was drawn from Heraclitus -- "War is the health of the State". For saying this consistently and applying to it as proof the examples of such suddenly nationalist intellectuals as his former mentors Dewey and Veblen, Bourne was banished from the pages of most of the magazines that should have been thirsting after his work. There is a legend that the Department Of Justice confiscated a trunkful of his manuscripts. "The people do not make

wars, they only lose them". (CTBL, p. 39)

Bourne realized that the State exists to keep itself going. It is only too quick to help make savages or permanent children of those who wish to be that way; its method is to instruct them to see themselves and others in general terms as obeyers of immutable laws sanctioned by the precedents in a trimming and spurious history. State and people, said Bourne, always negate "...the craft of the state is war, but the art of the nation is weaving, a Shaker chair, Whitman's cottage in Camden, New Jersey." (AFO, p. 83)

The objective difference between State and people is the police force, which usually protects the servants of the State from the people, who are at times (when they are pinched awake) liable not to believe the humbug about themselves that is continually foisted upon them. The ventriloquial State excuse for police is that for the people's good they protect from the enemies of the people the servants of the State (who are by definition of the State the servants of the people, since the State's constant claim is to its identity with the people). Randolph Bourne understood the viperous chicane of such "new orthodoxies of propaganda".

Both Thoreau and Bourne were unprincipled, says Dahlberg. In mortal opposition to the State, which is but principle and begets nothing save itself, Thoreau and Bourne saw that "Creeds have a way of taking their revenge upon us". (CTBL, p. 37) Neither of them thought it necessary to worry about elaborate fetishes in order to draw breath feelingly beside his fellow or alone. They saw beyond principle to a vision incomprehensible to a dedicated statist -- a vision of a life of peace and freedom; they knew that boredom was not the only alternative to war.

(The State gospel is played on a cracked record. It is a tomorrow-promise of justice -- elaborate ritual variation on theme of Hammurabi's law -- the lowest-common-denominator expediency of dull and speciously various food on supermarket shelves, supposedly strategic votes on issues the significance or

virtue of which is often most cleverly masqueraded to appear as of prime importance. Over the bodies of those who reject its bounty, the State historically rolls; the death rattles of libertarians are drowned by the nationalist tucket.)

Thoreau's limits were his own and kept him from being as free as he should have been. Still, he urged his readers to avoid being enslaved and rifled "of the reminiscences of the race" (CTBL, p. 35), as Dahlberg puts it. Randolph Bourne, in his turn, probably had personal limits more devastating than any Thoreau faced. While he lived, he overcame them. He was mirthful; he was audacious; he exercised fiercely; he walked from New York to Provincetown with his fiancée. Edward Dahlberg calls Bourne "a sensual gypsy Leperello with women." (AFO, p. 80)

With the American communal utopians of the nineteenth century, Bourne and Thoreau represented "the prefiguration of a Democratic America, the individual emancipated from State hegemony, or living apart, State-free." (CTBL, p. 17)

The rules of a cult are supposedly its means of avoiding tragedy. "American radicalism...is half Bible socialism, half sex cult." (AFO, p. 86) In the nineteenth century there were about eighty small colonies in the United States, many of which relied primarily on the farmer and the artisan for their goods and services. Some, such as the Amish, still thrive and the more strict among them have not slipped to the use of motors. They have their approximate counterparts in the Hutterites of the Canadian Prairies and the Old Order Mennonites of Ontario.

The co-operative communities Dahlberg talks about were deliberate assemblies of dissenters; displeased with State rules, they took account of original sin, made their own principles, and tried to bolt themselves to these principles. The result was at times a sort of dictated control over certain aspects of behaviour; this control sometimes led to the expulsion of an offender or to the

dissolution of the colony. Dahlberg does not scoff at the anomalies of the communalists; he is the author of one of the greatest collections of quirks and exceptions in the English language, The Sorrows Of Priapus.

Edward Dahlberg considers that Walden "casts a dry light" (CTBL, p. 17) on the determined efforts of the Christian anarchists. When we read Dahlberg's cry in one of his essays on Randolph Bourne,

We cannot pity or love or be MAN save in the Topheth of our remembering bones. For what are our avowals and covenants unless our blood and bones acknowledge them, aye, remember them, when we cower and hide! Do we need a credo to comprehend Proudhon's "Property is theft"; do we require a set of principles to declare that war is slaughter, hate, rapine; must we have articles of faith to be free? (CTBL, p. 37)

we are tempted to try to square it with his statements in his other works that he himself has principles by which he must abide, if need be, to his own ruination.

It is time for a digression. To the critic of Edward Dahlberg, squaring must be unprofitable. Dahlberg refuses to be bounded in a nutshell and hazards (the verb would be his own) that his art may be no more than his bad dreams. I am constrained to cite Walt Whitman here, though with a rider; Dahlberg would not be cloaked in the unearned pride of Walt. "Do I contradict myself? / Very well then, I contradict myself...." ("Song of Myself", ll. 1325-6)

To search for principles in the work of Edward Dahlberg is to jig for the elusive red herring and to invite the scorn Dahlberg heaps on "sterile grammarians". I confess the entire question ravel's my mind. I would not know a principle if I saw one. I shall quote a summary passage by Allen Tate which, when applied to Dahlberg, may either convict him or dismiss him from indictment.

A sound critical program has at least this one feature: it allows to the reader no choice in the standards of judgment. It asks the reader to take a post of observation and to oc-

copy it long enough to examine closely the field before him, which is presumably the whole field of our experience. This, one supposes, is Dogmatism, but it is arguable still that dogma in criticism is a permanent necessity: the value of the dogma will be determined by the quality of the mind engaged in constructing it. For dogma is coherent thought in the pursuit of principles. If the critic has risen to the plane of principle and refuses to judge by prejudice, he will, while allowing no quarter to critical relativity, grant enormous variety to the specific arts. For it must be remembered that prejudice is not dogma, that one has no toleration of the other. If prejudice were dogma, the New York Times Book Review would be a first-rate critical organ. It allows the narrowest possible range of artistic performance along with the widest latitude of incoherent opinion and of popular success -- simply because it uses, instead of principle, prejudice. 4

Let it be noted that Allen Tate is one of Edward Dahlberg's closest friends and strongest admirers.

Dahlberg's commentators -- who usually preface his books, which have seldom been able to find reviewers -- are unanimous in noticing that what draws Dahlberg's work together is simply his VOICE. "The Dahlberg style is unmistakable in any medium." ⁵ When one reads a Dahlberg book, one stretches out one's hand in vain for the structural intricacy of Dickens, James, or Joyce. The apparently random fact whose total significance appears when the fact itself has long been forgotten is no friend to the method of Edward Dahlberg. Really, Dahlberg's entire understanding of the world is that it is somebuilt of immutable discreta whose everlasting purpose it is to come together. In terms of art, this means that Edward Dahlberg has usually been unable or unwilling to utter conventionally architectonic works. His favourite genres have been the essay, the poem, the gnome. Perhaps a little obviously, Dahlberg employed counterpoint to gain unity in From Flushing To Calvary and Those Who Perish; he must have considered his use of that technique a false start. The chapters of his other fiction -- Bottom Dogs, The Flea Of Sodom, Because I Was Flesh -- are nearly complete in themselves.

Whatever we do is vast, unconscious geography; we are huge space giants of the mesa, surd, mad rivers that rush along; and we do not care to be near each other; this is not ancient wickedness, but solitary prairie grazing.

We cannot bear each other because we are immense territory, and our most malignant folly was to closet us up in cities, and take away our ocean past. (LA, p. 2)

Colonial and newly-independent America was blessed with genuinely optional directions in which to develop. Should the citizen have sought to be alone and yet civilized, gentle, and natural he need only have turned to such models as John and William Bartram, John James Audubon, or Henry David Thoreau. (There is frequent reference to the Bartrams in Dahlberg's works. Their eccentrically benign vision of a virgin America, recorded so beautifully in New Green World by Dahlberg's close friend Josephine Herbst, had a great influence on European botany and zoology of the eighteenth century, and also on English and, to a lesser extent, French Romantic poetry.) These men were not heeded.

An American alternative to "civilization" was the co-operative communities. In an essay that bewails their vanishing, Edward Dahlberg makes much of the Colonial connection between the artisan and the family. The early American craftsmen -- cabinetmakers, pewterers, silversmiths, potters, glassworkers -- often saw to it that their cottage industries were hereditary, or even formally communal.

There was Henry William Stiegel, the most famous glassworker in colonial America. Stiegel had communal visions. He built the town of Manheim in Pennsylvania, and populated it with glassworkers from Sweden, Switzerland, and Lorraine. Stiegel was a sort of manorial patrician; he was so kind to his Manheim townsmen that he was sent to a debtor's prison. (AFO, p. 95)

Communally, man often finds it easier to do what he wants to do. Sometimes he spites himself and his community and acts as its best interests (and frequently his own) say he should not. "The sects were either a Garden of Eden for freelovers or a commune of the most dour ascetics." (AFO, p. 96) Edward

Dahlberg finds it odd that we behave more oddly today than did these often unlettered idealists:

The Amana, Rappite, and Shaker garb was homespun, and in the marrying colonies there were no divorces or separations, no painted Jezebels or whoring Rahabs. The frugal Amana apron, the wide, rough peasant skirt, may entice the modern man who, as D.H. Lawrence remarked, is more interested in the under-clothing of women than in herself. One cannot help wondering about modern women, wearing their hair loose over their shoulders, and looking as though they were prepared not so much for the street as for their bedrites. (AFO, p. 97)

In principle, the communities favoured a simple style of living. Somewhat like the Puritans, they were attempting to seed the New Jerusalem in virgin soil. Unlike those hardy apostles of bigotry, they were not always given to the cult of work or of prurience. Sexuality and celibacy were equally unabashed. Education was frequently "confined to the three R's, and to the Bible, being together, and to telling the truth." (AFO, p. 98)

Edward Dahlberg likely considers that some of the most valuable humanising influences on the frontier came from the nineteenth century co-operators. The Bethel, Missouri colonists were among the first men and women to roll westward and they established a community at Aurora, Oregon. Dahlberg thinks that the continuing proliferation of small and really radical communities is the noblest fruit of the American genius. When one considers the normal effect of the land on most of the people apparently in contact with it, the American co-operative is nothing short of astounding.

What have been the causes, not only of the continuing failure of individual co-operatives but also of their combined failure to have exercised a greater influence on the course of American history? The vulgarity of social contracts is that all individual conduct referred to them is construed only in terms of prohibition. What law of creed can enjoin freedom or happiness? Communal man wishes to find virtue by limiting his individual perceptions for the general good; he often achieves, if not strife, a neutral unproductive boredom, or at

best, a peace that is forced and nervous. Co-operative communities have not been able to realize that a single person's privacy may well be at least as replenishing to him and ultimately, to the community as is the fact that he and his neighbours regularly and publicly scrabble at co-existence. "Nathaniel Hawthorne found his sojourn at Brook Farm very unreplenishing, for he said that after working all day for a year with manure-composts all that he was able to produce was a farmer's almanac." (AFO, p. 100)

Possibly the theory implicit in co-operatives essentially counters the operations of the literate imagination -- even Black Mountain College went bankrupt. All actions, especially art, are the results of frustration; in practice, the myth of the New Jerusalem has never been sufficiently dissociated from that of the Lotos-eaters. It may be that we shall never know, this side of Armageddon, whether and/or when to rely upon each other to stay apart or to stay together if we wish to stay happy, interesting, and interested in (if not fanatical about) what we want to do. Certainly we know little about ourselves -- less than about any other animal -- except for the cardinal facts that we are unpredictable and fallen.

It is very easy, and even slothful and smirking, to write of the failures of...brotherhood co-operative societies. Everything fails, for we die, and that is either penultimate failure or our most enigmatic achievement.

...

Aristotle has said that men who live alone are either wild beasts or gods, but there are so many of the former and maybe none of the latter, that it is better to be men and women together. (AFO, pp. 101, 103)

What a pity, thinks Edward Dahlberg, that Americans became "civilized" instead of picking the small co-operative community in which to possess or in any way respect the land on which they sat (like the Pueblo) or over which they moved (a bit like the Nez Perce). There was that chance to be together on simple terms, to explore a mode of being perhaps similar to the Indians', perhaps similar even to an elementary European past, not raping the land but influen-

cing it and being gently influenced by it in return. Listen to a sentence by Charles Olson on this subject. They come from his great essay "Human Universe," a work of genius. "...the truth is, that the management of external nature so that none of its virtue is lost, in vegetables or in art, is as much a delicate juggling of her content as is the same juggling by any one of us of our own." ⁶

The lessons the co-operative communities could have taught were certainly not learned. Edward Dahlberg's description of early nineteenth century Cincinnati is so surprising one hardly knows whether to weep at it or guffaw:

...a rough, barren Sparta of some twenty thousand inhabitants, where there was neither poverty, nor wealth, nor civilized entertainments. There were low taxes, and herds of filthy pigs in the main thoroughfare. At the family hotel table d'hôte sixty to seventy men stuffed their desperado gullets in grum, funerary silence, and then hurried away to the paper mills or to a wizened farm of a few cows, pigs, maize, and poultry, while their wives remained at home over their kettles and republican mush. The pastimes were tall stories, hawking, spitting, and pioneer tobacco-chewing. It was the age of the brass cuspidor, and no thriving public palace in Kansas City, Wichita, or Joplin was without its Grækish amphora, into which rounders, crimps, and dice-coggers expectorated as a recreation. (AFO, pp. 88-9)

Since the beginning of Europe's contact with America the subjects of the New World's chronicles have too depressingly often been about the restless fear of the Old World man for the New World land, his reactionary spoliation of it, and its unsubtle revenge on him. The small towns clung for a while to such fleeting innocence as that recorded in Winesburg, Ohio. While the few communal agrarians and artisans experimented bravely in being beside each other rather than beside themselves, large cities burgeoned. Today there are too few small farms anywhere in North America and the minimal rural population lessens daily.

The tragic irony of urban life is not quite a cliché to Dahlberg, who sees beyond the fact that a metropolis eats people more thoroughly than they should be eaten (O. Henry saw that). Dahlberg observes specifically that the American fault of rootlessness is merely exaggerated in a maze of channelling skinny streets where the sun is outlawed by tall buildings, and where grass is a lux-

ury; in large cities the asphalt is touched and not the ground.

New York is the big placeless Acheron, where locality, entirely protean, is always being mangled, and where nothing comes to rest. Everything rolls in the rubber tire cities; indeed, the whole motor-car country is rapidly becoming East -- and that is a dismal carnage for our literature and people.

(AFO, p. 71)

The national lack (enough of the nation is involved to make the adjective applicable) of self-knowledge brings other aberrations. "I doubt that we will ever be an intellectual nation:...our literature lacks maxims and proverbs; cartography takes the place of the intellectual faculty." (AFO, p. 71)

Indeed, Edward Dahlberg was not the first to notice these tendencies in American civilization. D.H. Lawrence and William Carlos Williams unlocked the word-hoards of the American annalists and the same ideas sprang to light. In two essays, one on Williams and the other comparing Rome and America, Dahlberg takes the thoroughly unAmerican stand that to be original is dangerous. "...every discoverer we have had has been a wild homesteader among the seers of the world." (AFO, p. 27) Referring especially to historians, he realizes that America has never produced a Livy, Suetonius, Gibbon, or Burckhardt. Dahlberg feels that energy, not intellect, rules the works of such men as Parkman, Prescott, Garcilaso de la Vega, Bernal Diaz. William Prescott, for example, composed much of The Conquest Of Mexico on horseback. He walked miles to and fro in his study, banging plaster from the walls with his elbow in an attempt to gauge the Andes and valleys of The Conquest Of Peru.

I want to mention a couple of anecdotes about William Carlos Williams. They are narrated by Kenneth Burke and they concern what he calls Williams' tactus eruditus. It is probably the same faculty possessed by Anderson and Prescott and other American authors.

Some years after Williams had retired from his practice as a physician, and ailments had begun to cripple him, we were walking slowly on a beach in Florida. A neighbour's dog decided to accompany us, but was limping. I leaned down, aim-

lessly hoping to help the dog (which became suddenly frightened, and nearly bit me). Williams took the paw in his left hand (the right was now less agile) and started probing for the source of the trouble. It was a gesture at once expert and imaginative, something in which to have perfect confidence, as both the cur and I saw in a flash. Feeling between the toes lightly, quickly, and above all surely, he spotted a burr, removed it without the slightest cringe on the dog's part -- and the three of us were again on our way along the beach. 7

The next story Williams told Burke. It is an example of the capriciousness of the tactus eruditus and its disastrous social consequences. Williams was visited by some acolytes who obviously considered him a Great Man. When they were about to leave he gave one handsome girl a humorous smack on her rump. The illusions of his visitors were collapsed and Williams was mortified by his lack of propriety. What a prig and a liar I would be if I were to equate this aspect of Williams' personality to (say) Hart Crane's morbidly serious desire for total experience. I will hedge; the difference between them is one of degree, not of kind.

According to Dahlberg, Williams distrusted books. This caused him to write works without moral volition in them, works that hopelessly confuse the reader.

It is impossible to know whether Williams is a man-hater or not, for though he employs a people's language, the bare hummocks, the "treeless knoll," and the waterworks in the poems are nomadic nihilism. "The water married to the stone" is not pioneer hardihood but supine pessimism and dingy misanthropy.

...

All earth is not suitable habitation for the imagination.

...

Williams says goodbye to Montezuma, Joppa, Nineveh, and disappears in the Paterson River. He is just homeless, without parent, or man or woman to be near; a prey to the fiercest elements. There is no creative metamorphosis but brutish submission and the cowering animal feeding upon its own paws.

(AFO, pp. 23, 24, 25)

The testimony of Edward Dahlberg follows, witness for the defence of the intellect as accompaniment to the tactus eruditus.

Dahlberg writes at length about isolation and he considers it inviolate.

"I have always been loyal to my beginnings, by which I mean I have always been an orphan." (EOOT, p. 21) ~~She~~

The purpose of all action is simply to bridge the gaps between people. The fact that action is futile and, parabolically, nonexistent; inactivity is cowardly and wicked. I am thinking of the word "action" as Blake used it on Plate Seven of The Marriage Of Heaven And Hell -- "The most sublime act is to set another before you." Action is the opponent, in time, of vice, which Blake also defined as the hindrance of another. Edward Dahlberg considers vice impossible also but he never counsels practicing it. We are, he thinks, capable enough of wrecking ourselves without consciously trying to do so by attempting to destroy those next to us.

Since Dahlberg realized very early in his life that isolation is axiomatic, he was not long in disabusing himself about political orthodoxy. His invective against the State and its specious enemies the Communists started in his second novel and has continued with gathered force right to the present. (I suppose also that Dahlberg's choice of political mentors, some of whom we have mentioned, resulted from his feelings about solitude.)

Lorry Gilchrist, the hero of From Flushing To Calvary, makes a pilgrimage to an orphanage in which he grew up. He finds it an empty shell and is desolated by his loneliness. He returns to his mother, who dies on an operating table. The novel ends with the truly orphaned Lorry eating a peanut the same way his orphanage friend Prunes used to eat a peanut. Suddenly he is trampled and nightsticked by the juggernaut police chasing an anonymous Communist demonstration. Triumphantly singing the orphan's hymn, Lorry asks his bleeding head bewilderedly the questions of the American litany with which Dahlberg has ended much of his fiction -- where should I go? How do I goad myself into going?

Dahlberg's third novel, Those Who Perish (1934), is about the modes of hysteria and indifference in the reactions of some bourgeois American Jews to the Depression and to news of the beginning of the pogroms in the Third Reich. All the characters in the book are spiritually impotent, victims of one statist superstition or another. They are all Good Germans. "It's not Hitler we're against his Jewish policy," (TWP, pp. 48-9) says businessman Lawrence Scheer, who considers Hitler to be a better gamble than the Bolsheviks, "in the long run".

The two main characters are lovers, Joshua Boaz and Regina Gordon. They spend their time making themselves and each other more and more neurotic. Both of them have been burdened with cretinous daughters. The array of boobs and saulds, both Jew and Gentile, witlessly oppressing them, is truly formidable. Boaz has a shocked heart and is a pastoral Zionist. He sentimentalizes about the lemon trees of a non-existent Promised Land and conveniently forgets to assist his enemployed friend Eli Melamed. Melamed, in turn, is so helpless he actually believes in goyische superiority. He visits a sophisticated savage party at a Gentile "friend's" house and allows himself to be defeated at ping-pong. The other guests at the party make it a real racial zoo; however, all the malice, direct and indirect, is to suffocate Melamed. Suffocated, he leaves. He dies on a bridge, of a broken heart, and is buried in Potter's Field.

Regina is deeply disgusted and scared by the vicious present so she thinks to fight it and to escape from it and from her impotent past by joining the Communist party. When Boaz comes to her bearing a pipe-dream, she rebukes him with her own. Seeking to help him somehow, she makes the mistake of telling him her child is his own dead daughter, whereat Boaz has a fatal heart-attack. To end the novel, Regina poisons herself and her daughter. Dreaming of an apocalyptic tomorrow, "she smouldered into yesterday."

The late chapters of Can These Bones Live are Dahlberg's most fervent discourse against tyranny. At the end of his discussion of Woman in the works of

Dostoevsky and Shakespeare he makes the connection between statism and frustration, in superb and unforgettable prose.

The craving for a dark age is eternal: the Apocalyptic Whore who comes to save man is the rotting, pullulating Attila, Tamberlaine or Hitler of his own devouring blood. The storm trooper is but the decayed tempest of self-loathing. Darkness is ubiquitous: the communist machines that free the enlightened Russian proletariat are the rational devils that obsessed the revolutionist, Stavrogin: the machinery he has heaped upon his steppes and wheat is the spewing forth of his own sickness. Petersburg, Dostoevski's or Stalin's, is the cold rational, theoretical city -- the megalopolitan ditch in which the abstract biped overpoweringly rots, alone. This national disjunctive Onan, separated from woman, whose angelical sap has been drained by the insane drudgery of industrialism, inevitably spills his seed into the Fatherland, for rebirth! The whole cataclysm, for a national kitchen Gretchen, for a "German clock," is the result of this ferocious breach between the nomadic halved male and the hyphenated worker-female. The buxom carnal peasant-girl, the servant maid, who fed the depleted aristocracy, now nourishes the machine and the office: she is the splenetic manikin, with the wormwood of pistons, lathes, cement upon her starveled dugs -- or the lesbian free-thinking political ideologue. (CTBL, pp. 161-2)

Elaborating on this disjunction, Dahlberg examines "the penultimate superstition" that is the State. It was no accident, he says, that Rome's originators were suckled by a wolf. In Shakespeare's Histories those avid for power scotch their own humanity and that of those over whom they achieve their desperate false glory. Caesar will not broadcast the sensual prowess of the love of Antony and Cleopatra; "their souls are chronicled on marble tablets for the superstitious vassal eyes of the plebians." (CTBL, p. 168) All of Shakespeare's political dramas tell us that policy kills. Dahlberg quotes preposterous Gonzalo's speech about his bastard Cockaigne and calls it "Shakespeare's Last Orison". It has not come to pass. Replacing it have been the well-advertised invisible glories of "scientific" views of history. "...the jeer at the Poet is still the victory of the State." (CTBL, p. 169)

Dahlberg has more than a murmur against the Church which, he claims, delivered man from pagan Reason or superstition and simply surrounded him with another

fear. Dahlberg finds his skimpy evidence especially in the savagery of Gothic sculpture. The Church, to survive, must establish itself with the State. If the State Church is (as at present) moribund, it is a sign that it takes no issue with the State. Questions of attendance are irrelevant -- I'm talking about Jerusalem, the City and the Woman, which has little to do with any establishment.

The history of the Church has been largely impersonal. It has been analogous to the history of its illicit abstract sibling, the State. "It is an axiom that in Shakespearian drama that Nature, Man and King can never coexist. Upon this postulate rests the divine right of Kings." (CTBL, p. 171) It is unfortunately also true that so far in the history of the Church Nature, Man and Authority have but seldom coexisted.

The State needs a ruthless leader whose blasphemous vision is propped by a superstition populace. He must have no human failings. Dahlberg considers Hitler a far better statesman than Macbeth (or Lady Macbeth), who is interested only in power for its own sake, and who is really of half a mind to be rid of power completely. Hitler invokes (remember the original publication date of Do These Bones Live was 1941) a bizarre destiny to allay national guilt.

Edward Dahlberg brings everything back home:

The populace exchanges one set of pieties for another, but the beliefs and the fetishes are essentially the same: crosses, icons, madonnas give way to the effigies of Stalin and Hitler. The need of a secular mariolatry for a more "scientific" citizen must be gratified. Screen stars are more immediate and practical as purification and expressive devices than the worship of remote constellations. The distinction between Zeus, Jupiter, Osiris and Popeye the Sailor, the comics and the goddesses of the screen is not in science but in poetics. (CTBL, p. 173)

It is certainly Osirian for the Soviet worker, says Dahlberg, to dismember himself for the glorious future dictatorship of the proletariat! How remarkable it is that so few people are not perverts -- Soviet or "capitalist," East or West -- so that they may easily be rendered totally irrelevant (as a precau-

tionary measure, of course), with the approval, and to the glory of, the WAY.

Poor humanity, forever rending its own limbs and drinking its own blood so that it can resurrect itself. Like a pharaoh, man lies in his own tomb with a pancake and cornmeal god at his side and so embalms his heart and brain, not knowing that they alone can rise from the grave and make him immortal! O, when will he throw away idols: the states, the toy tanks, war games and flags, the fatherland? Moses took us out of the primitive age of Baal and the golden calf, when he destroyed all the graven images.

Man will roll the Sisyphean rock until he demolishes the superstition of the state and the leader. There is the legend that the Empedocles threw himself into the crater of Etna so that no one would ever know that he had died; but the story, told by the men who lived after him, is that the crater belched forth his sandals! It is a beautiful story and a joy-giving irony, and the heart that can contain such mirthful sanities can laugh and weep. O, let man laugh the gods out of this world so that the heart can live in it! (CTBL, p. 179)

Edward Dahlberg has long resolved to be a "jocose iconoclast" (LA, p. 57). In 1950, James Laughlin published The Flea Of Sodom, in which Dahlberg did for the Communists (and others), with humour in a jugular vein. His sketches of radical activists and bohemians in that book are superficially tied to the events of the Thirties but the foolishness and hypocrisy are just as relevant to the quacks of contemporary radicalism, both activist and quietist. (They reappear, much diminished in stature and significance, as Kerouac's Subterraneans and as The Whole Sick Crew in Thomas Pynchon's V.) Dahlberg's caricatures make rubble of time generally because of the style in which they are portrayed, and specifically because of their hilarious names -- Thersites Golem, Andromache Lucy, Thais Colette, Pilate Agenda, Ephraim Bedlam, Ajax Proletcult.

At the beginning of The Flea Of Sodom, Dahlberg has left a note on its luxurious style.

If this little book appears opaque, the reason is easy to know: the line is gnomic, pulsing with Ovid, Livy, Strabo, Suetonius, Herodian, Plutarch, the Book of Enoch, and the Apocalypse of Baruch. The similes themselves are def-

initions of ancient rituals, which are a bucolic physic for men who feed and gender upon our macadam meadows.

...

The purpose of any author is to be artistically mirthful; for no writer can persuade who cannot entertain. Chaucer observes, "A licorous mouth has a lickorish tail," which is a didactic as well as a jolly line. Though this book has some melancholy matter in it, the author hopes that the sentences are made of that bread and wine, and have that accent of the timbrel, with which Saul ascended the holy mountain. (FS, pp. 12-13)

The Sodomites are grotesque and only too recognizable. Thersites is a rude humpbacked Marxist jew sculptor. Andromache Lucy, his sometime wife, is the ubiquitous scandal-mongering political Medusa and sexologue who takes on a man because he is stylish and drops him when she tires of him/he becomes hors de la mode. Thersites acquires slumming Pilate Agenda as his patron. All the Sodomites vibrate at the prospect of seeing him -- an authentick bourgeois! Pilate imports Spanish cork and sponges -- this does not stop the Sodomites from trying to milk him to support all the wormy radical schemes ever devised. Predictably, Pilate tries to seduce Andromache Lucy; after a while, he fails. Ephraim Bedlam is moderately human. He is a vegetarian playwright and he stinks. Ajax Proletcult is a classic activist boor who marches for oppressed workers and drops cigarette ash on Pilate's expensive rugs.

The segment of the book inhabited by the Sodomite rout is called "The Flea Of Sodom". It is narrated in the first person by a skinless Janus whom I dare not separate from the author. Whenever he appears, this narrator is the cause of Sodom's itch; he never fails to insist upon the virtue of some species of customary behaviour. Of course everyone walks right through him. Because of his solitude and because he really is no better than his associates except in intention -- a sort of failed Politic Would-be -- the narrator collapses to jelly whenever he is vouchsafed a beck or a touch. The action is credible for the Flea is almost willy-nilly of Sodom as well as in it.

The Sodomites squander their days and nights most assiduously in fornication,

frenetic political or artistic activity, rabble partying, or squalid gossip.

One night Monsieur Golem Patron entered the 7th Avenue rooms with Golem on one arm and a village trull on the other; they had met her at the china-america international restaurant or the workmen's lenin ping-pong club. Andromache, studying the cannery and shoe factory proletarian drama with Ephraim Bedlam, was asked to meet Thais Colette. "She wants to join the gutter queue of spongers, dowds and artists," added Monsieur Golem Patron. (FS, pp. 35-6)

Pilate gives a raucous party for the Sodomites. Longing for his bucolic Missouri childhood, the narrator woefully attends. Stroked by Pilate, he reels; when noticed indirectly by Andromache, he faints. "One will take to his heart an Heliogabalus or a Nero rather than be deserted." (FS, p. 45)

Pilate Agenda falls into disrepute, not because he is a profiteer, but because he tries inopportunately to seduce some demi-rep. The interest the Sodomites had in centering their activities around him suddenly vanishes; the interest they have in each other vanishes equally miraculously.

When I saw Golem he fled. Running after him I shouted at his coat tails, "Nabal beadle buttocks, occidental cathartic skin, do not primp and tinkle, soft bowels give pity." Admonishing Golem, lurking in a hall, because truth must correct error, I said, "All the sputum you have given for Madrid will not cure the stinking Bethesda pool of your own spirit. Do you slaver when you see people?" Pushing me away he hurried down the street. (FS, p. 49)

"They that touch pitch will be defiled," stated Master Constable Dogberry.

All the Sodomites now derive strength to banish their own boredom as they shun the narrator, who claims to be trying desperately "to relinquish the world for a proverb and lose my reason for the allegory." (FS, p. 52) Pilate appears to have come through, to have done exactly this; but when he attempts to perpetrate a Last Supper on the Sodomites, they hoot at his hypocritical inversion and desert him.

Pilate made a low obeisance and whispered so that not all heard, "Forgive me, if I wash you", which made Golem lift up his voice, "If Pilate says, 'I love man', look out. If he tells you, 'I know nothing', beware. But when he speaks low out of the heart, 'I am humble', run for your life".

...
When all had left Pilate I thought, "can the eyes drop water, when the bowels remain a sherd". (FS, pp. 55-6)

At the story's end the Lazarus narrator is desolated by the lack of reverence all around him. What is worse is that this desolation exists inside him also -- he simply can not leave the nonsensical Sodomites although he knows their souls are leprous. "Going away, I turned back, hungering as Lot's wife did for the lascivious hearths of Sodom." (FS, p. 56) Like other Dahlberg heroes at the end of their stories, he is totally ravelled, a man only of inanitioned parts. He does not know what to do or how to do it.

Perhaps I would go to Los Angeles, which is the orchard of Gomorrah, and not the fig of Israel. I knew I had slain my blood, for Abel was crying out of my veins. What should I do? "Sit", whispered my heart, entreating, "Will ye go away?" to which my soul and flesh replied, "Lord, to whom shall we go?" (FS, p. 57)

The impossibilist criticisms Dahlberg mounts against the State are just as precise, ferocious, and witty when he turns to our sorrowfully mundane social life. His definition of politics is exemplary for its massive implications. When prices are himalayan, look anywhere and you will find a sick polis. Since the State is a lie believed, Dahlberg's remedy is to tell the truth and live it!

Dahlberg's "social thought" (permit me a banality -- all of Dahlberg's writing is social thought) is largely discursive, in essays and epistles. Since he is a man of letters he has always borne a great interest in the preservation of the virtue of institutions founded to encourage letters and the intellect. Dahlberg's relationship with American universities has been a long-standing lover's quarrel -- he keeps returning to them -- though more quarrelling than love has often been in evidence.

From his student at Berkeley, where the goats near the campus ate his botani-

cal lecture notes, to his appointment in 1965 as Visiting Professor of English Language and Literature at the University of Missouri in Kansas City, Dahlberg has always dealt with universities more on his own terms than on theirs. As a result he has been at a surprising number of universities. He was a student at Berkeley and Columbia and he has taught in (at least) Brooklyn Polytechnic College, Hunter College, Boston University, New York University, Black Mountain College, and of course the University of Missouri.

"Good teaching is apocalyptic talking." (EDR, p. 329) This, for Edward Dahlberg, has meant refusing both to follow curricula and to use a text-book, "that abominable carcass". He admits to having been quite a success with students, if not with other professors or administrators. Once Dahlberg was invited back to a university; he had but four students, however, and was not given more than \$275 for a semester's work. That he considered the students had learned something and were sensitive and enthusiastic was apparently not reason enough for his advancement. I believe he did not return. At a faculty meeting at New York University Dahlberg was depressed by the banality: "...not hearing one good or wise remark I made the mistake of saying: 'Why, this is a capitulation to football culture.'" (EOOT, p. 23) Once at a party he cautioned a new university president not to begin casting up buildings like Caracalla. A president interviewed Dahlberg for a job as head of the small English department in his university. Asked after three hours if he thought he could get along with the other nine members of the department, Mr. Dahlberg retorted that he could not get along with nine people anywhere. "A professor is a man who has suffered from academic senility for at least forty years." (EOOT, p. 44) Writing to his nephew, Dahlberg says he hesitates to be a reference to a University for the young man -- "...suppose the letter falls into the hands of an English pathic, you are undone, and will never be admitted to any college, and might then get an education." (EOOT, p. 48) After Edward Dahlberg had left New York University

stories followed him of the dean who could not stop complaining that Dahlberg had tried to run his college.

These stories sum up Dahlberg's attitudes toward American institutions -- they are deeply corrupt and can only be healed by people. Certainly there are institutions to which Dahlberg would give no time at all -- unions and political parties⁸, for example (in all his work one can likely count upon the fingers of a few hands the references to American political personalities) -- but universities, hopefully, could become the Pierian springs for the entire republic. At present, they are ruled by "Polonius bursar" and are often a mere extension of what corporate-military America has become, "the Office by the grace of the Bank". (EOOT, p. 24)

Brave reading should of course go beyond the walls of the University. In a letter to Robert M. Hutchins, Edward Dahlberg considers that the commonwealth⁹ could well be served by what he calls "intellectual guerilla warfare" in which the lives and works of such American heroes as Thoreau, Melville, Veblen, Debs, Emily Dickinson, Emma Goldman, Benjamin R. Tucker could be made readily and continuously available, in chapbook form, to everybody. There is a great opportunity and need for a repertory folk theatre to arise which would travel from town to town with a portable playhouse. Like the medieval Miracle Players it would recite everywhere the deeds of the great men whose lives must be an example¹⁰ to the present.

Give the people the Living Tragedy, and not dead statistics, if you are to restore their faith and a longing for an Iliad or a destiny....You have read how many books on the Reconstruction period; what the churls in Congress said was insipid, for the history was being written on the soil, the plantation, and in the mills. What is most important is where the Negro slept, in a stable, or upon the furrow, or in a ditch; how much did a loaf of bread cost him, and whether it was mealy, sour, and corrupt; what did he pay for shoes, or had he any, and did he have a shirt to house his beaten and houseless back. (EOOT, p. 31)

Edward Dahlberg tells two stories about the acute knowledge the American Indian has had of the importance of personal economy, despite his ignorance of Marx or any other economist. The first story is in a letter to Theodore Dreier.

ser and it concerns an Indian who had made a chair. A merchant admired it, asked its price. Ten pesos, the Indian told him. The merchant wanted twelve chairs and the Indian said each of them would cost two pesos more. This astounded the merchant, who had expected to save money. The Indian urged him to think how boring it would be to make twelve chairs. In a letter to Herbert Read, Dahlberg asks, "Do you know the Indian in Thoreau who, after offering his baskets for sale to a lawyer who refused them, replied, 'What, do you mean to starve me!'" (EOOT, p. 55)

Politics is personal economy and Dahlberg flays mercilessly all departures from that norm. America, the richest country on the earth, has also the most to answer for. Dahlberg's most important political essay, "A Decline of Souls", is about the lassitude of comfort and greed. The worker is charmed away from his product by the machine. As a result, he eats silly packaged food, thinks packaged thoughts and speaks them in a packaged language, makes packaged goods and is mutely distressed when the rate ascends at which he divorces his packaged wife.

"The upper classes are as thoughtless as the commoners; finally, we have achieved the classless society! For the rich and the poor hanker for the same whorehouse amusements and puerile gewgaws." (LA, p. 8) The reason for poverty is simple -- the wage-slave fears boredom and beggars and enervates himself by hire-purchasing novelties to acquire spiraling status, which he mistakes as the prerequisite for acceptance by his inattentive peers. The difference between rich and poor is that rich people can apparently afford more debt. Boredom robs the Americans (and the Canadians) of their limbs; they love not, neither do they sit still.

Who are the avaricious exploiters of the idiot populace? The scientist, the industrialist, the financier ("His greatest hoax is the political one; he selects the millionaire masters of the people who suppose they will be their ser-

vants." LA, p. 11), the lawyer. How incredibly docile are the faceless millions who suffer high rents, unemployment, and wrenching interest rates -- all in the name of "government guide lines" and "tight money".

"The consequence of constant alterations in fashion is a polity of freaks." (LA, p. 12) Money centres of fashion encourage the abstraction of human content from the Human Form Divine; this is most assuredly the theft of its divinity or God Head. Anything can rapidly become fashionable, provided no revolt is threatened. Karl Shapiro¹² and G. Legman¹³ have written on this subject. The burden is very convincing: as long as bohemia adopts the tools of philistia -- presently, electric amplifiers, commercialism, bad art, jargon, commercialism, the city as it is, rudeness, commercialism -- it mimics that against which it purports to revolt. Hippies do not menace the Time-Life syndicate and those whose heads it fills with information, the parody of intelligence. A cursory scanning of the morbid newsmagazines for articles on such subjects as adolescent revolt, electronic music, drugs, and "pop" art will reveal that in a short time their editorial policy changes from alarm and disgust to one of flippant cynical distaste -- which is finally indistinguishable from flippant cynical acceptance -- to wholehearted enjoyment (insofar as anything in Time-Life is wholehearted).

The alternative taken instead of bohemia and philistia is to admit that solitude which we had all the time. The city is where we tell the truth about ourselves. Where man toils soddishly all week as a small part of some great malefic process to whose end or beginning he cannot connect his labour, there is the city. Where the community of the conversation, the porch, the stream, the sandlot, the tree to climb, the touch, is replaced by the newspaper, the radio, the television, the A & W, and the laundromat, there is the city.

Our history is the tragedy of separation. The pioneer slew valleys and meadows that are more of a retribution than the forests of Nodh had been to Cain. He poured out the entrails of tierra nueva, poured slag and cinders upon

the rivers, built soulless, garage apartments and highways that are tunnels in Hades. The modern American city is an industrial battle-field, and the avenues thereof are macadam guts with fatherless names, A, B and C. (LA, p. 15)

Go into one of these vast sepulchral markets, where people hardly talk to one another, and where self-service prevails, and you quit it more wormy than Lazarus. After one has bought canned peas, or pallid, storage carrots wrapped in cellophane as the dead Pharaohs were garmented in papyrus, you go to the cashier. Often a sour, wordless man or woman drops the coins into the palm of your hand so as not to touch it. But unless we exchange human germs, or otherwise we dare not kiss our mother, father, or wife, we will expire, diseased and cankered, in absolute solitude. Why do we have self-service? The answer is very simple: because no one wants to serve anybody nowadays except himself. (EOOT, p. 29) 14

One of the most devastating facts about modern life, thinks Edward Dahlberg, is its effect on human sexuality. He is a champion of what he calls "the old orthodoxies of sex," and we have seen what he thinks of their lack in American literature only too accurately reflects American life, and what has this life done against The Chase?

A female garbed in the trousers of Hercules the footsoldier confuses the pudendum. When not hoveled in lesbian pants she goes abroad in a skirt that divulges her pillared loins. The male burns for this depraved Messalina who is too costly and frigid an article; moreover, he cowers before the iron-boweled bitch. Beside himself, and undone, he becomes an onanist or turns to men. (LA, p. 13)

One of Dahlberg's favourite quotations is Tolstoy's thought that the poor and prostitute we have always with us. Accordingly, a cut-rate bawdy-house is, Dahlberg avers, as necessary to the good commonwealth as Moses or a decent price for butter. For the lack of cheap vice or even a bundling room for every house, one dwells, obviously, in a country (or a continent) which does not know what to do with its women; it perverts them with fallacious advertisements of themselves that label them mere lissome ornaments. If women look in mirrors or at each other after perusing an advertisement, it is no wonder that many of them "...become hard and despotic and arrogant." (EOOT, p. 28)

(Sadly, Dahlberg admits in a letter to William Carlos Williams about "The

Farmers' Daughters" that a similar sickness exists in Mallorca where women have not lost their softness but are, as a sort of compensation, dull.) "I think the American is going crazy; of course, his appetite for sickly, emaciated women, almost hipless, is homosexual. Put a woman in slacks, and you can't undress her without feeling like a Sodomite." (EOOT, p. 188)

Dahlberg himself has always needed a woman wherever he has been -- along with simple food, clothing, and shelter, books, and the opportunity to write and to converse, a woman is all he has needed. He wrote to William Carlos Williams, "I have a few men friends whom I deeply care for, one of them yourself, but otherwise the only people who have added one cubit to my life, or taken me from the middens and the piggeries, are women." (EOOT, p. 188)

Really, Dahlberg hates everything but life. That he finds death whittling life down to itself or to mere existence (and which is worse?) almost everywhere, and especially in all the commonly unexpected places, is his reason for writing. He can learn to be weary of any place on earth, even Spain or Kansas City (where he has at least let down runners), to say nothing of New York, Los Angeles, London, or Paris.

Friendship and then learning are Dahlberg's ways of lessening the evil effect of his time upon him. His letters and many of his essays are exercises in friendship, attempts to understand himself in terms of his present relationship with those he wants close to him, or eulogies for those now dead who have healed his solitude with their company when they were alive.

I mentioned when discussing Dahlberg's literary criticism his close connections with Dreiser and Anderson. I want to talk a little differently about his respect for D.H. Lawrence and Ford Madox Ford. I could not say that Dahlberg has had any intense regard for the work of either man or else he would have written more than he has in praise of their books. "Most of [Lawrence's] work is chaff in my mouth. He wrote far too much, always changing the stones into

bread." (TIMS, p. 81) However, before Lawrence and Dahlberg had even met, Lawrence had aided Dahlberg during his poverty in London, with money and didactic letters. Although it seems that he was dismayed by the Introduction which Lawrence contributed to Bottom Dogs, Dahlberg couches his personal opinion of Lawrence in the words of Bolingbroke about Bacon: "He was so great a man I do not recollect whether he had any faults or not." (EDR, p. 239) Despite or perhaps because of his fame, Lawrence always answered Dahlberg's letters, until Dahlberg stopped writing him, ashamed that he had nothing to say.

He was the most moral man of his age, and he never ceased advising me to be the bony Spartan. He urged me not to let publishers cozen me of my lentils, and I never have because they never gave me any. He also counseled me not to be unlucky and said that I should always write with great bitterness....I have always his advice as best I could, for have always been a bitter stylist, and I have always been luckless.

...
Though I have altered my thoughts regarding his gifts, let it be my portion when I retire to Erebus to have as companions the disembodied dust of Hesiod, Homer, Musaeus, Apollo, and D.H. Lawrence. "Eat and carouse with Bacchus," Lawrence says, "or munch dry bread with Jesus, but don't sit down without one of the gods." (TIMS, pp. 108-9)

There are in Truth Is More Sacred a few pages in praise of Studies In Classic American Literature; in all of Dahlberg's grateful memories of Ford Madox Ford there are only a few sentences about what he wrote. Ford could never do enough for Dahlberg in the Thirties; and Dahlberg has thanked him profusely ever since. His most common claim about Ford was that he had "windmills in his head". Ford lied, like Sherwood Anderson, because the world was paltry. If there were no southern manor to which he could invite his friends, it would be necessary to invent one. Ford continually aided American authors; he held salons, arranged dinners to get them publicity, got them grants. He offered to be Dahlberg's agent for Do These Bones Live (to protect him from publishers) and to write an introduction to that book, but he died before he could do so. Dahlberg records that Ford had been so kind to him that even had he desired it, he would have found it impossible to exploit the man. Here is the dedication to Ford of the

title chapter of Can These Bones Live:

A Lated Tribute to Ford Madox Ford:

How often since the Fates made you the companion of Saul, David, Empedocles, Maria Rilke, D.H. Lawrence, have I descended into Hades to converse with you. Though the deceased wail in pitiless Orcus, our moan is the sharper, because we who live dwell alone and unsure in the cragged eyries and mountain fastnesses of a defiant solipsism. How solitary our own earth-heart is, cheated, but yesterday, of these tumulting Images who gave us speech and memory, as did the libations of blood poured forth by Odysseus. Aye, we are the poor, maimed shades, Sir!

As I deeply bow to place my lips on your Brow, in gratitude for your Grace and dispensations to me, I weep because my homage is the coarse and pusillanimous thanks of the living to the dead. My pardon and my sorrow, Kind Genius, Good, Savory Ford Madox Ford. (CTBL, p. 41)

Edward Dahlberg calls his letters "the epitaphs of our times; they are for those who are lost," he says (EOOT, p. 2). In a way they are tragic. Dahlberg is a wandering man -- he is continually voyaging between Heaven and Hell -- and has his ulcer probably to prove it. I doubt if his readers or friends would prefer him any other way but they must always fail him because he insists that they should be at least as constant in their dogmatisms as he is in his own. Edward Dahlberg thinks Sir Herbert Read has withered because he worries too much about his social and monetary position, which worries may come from his being a family man. James Laughlin depresses Dahlberg because he insists on surrounding himself with what Dahlberg considers decadent writers. William Carlos Williams is a double-minded genius who simply prostrates Dahlberg by covertly referring to him in Paterson 5.

Admittedly, Dahlberg should be referred to everywhere, but what is to be said of such an overweening concern for the virtue or good opinion of friends? When Dahlberg bemoans his fate he is not being humble (he equates humility with vanity). In a letter to Isabella Gardner in 1958 he writes, "By now, I am about resigned to epistolary friendships and aetiological love." (EOOT, p. 214) Writing to Steven Sands, his nephew, he says, I hope not resignedly, "let NOTHING

reign, for nothing lives." And in one of his prose poems there is this sentence:

I shed tears on the Mount of Olives
because people no longer care
for each other; my friends lack
the character for the vigil. (CHD, p. 32)

Such statements to and about his friends are perhaps the sorriest anomalies in Dahlberg's work. Were we able to be objective about ourselves (I say these words in full realization of my idleness and lack of truth), we would see that we are friends with people as much because we respect ourselves beside them as because they themselves possess some extraordinary agility, humour, kindness, virtue, intellect, or vice. Dahlberg falls in the dust if his friends are human; would any sane man be another man's friend for more or less? Has Dahlberg tried to cement friendships without taking account of one of his most treasured premisses, that human beings (even the friends of Edward Dahlberg) are women and men, not Gods? Is it not a cowardly desertion of our own faculties to cry out in amazement and dismay whenever man reveals that his birthright is only a mess of pottage? Jesus said indeed, "What, could ye not watch with me one hour?" (Matthew 26:40)

Despite his contrary protestations, Dahlberg pays the hero's price of Western purblindness which is the desire for attachment. Paul Carroll has dubbed him the Job of American Letters. Job said of God, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust him." And Edward Dahlberg has been slain many times in this life. "Better the desert than the fat, comfortable heart."¹⁵ (EOOT, p. 130)

Chapter Four

Sorrow And The Flea

"Geographie without Historie hath life and motion but at randome, and unstable.
 Historie without Geographie like a dead carkasse hath neither life nor motion at all."

(Peter Heylyn, Microcosmus, 1621, p. 11.)

My allusions to Edward Dahlberg's use of myth have been various and in passing. In this chapter I want to focus on the myths he has as much manufactured as observed; I want to discuss his method, his mythopoeisis, as well as his matter. If I am seen to be repititious, may I be a little forgiven; there is nothing new beneath the sun anyway, although there are different arrangements of old things (or does that make things new?). I would not willingly be a poor magician, even if I did use only mirrors.

With Leo Tolstoy, Edward Dahlberg prefers the backward Gods and considers progress to be no myth but rather a superstition. It takes a great and very catholic vigour to re-member and to act, (p)re-serving or present-ing remembrance (those two facets of behaviour are what is mythmaking, or the imagination). It takes only sloth to accelerate the mechanical removal of oneself from one's relationships with a simpler, more manual past. The apparent energy with which our heroes the businessmen manage our country is the guise of Blake's Rahab or the medieval fals semblaunt. Their occupational ailments -- cancer, heart trouble, ulcers, hard arteries, high blood pressure, alcoholism, barbituation -- are their sins upon their own heads.

How worthy are these sentences by Allen Tate about Dahlberg's unformulated method, or style?

...he has a firm if intuitive sense of genre. The powerful, concrete narrative mastery of the material of Because I Was Flesh is related to the Hebraic and Classical past through intuitive synthesis. In the philosophical and critical books -- Can These Bones Live, The Sorrows Of Priapus, Alms For Oblivion --

we get intuitive analysis. In the poems the progression is associative and lyrical. 1

For our present purposes, though my petulance with Mr. Tate's intelligence unnerves me, his terminology may be uselessly vague. Perhaps his notion is that Dahlberg's main concern in the autobiography is conventional narrative; hence synthesis -- the shades of the orphans of the present are housed withing the bodies of the past. There is also much narrative material in "the philosophical and critical books" and it too is related synthetically to the past and stands up living. I suppose that what Mr. Tate wishes to stress about (say) The Sorrows Of Priapus and The Flea Of Sodom is their lack of a predominating story line, though it were skeletal and needing to be fleshed.

The paragraph of these two books is usually a structural oddity, about one subject and often composed of copular sentences illuminating that subject from the most peculiar angles.

The tongue is even less covered than the scrotum, and can hardly ever be called a secret part since few men have enough character to keep it in their mouths. It is difficult to know whether the tongue or the phallus is more harmful to men. The panther and the lion remain in their lair far longer than the tongue will stay in the mouth. This member is the foe to the whole of mankind. Hermes has empowered it with speech, and its utterances are sometimes oracles. Still, there is no galled tail so hurtful as this organ. It is a thorn, a stone, and also a witling, for when it is not a thong, it is a fool, and man spends the greater portion of his life reprehending himself because he could not be silent. If he has nothing to say, he speaks it, and sometimes this adder stings and poisons a friend, without cause and, particularly, to express ingratitude to one who has been kind or bestowed upon him a benefit. Even when it is hid in either jowl, it is a sly animal. Everyone is its prey, and as it is said in the Book Of Esdras, "The stroke of the tongue breaketh the bones." (SP, p. 26)

Analysis, synthesis; is not this passage as much the one as the other? May not the terms be disposable then? Mr. Dahlberg is concerned to resurrect the Body. His devastating revelations of the misbehaviour of that Body's organs are metaphors of the twitches of its various nerves. Northrop Frye says somewhere that Blake considered the body was weak enough without being separated

from the soul so he tried to unite them to see if he could hoist man out of his trough to a better Body, visibly a better Soul. Edward Dahlberg has set himself the same chore, has he not? Like William Blake, he will not blink at the process or at his materials. "...ends aren't ends but temporary means."²

The first part of The Sorrows Of Priapus limns the faculties of "civilized" man, sorry by comparison with those of other mammals, creeping things and "savages". He does not fare well; indeed, Dahlberg considers that "He is in an intermediate form; the highest man will have no scrotum; it is ludicrous for a moral philosopher to scrape and scratch as any worm." (SP, pp. 53-4).

Dahlberg's Man is recognizable, even in his misery. It is a pity Dahlberg does not find him potent enough to deserve some national identification, like Aeneas, Adam, Albion, or the Green Man. But perhaps I am missing the point; Priapus that garden god is everywhere the same and ludicrous, Dahlberg says, and draws examples to prove his claim.

The phallus has always been considered an unkempt beast. Though matrons and virgins brought fillets and hyacinths to this rude, homely god, it was never his face, but rather his abilities that were worshipped....Nearly every ancient idol was priapic. This was the god that protected the garden and seed-time, and who was associated with the melon, the leek, and the apples of Haran which were aphrodisiacs. (SP, pp. 27-8)

Primitive numbering is sometimes done this way: "1 -- 2 -- 3 -- heap." So Dahlberg's paragraphs work. They do not always progress lineally but are instead semi-associative. His style is therefore a sort of middle way between dramatic and more rigidly narrative or expository writing.³ It is perhaps the most apt vehicle for rendering the indecisiveness of his Man, who is at odds with himself and yet who, because Dahlberg continually refers to him as man, is no less nor more than total, or shall we say constant in his sorrow, knowing not which way to turn and unable to keep himself from turning.

Man was not always so intelligent. I like two phrases from a long chant by Dahlberg, called "The Garment Of Ra":

Men were plant and cowries of the shore,
 Woman a potherb, her legs and hair were rain. (LA, p. 82)

What evidence do we have of primeval lewdness, says Dahlberg; civilization is the kingdom of infamy. Man is no longer a giant or amoral. "Jared, Mahalalel and Methusaleh begat without the assistance of the female, and these immense mastodons had no minds or privy organs, or any knowledge of their uses." (SP, p. 51) Thought is death.

The Fall was into sexuality, which is the swamp of self-consciousness, that trifling awareness we have of the various knobs and hollows of our dithering bodies.

Could man moult his skin as the bird its feathers, and have new flesh, he would be innocent. (SP, p. 15)

He is altogether a double nature, having two lips, two eyes, a pair of feet, and a right and left hand. Man is a congenital hypocrite because he asserts that his purpose is simple. Should he aspire to be apodal, at least, he would have no feet to hasten him to evil. (SP, p. 21)

The ears of Aphrodite are small, rotund and toothsome, but the lobes of the male are a wallet into which he stuffs his greed, gossip, and carnal stupidity. Ears, often no better than the sow's, have a sluttish aspect; they root on the sides of the head, and like the pig can be fed mire and almost any filth.

The ears are worse than the navel because they cannot be hid. There are two kinds of ears, one which is a scale of justice in which all human pains are weighed, and there is the voluptuous ear which is a flute or a lyre, and which is always trembling; every man can play upon it, and receives some tune for his effort. One with fluted ears has eyes for wonders and marvels, and he is able to watch a poor man swallow stones and regard it more as a prodigy than a cause for pity. (SP, p. 23)

The small nose is regarded as more comely in a man, and though it is handsome in a face at table, it usually goes with a short, miserable penis in bed. Lascivious women run after men who have a nose the length of the small finger, but are grievously disappointed when they cohabit with them. (SP, pp. 25-6)

It is an affront that man should consider himself the paragon of creation, says Edward Dahlberg. The difference between man and the rest of the universe is that he thinks, and where has this marvellous ability gotten him. We do not know it well enough but we take our behavioural cues from all animals around us.

The pity is that we are too ready to mimic those animals who are themselves depraved instead of those who are no plague to the imagination. Wisdom is choice; "...since man is not going to be different for a thousand millions he should select certain animals to teach him to be just, eat and gender at regular intervals, and blush." (SP, p. 29) Most animals fornicate in one position only. Many do not even face each other. The human animal writes books describing and advocating the myriad and inflammatory contortions he supposes are suitable for his coition -- and he brags about his accomplishments. His dearest dream is to be vouchsafed one new whiff or glimpse of a human body, "for what man sees arouses him."

If a bird is wicked or lewd, he at least obeys the bird law of kind. Here is an adage from Reasons Of The Heart:

A profligate man who suddenly behaves as though he has saintly traits is a scoundrel because he has stolen our eyesight and understanding. Woe to him who has cultivated a vicious man who unexpectedly resolves to be benevolent. (RH, p. 125)

The birds and beasts know almost unerringly when and where to sleep and how to avoid the intemperance of the elements. They are often convivial too, and if they are not, they know whom to avoid and are themselves shunned. Those birds who leave their eggs in others' nests do so covertly. "The albatross sports with the frigate, the dolphin, and the shark without filling the stomach of one of his companions, and this is a proverb." Men live in a megalopolis, the most dense forests, or in the deserts which slake no thirst. They congregate randomly and very unhealthily, on top of one another or beside themselves, to get rich or poor, stink, or sow grain in rocky ground. When it is winter in Vancouver people journey to Hawaii and return quickly and with complaints if too many others have had the same notion as themselves or if it happens to rain.

The solitary loses his ability to be with others, for whatever he does is for himself, which is wicked. He becomes very predacious and has a scorn for failure, and his madness for lucre is terrible. He canonizes the thief, the criminal, and simpers at justice, adultery, falsehood and specious scales. His

sole aim is itching and going someplace else, and he has not least regard for the difference between good and evil. (SP, p. 35)

Though no monied tourist, the migrant swallow returns each year to Capistrano. After four years of life the salmon unfailingly returns to the place of his birth simply to make it his place of spawning and death. Many men would rather die on a bloody field than in bed.

Men grow degenerate far from river banks and the bulrush, or lose their song or powers without the marine bivalve, but what fowl goes alone? All that man does is to rejoin the human flock. The widgeons fly together, and gabble with one another in pools as they crop grass or fish for crabs. (SP, p. 36)

Edward Dahlberg is a vegetarian. "We are the food we eat, and that is why it is so disagreeable to look at people nowadays." (RH, p. 145)

Those who eat wretchedly can never have a pleasant nature, and now, after thousands of years of feeding, no man may can think too much about the flesh he kills and eats and puts into his stomach without fainting. An unreasonable man eats; one with an angelic faculty will very likely dwindle until he is a gnome because our diet is so nauseating. (RH, p. 146)

The frequent claim of vegetarians is that meat is the cause of too much acid in the body. Some among them (and the aspirin/touts) tell us hyperacidity makes us nervous and liable to devour our neighbour. It is no accident that many pacifists eat no flesh and wear suspenders and shoes made of cloth and rubber. Is there a chance that the passions will not be aroused by a garden salad or a mess of beet tops and diced turnips boiled? It may be good or necessary for people to be a little skittish, whether they eat dead beasts or living plants. So few of their fellows are used to the ideal of serenity that the placid man is likely to pass for a peagoose, an egotist, or a bad conversationalist. Edward Dahlberg lost none of his passion when he ceased to be a carnivore.

In The Sorrows Of Priapus it is said, "What men should eat has perplexed man as much as any other enigma." (SP, p. 42) Simple grains and fruits and spices were ardently recommended by the ancients and Dahlberg recounts anecdotes which

show the sages preparing their food or eating it. As a beast eats so is he; the buzzard is a necrophage and is despised; "The spider creeps up the tree at night to suck the eggs of the young of the hummingbird; it is loathsome." (SP, p. 44) "Man cannot scorn the hog, for, though he roots in the mud, he dotes on figs, acorns, millet, barley, wild pears, and neither gods, nor wise beasts, nor men find this fare intolerable." (SP, p. 45)

The human animal is a wise feeder or is prey to some degree of gluttony. Despite Sam Johnson, too much care for the belly tends to make one unfit for sex and other action. The gourmand is a conscript or partisan of the taste buds and is one of the most conspicuous and compelling of hedonists.

There was an epicure who is said to have eaten his meat with fingerstalls so that his food would be as warm as possible by the time he pushed it into his mouth....The greedy desire exquisite and mordant joys from every part of the body, and sometimes their arms madden them, and on other occasions they swoon because of the way they are housed in their clothes. Every pore in the skin of a hedonist is a voracious cranny, and this sieve of lust gees about like that sloven in Athens who always had enough obols to pay a chit, or a tart, should he happen to see one. (SP, p. 46)

Ecce homo.

In Chapter Five of The Sorrows Of Priapus Dahlberg says that before the earth was with form and void strange hermaphroditic monsters occupied great misty space and were content. Though they were visionaries, Saint Paul and William Blake agreed that in Christ there is neither man nor woman. "The anthropoid is more luckless and unintelligent than animals, and the remedy for his ills is not progress, going forward, which is always to his grave, but turning backwards." (SP, p. 18)

Though it is not Eden (which, according to Blake, was half-civilized and no large garden, the Fall being a process), the American land is primal. Part Two

of The Sorrows Of Priapus is called "The Myth-Gatherers" and is dedicated to William Carlos Williams, "Whose perception is primordial genius, [and who] writes in In The American Grain, that the conquerors were overcome by the wild, vast weight of the continent." (SP, p. 58)

The promise ignorantly sought on this continent by the first Europeans to visit it is what Dahlberg, like Williams, Lawrence, Cooper, Thoreau, wishes to see fulfilled.

"The first shall be last, and the last shall be first is geologic scripture." (SP, p. 59) That the novelty of the Americas stupefied the epically energetic discoverers is well known. The lesson we have from them for the learning is equally amazing because it is so large and simple at the same time -- which is mythology, again -- the land must teach us for we cannot simply teach the land.

The Spanish hidalgo and Portugal adventurer came for riches, but the harvest was often no more than the piñon nut, tanned hides of the woolly cattle of the Platte, or virgin discovery, which, like learning, is tombstone destiny. (SP, p. 62)

We have spent much of this essay weighing the present evidence against the great American divorce. In The Sorrows Of Priapus, Edward Dahlberg tells why it should never have occurred. That savagery has been rife and is now rife is no reason to suppose it ever should or shall be. Still, it is necessary that what is in us and in our soil must be admitted before it can be altered.

The American intellect is a placeless hunter. It is a negative faculty which devours rather than quiets the heart. Dakota is an Indian word for friend though it is a cruel tribe. This is a battle and prairie mind. Its deity is not Christ, but Quetzalcoatl, who is wind and snake; and its travail is as fierce as that of the Indian woman who cannot bring forth until she is given the blood of the serpent. (SP, p. 66)

When we look at the remains of the Indian civilizations of rough Central and South America we wonder at their sophistication in the face of the jungle. The Indians did not have the knack of the wheel and possessed no domestic animals, yet they were excellent astronomers and architects. Giving homage to the land,

they were allowed by it to flourish and, as William Carlos Williams writes of exemplary Tenochtitlan, in In The American Grain,

Streets, public squares, markets, temples, palaces, the city spread its dark life upon the earth of a new world, rooted there, sensitive to its richest beauty, but so completely removed from those foreign contacts which harden and protect, that at the very breath of conquest it perished. The whole world of its unique associations sank back into the ground to be reenkindled, never. Never, at least, save in spirit; a spirit mysterious, constructive, independent, puissant with natural wealth; light, if it may be, as feathers; a spirit lost in that soil. 4

We assume that the Indians came to the Americas from Asia. "The American fable is a table of the seasons, the moons, days and annals of the pilgrimages of tribes." (SP, p. 66)⁵ In Chapter Ten of The Sorrows Of Priapus, Dahlberg says definitely that all races are the descendants of the three sons of Noah, who peopled the earth following the Deluge. The Hamites were the first Asians and the first Greeks came from the loins of Japheth. "genealogy is a vast myth; the record of man, apart from legend, is stepmother history." (SP, p. 88) The Indians of the Americans cried for their forefathers. Unlike their Asian relatives who tilled with the water-buffalo, they "did not yoke the bison".

The Quiché Maya had a jaguar Genesis, and they had an old Semitic word, Balam, meaning soothsayer; like the profane Balaam, in the Old Testament, this Balam was the jaguar priest.

...
The Quiché Maya say that primeval man was shaped out of mud; Adam in Hebrew is virgin red clay....The Adam of the Quiché was unable to move his head, and his face fell to one side, and he could not look behind, which is the tragedy of the inhabitants of the New World. He had no mind, which is nothing but turning one's eyes toward the past. (SP, p. 88)

Much lore was lost in the anabases and both Dahlberg and Williams realize that in America the land has always been man's dictator, Dahlberg goes beyond Williams to claim

It is the works and produce of nature in America and not of man at which we marvel. The rituals of the table, the bed, and the hearth were never established; the naphtha that flows wild from South American rocks was burnt in the lamps at Genoa; Medea, lacking the knowledge of the turteldoves of Mylitta

or Ashtoreth, destroyed her rival, the daughter of Creon,
in the flames of naphtha. (SE, p. 67)

Dahlberg says in Alms For Oblivion (p. 26) that elegant Montezuma was "old in lore" when with dignity he submitted to Cortez, since he who conquers enthralls himself. "We think Christian nonresistance archaic Asian wisdom...." (AFO, p. 26)

Montezuma was, as William Carlos Williams records, the sophisticated and sensual god-leader of an exquisitely savage people. Edward Dahlberg believes that since all civilizations are cannibalistic, it is best to be so openly and with aplomb, like the Aztecs. Their priests were celibate and officiated at elaborate ceremonies in which a young Apollo, first given three weeks with choice virgins, was then gutted with an obsidian knife and his heart offered suitably to the sun.

The Aztecs gods were many and appropriate, with extravagant rituals attending them: there was the prude Vitzliputzli, who demanded human sacrifice, was carried like Moses in a bulrush crib, and who led the Mexicans to build Tenochtitlan on a bog. The Tlalocs were climate idols; Tezcallipuca, the deity who forgave sins every four years, was made of male skulls and carried a precious stone in his navel.

Dahlberg records in Alms For Oblivion that the Aztecs were ferocious in their punishment of inebriation, concupiscence, thievery, and lying. The common footpad was made a slave, for example, and the adulterer could be executed. Can we always assert that we are zealous to avoid such crimes? Similarly, the Brazilians thought it only proper that a man should speak to a woman with his back to her. Otherwise it was not likely that the conversation would be pertinent, since the woman's clout covered her navel instead of her nethers. "The Indian hedonist slew people as though they were dahlias and poured forth their blood as if they were drawing out the odor of mountain clover. Had they but eaten their gods instead of men, they would have been Gymnosophists or Pythagoreans, or one of the

great symbolic peoples of the earth." (SP, pp. 75-6)

Edward Dahlberg records that the natives of rain and river forests of Brazil make none of the pretensions to civility or good taste so dear to the Aztecs, Incas, or Mayans.

The face of these natives is homogeneous, lacking the havoc and the rueful lines which are the work of the intellect. The nose, though Caucasian, which has the long, aquiline, look of a Euripides or a Solon, is a mummer of thought. The Indian seldom balds, and many men would become savages solely to be as hairy as the bear or the pard. (SP, p. 96)

Some Brazilian Indians are finical about their diet and some will eat anyone. They treat their offspring with the greatest respect, says Dahlberg, beating them when they are of tender years so that they will not grow into sloth or nihilism. "Their women are very modest and never laugh; wit, the parent of malice and letters, is not one of the traits of primitive nations." (SP, p. 98) "Cannibals are not interested in...the occidental disease called love, and do not find it essential to practice furtive polygamy, as a woman can be had for a knife or a hatchet." (SP, p. 99)

Our fate has been so far from heroic because we no longer push back all limits and horizons as the discoverers did. There is enormous metaphysics in the lives of Cartier, Pigafetta, Behaim. For this reason one cannot reject as evil a Cortes or a de Soto; even their cruelties are Homeric, and I know when saying this that I am falling into the greatest danger of our times, our concern with aesthetics, which is the avoidance of human and moral judgments. One dare not make such a remark without realizing that Minos who weighs our acts and words has a crabbed visage. If he did not men would kill all day long to employ a Pauline phrase. (EOOT, p. 124)

Edward Dahlberg wrote this to James Laughlin. It is very untypical of him and it aligns him momentarily with Williams and Olson; the various European priests and plunderers and the Indians and the CONTINENT are the raw material with which the American annalist has to work. Where Olson and Williams stop, however, Dahlberg, as we shall see, would go on.

The Spaniards, Portuguese, French, and English found little in all terra dam-
nata recognizable, save their own rapacity, and they comprehended that seldom e-

nough. "There was no Virgil or Propertius to lament the feral peccary, tapir, armadillo, condor, or guanoco." (SP, p. 101)

The legends of a continent without household animals, timorous streams, and social birds, except the macaw and parrot bred in the swamps of the Sertão, are battle Kabalah of creation. It is told that after the Deluge the coyote planted the feathers of the various birds from which sprang up all the tribes of men. (SP, p. 104)

Many notable Indian tribes were spawn of water or land-weakened water and this accounts for their "grum honesty" and several hardinesses. The epic significance or potency of a region has nothing to do with its size, for the streams of Palestine and the island-dotted sea between the Peloponnese and Asia Minor occasioned the Psalmist, the Prophets, and Homer. Contemplation and utterance are possible beside the still waters but "Large, feral waters confound the races of the earth." (SP, p. 107)

The wafted American must look at, listen to, travel upon his great rivers, his endless humped and bowled land -- in the flesh and in the imagination -- to approximate himself to their secrets he does not now understand. Only then will he see that all rivers are one and only then will begin to inherit what Edward Dahlberg calls his "native agony".

I read an article once whose burden, author and location I cannot altogether recall. The name of it, however, now occurs to me -- "The Narcosis of Naming". I think it condemned the American poetic habit of seeking knowledge from cartography. The last two chapters of The Sorrows Of Priapus shame the arguments of that article. Before the kings of Egypt could have themselves sepulchred in gold under the pyramids, before their people had the leisure with which to welcome their tutelary gods on this earth or hereafter, they had to learn to live with their River, also a great teacher and provider. "When Egypt was first peopled it was a morass." (SP, p. 112) It has since given Edward Dahlberg one of his most interesting poems, "The Garment of Rā".

Dahlberg chronicles the early assaults on the Mississippi by La Salle, whom he uses to prove one of his axioms about human nature -- character is fate, or we do what we are.

La Salle had a February genius; he was a cold cosmographer, having fewer vices to moult than Cortes and De Soto. The Cavalier had little of earth, air, fire;...It is doubtful that he ever found the source of the Mechasipi which is warm and falls into the Gulf, because character, free will and destiny are the same. La Salle chose Canada, and North America, a Golgotha's vineyard, as his water and burial site. (SP, p. 112)

La Salle was a driven man and the harshness of his struggles set the teeth on edge. In a winter before they went southward La Salle's men were forced to live off the land. They rooted beneath the snow for acorns, like the starving deer. La Salle explored a territory as large as that of the sons of Shem; he was a greater geographer than Menelaus, who voyaged to Joppa. What was his hero's portion? Returning to New France, to Frontenac, he found himself unfavoured. He shuttled between France, the Governor, and his River, created no colonies, discovered vast waters and a few Indians, and was dispatched in the wilds by a mutineer.

The severest deity is need, a god who confers benefits upon men who toil with chance.

...

Memory is our day of water tutored by want.

...

Water is death but man must seek it. All our seeming wakings are the debris of evening waters; most dreams come from mean shallows, and are the digestive rot of secure bottoms; prophecies rise up from the marine depths ancient as the Flood. We are cartographers, unheeding the singing maggots, or bereft of the Angel. (SP, p. 114)

Finally, the soil; the American, says Edward Dahlberg, needs to open his eyes (recall my mention of white magic in Chapter One -- it applies here also). "Forest is the hope of the disciples; more learned than the fig is wildest ground" (SP, p. 117) -- WHICH DOES NOT MEAN THAT THEIR NATURES WILL BE SEEN TO BE THE SAME! "Every country contains the minerals of Paradise or is the barren ground for rough annals. Art without austere weather emasculates the American....The bark

of the aspen and birch is the food of the beaver; these are Laconian arts and meals....Canaan was fathoming the limestone strata of the Saskatchewan fringed with purple dogwood and dwarf birch, and populated by the pelican and the brown fishing eagle." (SP, pp. 117-8)

Edward Dahlberg wrote The Sorrows Of Priapus first to wake up man to the fact that no wisdom hangs below his belt; and secondly, to show our continents' man just what his sleepwalking has done for him and what in this place he must do to avoid further ruination of it and of himself. South America could be "Ariel", as Dahlberg asserts; imagine and create as an Israel the orchards of cocoa in the pampas and the American Testament will follow soon. Our north is the harsh instructor; taiga and tundra are metaphysicians and admonish frugality. (There are no accidents. The Jesuits, who first bared New France, were founded by the soldier-saint Ignatius Loyola. Dahlberg never flags in his approval of Ignatius's educational maxim, "The pupil should be a corpse in the hands of a teacher.") The lonely American is now dying and will not rise from his Forest Lawn coffin until he turns to his teachers for his lesson. "Where are the little hills which shall bring justice, or the fruits of Lebanon? O Forest spectre, ferns, lichens, boleti contain Eden. Be primordial or decay." (SP, p. 119)⁷

There are two critical asides in Dahlberg's letters to Isabella Gardner and Stanley Burnshaw which I want to cite here before proceeding to write about The Flea Of Sodom.

...is it possible for Homer, Horace, Lucian, and Virgil not to dilate the spirit? You must find the source for yourself, not directly in private experience; it is curious that though one has felt acutely, and that all, as Keats says, presses down on one's identity, the approach to his woe and travail is through ritual and myth. One has to tread lightly upon one's veins or blast them into a great darkness. Art is not straight and plain; were it so, then all that is chaff on the palate could easily be translated into a Golgotha or into the

Can a marriage wine. Quicksilver is most useful in an ass's skin, for everything must in some way be covered if the naked truth is to be found and deeply felt. (EDR, p. 291)

The use of [mythological allusion] heightens the entire vision, takes it out of the Valley of Hinnom, out of drab, particular experience and transforms it into a plural vision, all the experiences of other seers that pulse.... (Eoot, p. 287)

I think of The Flea Of Sodom as a sort of gloss on The Sorrows Of Priapus; forgive the vulgarity, but mainly as the how to its what. It is a recipe for epic behaviour and The Sorrows Of Priapus is the mappemounde of the path to the gates of myth. The two citations above are appropriate because I want to make a stylistic distinction -- which is also perhaps an epistemological distinction -- between the way Dahlberg treats the problems of personal economy in The Flea Of Sodom and the way he examines them in his more discursive works.

What lasts is the past. Dahlberg's essays and letters are usually less packed than the chapters of The Flea Of Sodom; in the former the "plural vision" is not so much the primary stylistic concern of the author and the sentences deal more frequently with the mundane, unfertilized by legend. The essays and letters are, as a result, more emphatically temporal⁸ than is The Flea Of Sodom and this is likely the reason why the latter is out of print.

The Flea Of Sodom does not concern itself with essences -- no ideas but in things -- but its subjects are like Van Gogh's Boots, which are in part the makers of the light that reveals them because they accept that light which is not of their own making.

Herbert Read says in his "Foreword" to The Flea Of Sodom that though its immediate focus is America, Sodom is the city that continues, everywhere. The book was published in 1950, when Read could point out, "...Stalin's tanks stand ready to invade Tibet."⁹ I contend that the source of a proverb is as important to Edward Dahlberg as is the direction in which it is uttered. Much of The Flea Of Sodom is Dahlberg's quest for his European and Near Eastern roots. If The

Sorrows Of Priapus says to us "Be primordial or decay", it is the Old World, as in The Flea Of Sodom, to which we must turn, some of the time, for our instruction in primogeniture. The reverend and ancient little lands skirting the Sea of Middle Earth -- Palestine, Attica, Phoenicia, Italia -- deliver their lore to us. The narrative sections (one of which we have already discussed) are applications of that lore to an approximately American situation.

The first chapter of the book is the chapter about the Sodomites, with whom we are acquainted. The opening few pages are a marvellous way for Dahlberg to speak after having been silent for nine years.

Let us admit, going over the Atlantic was a tragic mistake, and that he who drinks the vile, oceanic froth of Cerberus loses his memory and goes mad....It is better to be slain by a bow of cornel wood or face a warrior in a helmet made of the rind torn from the cork tree than perish by metal. The weapons by which man dies reveal whether he lived with the roe and hind close by the founts of Helicon, or in Boreal, gloomy towns. (FS, p. 15)

The marine exodus is the sin of laziness, which is amnesia. He who possessed his soul within the Pillars forgets it beyond them. "This Atlantic nonentity, muttering Babel's homogeneous words, hatches his slovenly cities anywhere." (FS, p. 17) The narrator of the Sodomites' tale takes the general perversity to himself. He would be mythic, returning to "the pruning-hook and Boaz's granary floor" but is instead rational/fallen, lonely, and given to loathing himself and all else. We have noted that he is convulsed by attention. He is no anchorite by design, however, and is ashamed of his solitude:

Suppose I imagine I am Messiah, and I also think I am Judas, I just betray myself. The evening I went with the soldiers and servants of Caiaphas, carrying lanterns and torches through the rueful olive groves and over the Brook Kidron and cried "Master, Master!" I betrayed Jesus for a kiss! for the Galilean glances he had given the eleven and denied me. O what lore was in the world then. "Judas, betrayest thou the son of man with a kiss?" Yea, Master. If I am not Christ, it is a disagreeable mistake. (FS, p. 21)

But the Sodomites give him no chance to be either, believing they require neither. The narrator and the Sodomites are twined in accidie and their stories

are essentially the same.

In The Flea Of Sodom there is a rough pattern: two chapters of narrative in which a prophet tries and fails to cleanse the doors of someone's perception alternate with two chapters in which all characters are subsumed by the vision of Edward Dahlberg, who is Los or the Spirit of that Time which he smiths into space for the readers of the book. Chapter Two of The Flea Of Sodom is called "The Rational Tree", which is the Edentree whose juicy fruit we still covet.

In Eden there are two trees: "Behold, I have set before thy face life and death, good and evil: choose life." Every Prophet has perished, for if man eat of the Tree of Knowledge he will die, and the Angel with the flaming sword that guards the Tree of Life can never be overcome until men are of a different shape, substance, and mind. (SP, p. 55)

The Rational Tree is the parody of the tree mentioned in the epigraph to Chapter Two, which Dahlberg takes from Christopher Smart's Song To David: "While Israel sits beneath his fig." The simplicity and singleness of spirit implied by this phrase are the ideals to which the chapter aspires.

What facilitates them? Dahlberg's first notice is that in our simpler past just weights and measures for all things were sacred. "In...Attica the idols stood guard over the market....Job puts his integrity, Archilocus his Iambic, and Shakespeare his Sonnet, in the Balance." (FS, p. 61) The gods saw to appropriate prices and recipes and the cities and people who feared them thrived. "The Jewish Sanhedrin, room of Justice, was half of a round threshing floor." (FS, p. 63)

The ancient city was sane, says Dahlberg, when one knew where to look for what one desired. "...in Jerusalem there were separate gates for sheep and asses and camels....Nehemiah tried to restore Zion by repairing the gates for herds and the dung!" (FS, p. 63) Would not our present cities be less despicable if we could be certain of buying a button or a bagel on streets beyond the red-light stews through which we could skulk to shop for a strumpet?

Good towns grow up by Bacchus's yews on warm nymphed seas twined in Poseidon's kelpy trident. Ilium, Joppa, Abdera are the cribs for pensive races until they are Caesar's; then the parable perishes like a Roman Egypt whose figs give suck to the asps in Cleopatra's Basket. (FS, p. 64)

In the Old Testament the Israelites were at their best, says Dahlberg, when they abstained from what then was progress, metal. War is no glory, but Joshua's followers yelled and trumpeted and trudged around Jericho; with the aid of Jehovah its walls toppled. Amos was a neatherd and a fruitpicker. Degeneracy was the worship of the golden calf. "What need has man to go beyond the sheepcote, the threshing-floor, and the augur's timbrel? A mortar and a pestle are enough for a culture!" (FS, p. 66)

10

Perhaps if we were not so intent on progress, which is ultimately the avoidance of difficulty, we would not be so cast down by what difficulties we have to face. For example, our smallest diseases are a cause for frenzy; violence is our pornography and death our new obscenity. Job pulled calmly at his boils with a piece of cooked mud. Disease was not prevalent among the Israelites when they were decorous and properly energetic. Are we, or is any astronomer the better for being able to theorize that in ten billion years the universe will expire, swallowing itself like a sea-cucumber?

The Old Testament use of metal Dahlberg associates with "profane vision". The ark of the Lord was of Lebanon cedar and Eden was not a paradise of gold and silver. "Not until King David was in his sere and peevish age, when he cut the Ammonites to pieces with saws and harrows, was iron important." (FS, p. 69)

The cure for our imperial blasphemies, Dahlberg says again and again, is to be still. "Eden is in a chair." (FS, p. 71) The animals that point this out to us are the ass and the ruminative cow. The cow is sacred to Buddha and to the Hindu and Balaam's Ass perceived the Angel. "...Cleanthes honoured Zeno by copying down everything he said on the shoulder blades of oxen." (FS, p. 71)

When the times are unruly the prophet's voice is stilled. Either no one lis-

tens to him or he does not speak (does the difference matter?). Dahlberg notes that after David and Solomon the prophets and kings were grumpy, and coarse or deformed. Their faculties declined as "civilization" moved ahead and forgot them. "Without livestock the Labans and Balaams are sick, and cannot be quiet, because there is not an apothecary's ounce of ass's dung to relieve them." (FS, p. 74)

Removal from simplicity is the inception of the rational mind. There is a difference, finally, between philosophies of legend and metaphysics, the difference of the easing Human Form.

Reason that does not suckle on proverbs and racial images, which are the vine in the blood, bears the grapes of Sodom.... 'Let me place my speech in thee', recites the father, delivering tradition to the Son in the Upanishads....

Mephistophilus promises Dr. Faustus Helen, but he will not cocker his arrogance by talking to him about unhallowed first causes. 'Tell me, who made the world?' cajoles Faustus. 'I will not tell thee', answers Mephistophilus.

Empedokles rests in Asphodels for putting the ass's Bladders in the hills to catch the Etesian gales; Speusippus, inventor of the Twig Basket, frolics with the sea-trulls of Neptune who found the vetch. But Anaximander is in Tartarus tethered to his maps, clocks and gnomon. Who would hesitate to be Virgil or Chaucer rather than Aristotle or Plotinos? Proteus's shells smite the mind more sweetly than Anaxagoras's kosmos, and the Vedic Heifer yields more than Plato's Philosophy. (FS, pp. 86-7)

"The first sign of a tepid theogony is mealy, pinchbeck loaf of bread." (FS, p. 88) Moses was the word of God when he told the children of Israel how and what to eat -- when he was not heeded the result, as Dahlberg says, was "the botch and hemorrhoids", and, it might be added, the eager tapeworm. The Prodigal Son "would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat."

Dahlberg is amazed that the man who angrily breaks an idol which may be salutary is himself no balm for the wound he has created by his destruction.

Diogenes leaves to the vulnerable imagination his malodorous cloak and the raw polypus he ate and from which he died. Cato's last act, the fraying of his entrails, after he read Plato's The Immortality Of The Soul, punishes mortal mind as much as Socrates, pleasurably scratching his manacled shanks, as he prepares himself for the Hemlock. (FS, pp. 90-1)

Karl Marx swore that the world would remember his carbuncles.

When Edward Dahlberg talks about the dreams of scientific humanists, his words would scorch their ears. A true conservative, he actually believes there is enough wisdom presently available in the world. (Norman Mailer has an equally delightful test to determine conservatism: "...somebody comes up to you and says, 'Look, here are five men and here are five trees, which are you going to execute?'...and you answer....'Well, I don't know, let me look at them.'")¹¹

Progress looks ahead and must be an abstraction. But what are we to say of these words?

Whoever desires to restore Ilium or build an Arcadia is impious and insane. Heraclitus rebuked Homer for attempting to 'bring about the downfall of the universe' by removing strife from the world. 'The sun will not overstep his measures; if he does, Erynes, the hand-maids of Justice, will find him out'. (FS, p. 91)

Has Dahlberg finally relinquished credibility (and morality) for consistency? Does he advocate giving up even the human struggle or am I being unperceptive?

Dahlberg's attitude toward the Negro/Black/Afro-American "Question" may shed light on the paragraph just quoted. He considers the slavery of the mind to be as serious as or perhaps more serious than the slavery of the body. Also, he refuses to be a liberal and declare flatly that the Negroes must be freed. This is impossible, for two reasons -- first, because Everyman is like Falstaff and will do nothing upon compulsion; and second, because even if someone wanted to "free the Negroes", many of them would resist the opportunity. The colour of his skin does not make the nigger a whit more saintly or talented than whitey, though it may make him poorer.

Listen again to Norman Mailer on conservatism, this time in a Playboy debate on that subject with William F. Buckley, Junior:

...the ceremonious conservative view...believes that if God allows one man to be born wealthy and another poor, we must not tamper unduly with this conception of place, this form of society created by God, for it is possible the poor man is more fortunate than the rich, since he may be judged less severely on his return to eternity. That is the conservative

view and it is not a mean or easy view to deny. 12

Apart from Mailer's metaphysical speculations, the passage would roughly characterize Dahlberg's position. Dahlberg writes in a letter to Allen Tate, "I have told my American Negro friend Harvey Cropper, not to be involved in racial strife. He will be a remarkable painter, not a fusty abstract tool, and besides, he cannot cure a problem insoluble at this time, and neither can I." (EOOT, p. 262)

I believe that the style of the quixotic Poor People's March on Washington would be after Dahlberg's own heart; the participants hoped to impress "Washington" with mules and farm wagons such as those used to carry the casket of the Reverend Martin Luther King, Junior. Some of those involved as leaders of the March went on television and were speaking from a Washington church. An elderly and toothless black woman with a crippled husband told of the vermin that patrolled her kitchen floor "like a natchl man". (However, another woman mentioned a song by Bob Dylan which contained a reference to a caboose. She said, if I remember properly, that poor whites, of whom she was one, were always on the last car of the train and it was a good place from which to throw molotov cock-tails. The newsclip ended then with the cheers that answered her fierce eyes, her loud, uncertain words.)

I do not wish to comment upon that fashionable intellectual, Stokeley Carmichael. Edward Dahlberg says,

I would rather write a truthful book which might fall into the hands of two Negroes than pass another law giving this unfortunate people the right to vote in savage Mississippi. If you can find an American Negro who comprehends the Logos, you have freed him, and translated him into Epictetus; no matter how much bread you give a man, he is...a swine only fit for the masts and acorns Circe will allow him. (EOOT, p. 174)

What gives Dahlberg's argument its cogency is not only the style in which it is delivered but also the fact that for the sake of the Word he himself has lived much of his life unwillingly in the company of the termites and skinny rodents of poverty.

The false prophet would simply and totally abstract not only danger, but also grace and vivacity from the world in the name of ease. All this would occur in time, that very human and muddled aether. "Time is Caesar's", says Edward Dahlberg, "and those who dwell in it can never discern the Paradise promised by the Angel of the Apocalypse." (FS, pp. 93-4) Sin is temporal and is Babel or "the appetite for a universal ratiocinative Gomorrah where Ahab and Elijah, the Prophet's Mantle and Nero's sacred beard, are of the same moral weight, and man and woman, wearing the clothes of sodomy, act as a single sex." (FS, p. 95)

Jehovah confounds the tongues of men that each nation may have its own myths and names. When all races are melted into one theoretical people there will be no difference between Shem and Ham: Luz and Gath and Tyre will be the same, and each a burden to the eye and the head. The Moabiteess will be attired in Rahab's robe, crimping-pins, and wimples; man will cohabit with man, and ennui and riot will roar in his veins like the Fires of Gomorrah. (FS, p. 96)

Janus, the true prophet, fails because he will speak only parables to those who do not understand him (those who do understand him either lie about their comprehension and oppose him, or bolster his wisdom with their own).

Prophets, in the modern sense of the word, have never existed. Jonah was no prophet in the modern sense, for his prophecy of Nineveh failed. Every honest man is a prophet; he utters his opinion both of private and public matters. Thus: If you go on So, the result is So. He never says, such a thing shall happen let you do what you will. A Prophet is a Seer, not an Arbitrary Dictator. It is Man's fault if God is not able to do him good, for he gives to the just and to the unjust but the unjust reject his gift. 13

That comment by Blake should be ranged with Dahlberg's "...character, free will, and destiny are the same" if we wish to find out what Dahlberg wants us to understand about the function of the prophet. Both Blake and Dahlberg put the responsibility for vice squarely upon the vicious man -- unless, of course, he is imbecilic or mad. However, Blake stresses the freedom of the will and its separation from chance more strongly than does lucky Dahlberg, who quotes Sancho Panza and who says "Evil and spoiling are in the imagination of families and races"

(FS, p. 66)

No one can invent a sane habit or one good deity. Man guesses, and comes to judgments after a study of saws and gnomes. 'What has most weight and wisdom pierces the ear'. Pastoral cities and theogonies are not premeditated; they just happen. (FS, p. 90)

Perhaps Blake's Vision differs from Dahlberg's Memory in that appears more emphatically to recommend action. Really, both men are volunteers in the Mental Fight, in the action of the temporal intelligence against its medium; telling the Truth is doing it. I cannot tell whether Dahlberg is an apocalypticist. Prime for him is the observed origin of a genealogy -- before youthful Adam, Kosmos Pantokrator. Progress from that first is degeneracy and a sin for we know where we should look for wisdom and energy.

Part Three of The Flea Of Sodom is "The Wheel Of Sheol", the vision offered to a fool. Beliar has the chance to avoid ravaging Abel, his ancestry and feeling. Seven prophets create before him a fantastic reflective beast that is man, cow, and horse. Apparently they do it not overtly for his benefit -- it is merely fortuitous that he is there. The prophets study adages written upon clods while Beliar works the ground for precious metals and gets piles for his effort.

A deep gully separates the asphalt world from where the "cattle of Elohim" and the seven prophets sit. An olive tree stands on the imaginative side and beneath it is Wisdom, at whom the loving prophets do not gaze. "...all knowledge that is for the living God is in the rear of remembrance, and as the face of God is tomorrow, no man may look upon it." (FS, p. 101) Predictably, rational Beliar faces Wisdom and lusts after her.

Beliar saw the wheels of Elisha's burning chariot, and the starry rings beneath Charles' Wagon loaded with holy censers in which were deposited prayers given as alms by humble penitents...Beliar craved the wheels more than Ahab longed for Naboth's vineyard.

...Beliar stole the Wheels and hurried away into the earth with them, and lasciviously shaking before his furnace and stithy, he riveted iron bands around the Wheels, and then commanded them, saying, 'O Wheels, go, go,' and these terrible rings of iron went through the whole world. (FS, p. 103)

From that time all knowledge in the world was infected and strife and lassitude was between people and pests at life everywhere, as life enjoyed the perversion of dying. Beliar is most pitiable for he cloaks himself as a searcher after truth but is indeed Faustus. "Beliar gnawed at knowledge and at space as the worms nourish themselves upon cadavers. For Beliar is sick, idiot matter in motion, and all his learning is for going somewhere else, since the place he is in is his affliction." (FS, p. 105) If Beliar is born, he disappears from his parents. If he lives, it is to forge a graven image of Pandemonium. When he dies, he is more alone than he need be.

Man sins even without his own consent; for there are Sybaritic insects swarming up from Cocytus that bite the flesh, and cause men to lie and cheat and shed blood, and infest the heart with such imaginings of sloth as to make men believe that the greatest good is a gross, nostrilled sleep.

...

A man piously passing a bough of dogwood or acacia, or just spending a sigh on a hungry urchin, at the same time, and without cause, is fainting with debauchery for Jezebel's shoes or Abel's blood. (FS, p. 106)

Time's touch at Beliar's hem makes him ever conscious that his virtue is going from him. He seeks the prophet, ostensibly to learn rest. "The seer... resembled an earthen pitcher of old wine." (FS, p. 109) Here are Dahlberg's words in the mouth of the prophet:

'Spleen is a sickness, for after a man has loosed his bile, he must walk in the valley of Kidron for a year to be quiet again. Three things you should heed and do: return to the world, but as a timorous stranger with a proverb in his mouth; second, be as nimble as a gazelle to run to a proverb, and as fierce as a lion to devour its meaning; and third, know that forgetting is the depravity of sloth.' (FS, p. 110)

The climax of the tragedy is inevitable and immediate -- Beliar realizes that the prophet too is flesh, which is grass. He smirks and the prophet stifles his anger. Beliar returns to his blacktop world and his seven devils are worse than ever they were.

"Bellerophon" is the title of the Fourth Part of The Flea Of Sodom and "Bel-

lerophon is Odysseus the artist" (FS, p. 113) and he who took bridled calm Pegasus, slew the Chimaera, was beloved of men and who proceeded to eat his heart out in solitude because at last, thrown by his mount, he could not assail Olympus. "Every one honoured by Mnemosyne is not a whole-born man...." (FS, p. 114) Since Dahlberg holds the watery artist responsible for his time, it is fitting that the artist should learn his own limits also. "Who demands more solitude than the Muses exact asks for Acheron and madness." (FS, p. 115) This is Bellerophon, as is what follows:

No one is on guard against his nature, for each man is dear to himself, and thoroughly unprepared for his vices. It is sin to believe in one's character....Take heed, wily Protean dust, the Angel you saw by the river Sihor is the lion, goat, and the dragon. (FS, p. 116)

In fine, says Dahlberg to himself and to all those who would be artists or honest men, the difference between brute and God, which is man, is the mind leavened by "MORTAL TOUCH". With the mind alone, a man is a machine and the heavens are not pleased by him. The mind's "negations, provided the Lamb yet lives, gladden the lilies. No knowledge rightly understood can deprive us of the mirth of flowers...Return to the Fig-trees beneath the walls of Ilium to chant to the timorous, dove-winged mind. Go low, Bellerophon, come down, O learned Dust, Wisdom is our PRAYER." (FS, p. 117)

Enough explication, or too much. I am going to falsify the structure of The Flea Of Sodom by failing to translate the three short proverbs Dahlberg has placed at the end of the book and dedicated to his wife R'lene. If the reader has borne with me this far I hope the proverbs will be as clear to him as they are to me. I hope also that I have made Dahlberg so interesting that my reader will not be Beliar but will obey the prophet and will run to the proverbs and

gullet them himself.

I shall now make a more serious falsification of the Dahlberg canon. Although they may deserve it, I am not going to discuss at great length Dahlberg's book of poems, Cipango's Hinder Door, which was published in a limited edition by the University of Texas Press in 1965. There is nothing Dahlberg hates more than a critic who without cause hides a work from a reader so I should at least try to make myself plain.

I doubt my ability to discourse upon Dahlberg's poems, both the book of them and the two long poems in The Leafless American. Harold Billings says, "All great ¹⁴ prose stylists are only a jot away from poetry." I am uneasy but I think rather that Dahlberg's prose is so good that his poetry is only a jot away from it. Indeed Dahlberg does occasionally take paragraphs from one genre, knead them a little, and reprint them in the other medium or genre. Not possessing dates of composition of his poems and prose, I cannot say which came first. It may not matter, but I wonder why Dahlberg would bother to write a work of non-prose if it could just as easily be considered prose?

Early in this chapter I quoted Allen Tate on Dahlberg's sense of genre and after toil, I found I could not then make great sense of those of his words I used. Further in his Introduction to Cipango's Hinder Door, he discusses Dahlberg's poetry this way and I believe I understand him better:

Progression by association of image and allusion has little dramatic interest, or even narrative interest, since evocation of the past of Israel, Greece, and early America of the explorers and Indians, lacks the immediate location in present reality [of] Because I Was Flesh...Mr. Dahlberg's feeling for genre eliminates from his poetry the literal progression which in his autobiography enables him to hold the past and present in a single timeless moment....The prose paragraph as poetic unit has allowed greater freedom of allusion and shift of tone than the verse unit allows; yet one must confess that the risk the poet runs is not knowing where to stop. 15

Mr. Tate does say that Dahlberg's instincts save him from being windy in his best poems but he does leave his friend open to censure by refusing to do just

that.

The rough distinction I tried to make earlier in the chapter between two tones of Dahlberg's prose could be made more precisely if we were to contrast the tones of his prose and his poetry. The range of Dahlberg's prose dwarfs that of his poetry. His prose, nay all prose, tends toward lineal progression and tends to concern itself with denotation. Poetry (including Dahlberg's) tends to curve back upon itself and is concerned with connotation. Of course my distinctions are gimcrack when applied specifically but the cross-fertilization of the two genres does not usually obscure their respective virtues and personalities.

What I would say shortly about Edward Dahlberg's poems may be a paraphrase of Allen Tate's strictures of them -- their occasional failure is due to their not being sufficiently yeasted by movement and the accepted, unsymbolic mundane. Some of the poems I like in Cipango's Hinder Door could better have been cut, stored, and rewritten piecemeal as prose; some were not, and I say no more. "Six Percent" is a diatribe against usury. It is worthwhile because it dramatizes the processional lie of rising interest rates.

Midianite princes,
In black flowing clergyman trousers.
...

"This is the Sabbath, Sir,
The day on which the Lord rested
After creating the sea, the dry ground,
And the banks.
Be at peace." (CHD, p. 52)

Some of the short poems are characteristically personal and we are saved from boredom or mortification because Dahlberg does not pity himself. Were his cries longer, he might be able to sustain them. I find the most rewarding poem in the book the most recognizable one. It has no title and refreshes because it is an ironic sort of ballad in free verse, the only sturdy poem in the book that is not ponderous, anguished, or oracular. I shall quote it in full:

Beyond Thirteenth Street is the horror of trade and the brutish labour;
Beyond Thirteenth Street are the avenues of woolens, silks, chintz, and cottons.
There flourish the drossy cravats, stockings made of the sod of sparrow's wings,
poisonous, spidery skirts and blouses for stewed drabs.
Nothing thrives there but the fuller and the mercer, the furrier and the moth.
I would as soon go the house of correction,
Or be penned up in the maw of a locust,
Than leave my footprints beyond Thirteenth Street.
I've heard there's buxom teal and widgeon,
Gaelic bawds that roost in the gutters of Chelsea,
But I'll stay home and lay my head on Bank Street, Charles or Jane,
Where I can baste a whore or the rump of a pied wren. (CHD, p. 60)

Chapter Five

By God, men may in olde bookes rede
 Of many a man moore of auctorite
 Than evere Caton was, so moot I thee,
 That al the revers seyn of this sentence,
 And han wel founden by experience
 That dremes been significaciouns
 As wel of joye as of tribulaciouns
 That folk enduren in this lif present. (Daun Chaunticleer)

It may be his cross, but Edward Dahlberg writes best when he writes about himself, or better, about what is closest to himself. Reviewing The Sorrows Of Priapus, Robert Duncan was distressed by Dahlberg's ideas and accused him of making his own disgust a metaphor for the frailty of the human race. Turgenev said he wrote for his six unknown readers and Mr. Duncan permits his poems to be published. Who can fathom a poet's vanity? Dahlberg has never denied his own.

He started his career with two or three autobiographical novels and built it that way to its peak, the catholic memoir Because I Was Flesh, which James Laughlin published in 1964.

If this book is a great defect, then let it be; for I have come to that time in my life when it is absolutely important to compose a good memoir although it is also a negligible thing if I should fail. Fame, when not purchased, is an epitaph which the rains and the birds peck until the letters on the headstone illegible. (BIWF, p. 4)

Because we are going to be talking about Dahlberg himself, we shall have to discuss in greater detail heretofore his ideas about action and its conflict with fate -- since Dahlberg considers himself the source of all his problems. "I have always blamed myself for everything except when I was idle and had the time to find fault with others." (BIWF, p. 4)

In The Leafless American Dahlberg has placed a tiny essay about Oscar Wilde. He illuminates our understanding of the difference between wit and truth by telling a few anecdotes from De Profundis. After Wilde had composted in Reading Jail

a long while he was given white bread instead of the normal prison brown. He explained touchingly that he ate every bit of his ration, even the crumbs, since he did not wish to waste them. Says Dahlberg, "This was possibly one of Wilde's few chaste remarks, but it is a lie." (LA, p. 66)

Wilde was by nature and mind perverse; he thought that beautiful lies are art....Paradox is a sin because the man that utters it is more interested in pleasing and amusing than in writing what is good or just....Wilde was...penitent; but it is an enigma that a froward man shall repent but remains steadfast in his errors. (LA, pp.66-7)

Emerging from his incarceration, Wilde had very good intentions; he wished to scotch malice and gossip by writing a lovely book. He wore a ring of lapis which had a scarab inset. "Wilde also said, 'To regret one's own experience is to arrest one's own development.' It is a clever remark and one has to give it very close thought to see how wrong it is." (LA, p. 67)

For Dahlberg, the difference between paradox and wisdom is "The whole body and intelligence", a difference of intent, of effort directed. Certainly a mental and physical attitude is not going to resolve all human puzzles. However, it would try to see that anomalies are truly insuperable and not intentional fabrications. "Wilde thought he had to be waggish to the last....Man's folly is that he does not know that his brain is much smaller than his soul; for how few have enough judgment to know that the mind is absolutely helpless and wicked without the spirit." (LA, p. 68)

We do what we want to do, whether it is good or evil. The saint is gratified by his charity and the mercenary likes to kill and to be killed in turn. In the absence of contrary evidence, must I accept rationalizations about "other-directedness". If a person grumbles at his lot, the grumbling, in measure at least, appeases him. Are we human animals like the tides, regulated by the moon? Certainly our desires for anything, unless we are phlegmatic, go and come as ebb and flood. The word "satisfaction" is from the Latin and means literally "enough done". A satisfied person is a mean ideal; says Blake, "Enough! or Too much."

We run down like so many clocks and rot whether we are unwound or no; we act so that our tickings may be the small sounds of pleasure at our own harmonies. We are emptied like holes and re-create our selves by filling in those pits, our desires. What we do to wind ourselves up, to fill ourselves in, demonstrably does not matter -- it gets the job done. Who will wonder at our perversities; if they do not make us happy in some obscure way, why do we continue at them?

It is obvious that many of us aid the workings of Death against us. If only that we may have the opportunity for our vital follies, it is imperative for us to try to separate character from fate or to try to find out what we want to do before we do it (in case it may be pernicious to ourselves, as well as to others). It is Dahlberg's claim that we inevitably do what we are and who is to dispute with him that the illusory absolutes we create to aid us in the fight called Life are necessary (or who create us to aid Them -- what is that difference!)?

Were Death truly preferable, perhaps no one would live. Were Life truly preferable, maybe none of us would bother dying. The elements are mixed in us. Neither Socrates nor Dahlberg "dilates his throat", as Dahlberg says, when he declares that he knows nothing; he merely states his appreciation of the Universe. Unaccountably neither of them stops at that. Dahlberg's irrational aim is to fight what he considers would disrupt his faculties, with everything he calls his will -- which is only as strong as his grassy flesh. Were he not to do this he would not be Edward Dahlberg and would, by now, long since have been a grinning skull or, what may be as tasty, successful or a nonentity. The chances we shall see he took on destruction before his task was more nearly accomplished were part of its accomplishing.

It has happened that Dahlberg is a person who has needed to account for himself in terms of his own personal myth, written on paper, in a book. He has had no choice and has failed diligently, he considers, in everything else he has attempted, except for a few friendships and some teaching (of course he would say

that to him these are as important as or more important than his writings; but his readers are naturally primarily interested in his books as they discover his works and days).

One French writer said: "If I had my life to live over again I would shoot myself." I totally agree with such a salubrious opinion, but at the same time no matter what the risks were, and they were infernal, I would only be a writer. Making a book, good or bad, is the only cure for any disorders that I know. (EDR, p. 324.)

Had I to do it over again (and who has the heart to repeat even a felicitous experience?) I should do what I am doing. Why not? What is worse and what is better? (EDR, p. 330)

Although each of us must assume responsibility for the maggots of his somnolence, who of us can blame himself for his energies and virtues? The autobiographer of Edward Dahlberg makes sure his story is as much his mother's as his own.

Whatever energy I had, and was able to employ with some comprehension, I had derived from her. Had I not received some moiety of her strength, I should long since have perished, or made the hopeless mistake of the average who are sure they are alive simply because they eat, excrete and sleep. (BIWF, p.

Her son does not record her saying so, but Lizzie Dalberg knew as little (or as much) about the world as he himself has known. She was always the dupe of men and of a vague but fierce hope for a decent life. Nothing that ever happened to her ever gave this hope a foundation. She fled a normal husband for a lewd barber called Saul, who taught her his trade and got upon her a son. "She gave me her father's name to hide the fact that I was as illegitimate as the pismire, the moth or a prince." (BIWF, p. 8) Saul exploited her continually. Edward Dahlberg says Saul could not have done otherwise; neither could Lizzie help being his coney, although he was not dear to her.

Carnal expression was as necessary for her health as it was rot to his blood....

Lizzie had no compassion for Saul and she never tried to comprehend him. It takes a long time to misunderstand people, and whatever we know about others is only what we are able to understand about ourselves. Nobody can pass beyond the boun-

daries of himself. (BIWF, p. 43)

What instructed Lizzie to relinquish Saul at last was want. He could not stay in one place and helped her little enough when he was with her. Lizzie took her child to Kansas City, Missouri, where she slaved in a lady barbershop owned by a man and then opened her own place. Lizzie was noble and exceptional in her gullibility. Linked with her need to be tricked was her optimism. "She was easily duped for she had strong, heady blood. Had she had a more dry and shrewd nature, she would have had few disappointments -- but less hope." (BIWF, p. 22) Lizzie was cheated by the lady barbers and she cheated them in turn. They stole each others' take and did their best to keep currency moving but prices went up all around them. Lizzie wondered why prices rose and despaired of her penury.

When Lizzie had to deal with and support Saul, the thieving and aimiable country chippies of her employ, and her tallowy child, it was too much. "... the soul only tolerates the suffering it requires." (BIWF, p. 118) She told Saul of her difficulties and his feet grew cold. When he left her, she began to hope again.

Had she not had such a strong body, Lizzie would not have been so easily deceived; sickly people seldom suffer from optimism. She took so much pride in her vigour that she never thought it unnatural to rub her back and loins in front of her child after taking her cold bath; she stood before him naked until she had dried herself with a rough bath towel. Criminal imaginings came from the perverted head and not from physical strength. She rejoiced because her breath was as fragrant as the cows of Job. (BIWF, pp. 46-7)

It was no use. The boy stayed sickly, despite his stay in a Catholic orphanage. Lizzie had her appendix removed but it did not help her child, whose sickness was of the imagination. He could not eat for reflecting upon the scuttling rats which plied the alleys behind the barbershop.

Although Lizzie had rid herself of Saul, she could only be the pigeon of other men. She had to speculate, with her money and her body. Could she somehow

attach herself to a lusty and affluent man or some profitable scheme or real estate? She could not. Before her son was eleven, Lizzie was raked over by a number of suitors -- especially one Popkin, whom for a while she married and who swindled her of her savings. The parsimonious Kentucky Blue Grass Henry Smith, a jolly rounder to begin with, lodged with her for free when he was at her end of the river. He did nothing but buy her a few ice-cream sodas, oysters and beer, which memories she cherished for the rest of her life. Her urchin's health did not improve and he was sent to a Jewish orphanage -- Henry Smith had connived at this and was rather glad to see him depart.

Most of Captain Smith's delight at calling on Lizzie was annihilated by the boy, who stepped on his polished shoes, hung on his coat sleeves, or just leaned. Had he not used Henry Smith's fleshy, perspiry shoulders as a bastion, the boy's whole life would have been different. (BIWF, p. 62)

Seven years the Captain stayed with Lizzie; he retired from the riverboat and sank so into his own flesh that he hardly moved from the flat he shared with her. When he left, she sued him for the back rent. The settlement brought her a clapboard house in Northmoor, a nice village outside Kansas City.

Lizzie was still barbering when she was fifty years old and her son was done with Berkeley. She had by this time confined her investments solely to men, having been stung sufficiently by foolish monetary speculations. Lizzie was alarmed at her facial dilapidation, though she still took pride in her passion, good health, and ability to play the piano. Whenever she had the vapours she went to a quack doctor for an operation. Dahlberg writes of her as did Villon of his Fair Armouress:

The tears that spring from the flood of Noah and which cover our nights ran down Lizzie's loose cheeks. What was left of her mouth? Where do the swelling hips go? And the skin dries on the wrist and hand, and the leg shrinks. Her bosom once could make a man forget he was in the dumps; and her calves -- the skirt-chasers would turn their necks around to look. But that was past and so much of her had disappeared. Good Lord, we die all day long and every hour; each minute we age somewhere in our bones. (BIWF, p. 159)

When her son was twenty-five and had graduated from Columbia, Lizzie retired to desultory chicken farming in Northmoor. She had been courted palely by a quondam railroader with the delicious name of Circlear. The best piece of writing Edward Dahlberg has ever done tells of her encounter with Tobias Emeritch, a wealthy retired pickler! Emeritch's "wooing of Lizzie provides one of the high² moments of comedy and pathos in our literature." The Tobias Emeritch chapters are intriguing simply because of the total contrast Dahlberg creates between his mother and this "dotty, rich, stinging merchant", as Paul Carroll calls him. Either Dahlberg made fiction out of truth or he combined the characteristics of several suitors -- he was teaching in New York at the time. The polarity of the couple is so intense that God (or the Devil) exists if Tobias was actual. The truth in the story is beyond the puling "real" or "imagined"; it is mythical and is believable because Lizzie and her gherkinmonger are at once so fleshfast they start from the page; also, they forever the comic confrontation of Life and Death.

Lizzie is a vital wreck whom only a sly wink could raise from the Slough of Despond. Needless to say, she gets none from Tobias Emeritch, who totters into her parlour, assiduously slobbers upon her hands, and collapses, exhausted, onto the couch.

What was breathing or even rattling inside his second-hand suit she could rather surmise....He wore a silk cravat with stripes that hurt her eyes, and he had not taken off his muffler or galoshes. (BIWF, p. 175)

He shakes his dusty umbrella, and Lizzie remonstrates that she has just mopped the floor; "Whereupon Tobias Emeritch endeavoured to put on his rubbers -- which were still covering his shoes."

Tobias talks like a Victorian novel; he admits he is a little reserved. He prattles about money, but to the broad and staring air and not to Lizzie, who seethes and frets with boredom beside him. Like Lizzie, he is concerned with the state of his ascending and descending colon. It would be better had he none.

Peas give you gas, cabbage sours your whole system and one plate of spaghetti is enough to rush one of your relations to a dealer in tombstones. Frankly, I would not eat if I could avoid it....Walking would be preferable if one had somewhere to go....If I could keep my mind on one thing long enough, I wouldn't do anything at all, for as soon as you do anything, you're sure to regret it. (BIWF, p. 180)

By this time, Lizzie thinks frantically that if she is to survive she must needs take an enema or count her chickens. This is a reverie and Tobias makes another fitful motion to depart, considering himself neglected. His agitation wears him out. Lizzie is beside herself; has he come to propose to her or not; and what sort of prize is he, with all his blather of cole slaw, horse-radish, and mummified cucumbers? Still, it might not be wise just to show him the door. "Sir, I'm not detaining you; however, I have the utmost faith in life." (BIWF, p. 184) And she tells him how keeping house and cacklers fills her day.

"Madam, that's not a day, it's a whole life, and if you don't object to my saying so, a terrible one....What's unusual about Tuesday that it couldn't just as reasonably pass for Monday?.... You take all the slops out of the business days and throw them away, and call it the Sabbath which is the emptiest day of the week." (BIWF, p. 185)

A week and a half after Tobias's first intrusion, Lizzie receives a mincing epistle, ostensibly from his attorney, assuring her that he is "retired in every respect", and though marriage is out of the question, he would not mind seeing her from time to time. His second visit is immediate and is a greater calamity than the first.

...she asked him, "How is it that a man of your mature years has never been married?"

Tobias answered, "I was saving my strength."

"Well," retorted Lizzie, "judging by your appearance, you didn't accumulate much." (BIWF, p. 193)

Despite his audacious letter, Tobias has made a gaffe in even appearing; he and Lizzie know that. She tries to needle him toward an understanding; when this fails, they go out to look at her chickens and then sit to eat. "Don't mention food to me -- " says Tobias, "it upsets my stomach."

On the way home from a subsequent walk to the grocery store, at which Lizzie drygulches Tobias and makes him pay the bill, a storm arises.

...Tobias stood still to conserve his energies and to gaze with wonderment at the emerald meadowland opposite the duplex, and at a bull of tremendous girth which was looking back at his offending, gaping face with ferocious hostility. The rain fell, quickly gathering into a puddle, and Tobias slipped and went down into it. The umbrella flew open and was blown over into the glistening grassy pasture; the bull pranced toward it as it descended to the ground, and butting it first with his head, then gored the cotton material, and after stamped on it. (BIWF, p. 202)

Tobias departs and returns occasionally, tremulously making promises of miserable financial arrangements, which he does not keep. He is always a jot and a light-year from marrying Lizzie and she has not the malice to turn him away.

Her son brings his body home to her. That is all he brings, for where was he and where had he been? The Jewish Orphan Asylum was one of the most important places that ever happened to Dahlberg and he has written of it in many of his books. Who can say what the institution was really like? Perhaps we would be happy if things never got worse than they seemed to be in our childhood; instead, we are often dismayed to find that they become no better. "And down they forgot⁴ as up they grew," says Edward Estlin Cummings.

In From Flushing To Calvary the protagonist returns to admit the defunct orphanage -- his transience must be fructified by the permanence of its ghosts. But only in the imagination can we even pretend to lay the shades which haunt us. Lorry is trapped in his present and the memories in him are unwelcomed even though he is attracted by them. The superintendent was dead who had been his Jehovah. Although Lorry tries to vomit up his past it stays with him, a cancerous chimaera.

The years between Bottom Dogs and From Flushing To Calvary could not have

taught much to the artist Edward Dahlberg. To live with his own past it was necessary to make the past of others coincident with his personal vision. Here are some of his words prefacing Lawrence Ferlinghetti's new edition of Bottom Dogs:

...the defect of the novel lies in its jargon.

...

There were other authors in Paris in the early twenties, John Hermann and Robert McAlmon, now deceased, who had a passion for the American scene. With all charity to the dead and with very little toward myself, I believe we failed because we thought we could not write about the midwest, Texas or Montana except in the rude American vernacular. There was a great deal of noise about regionalists then who were merely local dunderheads and yokels of a Main Street intelligentsia. (BD, p. iii)

What Josephine Herbst said of that novel is also true of Dahlberg's life -- he had to break its limitations, which were then his own, or they would break him -- he has admitted as much concerning his psychic integrity.

Because I Was Flesh -- indeed any of Dahlberg's work published since 1941 -- spoils the reader for his early novels. Bottom Dogs abounds in nasty, grating, dated slang and in raucous and static set pieces of local colour humour. "That Racehoss Bladders", which concerns a hilarious attempted swindle involving a nag as decrepit as Petruchio's, might just as well be about a celebrated jumping frog; and Dahlberg has long looked sternly at the nostalgia of such writers as Twain and Bret Harte.

The poet's faculty is divided; it is Janus-faced, one cheek is at war with the past, but in the other is the dove and the olive-branch which means that he is at peace with his memories. No poet can reflect a past with which he is not sorely at war; otherwise he ceases to be truthful and his chant is the siren's song which deceives the people. (LA, p. 19)

Here we have then, another function of myth or "the plural experience"; it moves occurrence beyond (say) the Kierkegaardian categories of the aesthetic and even the ethical and into the realm of the religious. Myth is the cause of morality, not its effect. But all this theory is meaningless without the evidence upon which it is based. For Dahlberg, questions and answers of morality are in-

divisible from questions and answers of style.

On Sunday mornings they had chapel; that was torture for the fellows; a damn good day spoiled; everyone was blue and down on Sunday mornings; a guy never had a moment to himself. Always some pestering governor hootin' his whistle and making kids stay in all for nuthin' too; that's what hurt so much.

Well, they had to go; sometimes a guy tried to get out of it by going over to the hospital and saying he was sick, but they were always bothering a fellow's mouth with those nuisance thermometers, so as he couldn't talk and explain how sick he was. So it was no use; they just had to climb up those steep flights of stairs, all marching in line, to the top of the schoolhouse building to the chapel. The opening prayers were just dry as bones and all the fellows snored to beat the band; the more wakeful ones whittled pencils, and good guys in school got all earnest and red; the hell with them birds, it was just because of them they had chapel. They made Doc believe the kids really wanted it, think of that. (BD, p. 80)

Some of the boys had huge boils on their necks, cheeks and impostumes -- which were called "Becker's boils" -- on their heads. For years many had sore heads which were smeared with Unguentine and bandaged with white gauze. Lice were a common affliction, and the two nurses at the orphanage infirmary were kept busy with their fine combs. A continual discharge of mucus flowed from the noses of spindly 3rd-graders. Had Gabriel, Michael, Raphael and Uriel forgotten them? Why was Abraham, who saw the angels as he slept beneath the oaks at Mamre, more blessed than these helpless oafs? 'Ai is spoiled; run to and fro in the hedges. I chant the song of the fungus. I am clay, dust and maggots, but I shall not forget thee, O ye who wore bog moss and hunger, until I forget my crying flesh.

They were a separate race of stunted children who were clad in famine. Swollen heads lay on top of ashy uniformed orphans. Some had oval or oblong skulls; others giant watery occiputs that resembled the Cynocephali described by Hesiod and Pliny. 6 The palsied and the lame were cured by the pool of Bethesda, but who had enough human spittle to heal the orphans' sore eyes and granulated lids? How little love, or hot sperm, had gone into the making of their gray-maimed bodies? The ancient Jews, who ate dove's dung in the time of dearth in Samaria, were as hungered as these waifs. Whatever grace and virtue we give to others comes from our own fell needs. We pray for the face we need and call this intellectual perception. Without the feeling we are willing to give to others, the Kosmos is vacant and utterly peopleless.

Though all day long nothing was in the ailing minds of the orphan-asylum Ishmaels but the cry for food. What these mutes asked for was never given. O Pharisee, when will you learn that we never came to your table for the gudgeons and the barley loaves?

(BIWF, pp. 75-6)

Lizzie's child, Number 92, was given to puking, studiousness, and solitude.

At first, he did not like the orphanage at all, and wept because he was irrevocably separated from his mother. "...at the age of eleven one of the few illusions that he still had was that one could do what one wanted to do." (BIWF, p. 70)

The food was institutional or, fit not for human consumption but adequate fare for orphans. The routine and discipline were as dull and harsh as the "meals", though the orphans' lives were not totally dependent upon house rules, which they continually avoided and replaced with their own Spartan regimens. One of the most shattering events in the history of the Jewish Orphan Asylum occurred when one Superintendent died and his successor took over. The small brutes were quite ready for an orgy of leniency and a halt to famine.

They sat at the desks with folded hands and waited for Simon Wolkes, who strode up and down the classroom in his hundred-dollar Talmudic suit, to tell about the new orphan-home commons. In a long, solemn sermon, he admonished them not to be slaves of their stomachs; he delivered a Levitical caveat, warning them never to use public toilet seats lest they come by a venereal disease. Then he told them that they would be gray-haired before confirmation day if they masturbated. After Wolkes' potent exhortation the 8th-graders were crestfallen; many thought now they were no better than fish who rub themselves against something rough, as Dio Chrysostom says, when they have the need to eject their sperm, and they were sure their legs were too hollow and decrepit to stumble back to the basement. (BIWF, p. 86)

The orphans were not simpletons. They knew Wolkes' epic walth depended upon their parentless misfortunes.

Number 92 could not stop puking and he could not recall his mother; worse, he was mortified once when caught short by the Superintendent. "Number 92 descended into his legs while the water sang in the urinal with the Jesus pensiveness of the Brook Kidron. The hallowed Adonai had forsaken Number 92. Why must Wolkes make his daily inspection of the toilets when 92 was on the hole and the Lord had fled?" (BIWF, p. 81)

However, 92 was unfortunate enough to graduate. The Jewish Orphan Asylum "Confirmation" was his puberty rite and Edward Dahlberg's excuse and necessity to begin writing about himself in the first person. "Until my seventeenth year...

I was suffering locality..." (BIWF, p. 92)

Despite the ferocity of the orphanage, Dahlberg's very adult and unillusioned prose lets him see it at least partially as a sort of solemn game. What else, at last, did the little wretches know? Their sterile playground and the miserable standing water beyond it were their Earth and Ocean. When these inmates departed from the J.O.A., either by graduation or expulsion, they found out what it was to be an orphan. Cast forth, they ached for the hardships that were familiar, rather than suffer a new pleasure.

All that is sepulchred in the bosom of man is sacred, and nobody will give up a single remembrance of a chagrin, wound, shame or infamy.

Our past is our only knowledge, and, good or ferocious, it is, for sublime or baleful purposes, the sole viaticum of the spirit. We can digest our childhood but never our present deeds, because no one knows what he is doing while he is doing it. The present is an absolute sphinx to men. (BIWF, pp. 90-1)

Those words are prophetic. Dahlberg returned to Kansas City replete with ignorance. A graduate of the orphanage at seventeen, he had no trade and desired none. "...I had no conceptions worth the remembrance", he tells us, and his brain was scalded with lickerish desires which he was too bumbling and scrupulous to erase. Overtly, the orphanage had been segregated.

Always accosting a woman in a whisper, muttering, "Isn't it a pleasant evening," or "What a dry summer it has been," I was either ignored or taken for a noddy. Dressed in a loud green suit that appeared very stylish to me, I must have looked like a Lithuanian factory worker. Sometimes I was so nervous when I approached a woman that she took me for a plain-clothes man and fled. On other occasions, when I mumbled, I aroused hauteur and coldness, even in a harlot. (BIWF, p. 103)

Dahlberg played then the young man's trick upon the world and on himself.-- he went away: from his mother, from Henry Smith, from shrunken Kansas City, no longer the breathing Eden of his childhood. His exodus was only self-deceit, since he considered his ragged mother's thirst for living to be a drag upon him. He lied to her about his reason for leaving, "to make sure that I would be an orphan." (BIWF, p. 115) Dahlberg deserted his mother a number of times, and he

did so more often of his own volition than hers. These partings distress and embarrass the reader because Dahlberg never really used to leave her and he always was perturbed that there was a connection between his ever-dying mindpicture of her and her true growing toward death. Would he ever see her again? Did he have a mother? Who was she?

But freedom he would need, to keep forging his identity as an orphan, though it almost killed him. Dahlberg learned the Depressions's lessons at the end of his teens.

Toward evening I overheard one vagabond say that a platoon of detectives was waiting for us in the railroad yards at Ogden, Utah.

A houseless beggar, I preferred to starve rather than be locked in an iron cage like a feral beast. Besides, the soul only tolerates the suffering it requires. I did not go out in the world to have every bad experience there is, but my will had spoken, and though I did not know what I was doing, I must needs obey that oracle within me or live dead. A few miles outside Ogden I jumped from one of the boxcars; the freight was rattling against the tracks at about 45 miles an hour. I lay bleeding in the soot and amidst the sharp cinders of Acheron.

(BIWF, p. 118)

Some Americans have an easy pilgrimage across their land; Dahlberg did not. He starved, reeked, and went bald and alone. He does not remember when or how he got where he went and it was of no account, for all his destinations were similar -- mean, shrouded towns which did not speak. "In Needles a man walked by and my fingers were bleeding between his teeth. Another who had eaten his lips slinked into one of those festering wounds in a wall where the American lunches; there was one whose jowl was filled with morose hymns and suety sermons. They carried my youth in their bosoms." (BIWF, p. 120)

All this was good for him, as his drawn belly strengthened his will. He still was empty-headed and unripe for the book-learning which was later to make him, as he would say, a better thinker if not a better man. Had he been literate, who could say whether his misery would have been the less? Perhaps it was caused as much by the squeezing meanness of the inhabitants of the Southwest as by Dahl-

berg's own insanity.

Dahlberg's peak in Darien was Los Angeles, though even in 1919 it was "a sewer of Sodom", and from it he gazed on no Pacific. The YMCA became his haven and it was there that he learned what he was for -- literature. Lizzie sent him fifteen dollars weekly and he read only good books and argued with the other boarding whipsters and fanatic vegetarians. (Dahlberg also tried very hard to acquire a social disease and failed miserably.) This sunny chapter bears the story of Lao Tsu Ben, Dahlberg's first true friend, who introduced our author to much fine literature and taught him the truth of Hamilton's adage, "Your people, sir, is a great beast." Dahlberg sent him to Coventry.

Lao Tsu Ben became a wealthy man, but utterly removed from me, while I remained a beggar, going to and fro in the lazar house of literature for a few pennies a page. Lao Tsu Ben was the one friend of my soul, and no matter who has since said to me, "I am your friend," I sit in my waste places without anyone except the owl and the bittern. (BIWF, p. 141)

Berkeley was where the scrotum of Edward Dahlberg caught up with, and outran his mind. The gusto with which he tweaked the dugs of that sacred cow called Higher Education is most exhilarating.

What need had I of the sour pedants of humid syntax, or of courses in pedagogy, canonized illiteracy? I saw that anyone who had read twelve good books knew more than a doctor of philosophy. Had I not studied on my own the works of some of the Russian savants of letters and read the great English and Krench authors, I should still have been thoroughly uneducated at the time I received my Bachelor of Arts. Was I not ignorant enough without walking the earth with several degrees? A grocery boy with good sense is more learned than many an American professor in the general arts whose stock in trade is ambiguity and circumlocution. His wine is a tootnote to a platitude. (BIWF, p. 143)

The use Dahlberg found for books was to assuage his amorous longings. He lived ascetically on nuts and water and shaved his skull. Had he not been virile, he says, he would have made of himself something like a Shelley. "One of the reasons that I did not kill myself, as others had done after reading Goethe's

Sorrows of Werther, was that I found the novel a bore." (BIWF, p. 144) I shall leave to the reader Dahlberg's Berkeley affair with the perfect Angelica. He who has ears to hear, let him hear. He lusted after her, ravished her from "an automobile Hittite", was unfulfilled by her, and left her -- for New York! How many men have done the same thing, understood their shame and foolishness, and repeated it. "Pray unto God, O human gnat, for a wise mistake", says Edward Dahlberg.

Before going to New York, Dahlberg looked in on his mother for a while and was destroyed. All his airs and learning were as chaff and stubble to her obduracy, ragged in the face of hopelessness. Because he could not accept his mother -- even when she shuffled past his eyes -- he longed for a father and she knew it. When he plucked an elderly photograph from her small brood of souvenirs and plagued Lizzie for an identification, her lips were stitched.

I roared, "It is Saul! Who else could my father be? I know it is Saul. My blood is ruined; a thousand lusts boil in his skin and in his tumored brain. But where is he? You must know. He is my father. Tell me, I must know...or live and die unborn ...for I will wail all the hours of my flesh if I am unfilled by a father!" (BIWF, p. 70)

New York was a Golgotha to Dahlberg, and he returned to his mother. Which was worse? He was moderately learned and had written a few books but was he more just for it? When he was not with his mother he castigated himself and vowed never to become peevish because she was a slattern. His brain realized that her life left her in disarray -- but then he would see her and could not stomach her. Perhaps because of him, she had to be the way she was. They were each other's burden.

Let me say now that I have not the least respect for my moral nature. I do what I am, and though I would do otherwise, I cannot. I do not say this easily, but with infernal pain in my heart. Perhaps, after many years in libraries, I can prattle better than I did. Has not Addison or Steele asserted that no one was any better for beholding a Venus done by Praxiteles? Some are the worse for having read Swift, Defoe or Chaucer. Several thousand volumes are the making of a marvelous mask, for aesthetics

is a style of living, enunciation -- and affectation. (BIWF, p. 97)

It is likely that Dahlberg felt for his mother the same apathy he has described in Theodore Dreiser. He had not the masculine force, the father's will within him to cherish her, although all around him she hung like a fog. After Tobias Emeritch had fled, expired, and showered a fortune all over his brother and sister, Lizzie was at her wits' finish. Her son scraped together a resolve against the Reaper: "My mother must not be taken by surprise; I will watch over her with the spear and javelin of the mind." (BIWF, p. 187) It came to nothing, for the buckler of the intelligence is of no worth save it be peopled by compassions. When they played cards he could not let her cheat; with her prospects, it was innocent enough; to what other winning or satisfaction could she look?

After Tobias Emeritch died, Lizzie joined her son, who was in New York, again. Her life within the big city was so patched that she surmised she had defected from an Eden in the weedy environs of Kansas City.

Since Dahlberg feels that consciousness is a trance, the merest parcel of the Dream (which no man's will controls), it is no wonder that he can easily dispense with time in his own life story. The days of his stay abroad in the thirties, what he did during his Season in Hell after he had refused to write any more naturalistic novels, what he did during his first marriage -- very little of these events is traced in any manner (lineally or associatively) in his autobiography, although sketches of them are to be found in his letters and essays. Toward the end of his mother's life, Dahlberg came to realize that she was the only potent vision in his day-dream. "Should I err against her dear relics or trouble her sleep, may no one imagine that she has not always been for me the three Marys of the New Testament. Moreover, whatever I imagine I know is taken from my mother's body, and this is the memoir of her body." (BIWF, p. 4) Paul Carroll explains how this is so:

She becomes Mary the Virgin Mother in that the author like

Jesus, feels that no man really possessed her but himself; Mary the Magdalene in that a stable of suitors actually copulated with her; and Mary the sister of Lazarus in that the author by conjuring back the ghost of his boyhood is her brother, and during the hobo wanderings of his young manhood he is always dead like Lazarus, until he returns home to her. (EDR, p. xiv)

Water is the parent of dreams and sometimes of action, which is compassion. Jesus was baptized in water; in water he washed the disciples' feet. He opened the eyes of the blind with moistened clay. In Because I Was Flesh, Dahlberg's dreams rise and fall like tides, and when they are at their lowest he feels more inactive than usual. The dream of cardinal importance to him occurs late in the book, when perhaps he was existing in New York. In it, Saul was revealed to him as a tender cloven maggot which cautioned, "...do not renounce me lest you mangle your own worms; no man can flee from his own worms and not be an evil to himself." (BIWF, p. 217) The dream changed then, as dreams will, and a Jesus was revealed to Dahlberg, who had the hair of Saul and the long nose of Lizzie. He claimed to be the son of the Magdalene, whom he loved above all others.

Did Miriam Megaddela Neshaya, the lady barber who had dressed Yeshu's locks also shave and manicure customers in Memphis, Louisville, New Orleans and Dallas? Now I saw her standing at her regular chair, holding the comb and scissors in her hands, and when she laid them down for a moment, she folded the curls that hung over my forehead. Who was sitting in her chair -- the Nazarene or I? There were large seals of bastardy on his chest and loins, and the gore fell at his feet, and I bent down to kiss the illegitimate blood. (BIWF, p. 218)

As Jesus had no Joseph, he was despised and needed to invent his friends and disciples. In Dahlberg's dream he is truly insubstantial -- "No-place, no-time, no-body" -- and this is why he cautions his interlocutor, "take heed lest you forget that the law is never the heart." (BIWF, p. 219) In the dream Dahlberg is torn between his concern to seek out his own paternal Saul and his itch to find out cheap rational secrets about the miracles of the Gospels. He is quickly silenced by Jesus' retort that "When a man slumbers, he can perform miracles." ⁷

The next scene in the vision connects the boy Edward with the address of the

Star Lady Barbershop, his mother's emporium. 16 East 8 was his Jehovah for both were seven-lettered utterances of the name of his parent and his God. When is where is what. Dahlberg, upon awaking, knew simply that he loved his memories of the unimportant shop and the sluttish alley it hid.

Is there no real revelation after childhood? Can we learn only by remembering what we felt then? Do our souls need dirt, lice, rats, mud puddles and woe? The sweetest fennel makes us indolent and gives antiseptic memories. We caress and stroke our rotten starved years because the dream requires it. (BIWF, p. 222)

Dahlberg lived with himself and looked at his mother and knew it was true. Her present and his were ghastly; their pasts were all they had, and what were they? Lizzie wanted a future and was determined to live for it. Well, she had always been a little mad; that was obvious. Her son still could not see beyond himself and since his constant thought was of his mother's disappearance, he avoided her, which was the same thing. How could he truthfully imagine a father and desire to find him if he could not approach the parent available to him?

The solution was to hand -- he would get married and go away. The marriage was not superb, since it was apparently quite technical: Dahlberg needed something to warm his lower trunk as he slept. Lizzie promptly pauperized herself, selling her Northmoor property for her son's sake; she gave him money, which she hoped would create the future she longed for them -- especially him -- to have. "Now when I regarded this pile of palsied spirit and tatters before me, a shrewd, cold feeling came over me; the demon sat on my lips and smirked at me: 'Will she die before she becomes a burden to you?'" (BIWF, p. 230)

Although a doctor had said she would live long, she was comparatively quick in going under the earth's lid. (Dahlberg was not present when she died; nor was anyone else.) "Nothing is dead -- neither Christ nor the widow Lizzie. Nor will the Star Lady barbershop ever expire -- because there is no time and nothing really changes." (BIWF, p. 53)

Edward Dahlberg could not save his mother. She would not have been his mother if she could have been saved. He did not want to save her; he would not have been Edward Dahlberg if he did.⁹ That was their (unchristian) tragedy. His action for her could only be the result of the steeping of his imagination's error in and out of time and the consequent turning from that error to admit it in art to her glory -- because he was flesh.

Conclusion

"A lifetime of reading" (Harold Billings)

Other essays could well be written to emphasize different aspects of Dahlberg's art. I want to talk a little now about these hypothetical critiques; I shall also make a few conjectures about contemporary society from what I presume is a Dahlbergian point of view. The latter theories are only that because Dahlberg has scant interest in being contemporaneous. He has not made any comments that I have been able to find, on our peace marches, hippies, or Marshall McLuhan.

These topics have occurred to me in connection with the work of Edward Dahlberg: a paper on his use of water symbolism; an extended one contrasting his stance with that of Charles Olson and taking as a springboard Olson's comment in a dedication to Dahlberg of a short section of Call Me Ishmael: "...I imagine you have turned...to the Mediterranean world, and Christ"; and finally, there are at least three quite long essays to be done: one on Dahlberg's style -- this could mention the difficulty encountered with the poems and could employ the critical attitudes of Allen Tate; another on his sources; the third about his peculiar (religious) unorthodoxy.² The emphases of my own composition have been eclectic; generic, thematic, mythological, biographical. Expanded and more fully researched and better organized, its claims could stand as a general introduction to Dahlberg's thought.

At present, Jonathan Williams is publishing a collection of essays in praise of Dahlberg; it is long overdue. Harold Billings has collected and introduced some perspicacious reviews and articles on Dahlberg. Roger Beacham has handsomely published them as Edward Dahlberg: American Ishmael Of Letters; this book is now the definitive introduction to his work and it appeared just before his latest book, The Carnal Myth, which appeared at the start of 1968.

Edward Dahlberg should be liberally represented in dictionaries of quotations.

However, such a lack of obscurity he might dislike; he is disgusted by anthologies and inclusion in them would tend to make him an academic industry instead of a deity of the hearth or the bedside. Allen Tate has claimed that in Cipango's Hinder Door Mr. Dahlberg is obsessed with the theme that Abel is our feeling -- because he is our past? -- whom we Cains have killed. This is the theme of everything Dahlberg has ever penned and his variations upon it are legion. For this essay alone I made hundreds of pages of excerpts from his work and often had to choose one of several astounding phrases when a citation was necessary. Sometimes I lost the location of a keystone sentence and could not then use it for lack of a reference. This was an unavoidable lapse in my memory, not my research technique; however, it does point up the need in Dahlberg's books for better indexing (only Epitaphs Of Our Times has an index and it is next to useless, usually referring only to people and book titles). I would like to know the location of this phrase by Dahlberg: "first came NO-THING, then the Word, and then the apple." It is a marvellous polemic and I think I have it almost right, at least. It sums up perfectly Dahlberg's insistence that the intellect as presented literarily is naturally precedent in order of creation -- and by extension importance -- to its evidence in the visual or plastic arts. I would buy a Dahlberg concordance in a trice.

No fewer than six of Dahlberg's thirteen books are out of print and at least three of them, The Flea Of Sodom, Truth Is More Sacred, and The Leafless American, should be so reprinted as to make them the transient inhabitants of all respectable bookstores. Those of his works which are now only limited editions -- Cipango's Hinder Door, for example, was printed one thousand times three years ago -- should also be made more readily available.

In Chapter Three I talked a little of hippiedom. Dahlberg has probably not written any thing about "hippies", although he has taken time to club such men as Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, Robert Duncan, and "Saint Anthony Adding Machine

Burroughs". I am safe, I think, in supposing would have no time for hippies. Their name is barbaric and I will overgeneralize about them to make a point -- many among them are conscientiously illiterate and consider themselves spawn only of the Bomb, psychedelic drugs, and electronic music and its associated technology (radio and television).³ They are often beyond words or print; perhaps words and print are beyond them. One need only peruse their newspapers to realize at least that these are the alternatives. Marshall McLuhan, by default advocatus diaboli -- whom Dahlberg would no doubt abominate -- has said that our present electronic planet is perforce a village. Hippies make a point of pseudo-primitive or communal existence, the best among them on a scale and in a style akin to that of the Indians or the nineteenth century communalists. It remains to be seen whether any decent bucolic art will result -- the best literature contingent upon contemporary bohemia so far has been Gary Snyder's A Range Of Poems, and perhaps Paul Goodman's underground epic, The Empire City.

The careful reader of Dahlberg will find his conventional ideas of clarity of expression called totally into question. Although Dahlberg is rarely anything less than complete comprehensible, he scatters punctuation, parallelism, verb-subject agreement, and reference of pronouns to antecedents. He relies for his exactitude upon his staggering vocabulary. The most useful book to have near when reading him is a foot-thick Oxford dictionary. I think that much of the time he writes with half a mind pour épater les grammariens. (This has not prevented him from being a most passionate student of a great number of writers who have imbibed the trivium and quadrivium as their mother's milk.) He has claimed that virtually all he knows about grammar is that the god Thoth invented the semi-vowel.

In addition to all the other delights which we have marked in the art of Edward Dahlberg, it should be mentioned that his work is, along with that of Jorge Luis Borges, perhaps, the twentieth century's most comprehensive guide to world:

literature. To have his books as companions would necessitate nothing less than what he proffers, ⁴ a "lifetime of reading". (He could and should be imitated too -- if he is acknowledged -- for recognition and praise feed the soul and influence intelligently absorbed perpetuates art.)

To conclude, here is a sentence from a letter Dahlberg sent to Robert M. Hutchins: "I have human fervour, and whenever I meet anybody I do all I can to drive him to a sage book." (ECOT, p. 23) If, as a result of having fared through this essay, my reader thinks as much of me -- which is to say, if he feels constrained to read the works of Edward Dahlberg, I shall have achieved what I set out to do.

Notes

Abstract

1. Jonathan Williams, "Edward Dahlberg's Book of Lazarus," in Harold Billings, (ed.), Edward Dahlberg: American Ishmael of Letters, Selected Critical Essays With an Introduction, Austin, Roger Beacham, 1968, p. 27.

Introduction

1. Allen Tate, "Is Literary Criticism Possible?" in Collected Essays, Denver, Alan Swallow, 1959, p. 474.
2. Ibid., p. 478.
3. Ibid., p. 481.
4. Ibid., p. 482.
5. Ibid., p. 486.
6. John Aubrey, Brief Lives (ed. Oliver Lawson Dick), London, Secker and Warburg, 1949, p. 214.
7. I suspect my perusal of the art of Edward Dahlberg has been to me as a tight curb. I have been shown the folly of my lazy reading habits -- they waste time. Perhaps I may recover some of the energy which I had in the reading of my childhood when The Jungle Book, Tom and the Water-Babies, The Secret Garden, The Swiss Family Robinson, Robinson Crusoe, Penrod, Tom Brown's Schooldays, Pinocchio, and Wind In The Willows were my manna. Of course I do not consider that to study these books is now my sole inclination. Although peace is not escapism, I quite concur with Edward Dahlberg when he writes,

As for me, I can find little or no contentment save in the balsam of poetry or criticism or belles lettres; let it be Raleigh or Swift or Hazlitt or The Forlorn Demon, for I can lie a dreaming with a boke, and imagine myself stretched upon that oxhide in Iberia where Menelaus once slept. (AFO, p. 166)

Chapter One

1. Sir Philip Sidney, "The Defense of Poesie", in O.B. Hardison, Jr. (ed.), English Literary Criticism: The Renaissance, New York, Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1963, p. 104.
2. Ibid., p. 100.

3. Read Kenneth Burke, "Magic and Religion", in Perspectives by Incongruity (ed. Stanley Edgar Hyman), Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1964, pp. 118-122.
4. Paul Carroll, "Introduction" to The Edward Dahlberg Reader, New York, New Directions, 1967, p. xiv.
5. Bertrand Russell, History of Western Philosophy, London, Allen and Unwin, 1965, p. 592.
(I would contrast Dahlberg to William Blake in this respect; Blake in his Prophetic Books sacrifices drama for consistency.)
6. Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, The Ingenious Gentleman, Don Quixote de la Mancha, in The Portable Cervantes, translated by Samuel Putnam, New York, Viking, 1960, p. 698.
7. Ibid., p. 700.
8. Edward Dahlberg, "Further Sorrows of Priapus", in James Laughlin (ed.), New Directions in Prose and Poetry # 19, New York, New Directions, 1966, p. 75.
9. Robert Duncan, "Against Nature", Poetry 94, Chicago, 1959, p. 57.
10. Ibid., p. 59.
(There is an interesting counterblast to this sort of Lawrentian proclamation in one of Dahlberg's letters on Lawrence in Truth Is More Sacred, p. 89: "He who trusts his blood is stubble and chaff in the wind, and knows not where he is to be driven. The blood is deceitful and unstable, and it changes its shape as often as avarice, sloth, vanity and stupidity beckon it to be the goat, the swine, or the ass.")
11. Yvor Winters, "The Significance of The Bridge by Hart Crane, or What Are We to Think of Professor X?", in In Defense Of Reason, Denver, Alan Swallow, 1947, p. 109.
12. Allen Ginsberg, Kaddish and Other Poems, 1958-60, San Francisco, City Lights, 1961, p. 45.
13. Ibid., pp. 83-5.
14. Yvor Winters, The Function Of Criticism, Denver, Alan Swallow, 1957, p. 200.
15. Genesis 5:24.

Chapter Two

1. Sir Herbert Read, "Foreword" to Edward Dahlberg, Alms For Oblivion, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1964, p. viii.
2. Loc. cit.
3. Loc. cit.

4. Dahlberg, "Further Sorrows Of Priapus", in Laughlin, op. cit., p. 75.
5. Henry David Thoreau, "Civil Disobedience", in Sculley Bradley, Richard Croom Beatty, E. Hudson Long (eds.), The American Tradition In Literature, New York, W.W. Norton, 1967, p. 740.
6. Henry David Thoreau, Walden, in Bradley, Beatty, and Long, op. cit., p. 720.
7. Henry David Thoreau, The Journals, quoted in Robert E. Spiller, Willard Thorp, Thomas H. Johnson, and Henry Seidel Canby, Literary History of the United States, New York, Macmillan, 1960, p. 400.
8. Read, "Foreword" to Dahlberg, Alms for Oblivion, pp. ix-x.
9. Tate, Collected Essays, p. 60.
10. Sherwood Anderson, Winesburg, Ohio, New York, Penguin Books, 1946, pp. 130-1.
11. Ibid., p. 153.
12. Earlier in Truth Is More Sacred Dahlberg writes, "It is not my purpose to judge the lives of the poets, for they are vain all day long and more amorous than the quail or the partridge." (p. 19) Ezra Pound has recently been reported as disclaiming -- once to no less than Allen Ginsberg -- his Cantos, calling them "a botch". Ginsberg was happy to find that Pound is no longer an anti-Semite and hastened to assure him that many readers and poets considered that the Cantos had aided them greatly.
13. Read, op. cit., in Dahlberg, Alms For Oblivion, p. ix.

Chapter Three

1. Edouard Roditi, "Prophet or Pedant", Poetry 77, p. 236.
2. loc. cit.
3. Thoreau, "Civil Disobedience", in Bradley, Beatty, Long, op. cit., p. 728.
4. Allen Tate, "The Function of a Critical Quarterly", in op. cit., pp. 65-66.
5. Allen Tate, "Foreword" to Edward Dahlberg, Cipango's Hinder Door, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1965, p. 8.

6. Charles Olson, "Human Universe", in Selected Writings (edited and with an introduction by Robert Creeley), New York, New Directions, 1966, p. 58.

The relationship between Olson and Dahlberg is most fascinating. They refer to each other in the work they published in the 1940's. Olson took over a teaching position vacated by Dahlberg at Black Mountain College. The difference between their stances is obvious, vast, and perhaps irreconcilable. Olson embraces "barbarity"; Dahlberg observes it and is usually bemused or disgusted by it. "Civilization" to Dahlberg denotes an order the human being can at least notice, if not impose; to Olson, it means a human satisfaction with the lack of hierarchy in Nature. "Human Universe" is built

around one key word -- unselectedness. I have thought much about the relationship between the ideas of these two men. An exhaustive comparison of their achievements is very necessary; they are, I think, the pivotal figures of twentieth century American literature.

7. Kenneth Burke, "William Carlos Williams: Two Judgments", in J. Hillis Miller (ed.), William Carlos Williams: A Collection of Critical Essays, Englewood Cliffs, Prentice-Hall, 1966, pp. 51-2.

8. The trade-unionists are, as Josephine Herbst once very accurately remarked, dinner-pail apostles of wages, hours, and comforts -- the three beasts that today are together devouring Conscience, Honesty, and Justice. The lodestar of the trade-unionist is apathy, and his indifference to the people is as cynical as that of the money Borgia, the college professor, and the writer. The ancient prophet weighed the egg as carefully as he did the law, the spirit, the wine, and the oil of the people. Do the trade unions, the professors, or the poets go out like angry Gideons to combat thieves, usury, cartels, milk at twenty-three cents a quart or beef at a dollar-ten a pound? The nation has become booty, and no one advises the impotent people punished by thievish prices and draconian taxes, that what matters most is not the auto pleb, the college professor, or the writer, but good workmanship, learning, and literature. (AFO, p. 86)

9. Dahlberg likes guerilla tactics. In Can These Bones Live (p. 38) there is the ancestor to this idea. He is talking about the Communist apostates who in their violence have kissed the State rod.

20. Were they even true militants of revolutionary coercion, they would go into the pulsing streets of every city and industrial center and enact the unspeakable horror of the hydra, WAR, just as the English troupe used to do as it went from one hamlet to another with the Passion Play. They would inculcate the General Strike and organize with syndicalist imagination guerilla strikes in every town to destroy the mysticism of the State, to recreate the people, and to make them ready for their own odyssey.

10. In Canada, the story of Louis Riel was made into a television play a few years ago by the Canadian Broadcasting Company -- it may have won an award. I saw the script and it claimed that the play had not yet been produced for the professional stage. At the University of British Columbia, I heard Bruno Gerussi recite Riel's vindication of himself. Dahlberg is right when he says "Society is clairvoyant, knows how to govern, when to load its musket, when to erect an obelisk -- when to canonize." (CTBL, p. 15) Had that drama and that soliloquy been staged by brutalized Metis from Faust, Alberta, right in front of the Houses of Parliament during (say) the Flag Debate, the members of the entire company would have been clapped in irons. Or maybe they would have been interviewed by Norman DePoe or Ron Collister and their yells would have rated a one-minute spot on the late night news.
11. It is proper to clear some ambiguity I may be causing. As a Canadian in

Canada I sometimes feel embarrassed to be writing ready equations about the United States, a country much more deeply, or perhaps just more obviously stricken than my own. Marshall McLuhan has said, I think, that no-one knows more about Americans than Canadians. This is a vanity; on such a scale, probably no one knows (more) about anything. The main differences between Canada and the United States -- I know it is blasphemous to lay blanket descriptive phrases on two hundred and fifty million people -- are that we are in Canada more solitary than Americans; most of us, like most of them, are not indigenous, though we are spread more thinly. We bark through the telephone more than any other animal on the face of the globe. We are much cannier than Americans in our discriminations -- we do not admit the existence of our minorities upon whom we tread. We are more timorous than Americans, which is usually taken for a finely-honed conservatism. This is a sorry falsehood and a linguistic perversion; we have a weaker sense of history than those to the south of us. The French have been in this country as settlers as long as the Puritans, the British as conquerors and settlers longer than the Declaration of Independence. Have we produced a great, even if wounded literature, visual art, or music? Have we accounted for much of our non-autochthonous behaviour in epic terms? We have not; I suspect we have given in too much to the SPACE, the rocks, the woods, the rivers, the climate, the Church, and lucre. Our heroes are the mammon Company of Adventurers of England Trading Into Hudson's Bay and the prehensile Royal Northwest Mounted Police. What a shame it is we did not learn of the Indian and the buffalo and the lakes before we decimated them. We have not been wrenched by the Enlightenment out of our ecclesiastical robes; electronics is doing that, and the process will likely go to completion after we have decorously omitted the twentieth century and before we know who we are. Art, like people, may be obsolete before we realize what we might have done with it. Canada possesses the weathers of Russia without its passions, which are likely the results of a millenium of muzhiks and their nobility, seethed together. Canada also has much of the wealth and style of the United States without the guilt and hysteria Americans are starting to see are concomitant with the abuse of that wealth and style. We are a nation of pygmies, very lucky, we think, and certainly very subtle. Personally, I am apprehensive; we may well have spent our Centennial wrongly, as a gigantic, misplaced, ineffectual, and Narcissistic puberty rite.

12. Karl Shapiro, "To Abolish Children", Esquire Magazine, April, 1968, pp. 119-121.
13. G. Legman, The Fake Revolt, New York, Breaking Point Press, 1967.
14. Lately I bought a pound of unground wheat for eighteen cents a pound at a tiny health-food store near my house. The ground cereal grain I buy in a supermarket costs twenty-nine cents the two-pound box. It is manufactured in bulk. I could buy a cereal that has certain additives to prevent spoilage during its trip from its manufacturer (who could just as well be across the inlet as a thousand miles or fifteen hundred miles away) to my cooking-pot. I shall not bother defending the self-evident morality of pure foods; what dismays me is the fact that had I a wish to duplicate or alter -- in way control -- the composition of my breakfast cereal with the wholesome grains I could buy, measure, combine and grind in small lots of a few pounds, from local distributors, the difference in cost would rise with every pound of whole grain I chose to buy.

15. If the reader now refers to the Duncan incident recounted in Chapter Two, he may wonder about my credibility or consistency. I think that Dahlberg distrusts acquiescence with a Hebraic biliousness. However, his relationships with his friends tumble him, it seems, into his own trap. Our necessity to overcome loneliness should be at least partially recognized as a desire to avoid infinitude (or should I say, chaos?), which is the loneliness of God. Job sat on a very temporal dunghill and did not compromise. This may have been shrewd. Perhaps I am caught between walls of possibility, and have failed my language or am traduced by it. "Resolve these ambiguities who can?" (CTBL, p. 3)
- (Having purchased Edward Dahlberg: American Ishmael Of Letters after I had finished this essay, I was intrigued to find my judgment of Dahlberg's relationships with his friends is just that of Kay Boyle, who writes in that book on this subject. It eases one to be in good company. Allen Tate has said that he often finds his most independent judgments to be his most conventional ones.

Chapter Four

1. Tate, "Foreword" to Dahlberg, Cipango's Hinder Door, p. 8.
 2. Ira Sandperl, "Peace as Pitfall", Institute for the Study of Non-Violence Journal, #4, Carmel, California, November, 1967, p. 13.
 3. In Edward Dahlberg: American Ishmael of Letters, Professor Joseph Slate has some extremely valuable insights into the technique of The Sorrows Of Priapus. He notes that Dahlberg achieves his effects by the use of irony and the apothegm. The double nature of Priapus / forgetful man is explored in many ways: Dahlberg varies his mode of diction from clause to clause; he employs parallelism; he twists his syntax ("Ham and his son Cush were the original artists, for painting is all about the nudity of other people and ourselves").
- The most important idea Slate has about apothegms is this:

Each sentence stands alone. The lack of connection by pronouns is significant. The paragraph is a collection of separate sentences, not a logically related unit. This discontinuity not only demands of the reader an unusual capacity for seeing unity where it is not apparent ("a book for brave readers and poets", Dahlberg calls The Sorrows), but it also turns the reader back to a time almost lost in the mists of literary history when the bestiary was a primordial list, a creative ritual, and very close to myth. (p. 81)

Exactly. This statement amplifies what noted, first, about Edward Dahlberg's view of the world -- that it is composed of everlastingly discrete particles whose job it is to at least try to come together; and second, my perception that Dahlberg's paragraph is structurally most eccentric, in that it often takes the slightest account possible of lineal progression and the ordinary cohesion that progression is considered to offer.

4. William Carlos Williams, "The Destruction of Tenochtitlan", in In The American Grain, New York, New Directions, 1956, pp. 31-2.

5. I realize that for a fable I am neglecting Lord Acton's saw which is applicable to all nations with imperial egos but the cliché broadcast against Lyndon Baines Johnson -- that he considers himself "President of all the people" -- may be analogous to the ancient conception native to the Chinese -- that China is the centre of the earth.
6. See Ciro Alegria, The Golden Serpent, Toronto, The New American Library Of Canada (Signet Classic CP 114), 1963. This book is exactly what Dahlberg talks about; it is a group of short stories about the half-Indian inhabitants of the banks of the Marañón River of Peru. They go forth upon their treacherous river with slender balsa rafts and their bravery is matched only by the extent to which they are oppressed by the central government at Lima. Their story is not told naturalistically, however, and makes a legend of the river and the courage of the men and women who live beside it and who love it and each other.
7. My aim in discussing The Sorrows Of Priapus was not primarily to say something new, although I hoped that I would be able to do so. I was a bit worried, as in Chapter Two, about repetition and tried to achieve a mosaic's tension, not tedium, by attacking the same very resonant Dahlberg themes from different flanks. (Be it said that Dahlberg is himself as repetitive as the Bible, Shakespeare, or Marx, and is forever saying the same thing with but a generic difference.) Here is a comment by Harold Billings, who introduces perceptively The Leafless American:

There is a lifetime of reading in this [work] alone, for Dahlberg is so much, so complex, he cannot be reduced to explication. He can only be read, re-read, and accepted as a writer unique, and uniquely American.

I agree with Mr. Billings -- Dahlberg does not lend himself to paraphrase. My style in the section on The Sorrows Of Priapus is pallid Dahlberg. The parody is unintentional and results from my drive to understand him. I hope imitation is the sincerest form of appreciation, not flattery; better, I hope we become what we behold.

[Eccovi!

Judge ye!

Have I dug him up again?]

In a way, it is pernicious to read a great writer, for if, as a result, one's perceptions become more acute, then only he is to blame, and not those many he has metamorphosed -- any of whom might have done the same for us, and all of whom might have done much more. Of course, the solution to the problem is to read everything. But we must always be ware of what Allen Tate names the "authority...not visibly earned."

8. A semantic curiosity deserves mention here: the word "extempore" can connote freshness and vivacity. Dahlberg would agree soon that The Flea Of Sodom is a more vivacious work than his essays or letters.
9. Sir Herbert Read, "Foreword" to Edward Dahlberg, The Flea Of Sodom, New York, New Directions, 1950, p. 9.
10. We canonize Newton, whom John Barth says was an invert; Copernicus, who was

almost pathically timorous and irascible; and (I think it was) Kepler, who likely had not a moment's rest; so plagued was he by disease and the mutability of princely favour. I do not complain about their exploits, which eradicated cumbrous habits of thoughts. But they also gave us the space race, the value of which today is doubtful; and for all their intelligence, were they better people or did they have great joy of it? I am not denigrating wisdom; I just do point out that often it has nothing to do with anything but itself -- Koestler's title for his book about the cosmographers is so apt; he called it The Sleepwalkers.

11. Norman Mailer, The Way It Is, CBC Television, March 3, 1968.
12. Norman Mailer, The Presidential Papers, Bantam Books, Toronto, 1964, p. 172.
13. William Blake, "Annotations to Watson", in The Complete Works (ed. Geoffrey Keynes), Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1966, p. 392.
14. Harold Billings, "Introduction" to Edward Dahlberg, The Leafless American, Sausalito, Roger Beacham, 1967, p. viii.
15. Tate, "Foreword" to Dahlberg, Cipango's Hinder Door, pp. 8-9.

Chapter Five

1. William Blake, "Marriage of Heaven and Hell", in op. cit., p. 152.
2. Paul Carroll, "An Introduction to Edward Dahlberg", in The Edward Dahlberg Reader, p. xiv.
3. It is uncanny; Tobias's words could come straight from The Sorrows Of Priapus or Reasons Of The Heart (this more appropriately). However, he could never say with Dahlberg, "All of life is a mistake, and I mean to commit it as valiantly as I can." The body bites its thumb at wisdom and the meaning of words depends greatly upon how they are blurted.
4. e.e. cummings, "anyone lived in a pretty how town", Oscar Williams (ed.), A Little Treasury of Modern Poetry, New York, Scribner's, 1952, p. 361.
5. Referring to Bottom Dogs, Allen Tate has declared that he did not think Dahlberg "should have repudiated this powerful book." I shall not denounce Bottom Dogs, although it does not bear more than a single close reading. How many critics could write such a bad novel, even if they had to?
6. Concerning this sentence and the one just before it, Allen Tate has written a passage with which I agree totally:

I wish we had a third word which would express an attitude toward history which is different from both unhistorical and antihistorical; perhaps the word a-historical conveys what I mean. Mr. Dahlberg has an immense knowledge of western literature, along with an intuitive sense of our history; but this is not the history of the modern historians; it is the history of historians like Herodotus, before historical method reduced the past to the relativism of time. Mr. Dahlberg's history is the history of man as

he was experiencing history at certain definite times; it is therefore expressed in the myths and legends of those moments; and so he can see an incident of sordid misery in the orphan asylum of Because I Was Flesh as a timeless moment in the struggle of man to recover and keep his dignity....The Cynocephali are not merely a learned and ornamental allusion, or vain indulgence of the author. The Cynocephali are as real to Dahlberg as the wretched orphans. The lost moment in the orphan asylum is given a universal and timeless reality because it exists simultaneously with the dog-headed monsters of antiquity; it occupies the entire imaginative stretch between Hesiod and Kansas City. If Mr. Dahlberg has a "method" I think that I have described it; but it is a method that he has never had to formulate; and it is therefore a style of great eloquence and enormous range which permits him to see "eternity in a grain of sand."

(CHD, p. 7)

7. For the first time, in reading Dahlberg, I have been faced with the four elements used seriously and not as mere literature. I have not educated myself to their complexities and I fear I do not handle them with skill. I can understand the connection between water and dreams, but I am punctured by Dahlberg's use of the dream here -- it seems profoundly undramatic. Also, that Jesus is a hydromancer is a very mean conception of Him, I fear, and all too rational / consistent a concession to Proteus. Either he was the author of the prodigies, or he was not. Hypnosis is fakery, as are mirrors. Belief should take the hindmost. Mercury is the stuff of mirrors and is liquid metal. Possibly this retort of his is a sign of his being "subtly unmanned" -- the phrase is Dahlberg's -- by Dahlberg's impudent and fearful questionings. Dahlberg's entire unorthodoxy seems to me to be a little worldly -- he is forever concerned to act as if God exists, which hedging gives away his game. I am nervous, though; maybe Proteus is the god of (my?) composition too, and not Mnemosyne. ("Ne:do no fors of dremes", say Dan Catoun and Madame Pertelote.)
8. Compare Because I Was Flesh, page 233: "...it would be idle to say that Lizzie Dalberg, whose bones still have sentience, is what she was. She is and she is not, and that is the difference between the trance we call being and that other immense experience we name death."
9. It is hideous and coarse to assume that we can do something for others -- and it is vile not to endeavour to do it. I had not the strength to handle her tragedy, for my will has failed me every hour of the day. It is said that a wise man falls down seven times a day and rises; I have fallen and never gotten up. (BIWF, p. 233)

Conclusion

1. Charles Olson, Call Me Ishmael, San Francisco, City Lights, 1958, p. 88.
2. Read the best Western literature and you will find that Dahlberg has ap-

propriated it to his own idiom. This restores one's soul to faith in the honourable state of belles lettres and their criticism, now sunk, alas, so low. However, it cannot help but be the excuse for one, two, three, many Ph.D.'s.

3. In The Fake Revolt, G. Legman has pointed out that the hip generation is by no means original (say) in its interest in sexual perversion in art and life and in the abuse of drugs -- Baudelaire beat them by almost a century, had much more energy as well -- and was even some kind of Catholic.
4. Billings, "Introduction" to Edward Dahlberg, The Leafless American, p. x.

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