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Existentialism and New England: The poetry and criticism of Hayden Carruth

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Existentialism and New England: The Poetry and Criticism of Hayden Carruth

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of English

by

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Preface

This is the first full-scale study of the poetry and criticism of Hayden Carruth, and I have tried to consider as much of his vast output as possible. The study begins with three chapters which describe and analyze Carruth's development book by book, period by period, from 1959 to 1983. Though all of his collections overlap in the order of the composition of the poems in them, it has been possible to put the books in a reasonably straightforward chronological sequence. Following these first chapters, in "Carruth's Existential Revisions of Walden," I consider Carruth's response to the New England literary tradition by way of elaborating his response to Thoreau in particular, with asides into Emerson, Robert Lowell, and Paul Goodman. In the next chapter, "Erotic Conventions," I explore the nature of the narrative voice in Carruth's long poem The Sleeping Beauty. The final chapter is a study of recent developments in Carruth's work since 1984, especially his critique of cultural optimism. There are remarkable consistencies of vision and of verbal effect in Carruth's work, and in each chapter I have sometimes harkened ahead, sometimes backward in time in describing these connections. Finally, I have appended a 1989 interview with Carruth in which he addresses some of the inquiries I have begun here and provides additional information about his life and work.

Carruth's primary importance is as a poet. I have given attention neither to his novel, Appendix A (1963), nor to his widely respected anthology of twentieth-century American poetry, The Voice That Is Great Within Us (1970). I have also ignored books of two types: those which seem to be minor accomplishments -- though as such, coming from
a major poet, they have their own pleasures and attractions. *The Norfolk Poems* (1961), *The Clay Hill Anthology* (a collection of haiku published in 1970), and *The Mythology of Light and Dark* (1982) are not central to my primary purpose here, which is to show why Carruth's work is important and why it should be read. The second category I have omitted is of recent limited editions, *Mother* (1986), *The Oldest Killed Lake in North America* (1985), and *Lighter Than Aircraft* (1985). These books are not generally available, but as of this writing (July 1989) there are plans for future commercial issues in which they will be included. Adynamia at the terminus is unavoidable in considering a writer who is still working.

In addition to studying the poetry I have also undertaken to show something of Carruth's critical achievement, which is significant not only in programmatic relation to his own poetry but also for its fine style, for its synoptic and attentive scope, and for its incisively brilliant readings. I have approached it in two ways. Along with the initial narration of Carruth's career, I have included an exploration of his critical fiction, *After The Stranger: Imaginary Dialogues With Camus* (1965). *ATS* is an integrated, finished work, and it is extremely important in regard to Carruth's development as an existential thinker. *Working Papers* (1982), and *Effluences From The Sacred Caves* (1983) are miscellaneous selections of essays and reviews written mostly on assignment between 1949 and 1982. Despite their heterogeneity Carruth's visions of the projects in contemporary literature emerge clearly, along with his passionate appreciations of great works of the past. Yet, because of their heterogeneity, it would be misleading, to treat them, as some of his reviewers have done, as if they were a deliberately argued manifesto. Indeed, the fact of their spontaneous discursions is philosophically consistent with Carruth's ideas about the improvised nature of existence. So instead of wringing them for a meta-criticism, I have selected parts of the most salient pieces and brought them to bear on his poetry. In the final chapter I do, however, address certain essays in *Sitting In* (1986) precisely for their
argumentative consistency. I think this is fair because the essays were written freely, not on assignment, and over a relatively short period of time.

Having tried to describe my subject, I should try to explain my methods. I have not included large chunks of biography. Interest in personal activity of artists is ever a lesser kind of interest; Carruth has himself written about his life in many essays, e.g., "Notes About Laughlin's Typewriter" (Ef), and "The Guy Downstairs" (SI). I cannot elaborate on his private life any more than he himself has. If this study is successful, readers primarily interested in the poetry will go to the essays and discover there, in addition to the singular generosity and erudition of his intellect, whatever he has said about his life.

In summoning other writers and thinkers to help illuminate Carruth's work I have tried to limit myself to those with whom he has firm and fairly obvious connections. His thinking is firmly based in secular existentialism, non-violent anarchism, and Yankee pragmatism, and I have used a variety of existential writers in an effort to show where Carruth joins and where he departs from the currents of existential thought. Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, and Camus, as well as Sartre, have at times appeared under "existential" rubrics, although I am aware that Camus not only abjured the rubric but also large parts of Sartre's existential theory. In this cohort Carruth's position is closest in substance to Camus, in the textures of its expression to the puzzling Dane, in force of expression to Nietzsche, and in its implications for the social polity to Sartre. Informing all his intellectual feeling is his life-long affection for Kropotkin, Bakunin, Goldman, for Emerson and for William James.

There are in fact many connections between Carruth's work and issues central to twentieth century philosophy and literature. For example, in Georg Lukaes' critique of Marxist dialectics, *History and Class Consciousness* (Trans. by Rodney Livingstone, MIT Press, 1971), we find this apothegm:

That genesis and history should coincide, or, more exactly, that they should be different aspects of the same process, can only happen if two conditions are
fulfilled. On the one hand, all the categories in which human existence is constructed must appear as the determinants of that existence itself (and not merely of the description of that existence). On the other hand, their succession, their coherence and their connections must appear as aspects of the historical process itself, as the structural components of the present. (159)

This theory of the coincidence between genesis and history describes very well the vision of the relationship between history and the individual in *The Sleeping Beauty*, and it is consistent, or could be shown to be consistent with, Carruth’s ideas of representation in jazz and poetry. An intensive foray in this direction might clarify my style of textual analysis; it might suggest in Carruth a synthetic ground of Marxist and existential aesthetics, but it would also have the effect of leading us away from the poems. Similarly, in the chapter on Carruth’s criticisms of Thoreau the discussions of relative attitudes on love, death, work, and guilt might be explicitly connected with Freudian theories. There are, as I say, a myriad of connections; if I have succeeded in elucidating the poems, readers will be able to make connections which are accountable to their own understanding.

Finally, while using a variety of perspectives and affective interpretations, I have tried to be resolutely subjective, and by that to fashion a reproach to the joylessness and ultimate friability of much academic criticism. I have made a normative declaration: Carruth is an excellent poet. But ranking or rating poets in regard to one another is invidious and probably useless. I might be inclined to do so casually, but to pursue that kind of comparison goes against my amiability toward all serious writing. That amiability, I hope, means that this criticism, like Carruth’s poetry, is an act of communion with its subject and with its readers. So I hope that this book will be taken as such an act. I would not be in regard to Carruth what Pope deplored: one

> Who can his merits selfishly approve  
> And show the sense of it without the love.

Baton Rouge, July 1989
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Abstract

Hayden Carruth (b. 1921) has reached an advanced stage in his distinguished career as a poet, critic, and editor without having received the critical attention which he deserves and which has been accorded many of his less able contemporaries. He is a thorough-going existentialist, a dyed-in-the-wool Yankee, and an anarchist. The study uses these characteristics to explore the importance of his poetry and the nature of his complex relations with his chosen traditions. The first three chapters describe and analyze Carruth's development book by book from 1959 to 1983. The fourth chapter, "Carruth's Existential Revisions of Walden," considers Carruth's response to the New England literary tradition by elaborating his negative response to Thoreau in particular, with asides into Emerson, Paul Goodman, Robert Lowell, and other regional poets. The fifth chapter, "Erotic Conventions," uses a theoretical framework derived from Kierkegaard’s Either/Or to explore the nature of the narrative voice in Carruth's long poem The Sleeping Beauty. The final chapter is an analysis of recent developments in Carruth's work since 1984, especially his on-going critique of cultural optimism. What emerges is that Carruth's work is both an accomplished extension of the central line of lyric poetry written in English and a substantial, essentially American contribution to the current of existential thought.
Hayden Carruth (b. 1921) has reached an advanced stage in his distinguished career as a poet, critic, and editor without having received the critical attention which he deserves and which has been accorded many of his less able contemporaries. Perhaps one reason for this neglect has been Carruth’s relative lack of self-promotion. He lived in northern Vermont for twenty years, until 1978. He taught only a few students at Johnson State College and gave no readings. Most of his books have been prominently and favorably reviewed, but others have been completely ignored. He has published twenty-three books of poetry, a novel, and five collections of criticism, as well as editing the influential anthology of twentieth-century American poetry The Voice That Is Great Within Us. He has been editor of Poetry (Chicago) (1949-50), poetry editor of Harper’s (1977-83), and a current and longstanding member of the editorial board of The Hudson Review. He has received nearly every major award and grant, including a NEA Senior Fellowship Award in 1988.

Carruth is a thorough-going existentialist; he was exposed to the works of Camus during the period when he was reconstructing his personality after an emotional breakdown and subsequent institutionalization and electro-shock therapy in the mid-50s, an experience which he writes about in The Bloomingdale Papers. His book on Camus, After The Stranger, is somewhat autobiographical in regard to the genesis of his own existentialism. Carruth is also a dyed-in-the wool Yankee and an anarchist. Yet, it would be misleading to assume that given these proclivities Carruth rests comfortably defined. He does not. He is a Yankee who has given us some of our most severely negative criticisms of Thoreau. He is an existentialist who has heard voices speaking to him from out of the air. He is a romantic who has spent a lifetime exploring the destructive consequences of that impulse. He is a pragmatist who has made his living as a poet, a poet who has given us in his
collections of essays perhaps the best history of twentieth-century American poetry.

There have been many influences on Carruth’s writings, and I will discuss them as they appear to be salient. His mature voice is clearly his own, yet one of the pleasures of reading his poems is in catching intimations of other voices which he allows to more or less coincide with his own. Many occasional riffs of Pound and Yeats. Deliberate and respectful mocking of Frost. The high lyricism of Duncan. The formal diction of Paul Goodman. The casual courtliness of Cummings and Creeley. The affective music of James Wright. The serious sensuousness of Levertov.

Carruth is a peerless poet of the North. It has been suggested that among his contemporaries Bly and Ammons come close to him in evoking "the Northness of the North," but the range of technique available to Carruth is far greater than theirs. His landscapes have some of the cold emotional chiaroscuros of Frost's most memorable, the sense of human history in Thomas McGrath's, and, to borrow from other languages, the eerie incantatory air of Blok and Heine. Yet, all of these affinities considered, the poet to whom Carruth seems closest -- especially in his books from 1963-83 -- closest in diction, in pace, in voice and in subject is another rather neglected poet, Conrad Aiken.

Carruth comes from the New England which, as a poetic landscape, has been worked as thoroughly as the hills of the actual land. But his poetic ancestors -- Emerson, Dickinson, Robinson, Frost, Scott -- and his neighbors -- Francis, Lowell, Olson, Enslin, Booth, Kinnell -- have not depleted the soil of nourishment for Carruth’s particular crop. In fact, his sense of that tradition, along with the challenge of contributing to a diminishing resource, poetry itself, has created exactly the kind of sparse, severe artistic realm in which Carruth has been able to prove his worth. It is a product not exotic at all, even though it has been heretofore unknown by many. I have tried to choose carefully among his works here in order to give a sense of their richness and strength, but, wanting also to do more than walk through his poetry for the first-time reader, I have had of course to leave many
fine poems out. His Selected Poems is an intelligent sampling, but it contains nothing of
his very best, Contra Mortem and The Sleeping Beauty. The former is still in print in For
You, and there are plans now for reissuing the latter with Copper Canyon Press. Along
with these four books, From Snow and Rock, from Chaos is indispensable to an
introduction.
Chapter One
The Crow and the Heart (1959)

The importance of first books of poetry in regard to foretelling what will follow is not perfect, not at all. One can adduce for example two radically different books: the brilliant prelude of Wallace Steven's Harmonium and the shaky venture of Yeats's Crossways. Hayden Carruth’s first book, The Crow and the Heart, is a combination of true achievement and of poems that are less than promising. In reviewing the book James Dickey, while expressing his general admiration, notes that Carruth has "a set of mannerisms which . . . seem determined to reduce him to the level of a thousand other poets who can do, just as easily as he, most of the things he does in about three-quarters of these poems."1 This is a fair characterization. Dickey senses that many of the occasions of the poems seem not quite inevitable, and the sense of contrivance bears in on the structure and style of the poems. Often the verbal effects are simply or very baroquely distracting: the characteristic dense mode of 50s formalism is choking itself to death. The rhymes are often cloying. In a much later review of James Wright’s work, Carruth himself wrote,

In the late 40s we had an ideal music running in our minds -- for me it was the dirge from Cymbeline (Act IV, II). . . if only, I thought, I could get modern experience into that measure. In general, our favorites were the poets of the English Renaissance, from Wyatt to Marvell, but then we skipped all the way to Hardy, late Yeats, early Pound, Ransome, Muir, Cummings. The rhymes are a giveaway.2

"Golden lads and girls all must/ As chimney sweepers come to dust." This is a beautiful music, but Shakespeare's song is short; it is difficult for most readers to be attentive to page after page of this intensity.
The influence of Yeats, which, as we will see, is apparent well into Carruth’s career, is evident from the very beginning here. *The Crow and the Heart* begins with "The Wreck of the Circus Train," in effect a continuation of Yeats, in whose end, "The Circus Animals’ Desertion," is Hayden Carruth’s beginning.

In a later essay, Carruth, writing about Robert Lowell, asserts,

All young poets...begin, or at least they try to begin, where the mature poets they admire left off. They do this in the compulsion of their literary zeal, in spite of the inevitable unfeasibility of it, owing to the irremediable disparity of experience.(WP,146)

Yes, the artificiality and contrivance assert themselves to an extreme degree: "a total crash,/ Deep in the rising surf of dust." This is metaphoricity out of control. Carruth will spend a lifetime understanding and ultimately trying to overcome the metaphysical consequences of metaphor. But the important thing here is that freedom, freedom of spirit, is inherent in the climax of the poem:

three lions, one
Male with wide masculine mane,

Two female, short, strong, emerged
And looked quickly over the ruin,
Turned and moved toward the hills.

Perhaps we don’t need to be informed by, nor does the line need to be padded with, the adjective "strong." Nor does the omission of a pronoun in the ultimate line do much for the striving toward a climax, but the image is a symbolic one for Carruth: three wild things moving toward the hills. It is a vector of almost eerie prevision for his own life.

*Crow* is a compendious book, a reminder of what poetry "collections" used to be. And it is chockfull of poems that prove Dickey’s objections. "The Snow" is a symbolist poem, three sections of seven iambic pentameter couplets each. Dickey sees that the snow in the poem is "a decorator’s snow." "One nearly can observe, almost believe,/ The servants hurrying behind the snow." Is this decorative, I mean not like Blake’s ornamental energy, but merely decorative, or is Carruth actually trying to evoke and evaluate class distinctions? If the latter, it is far too distant. If the former, aside from its admirable facility, who should care? Yet again it is an early discursion upon a
subject which later will become the vehicle for some of his best poetry. But here the language is self-consciously clotted:

The sparkling meadows rise to farther hills,
Luring a snowcaped fancy to the rim

Where sun's profluent aureate flood descends
And gilds the frozen billows.

Ach! Carruth!, the reader might say, as does the speaker of the title of another poem in this first volume (which shows that the speech is self-consciously dense), "Min Eres Aken of Thy Drasty Speche."

The visionary and verbal effects that resonate so strongly within the body of Carruth's work begin with this first book. In "The Children's Village," the line, "Where sunning blacksnakes woke like whips and fled" is remarkably similar to the final image in "Emergency Haying" (Snow and Rock), "whipped by a bleeding snake," and though the relative power of the latter poem is infinitely greater, the verbal energy is evident in each and all of these first poems, as are the allusive echoes of other poets, primarily Stevens: "Summer and morning bid the mind to ease/ And bend the walker's hopes to ten o'clock./ To chintz-hued coffee time, the casual news./ And airiest speculations," and Frost: The end of the street turns up to meet the church,/ As if the street and steeple were one walk,/ Joined at an angle," and of Hart Crane in "The Street," whose first line, "Invariably dawn seeps stinging in quiet eyes," reeks attractively of Crane's "The Wine Menagerie."

I think it serves no particular purpose at this initial point to spend time explicating the excellences of the many poems; certain patterns emerge. Despite the elliptical and (often merely intellectual) tone of most of the poems, e.g., he refers to Egyptian hieroglyphs in "the Fact of the Matter" but he does not incorporate any kind of hieroglyphic gestures, and the reference remains appropriative in a rather naive fashion, there is a restrained sense of authenticity, of a poignance that comes only from felt experience. For example, in "Laura," despite the insistent metaphoricity, the metaphors are brief, asserted descriptively in service of the image, not as logic; he is not a
modern metaphysical, but at the same time it is clear, as we see in the title poem, an allegorical ballad about the effect of suffering on the artistic imagination, there is often a more neo-classical than a romantic aesthetic. In fact, the diversity of approaches amounts to a contradictory style, the eclecticism with which he has often been charged: romantic lushness in a vocal chiaroscuro with logical astringency: severe technical precision in service of rational articulation, as in "Alice," which is reminiscent of J.V. Cunningham. And the rigorous syntax is coupled with an even more prevalent envouchment of the mysteries, e.g., in the second poem of "Four Love Poems in A Time of Approaching War."

There are many poems such as " "The Storm of Birds: A Recitative" (beginning with thunder and volley, "Outlandish ribbons did not rake the sky...") that reveal that Carruth is not doing what he must do, but showing what he can do, the flaw in most first books. But the best of the poems here are quite fine indeed. In "Mondrian," one of many poems about painting and music, we find a startlingly concise statement about the formal function of art, one that Carruth will affirm and expand throughout his work:

Line
And color make the sign
That shapes the thought to close
With being, make the symbols that forestall
The mind's blind rush to madness in the void of essence.

A stark admonition about the vertiginous ascent involved in the Platonic structure of value. Note that artistic form "forestalls" but does not alone prevent the outrush of ego into possibility. The making of a perfect likeness is impossible, but it is only in these failed contrivances that we exist.

Looking back from the perspective of thirty years after The Crow and the Heart, it is certainly possible to appreciate the virtues of poems like "The Fat Lady," an extraordinary poem. A local narrator, somewhat Frostian in his tone, alternates with an omniscient "poetic" voice in narrating the grotesque story, the lives, loves, and finally the self-immolation of a four-hundred-and-
fifty pound woman. It is, at 127 lines, longish, and perhaps this is the reason it is not in the
Selected Poems. A shame. Yet it was written in what became rather quickly an obsolete mode for
Carruth. There are also poems with the voice and the force of his future accomplishment. In "The
Sound of Snow," taking a congenial theme, one that, because of its themes of remembrance and its
insistence on precision of image rather than on symbolist impulse rises above the poem,"Snow",
Carruth reaches beyond his limitations into intimations of his mature voice. The whole poem
would have to be quoted in order to show how quietly, through the metamorphic memory of the
estranged speaker, it reaches, genuinely, the final sentence: "The stranger shivers and listens/ To
the ceaseless unintelligible whispering of the snow." In context, the slight personification is not
only earned, it is inevitable. There is the same
degree of compositional integrity in "On a Certain Engagement South of Seoul." The terza rima is
so expert that, Dickey's notations on its fluency in evidence, it is naturally unnoticeable on first
reading. Its short declarative sentences, with the pitching forward of the rhymes, are perfectly
decorous for the theme of pain and brotherhood, helpless commitment and communal sorrow.

And then there are the most accomplished poems in the book, the internal explorations of
emotional illness and recovery. "Anxiety" is terse, and it does sing with the music of the dirge
from Cymbeline. To the tortured sensibility the canting of the planet toward the sun, April, creates
frightening irregularities in the definitions of phenomena and of the self. The poem concludes:

But person is gone.
The walker steps on,
Wired by pain
To his bones, insane
In the final danger
Of loss, of anger;
He runs in the meadow
Where he casts no shadow.
And the separate wits
Of his brain are bits
Of memory falling,
Crying, and calling.
And in the cold spring
The wind is singing.
This is his defect, and this is his theme. Memory creates a distance which is perceived both as imposed separation, passive and inevitable loss, and, in its pain of longing, as a wrong in which the self must have participated, as guilt. And more guilt and pain in the necessity of forgetting, forgetting in order to recover and to be free to create a new world. But through all of this there is some belief in the creative potential of suffering. That is evident in "Lines Written in an Asylum," in "Anxious View of a Tree," in "Reflexive," and, most brilliantly, in the thirteen-poem sequence, The Asylum.

The sequential lyric is what Carruth has always done best, here and throughout his career, in Journey To A Known Place, Contra Mortem, North Winter, and The Sleeping Beauty. This sequence is of thirteen fifteen-line paragraphs, a stanza which was inspired by a poem of Paul Goodman's, "In Lydia," which Carruth saw while he was editor of Poetry.

In his review, Dickey noted the eminence of The Asylum:

Carruth amuses himself by being playfully skillful with internal rhyme, inventing bizarre Sitwellian images, being witty and professionally sharp. And there is much of this. But through Carruth's verses-by-anybody we are led slowly and a little restively, like the true mad, into "The Asylum," surely one of the most remarkable sequences of recent years.

Its theme is the disintegration of a personality, the same information Carruth includes in his account of his institutionalization in The Bloomingdale Papers. His persona appears obliquely here. The first verse paragraph shows us the asylum, the old Bloomingdale estate in White Plains, what is now the New York Hospital, Cornell U. Medical Center Downstate Psychiatric Facility. The second paragraph is a surreal scene of a patrol entering a bombed-out church; the third, a memory of a former wife; the fourth a deranged, Jacobean soliloquy; the fifth, a rather oblique suggestion of a connection between Manifest Destiny and personal insanity; the sixth and the seventh describe a metamorphosis, in Chicago, the anarchism of the speaker's adolescence becomes a less innocent, more exacting existentialism; and the eighth poem is about Pound. We see that Carruth's respect for Pound, who is not mentioned by name but his characteristics are unmistakable, is now mixed with sadness and feelings of betrayal because "he of us all had risen/ To history, taking wide
compass, curiously/ And now all hideous, false and false, rotting in wind's prison."

Indeed Pound was Carruth's mentor, though they had never met in person. They did correspond before and during Pound's taking of the Bollingen Prize in 1949. The fact that they both were institutionalized in insane asylums in 1953 must have seemed horribly ironic to Carruth. In a defense of Pound in Poetry in 1949, "The Anti-Poet, All Told" (WP,1), he writes:

Many generations will pass before a young poet can overlook the work of Ezra Pound; only by understanding it and using it -- or perhaps by designedly, knowingly discarding it -- will the poet of the future be able to acknowledge his vocation intelligently and properly.

He reveals later in the essay what he largely learned from Pound:

Poetry is the reason for all things humanly true and beautiful, and the product of them -- wisdom, scholarship, love, teaching, celebration. Love of poetry is the habit of wise men wherever they are, and when for some reason of social or personal disadjustment they are deprived of it, they will be taxed in spirit and do unaccountable things.(WP,3)

This initial idealism provides an interesting contrast to the functional despair about his craft that we will attend in the final chapter of this study. Here the defense of Pound becomes a defense of poetry in general and a statement of Carruth's poetic goals, which include, as he writes in a later essay on Pound, "a vision of goodness, the good that exists somewhere in the universe, the excellence at the heart of experience, which is obscured from us most of the time by the imprecision, not to say chaos, of our human arrangements" (WP,112). Carruth sees that Pound’s debilitating forays into economics caused him to distort history, but that Pound’s predicament should have in the mid-50s saddened his confined disciple is not surprising.

The Asylum continues in the ninth paragraph with a vision of revelation, which causes questions about the standards by which one is declared sane, or insane; the tenth is a recapitulation of the first, a year and a half later; the eleventh, a mythical vision of the arrival of Europeans in America, seeking "asylum": "But what we fled from we shall find." Carruth comes in the course of his miseria to questions about the possibilities of withdrawal as a social strategy. The twelfth verse begins, "Then ultimately asylum is the soul/ Where reason curls like a nut in wrinkled sleep." The ultimate vision here is, as Carruth writes in the introduction to The Bloomingdale Papers, of
"the inner condition of exile as the experience par excellence of the mid-twentieth century." The only hope, if hope it is, is to find and then find a way to maintain the irreducible self. The Asylum ends strangely, with a suggestion of some kind of eternal, universal, even Shelleyan martyrdom: "We lie all nailed and living, love's long gain." It is a rather fuzzy conclusion.

When the poem was reissued in For You (1970) Carruth had made significant revisions. These are not simple rewritings to give the idiom currency in regard to his work of the later period. Most of them are true revisions of the original themes, of the meaning of those experiences in the asylum as they have unfolded in his life. And so what is not revised also takes on added significance. Carruth technically reconsidered what his voice in the mid-50s said about him at that time; the rewriting is an act of critical autobiogenesis, and the revisions are worth noting in some detail because they are an accurate indication of the direction in which his writing moved.

Many of the revisions are away from the overly stylized compression of his early writing and toward immediacy of effect. In One, "walls" becomes "these walls," "the dense" becomes "this dense; "the wind" becomes "this wind"(7), "land" becomes "nation," "this is where" becomes "here is where" (11), "a windy knoll" becomes "this windy knoll"(12). The shift toward immediacy also occurs in the change of syntax and mood, again away from the symbolic and toward the psychologically acute. In the second verse "across my deference to the stars" becomes the more contextually musical and visual "across my catacomb of stars;" "Dispersed,/ Quenched in the murk"(2) becomes "dispersed/ In lumps of fume," again a shift toward the sensory.

The first line of Three has been changed from "Detrital memory shifts in a windy skull" to "Wind is a stealth of memory," that is, from the mingled, not to say mangled, metaphorical to the more abstract, decorously evocative difficulty of perceiving what memory is. In its elusiveness for the poet it is more like wind than like detritus, and this is a more precise phenomenological description. "Kissed at the mouth" becomes "mouth to mouth;" "lissome in love," with its archaic poetic diction, becomes "a marvel in love," which is much more ambiguous. And the address to the woman becomes, again more accurately, an address to memory. The extremely difficult syntax
of "Your absolute art/ Was love, the gift of the meaning part/ Whereof your touch was history, the green earth/ Made mythical" becomes "Your absolute art/ Was love, making the meaning part/ of all madness, myth and history, hard earth/ And its hard cities." This is a substantial revision. "Green" becomes "hard." "Making" instead of "gift" brings in the theme of self-making, responsibility for action, and then comes the correlation between madness and history that is thematically crucial to The Sleeping Beauty. The last lines of this poem give strong evidence of Carruth’s increasing lyrical powers:

No storm or dearth
Can harm it. No mortalness incurs
Its frailty. Times late in madness keep this power
Thus sweet and classical, and it is yours.
Wrack of wind, wide, wide, but here this flower. (1959)

The romanticism about madness is something that Carruth had knocked out of him by experience; the oversimplified notion of the classical was changed by his study of Camus.

No violence or dearth
Can harm it, nor mortality that stirs
Like sounds in the wall. You are gone? This power,
So classical, is here and now and yours.
Wrack of the wind, dream-wrack, and then this flower. (1970)

More flowing and more immediate. In the original "mortalness" had been made to rhyme with "bodiless" in the previous line and with "madness" in the next, but the internal rhyme was hardly worth the awkwardness. In the revision he drops the whole chain. But more important is the effective change in the texture of the vision. "Storm" is dropped for the part of the storm that he means, not the relief, the nourishment, the beauty, but the violence. "Classical" is now qualified by "so," not an intensive here but used in the sense of "thus" "therefore," referring to what follows "here and now and yours," not to the dream-like qualities of an imagined and past classicism, but to the actuality of a world with the excess of vision removed, forced out.

In Six there are equally profound re-visions.

We tried to hurry, breathless, stumbling, sick
Tried to hurry, tired, but it was all done,
End and beginning, the saint and the heretic. (1959)
We tried to hurry, breathless stumbling, tried
To find a way. But everything was done.
Belching, grinning, all the doors swung wide.(1970)

The manic, fragmented, and ultimately inhuman and symbolic extremes of the first self-image
("saint and heretic") give way not only to more subtle rhymes, but also to a truly horrific vision of
the frenetically exhausted intelligence being engulfed in the maw of the asylum.

All of these kinds of changes inform, indeed, compel the large revisions of the final two
paragraphs. Twelve:

Then ultimately asylum is the soul
Where reason curls like a nut in wrinkled sleep;
And here, here on a windy knoll
This house was built to keep
One image of retirement and control.
We practice, we poor folks, to make us whole;
And when the wind bears hard against
Our walls, and soul and thought are tensed
For bladed terror striking from the real
Into our cells, we try
As well as ever we can to know and feel
The natural hopes of good that die
Last of all; sometimes we find out then
The irreducible self; hopes multiply
And reason wakes, and help is safe again. (1959)

Then ultimately asylum is the soul.
Reason curls like a nut in wrinkled sleep,
And here, here on this windy knoll,
Our house was built to keep
One private semblance where we conceive our role.
Thus when our solemn inspectors come to stroll
The shadeless halls, our wives and friends,
We seldom mention how the winds
Shriek in their mouths. Gradually we feel
More natural, we try
To sink like the silent leaves that slide and reel
In anguish down the windy sky.
Sometimes it works. Sometimes we find out then
Our tiny irreducible selves. We die.
And after that we die again, again. (1970)

There is much to admire in the original version. Most poets spend their lives getting to a place
where they can write like this. But look how, given more than a decade of trying, Carruth has
improved the poem. Instead of the just, but also easy, excoriation of society at large for pressuring individuals to conform, "To keep/One image," Carruth has posited a "private semblance wherein each person is self-determining. The narrative is strengthened by the substitution of personal agency for malevolent natural force. The speaker's paranoid response to the institution as building, to the physical environment as the oppressor becomes rather an acknowledgement of the pathological horror of being with other people, even wives and friends, and it is the memories of that horror, of them, through which the inspectors, the doctors, are "strolling" (trolling). The final lines reflect a profound philosophical revision. In the original there is an optimism, a belief in a "natural hope," a resolution and consolation in "knowing," as well as some possibility of an essential, Platonic, self; it is a thing, there, if he can only get well enough to find it. "Hopes multiply," and reason, the sentinel against internal chaos, preserves hope. How utterly different from Carruth's later thinking. In the revision, if there is an identification with nature, it is with the natural anguish which comes from the knowledge that all natural things are finally obliterated. The relief that comes with finding not an essential self but a tiny kernel of genuine personality is now totally contingent. Because part of that kernel, if it is genuine, is the fact of obliteration, repeated in perpetuity.

The ultimate paragraph is totally revised.

For rain's in the wind, lost names bethou my heart,
My lady are you left? I am a breath,
A puff in these white bones of hurt;
Yet my particular death
Still shames me: I sense me: now the general part,
Amor, fleshes in reason: and you assert
What all wounds know and I must follow
Here shyly. For sweetheart, fellow,
Through you to these, to everyone I think,
My heart's ruth flows. It fails
Their anguish, theirs fails mine, and we shall shrink,
Down, down, in our particular hells.
But even here tonight in the house of pain
Where the small wind spills among the broken walls
We lie all nailed and living, love's long gain. (1959)
Persimmon wind, lost names raining. Thwart
of forgetfulness! Lady, I'm a breath,
A puff in bare bones, a dry heart,
A small particular death,
And here I am -- this death, the unquestionable part
of reason. Good night. The bones assert
What the bones know, and love will follow,
Follow. My sweetheart, fellow,
I lived with you, but now with these, all gone
Stark crazy. If love fails
To soothe such pain and runs like the salt sea down
The wounds of these particular halls,
Good night. Good-bye. Here's darkness and rain
And a small wind in broken walls, dear walls.
Here I am, drowned, living, loving, and insane.

Again the original is a very fine poem. The last phrase in the first sentence is amazingly
previsory of later poems (see the discussion of "Names in the final chapter). "My death shames
me" (1.5), introduces a peculiar connection between death and guilt. And again the poem is
improved in revision. Names are changed from raindrops to wind scented with persimmon And
they must be ripe-rotten, sweetened and grounded by the frost in that case, astringent bitterness
changed in death, the death which one does not have, but which one is. As Carruth writes in a
later essay, "Every natural thing is transitory and contained in its own non-existence."3

At first it is the love of woman which makes the speaker's "ruth" (he can't resist the pun)
flow to mankind, with the inevitable anguish both of the initial love and the metaphysical agony of
the consequential involvements. In the revision there is a simple fact -- he is other than her -- and
a conclusion -- if he cannot love himself despite that, then he is done, sooner rather than later. In
the original the crucifixion image in the final line seems to claim from that act martyrdom for a
higher purpose, "love's long gain." This is hard to take. In the 1970 version the terminus of
experience is in the present, where the speaker is drowned in his elemental need to love, and where
to understand is to tolerate insanity.
Journey To a Known Place (1959)

If Carruth's "eclectic" poetics have made him quite unclassifiable in regard to schools and movements in twentieth-century American poetry, they have also caused extravagances vis-a-vis the developments in his own work. His long poem *Journey To A Known Place* (New Directions, 1959, reprinted in *For You* New Directions, 1970) is an extraordinary wandering away from the formal conventions in his other books of the same period. It seems nearly incredible that the poem was written by the same man who wrote *The Crow and the Heart* and *The Norfolk Poems*. In a review of a later sequence, *North Winter*, Jim Harrison noted with some astonishment at the stylistic range of Carruth's work that *Journey* "is harrowing, violent, expansive, and deeply individual." Richard Howard wrote a year after the publication of the poem that *Journey* "is one of the finest -- most focused in design and finished in detail -- long poems written by an American since *The Auroras of Autumn*." In his review James Dickey wrote, "I can only give an inadequate, betraying sketch of this beautifully conceived and imagined poem, into which Carruth blends his tremendous and sensitive vocabulary (surely the largest and most precise since Hart Crane's) with a mixture of cold, steady fury and nightmarish passion in the presence of which I can do little more than record my amazement and gratitude." Dickey goes on to note that the poem "is bound to be discussed and reread for many years." Perhaps. But that the discussions have been largely private is as astonishing as the poem itself. These reviewers, a small audience of peers, praise both the conception and the execution of the poem. Indeed, Carruth has always had a reputation among poets as a virtuoso. As they suggest, the virtuosity of this poem is in both its execution and in its general design.

*Journey* is a poem in four parts, the natural world experienced in its classic elements: "Terra," "Aqua," "Aer," and "Ignis." This is not a surprising way of structuring a
poem about psychic travelling; in this case there seems to be a detectable source for the
structuring. In a review of Book Three of W.C. William's *Paterson* (The Nation, April 8, 1950. Rpt. in Working Papers, p.7.), Carruth writes that the landscape in *Paterson* is symbolic and the elements are symbolic:

- water is a sexual link and has the further significance of flowing time and of language, usually the fundamental or premental language of nature. Earth is the speaker that knows this language, the chatterer. Fire is the creative act, in love or art. Wind is, if my reading is correct, inspiration, the interrogator, the carrier of sounds and smells.

It seems that this is roughly the kind of symbolic valence that Carruth has given to the elements in *Journey*. In each section the speaker enters the element, inhabits and is inhabited by it, and then moves into the next element, until the purifying arrival and return in the final section, "Ignis." The speaker is at first one of a group of refugees in exodus across a desolate landscape to ships, where, in the melee of departure, he drifts apart, into the sea. He is taken out to sea, then down through successive depths to the cave of "the great beast of the sea," which seems to be a giant octopus. This encounter produces sleep, and upon waking he finds himself on shore at the foot of a mountain. With the help of an eagle he rises toward the summit. As he climbs "toward the "dome of brilliance," he is united with his former wife, and, continuing upward, they come to a Byzantium-like city of community, love, and rebirth.

But the narrative armature is the least impressive part of the poem. Dickey's statement of critical inadequacy is not merely avoidance. The acuity of imagery, the fecundity of vision, the rhythms and the emotional energies of the poem nearly defy description. There are nonetheless aspects that can be talked about in regard to the poem's huge importance in Carruth's development. First, the poem shows more forcibly than any of Carruth's other work his debt to Williams and, secondarily here, to Stevens and Pound. The first section, "Terra", is composed of strophes with long lines, occasionally rhymed,
which are interrupted by centered couplets. As one might expect at this point in Carruth's career, the rhythms are strongly Poundian, with Whitman's influence behind that, and one can also hear Yeats, Tate and Aiken. The imagery is stark, cold, the voice stern:

At night the moon shed a shadowless whiteness,
And I wondered if this were the color of lunacy,
Or if the low fiery sun, glowing without warmth,
Resembled the day of our ultimate despair.
We spoke in the voice of our fathers,
Utterance laden with prophecy, clinical and severe.

This earth is the realm of dissention, argument, antagonism, a brutal, carnal chaos:

Men fought, often with women and children cursing and struggling,
Often with one another in explosions of fury,
Claiming here historical necessity, claiming there the divine will
and we had no unreadiness
of combative slogans.

Earth is hell; l'enfer c'est les autres; the world is a carnival, a carne-vale, veil of meat: "In the gray sloping waters heads bobbed like rotten fruit." Men are gobbets in a foul stew of their own making. From this, the pilgrim is delivered by accident into the sea.

The next section, "Aqua", is one of the most amazing stretches of poetry Carruth has written -- pure poetry if that term means anything at all. Again, there is a symbolic valence to the element: the sexual, the source of flowing time and of fundamental language. The sea moves without exhaustion "heaving/ in tidal energy"; it is the realm of primal independence. The rhythms and the imagery here are singularly brilliant, reminiscent among my own reading only of Neruda, whose work I can only read in translation. The section is composed of tercets, lines variously end-stopped and enjambed, enjambed on words such as "the", "a", "and", and "which." The primary measure is not the line but the set of lines, the tidal stanzas. The only interior stanza that has terminal punctuation is the fifth: "And downward the dimness of the interiors opened before me." This is a dramatic
pause, allowing the reader to breathe before the fantastic beholding.

But these are pedantic notations. This is phanopoeia, logopoeia, melopoeia, of the first order.

Wavering fishes, the febrile schools, silver and gold, 
Shone gloomily beyond my fingertips, which extended
Willessly in the waters, bending in the cadences of a
Dream. And the lobster flounced on the sand, mad
Claws dragging a wasps body; the grampus plied there
In the unctuous waters, and the blowfish stuffed with fear;

I saw the manatee browsing, imperturbable, obese;
The halibut, twisted and anguish-eyed, fled from himself;
Ten thousand herring marched right oblique at unison’s mute
Command. Down, down to the stiller mid-regions
Where giant sea-snails hung torpid in copulation,
Half out of their shells, white flesh rolling, exposed

Obscenely in the slow coiling and cramping of a cruel
And monstrously deliberate ecstasy. And I looked away
In my boredom, but other snails hung also before my eyes

Everywhere, coupling identically, an abhorrent multitude.

Read this again. It is overwhelmingly horrible and beautiful. The description of the snails coupling is in the grand style. The vocabulary, in fact reminiscent of Crane’s, is working precisely even in a passage of visual and sonoral liquorishness. Carruth bodies forth Pound’s dictum: phanopoeia must include the moving image, otherwise “you will have to make a needless division of fixed image and praxis or action.” That is, make it move.

Note the affective abstraction, "Blowfish stuffed with fear," and the halibut’s visage making him appear to flee from himself. And the attention to etymologies: the sea-snails "half out of their shells" (or half out of their skulls) in a "deliberate ecstasy," i.e., in ek-stasis, out of place. The sensuousness of the language and the sinuousness of the lines is stunning.

Another passage, further on, will serve as evidence of Caruth’s melopoeic genius.
Every carnality, slithered and lurked on the primitive rock.
Massive eels upheaved and subsided. Blind mouths, vulviform,
Maneuvered in the lewd ingestive suck. Brilliant anemones

Took down their prey convulsively from the waters.
Still I moved downward drifting unharmed in the carnage.

The "r" sounds in the first line, give way to "v", anticipated in "primitive", to "u", "eu" sounds, and the nominal "suck" reinforces the vowel. The Miltonic "blind mouths, vulviform" gutters the end of the line, the terminal "m" flows into "maneuvered" and chimes with "anemone."

This phantasmagoria is from the poet who was, at or near the same time, writing

The master grieved with age,
Said discourse of art and song
Is pastime for dotard men,
Love being for the young;
He said moreover they
Will not have it long. (Nothing For Tigers)

The Yeatsian voice is clear in this. Both styles are made expertly. There is no need to say that, given the variety of his voices during this period, Carruth had not reached a "mature voice." This gives too much emphasis to originality. We shouldn't cleave Carruth's career or anyone else's into the good and the bad. It is valid to say that after Nothing For Tigers, in the mid-60s, there is a more compact identity to the voice in the poems. But even since then Carruth has experimented continually with personae, sometimes with ridiculous masquerades, see, e.g., "Songs about What Comes Down" in Pulpsmith, v.7, no.1, by a poet, Septic Tanck, aka Carruth.

In section three, "Aer", the poet begins his ascent of the mountain, aided by wind. The elemental contrast with the densely fecund sea is attended by a drastic shift in typography and diction. Instead of the rolling verbal surface, "Aer" is in broken, staggered lines reminiscent of Williams. Inspiration indeed. In the same review of Paterson in which he discovers the symbolism of the elements Carruth notes that Williams used "the short,
oddly broken line to obtain the effect of speed in a lyric poem." It seems that is the intended effect here: speed, lightness, winds flowing

Curling in supple rills over my Body,
mounting upward continually.

The wind is "humming with spice", the simoon is "heavy with sweet dew./ pungent." He meets an eagle, symbol of loneliness, of freedom, poetic voice "singing/ The whole selfhood of loftiness/ And of rock." Carruth is obsessed by rock.

The rhythms and the typography of this section don't exactly fit Carruth's lush vocabulary. The lines are an experiment. In the same review Carruth had asked, "How is aural structure to be sustained in a long poem in which the line-values are suppressed?" It is difficult, and though this section is not a long poem, it seems that the attempt to give a rhythmic tension to the abstract element, decorous though the relative abstraction may be, is made at the substantial expense of force. Carruth uses this typography later, but only in short poems, in sections of North Winter, in "Fear and Anger in the Mindless Universe" (in From Snow, Rock, from Chaos, strange poem indeed), and in paragraphs in The Sleeping Beauty.

The final section, "Ignis", is composed of alternating meters and lines, mixed as fire is a mix of air and fuel and heat, blank verse narrative and tightly controlled, pristine songs. Both of the measures are lapidary, finished, conveying a sense of closure, calmness, and completion. The end of the journey is unity, of love and of art. There is a touch of Yeats again here, of the climbing Chinamen in "Lapis Lazuli," of the lapidary polis of Byzantium and also of the land evoked in Baudelaire's "L'Invitation Au Voyage ("La, tout n'est qu'ordre et beaute./ Laxe, calme et volupte." ) But the luminosity of the landscape, the radiance, is closest to Pound, e.g., Canto XVII

And the wave green clear and blue clear,
And the cave salt-white, and glare-purple,
cool, porphyry smooth,
the rock sea-worn . . .

and Canto XX:

Jungle:
blaze green and red feathers, jungle,
Basis of renewal, renewals;
Rising over the soul, green vivid, of the jungle
Lozenge of the pavement, clear shapes,
Broken, disrupted, body eternal

And from "Ignis":

I mounting, going where stout clumps
Of wild wheat purply ripened, among rocks
Glowing like porcelain now, like jade among
Silken grasses flowing in flame-like waves . .

And the gem-like rock glowed under the mosses,
And ferns splayed like cool flames, and trees
Lifted, arching and strained to the august sky.

Can one be derivative and also quite as good as the original? This is the goal of the
apprentice on his way to becoming a journeyman poet, of the journeyman with luck on his
way to being a master. In this case the answer is yes, and it is an important step for
Carruth. Read the comma after "now"; Carruth's control of the syntactical rhythms is
expert. Other parts of this final section, in a completely different style, also give evidence
of Carruth's increasing power:

Proven never,
Being riven
By a steely word
That seals and deafens,
Till, until
One is but one
And all a-frighted,
Lone, alone --
Still no treason,
Time or distance,
Quells the quick
Supposing faith;
Will and reason
Drive the breath:
You, you, you.
I don't believe there is any way to read this without a sense of its beauty. It is marvelous music. If there are definite echoes of one of Carruth's favorite poets, J.V. Cunningham, there are also strong echoes of an older poetry, of Shakespeare, of the influences that Carruth admitted above, "of Hardy, late Yeats, early Pound, Ransom, Muir, Cummings. The rhymes are a giveaway."

This passage shows these influences, and it is much more effective in brief than it is poem after poem, the way it comes and cloys in *The Crow and the Heart*. This passage includes the themes of "Ignis"; Carruth will attempt them over and over: the sweet impossibility of perfect representation of human absurdities in language, the absurdity of the effort, the inevitable loneliness, and, in that consequent universal condition of existential sorrow and despair, with will and reason irrationally but not unreasonably attempted, we look for the strength that love gives to lucidity.

The final vision comes in the central square of the city of gold, a Dantesque vortex of intense light. There is a great wheel that Carruth will see again in *Contra Mortem*.

*Contra Mortem*

Where the people rode in their
Separateness all together, ascending and equally
Descending in the light

The wheel creates sexual unity, the unity of all opposites, "the real urbanity" and the pilgrim sees how the

Bitter bitter shame, terror, quick retaliation  
And lust, yes, even ignorance that is called evil,  
The enormous relative compassment complete,  
The rebellion too, the heart's grand assertions  
Against the ruin of broken works and days,  
All fact, all dream -- how from this we make,  
Each in his only ascertainable center,  
The world of realization, the suffered reality,  
Through which comes understanding; or, if not  
Understanding, at least the person fleshed  
Sufficiently in love's fragments  
That gleam in the rubbish of cruelty and wrong:
To know what it is to receive what one has given,
As in a kiss, to bear and to be born,
To see the earth beneath the heron’s eye.

The enlightenment in the city of gold is the poetic and philosophic nebula that will inform much of Carruth’s future work. The first two lines evoke the atmosphere of the poem’s beginning, then comes the contingent and accidental freedom, then conscious rebellion that creates personality, a personality complicated of guilt, fear, anger, lust, brutality, of every human emotion and of the heart’s rebellion against its own incapacities. "Personality," Carruth has written, is the plasmodium of endurance/ A scarecrow in January." And also he’s written that "Politics is love, anger is love, and poetry is love. All human acts are loving one way or another." This, of course, takes into account that erotic acts are the hotbed of human error. It is a profession that echoes Carruth’s strongly influential friend, Paul Goodman: "What they do not express they display. There is no one who has nothing to do with love." It also sounds like Pound, Canto LXXVII: "Nothing matters save the quality of the affection.” The act of creating a personality out of chaos is an act of love, self-love, the prior condition of community. Suffering is undeniably a part also. The result is not wisdom, not truth, but a tenable personality which, in love, by loving, attests to the joy and agony of its own making.

In Journey, particularly in the last passage quoted above, we can catch definite forerenderings of Carruth’s future diction and methods, as well as the romantic and erotic genesis of his existentialism, "the rebellion too, the heart’s grand assertions." In After The Stranger and in Contra Mortem rebellion will be elaborated more fully, especially in the way that Carruth understood Camus’s definition: as "a claim motivated by the concept of complete unity, against the suffering of life and death and a protest against the human condition both for its incompleteness, thanks to death, and its wastefulness, thanks to evil" (Camus, The Rebel). It is a kind of rebellion expressly not of the Rousseauvian and
the Thoreauvian variety. The assertion is the assertion of personality against the forces of
depersonalization. On Carruth’s account, to be a person is to be an artist, subjective and
free, creating and denying freely. To deny "the ruin of broken works and days" both
denies death and evil and affirms the possibilities of human creation, the ability of the mind
to impose subjective order. Again, this means the creation of a style, a literary style. As
he write in Contra Mortem, "Scan/ this circle vanishing across the deep/ it is contrived it is
actual it is a man." This is an existential aesthetic: Camus again: "Style supposes the
simultaneous the simultaneous existence of reality and of the mind that give reality its
form” (The Rebel). Artistic rebellion demands a toleration of this exchange, as well as a
responsibility to try to understand as much as possible of reality, of the human condition,
especially as it has evidence in history, in the works of say, Hesiod, to which Carruth
alludes above. He proposes a rebellion with, not against history. This is what it means to
be born, as the Sleeping Beauty is born into Carruth’s finest poem, by a kiss.

Journey is nothing less than an artistic triumph. It would have been understandable
had Carruth tried to stay within the same general style. But that would have meant stasis,
or the illusion of stasis, and the consequent morbidity in personality. Carruth is serious; he
believes that the great wheel of being turns. In his next book, Nothing for Tigers, he shifts
again, walking back over, cutting into his previous moods and voices in the attempt to find
himself, on the page.
The first two sections of *Nothing For Tigers* (NFT) were written just after the poems in *The Crow* and *The Heart*. Even though the book won the *Virginia Quarterly Review*’s Emily Clark Balch Prize, the number of accomplished poems is small compared to the derivative, though workmanlike, poems. This is especially apparent when the book is seen, as I inevitably have to see it, after having read his later, extremely original collections.

In a recent essay, "Suicide," Carruth writes,

> I could never find so distinct a voice [as Yeats's] in my own work, which seemed to me to be a disconcerting concatenation of other voices, other people’s voices mimicked or faked, including in some poems the voice of Yeats himself.

The poems in the first two sections of NFT are starkly derivative: of Pound, Frost ("Comforts of Granite"), Ben Jonson via J.V. Cunningham, Stevens ("The Carpenter’s Flute"), The King James Bible, J.C. Ransom ("The Saving Way"), Mallarme, and behind them all, even more than in his first book, the influence of Yeats, both rhythmically and topically.

Yet, even in borrowed modes, Carruth’s personal voice can be heard. In "The First Snow," a favorite occasion, the speaker concludes,

> And now I have written -- certainly not a poem,  
  Only a marginal note  
  On the long book of the snow.

Well, it certainly is a poem, a good one. The challenging irony of this disclaimer is another indication of Carruth’s poetic stance in the late 50s. A poem is something highly and intensely wrought. The speaker must be masked as a speaker. The occasion of the poem should be effectively organic insofar as it must seem to come inevitably, as a natural part of the speakers self-evaluation of the phenomenon. It must seem to be perfect, as if the subject had created its own form. The poetic event should be expressed in the poem, without a seam between the event and the meter, stanza, rhyme. Artifice is primary. But
this is congenial to Carruth’s mode of developing his voice. These personae sound the
themes that Carruth will continue to develop. In "Abelard at St. Denis" the philosopher,
contemplating his "recent misfortunes," realizes "love is the loss, the disparity./ The gain.
All’s told. Hurt is all understanding." And the next morning he does understand that

The fuel here is affections. Our motive is

Our love, love being the ground from which all other
Affections rise by differentiation.
If newborn infants tried to say "I am,"
Could it be anything except "I love"?
Feeling, like the heat of fire, combusts,
In first necessity, the actual spark
Or node of consciousness, yes, is that spark
Constantly burning and escaping, spread
In resonant ego’s ----

Lord I’m out of breath!

What was it you desired when you created
The philosophical temperament?

Abelard’s voice here is one which Carruth will find increasingly attractive; it is questing,
abstractly oriented, lucid, rhetorical, not merely rhetorical, but made with the dense and
inevitable rhythms of querility. The poem’s calmness, abbreviation, and concentration allow
us to be enjoined by a responsive human intelligence which must to itself give an account
not just of its products, but of its very nature.

Abelard’s theme is of the nature of the metaphysical agonies arising from love. His
method is a subjective one which is tempered by the objectivity to which one must accede
in a medium of rational discourse, in language. Abelard of course is Carruth. From a
much later essay:

My curiosity is not the kind that can be satisfied by objective knowledge. Plato
said that opinion is worthless and that only knowledge counts, which is a quite neat
formulation, attractive to Mediterranean temperaments, including Yeats’s. But
melancholy Danes from the northern mists understand that opinion is all there is,
ultimately. The great questions transcend factuality, and discourse is a procedure of
personality. Knowledge cannot respond to knowledge. 7
Discourse is a procedure of personality, and Abelard's is a mixture of asceticism and voluptuousness, as the misfortunes of the historical Abelard attest. He found "philosophies in each soft inch" of Heloise. He realizes that he is "a -- well sentimentalist/ With something lacking (God!), and hence driven/ in guilt's awful contraries to submit/ Desire to its opposing reason." This tense dualism has destructive consequences: "the person/ Stands gaped and shredded like a poor comical ghost/ Caught in a collonade." But love, even (or especially) socially illicit love (for which Abelard was castrated!) is the occasion of "one scanting glimpse of something." Abelard's poem is the most successful of the first two sections.

The erotic genesis of Carruth's existentialism is evident in two poems, together, near the end of the second section. In "Ontological Episode of the Asylum," the speaker, literally prevented from suicide by conditions in the asylum, prays for "light in the mists/ Of death," and then he realizes that "God doesn't care./ Not only that, he doesn't care at all, One way or the other. That's why he exists." In the following poem, "Existence Before Essence," sexual intercourse is the cause of terror and of world-weariness:

We rolled apart on the forest floor
( Remember?), each in a sighing terror,
As Hector after one battle more,
Sighing, turned the armor-bearer
With his black lance in that black war.

Darling, then as the leaves plunged down
I knew the peril of such deep giving
(Leaves of aspen, leaves of rowan)
And the uselessness of such retrieving
Under a woods gone all nut-brown.

This is a most beautiful poem, a compression of one of Carruth's obsessive themes, which finds its ultimate elaboration in The Sleeping Beauty. Lovers in a pastoral setting experience what they have created in the paradoxical energy of their union; love is war, as far as we know. What is given? Has Hector given love? In love has the speaker given or
been given anything but an inkling of obliteration? Has the poet given us anything but an inkling of dissolution?

These questions are historical and personal. In paragraph seven of The Sleeping Beauty we find Helen who has "caught the coupling habit, torrid/ Duplexities of love and death (or fact/ And fancy, real and ideal)." She is followed by a man:

No innocence was his
Whom Homer called not brave
But more than brave, who in this world that is
Knew himself victim, dead to save
The stupid heroic pride of the prime defector
In history, and still went out and gave
His life without hope or despair. His name was Hector.

Hope is illusion. Despair is useless and self-fulfilling. Carruth’s admiration of the resistance of these emotions is consistent with his refusal of optimism and of nihilism. The destructiveness of romantic love in history and in person necessitate an ethic of unmitigated personal responsibility. Otherwise we accede to murder. In "the world that is" it is not enough to be brave enough to love and to kill.

Here Carruth has already begun to write, if not at the level of mastery in his later work, certainly, with the clairvoyance into the traditions of romance that make his work a significant contribution to that tradition. His concerns are natural for a disciple of Pound. Helen. Hector? The allusions are not gratuitous. In fact there is a fine parlay. In Canto V of the Inferno, in the second circle with the carnal sinners, scourged by the black air, is Helen, "per cui tanto reo/ tempo si volse." "For whose sake so many years of ill resolve" (trans. by John D. Sinclair). Dante has put her there, with Achilles and Paris, because she "subjected reason to desire." Pound admired intensely Dante’s "epithets of 'emotional apparition', transensuous ... Dante’s coloring and qualities of the infernal air."8 The same qualities of this canto are evoked in Pound’s Canto XIV, with its first line from Dante’s Inferno V : "io venni in luogo d’ogni luce muto." This is Pound’s canto where the
"Profiteers [are] eating blood sweetened with shit" and "sadic mothers driving their daughters to bed with crepidite," canto of the monopolists, "slough of unamiable liars."

Pound's canto takes its first line from *Inferno* V, but the imagery, the rain of feces, for example, comes from *Inferno* XVIII, the eighth circle, inhabited by pimps, seducers, panderers. Here is the central line of the *Inferno*: "Via! Ruffian! qui non son femmine da conio." "Off pander! here are no women to coin." "Conio" comes from the Latin "cuneo", to drive with a wedge, to stamp as on a coin; cognitive with cuneus, with "cunt."

This is the circle of the reifiers, who treat people as things, women as cunts. As we will see in a later chapter, this is the place for Kierkegaard's seducer, and for the addressee in the seventh paragraph of *The Sleeping Beauty*:

```
Why dost thou tear me? Had I done thee hurt?
For my name you took me which was Lilith.  
   Cunt

Was my name, the sweet thing wild and furtive
On the grass plain and the mountain.
Woman was my name.

Perche mi scerpi?
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Perhaps she is talking to Adam, for in Hebrew myth Lilith was Adam's first wife. The first and last lines here come from *Inferno* XIII, 1.35; it is in the second circle, the place for those who sacrifice themselves -- the suicides. It is spoken by Pier delle Vigne, who is now a tree in the contrapasso of the hell of suicides, which is suicide itself repeated every moment, for eternity. As Carruth's Lilith says,

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Here
   I am death. You made me. Now
Why do you tear me?
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To idealize under the impulse of romance is to destroy the other. It is also suicide.

Carruth's Abelard finds Heloise "so genial in every coign" that he suffers social isolation and castration as a result of his momentary possession of her.

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After writing the first two sections of *Nothing For Tigers* Carruth moved from his
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family's home in Pleasantville, New York, to Norfolk, Connecticut, to a house on the estate of James Laughlin. There he wrote *The Norfolk Poems* and the third section of *NFT*. The epigraph for the third and final section of *NFT* comes from *The Norfolk Poems*. Kršna, in the *Bhagavata Purana* chides the milkmaids who have come to him: "What! Have you come in the night? Through the forest? Then you care nothing for tigers?" The significance of the scripture is that a lesson in control is taught via erotic desire, that of the milkmaids for Kršna.

The natures of the poems in this final section of *NFT* perhaps compel Carruth, while he continues within a strict versification, to write poems more like what will follow in his next books than like what has come before. The voice of the poems here is much more assured, more personal. The austere lucidity, always astringent in regard to the voluptuousness of literary incarnation, is often now informed by a sweetness.

Carruth had married Rose Marie Dorn. In "Essay on Marriage" he writes about being

_Married twenty-two days._
_Not long, but considering the nature of_  
Joy it was long enough. Because
_We each had known_  
Many bitternesses and disloyalties, and so
_Recognized the advantage that loving brought to us_  
After the ugly hope of solitude,  
_We were very successful._

_I was content to die._

Before this in the poem Carruth says he had been "studying Dr. Williams on the 'variable foot'." It is possible that this stanza is Carruth's variation on the variable foot. It is a stanza he will employ in many other "Essay..." poems, two lines of pentameter, flush left, followed by a tetrameter line, indented, and then a three-beat line, indented from the third. Apparently Carruth feels that the architectonics of this form have some possibility or
evocation of argumentative consistency. 5,5,4,3: from the general to the particular? At any rate, the really remarkable aspect of this poem is its discursion on the relationship between love and writing, its explorations of how the joy of loving can inform the poetic act. With the Yeatsian relationship between beauty and poetry definitely understood here, Carruth advances into his own stark world of inquiry:

Poems will come inevitably like the seasons,

Imperfect and beautiful like the deathly woods,

Expense of labor and expense of time,

Like seasons and woods.

Like mechanisms, parts of a universe which means

Nothing, I guess, but simply moves, on and on,

Imperfect and beautiful as only things

May be that have no minds.

Again the pessimistic attitude about the nature of the mental aberrations that make us human, and the enhancing beauty of the language working against the self-abnegating content of the thought. Despite his admiration of Williams, Carruth obviously does not believe that poetry cannot accommodate abstract thought, "large" issues.

In "August First" (Brothers) he looks back to this poem.

I

remember a poem I wrote

years ago when my wife and

I had been married twenty-
two days, an exuberant

poem of love, death, the white

snow, personal purity. Now

I look without seeing at

a geranium on the sill;

and, still full of day and evening,

of what to do for money,

I wonder what became of

purity. The world is a

complex fatigue.

Personal purity may be intermittent, but poetic purity, if by that we mean a sense of perfection (per-facere), of being thoroughly made, is something that Carruth has begun to grasp firmly by the end of this book.
In "Freedom and Discipline," a poem he included unrevised in his book of essays Sitting In, Carruth is nearly perfect in the movement of his couplets, as he writes about how he learned both technique and artistic discipline from musicians, from Rachmaninoff, Coleman Hawkins, Vic Catlett, Lester Young, Thelonious Monk, Frankie Newton, from Berrigan, Fasola, Papa Yance ... and from Yeats. The poem is full of the poignancy of his loss of the possibility of life as a professional musician. Carruth was an accomplished clarinet player and actually played with some of these musicians in Chicago in the late 40s, but part of his emotional debility was the inability to play in public.

Why I went to verse-making
is unknowable, this
grubbing art. Trying,

Harmony, to fix your beat
in things that have none

and want none -- absurdity!
Let that be the answer

to any hope of statecraft.
As Yeats said, fal de rol.

Freedom and discipline concur
only in ecstasy, all else

is shoveling out the muck.
Give me my old hot horn.

The absurdity in writing poetry is an existential absurdity. The impossibility of final unity mocks existence. Carruth's dictum about freedom and discipline would be perhaps inconsistent with his other thoughts on the topic had he written "occur," rather than "concur." Ecstasy is a loss of identity and there is neither freedom nor discipline in that. And the "lyric convention," he writes in Sitting In, "is a freedom, not a restraint." I think what he means is that true ecstasy is an illusion, albeit an attractive one, and that an objective self is an illusion and an impossibility. Therefore freedom and discipline never
completely concur, but the effort toward making them concur is the positively valuable function of the process of art -- the artist at work in a state described by Jaspers: "In infinite passion the immediate feeling, which is held fast and genuinely true throughout the questioning, is grasped as free." All else is drudge work, "shoveling out the muck."

The relationship between music, especially jazz and blues, and poetry will become increasingly important to Carruth's poetry. In *Sitting In*, he writes,

The great contribution of the twentieth century to art is the idea of spontaneous improvisation with a determined style, a style comprising equally or inseparably both conventional and personal elements. It means the final abandonment of the neo-classical idea of structure as a function of form, which the romantic and the post-romantics of the nineteenth century had never given up. Instead structure has become a function of feeling. (47)

Carruth finds this stylistic determinant in the clarinetist Pee Wee Russell and in Yeats. It is an extension of Poundian theories on style, e.g., "Emotion is an organizer of form." Russell, Yeats, and Pound are his heroes. From this point forward, this is how Carruth tries to work -- in a mode of "improvisation within a determined style," personally and conventionally. Carruth is not, as some critics seem to have believed, a formalist, dependent solely on convention. For he did not continue in the manner of his first book. He is not an "academic" poet, that is, he does not adhere to any particular "school" of poetic thought. He has made his living by teaching in the academy, but this is not what the rubric "academic" means. Many writers of popular fiction, independent financially because of the marketability, pre-planned, of their stories, fit under the rubric much better than many of the poets who are accused of being "academic," meaning, pejoratively, not that they adhere to a program but that the poets can think and write at the same time, insist that the reader do the same, and thereby that they somehow impede enjoyment. Carruth is not a shaggy Nemerov or a rusticated Hecht, much less a John Irving who happens to write in verse.

The relationship between personality and convention is expressed concisely in a later
poem, characteristically concerning jazz, a poem in *Brothers, I Loved You All*. It is a statement of feeling that informs all of Carruth's mature work, and it is an example of his profoundly considered lyricism; a statement of purpose that sounds over and over, each time with valences of different quality, subtle variations, so that, even in the variety of "forms," one can sense that Carruth's work may be one poem, one lyric. The repetitions are burdens and refrains extended over a space greater than the modern reader is used to spanning: his work is an epic of lyrics, which is a contradiction in terms if one adheres unswervingly to generic classifications. (I don't.) The poem is "Late Sonnet."

For that the sonnet was no doubt my own true singing and suchlike other song, for that I gave it up half-coldheartedly to set my lines in a fashion that proclaimed its virtue original in young arrogant artificers who had not my geniality or voice, and yet their fashionableness was persuasive to me, -- what shame and sorrow I pay!

And I knew that beautiful hot old man Sidney Bechet and heard his music often but not what he was saying, that tone, phrasing and free play of feeling mean more than originality, these being the actual qualities of song. Nor is it essential to be young.

He uses the convention of the sonnet to teach, to show something about the sonnet, to display by example what he sets forth in theory. Did he really abandon the sonnet? In *The Asylum*, *Contra Mortem*, and *The Sleeping Beauty* he adds a line to the traditional fourteen. In order to proclaim the virtue of his individual voice? Or to proclaim the virtue of the sonnet, an improvisation which calls attention both to his form and back to the standard form? Certainly he is using the convention reflexively, beyond its original erotic theme, to comment on itself. But isn't this also erotic? The passion of a poet for his metier? "Late Sonnet" and "Freedom and Discipline," are professional epistles, as Wordsworth's "Resolution and Independence" "Late Sonnet" is a reprisal of a poetic career.
"We poets in youth begin in gladness/ (But thereof come in the end despondency and madness."). There is a similar warning in Carruth’s admonishment about the urge toward mere originality, mere novelty, the Romantic impulse. "Tone, phrasing, and free play of feeling" are the determinants of poetic structure, inner determinants.

The final poem in NFT is "Michigan Water: A Few Riffs Before Dawn (in memory of Richard Wright)." It is also included unrevised in Sitting In. In seven sections of seven tercets each Carruth’s song combines the conventional elements of his influences in a poem about Chicago, about aesthetics, race relations, and the cruelty of urban ugliness. In a 1965 omnibus review of Carruth’s work in Poetry, Richard Howard found in "Michigan Water" a "perfected" equipoise between formal demands and personal voice, between the person and the persona."11

Again there are clear influences: in the first three sections of Eliot, in the fourth of Muriel Rukeyser, in the fifth of Jarrell perhaps, and of the blues ("The sun will shine on my back door/ someday"); in the sixth of the Hebrewisms in the Bible, that repetitiousness via Pound, and in the ultimate section there are clear echoes of Paul Goodman. It is what jazz musicians call a cutting session. You get onto other people’s style and imitate, mutate, and extend them. Carruth does this often, as here, partly satirically, but with the respect of a virtuoso who himself naturally understands the personalities that live within the other styles. And even if it seems a concatenation, the ultimate effect is Carruth, a mixture of lyricism, somber, austere inquiry, and a hopeless yearning for human love, a style which will sustain him into the period of his finest accomplishments:

Gray dawn seeping through stone --
see, the room blanches. Let the beat intensify. Between bone and bone

the little blood aches with rain
and the tones deepen. Music!
Given all to Saint Harmony, all
the pain, the awareness of the pain. That is all. Music is heard in one heart, harmony’s great chord in one conscience only; and yet there is this not explained reaching, touching, extending, as if the pain could gather each of us to its own being. Is it possible?
Notes: Chapter One

Chapter Two

"Scan/ this circle vanishing across the deep/
It is contrived it is actual it is a man."

North Winter, After The Stranger, Contra Mortem
Even to those who generally know the body of Carruth's work it has seemed at times almost incredible that a poet so personally distant in so much of his early work could have evolved into the writer of the past twenty-five years, a writer of extreme flexibility, a writer of "free verse so invisibly artful that under its spell we seem to be not in the presence of a poem, but of the world." At the same time, he has continued to write in the tightly controlled lyric forms of his early work, but these too have become more subtle and more personal. And he has written hundreds of essays and reviews, many of them astonishing not only for the quality of the writing -- he is always "on" -- but also for the scope of their information and for their amiability. There were of course, as I have noted above, many first-rate poems in each of his books, the result of an a gifted sensibility at hard work: many beautiful short lyrics, The Asylum, and the most accomplished piece from his early period, Journey To A Known Place. Yet, even considering the promise of Journey, after 1963 there is a change in voice, an assurity of movement so definite that one asks, is this the same poet, the same man? Poet Brooks Haxton has suggested that the change had something to do with a kind of public resignation on Carruth's part. His first books had received some attention, but not the kind of acclaim that he might have wished. In a situation similar to Aiken's, whose first collection appeared in 1922, the year of The Waste Land, he came out at the time when Lowell was ascending. That he was able to withstand and to understand Lowell's public preeminence without lasting bitterness is clear from his critical response to Lowell (which I will address at length later in chapter four) and from his piece in Harpers' in December 1977 on the occasion of Lowell's death. Explaining his own upset over Lowell's early death, he writes,
It is because I see myself in Lowell. I see all of us -- poets of later-day America -- in him. He was truly the figure of the embattled artist (though one uses such post-romantic terms with a reluctance now), the artist fighting in a degraded society, a cruel history, an absurd universe, and most of all a sense of lack in his own being, fighting in complete honesty and utterly refusing to compromise. With less talent and far less knowledge, I am doing the same thing. So are my friends. What else can we do?

By dint of his talent and his immense knowledge Carruth was and is more aptly comparable to, I mean the equal of, Lowell than many poets who have asked, begged, or have been publicly presented by prominent critic-champions for even second-ranking. The personal incapacities that prevented Carruth from promoting himself ultimately forced him to create a life, out of the public eye, which led him to a place where he did achieve his own particular excellence. At the same time perhaps it recruited him from his early public ambition. If Carruth thought, as he no doubt did, that he was writing poems that deserved more attention than they got, he was able to keep that resentment out of his own writing, out of his critical work, his reviews, which are singularly remarkable for their generosity, even when attending to less able and more popular writers than himself.

Certainly, Carruth's move to Vermont had something to do with the "opening up" in his poetry. After writing NFT, Carruth and his new wife, Rose Marie Dorn, moved to Johnson, Vermont, a village in Lamoille County, on the Lamoille River, between Stowe and Burlington. With a population of two thousand it was the home of Johnson Woolen Mills, a small branch of the state university, a talc mine then employed but now defunct, and the village center of many small family farms, also now gone. The Carruths bought a house on Clay Hill, in a gulf above the village to the north. Their house, a "laborer's holding", as Carruth writes in "Marshall Washer," is between a gravel back road to Waterville and Foote Brook. From the hill across the road on Washer's farm they could see Johnson below and across the valley, above the staggered notches of the Green Mountains, the top of Mount Mansfield. It is a singularly beautiful place. Not only did it bring Carruth into a close relationship with the natural world where he had to get his wood, shovel his road,
clean his spring, plant his garden, chores ad infinitum, he now had his own house, a family, a plot of ground. The majority of his poems for the next fifteen years concern this place, which he called Crow's Mark. And so he continued, as he had in Chicago, in New York, in the asylum, at his family home in Pleasantville, on Laughlin's estate in Connecticut, to write, now in a renovated cowshed out in the yard, by the brook.

The move to Vermont was crucial in the development of Carruth's poetic personality, and intellectually he was maturing rapidly. Throughout the early 60s he had been assigned many reviews of many different kinds of books and had done various kinds of editorial work. In 1963 he reviewed Genet's Our Lady of the Flowers and Sartre's Saint Genet: Actor and Martyr. Sartre wrote that he had tried in his book on Genet to indicate the limit of psycho-analytical interpretation and Marxist explanation and to demonstrate that freedom alone can account for a person in his totality; to show this freedom at grips with destiny, crushed at first by its mischances, then turning upon them and digesting them little; to prove that genius is not a gift but the way out one invents in desperate cases; to learn the choice that a writer makes of himself, of his life and the meaning of the universe, including even the formal characteristics of his style and composition, even the structure of his images and of the particularity of his tastes; to review in detail the history of his liberation.

This is an uncanny description also of Carruth's aesthetic endeavors, though it aims at description rather than true autobiogenesis, nor would Carruth says that there is some original state of freedom from which one can fall away or be taken by chance; freedom is created by action. Like Sartre's, Carruth's emphasis is on writing as personal action, especially the personal genesis of "the formal aspects of his style and composition." This "choice in desperation" "that a writer makes of himself" goes to the heart of Carruth's morality of aesthetics. In an essay entitled "Authenticity in an Age of Massive, Multiplying Error" (SI,73) Carruth expresses the same view of the potency of the act of choosing; he agrees with Wendell Berry that agony of choice, whether mindful or unmindful, is what distinguished the living from the dead, and not inventiveness or a desire for expediency ...and that from this it follows that the only alternative to suicide, the only way to assert a positive value against a negative one, is to choose the course which we think -- or feel or imagine or whatever -- may give us the opportunity to make further choices.
Freedom is choice, not freedom to choose but freedom in accepting the necessity of choosing. The only optimism is the assumption not that we may choose a good consequence, but that choice may continue -- that we may choose to continue living. And this is not accomplished in a social void. On a blank page in the back of his copy of Sartre's book on Genet, Carruth has written this quotation, which I happened to see:

Unless one is a god, one cannot make oneself happy without the help of the universe; to make oneself happy, one needs only oneself.

As I will point out in later chapters, this admonishment informs Carruth's critique of Thoreau's isolationism; the refusal to admit the other connects with many kinds of irresponsibility which Carruth finds destructive.

In his review of *Saint Genet* (WP,72) Carruth wrote that Sartre's method begins in simplicity itself, with the basic opposition of Self and the Other...But this basic opposition quickly opens up into a spiraling, or helical series of dualities: being-becoming, essence-act, eternity-time, nature-freedom, beauty-happiness, form-content, and so on.

These are the dualities whose consequences inform the dramatic action in *The Sleeping Beauty*. He concludes that Sartre's book reveals that the criminal, the aesthetic, the religious are one. And he admires the book immensely as a critical act; it grants what scholars and critics seldom do, that art is not a product of the objective world but a communication between the artist and god, or the ego and the unknown.

Another of Carruth's reviews of this period that is particularly revealing is "Materials From Life," a review of Irving Singer's *The Nature of Love: Plato to Luther* (WP,121). Carruth had already reviewed DeRougement's *Love Declared*, calling its tracing of Eros from its entry into Western Civilization (according to DeRougement) in the 12th Century, its dissemination by the troubadours, and its progress, through the Tristan legend and into our time, a "pious intellectual fraud" (WP,76). Carruth points to DeRougement's spurious analytical stance, which assumes that eros is destructive but yet pretends to discuss
eros critically. DeRougement ties the problems of marital love to heresy, and Carruth finds this, along with DeRougement’s basis in Catholic dualisms, unacceptable. In short, Carruth objects to De Rougement’s analytical simplification, preferring the rational "realism and relativism of writers like Camus," who, Carruth thinks, "had an attitude toward love, which may be worked out in more or less detail from suggestions contained in The Fall, but I doubt he had a concept of love." So, neither DeRougement nor Camus is quite satisfying on this topic. He also finds Sartre’s "theory of existential psychoanalysis" "awkward, difficult," the freedom that it proposes "elusive and obscure in the experience of our lives, particularly in the experience of falling in love." But Singer’s "phenomenology of love," beginning as it does, not like Sartre’s, with man in alienation, but with man in love -- the more existential ground in being -- he finds more useful, particularly Singer’s notion of "bestowal" as a part of love.

On Singer's account, love has two operations. The first is appraisal. Appraisal is the finding of value, both objective and subjective, in the beloved. The second operation is love-as-valuation, the bestowal of a value to the beloved that the beloved does not pieces in "reality," though the bestowed values are not only real, they are essential.

Carruth finds at least three "important consequences" issuing from this concept. First, bestowal is gratuitous, the value is a free invention of the lover; it proceeds "directly and solely" to the beloved as a person, a someone...and the concept therefore attacks the Freudian deterministic concept of love as sublimated narcissism. Singer gives love a content beyond necessity.

Second, the invention of value is itself "an augmentation" of the lover’s own creative capacity. This is less freedom of choice (of the beloved one) than it is freedom of invention, "freedom of making rather than freedom of affirming, of initiative rather than response." Life-force itself, or eros, becomes a function of living. Carruth’s elaboration of this, as we will see in his poems, has social implications; it translates into a practice of
non-violent anarchism.

Third, bestowal is imaginative; "love is functionally aesthetic." The danger here, of course, is that imaginative idealization is essentially reification, or, in literary terms, the appropriation of the allegorist who robs the object of his attention of whatever unique qualities it might have in order to imbue it with his own. (I use the masculine pronoun automatically, but it is not, I think, completely without weight in considering, historically at least, the impulse. In The Sleeping Beauty (58) we see a classic case of overbestowal from Heraclitus, whose gigantic passion beautifies and develops the beloved, who flushes, "molten, undulant/conceiving/the whole of the universe.") Carruth believes that this kind of idealization may not be inevitable -- or inevitably destructive; it could lead toward "reinforcing" the personality of the beloved. This is possible if love can escape religious and naturalistic traditions which direct it toward the ideal, toward God or toward Nature, away from the person and therefore away from its ability to bestow value. "To love without external sanctions" is the requirement for the development of "an affirmative philosophy of love." Carruth hopes that Singer's projected volume on modern love will lead to "the consideration of the role of existential idealization in human love and in life generally." In fact, Carruth himself will make precisely this kind of consideration in many of his poems, most cogently in The Sleeping Beauty.

Why was Carruth particularly attracted to Singer? In earlier works, in "Abelard at St. Denis," in "Essay on Marriage," the ground of Carruth's account of the necessity of personal responsibility and of creative affirmation at all levels, was erotic, generated out of the moral, psychological, and metaphysical agonies of loving -- of loving women and of loving nature. These agonies come from the love of beauty, and they are a result of the human consciousness "striving to create value and getting beauty instead/ Dripping with blood" (SB). Yet, the erotic impulse is, in the face of individual alienation and universal meaninglessness, the only way to act with a full human capacity. In this is the possibility
of action not based on Sartre's Cartesian divisions between self and other, "with all of its supervening burden of self-divisiveness consciousness." Again, Carruth thinks that Singer's concepts of love begin with love, not alienation.

Singer's concept of bestowal also partakes of the aesthetic and literary tradition which Carruth had thoroughly assimilated, the Romantic, with all of its Keatsian equations between Beauty and Truth. In regard to this tradition though we must ask the questions, to what degree can we safely bestow beauty on the objects of our attention, and then, having bestowed more or less, what kind of truth is it that we can find in them? These questions are as much at the heart of Carruth's "considerations of existential idealization" as they are central to Stevens's poetic examinations of metaphor (in, e.g., Notes Toward A Supreme Fiction) and his constant tug-of-war with the romantic tradition which one can find in almost any of his poems (se, e.g., "Sailing After Lunch"). If the spirit of man is a part of reality, to what extent does it share characteristics of the other parts? At what point does the unifying impulse of the imagination begin to distort rather than inform? At what point do conventions, human conventions, expropriative in essence, create illusions? And, practically, if there are correspondences between nature and self, as there are in Carruth's North Winter, between winter and the winteriness within the poet, how can these correspondence be represented as equivalences of value rather than in the traditional Platonic scheme of anthropocentric representation? For Carruth, moral feelings precede aesthetic feelings, and the representation of the world in anthropocentric terms is a symptom of human willingness to appropriate and destroy the world at large.

Camus' concept of lucidity, as Carruth reveals his understanding of it in After The Stranger, is a moral and aesthetic antidote to romanticism, to over-bestowal. Lucidity finds limits. It refuses mystification, even, or especially, the mystifications of nihilism. It finds limits in reality which create the necessity without which freedom cannot exist. Camus writes, "Genius is a rebellion that has created its own limits." Singer would say genius
bestows creatively; Keats might say it has "negative capability."

Keats in fact shows clearly how existential concepts can inhere in a sensibility which, like Carruth's, is essentially erotic in its impulse to imbue nature with human characteristics. Keat's awareness of this impulse issues in an understanding of his own writing, an understanding which in effect is a phenomenology of love, as a quest for the ground of being, a poetic ontology. And since one of the goals of this quest is to find man's place in relation to other elements of the universe, the act of writing, existential in its choosing in unqualified freedom, is also a religious act.

In an 1817 letter to his friend Benjamin Bailey, Keats explains his commitment to poetry as the means not of expressing but of finding truth and his belief that the sensuous world is indispensable in the search. Yet, he is not absolutely sure about poetry's ability to actually convey truth:

I am sometimes so very skeptical as to think Poetry itself a mere Jack a lathem to amuse whoever may chance to be struck with its brilliance -- As Tradesmen say every thing is worth what it will fetch, so probably every mental pursuit takes its reality and worth from the ardour of the pursuer -- being in itself a nothing.2

Everything is nothing unless value is bestowed by a pursuer. What can the poet give, what can the reader bring to the poem in order to make it beautifully true, truthfully beautiful?

What is the place of the poem and of the human intelligence of which it is the product in the phenomenal world? Keats continues,

Ethereal thing[s] may at least be thus real, divided under three heads -- Things real -- things semireal -- and no things -- Things real -- such as existences of Sun Moon & Stars and passages of Shakespeare -- Things semireal such as Love, the Clouds & c which require a greeting of the Spirit to make them wholly exist -- and Nothings which are made Great and dignified by an ardent pursuit -- Which by the by stamps the burgundy mark on the bottles of our Minds insomuch as they are able to "consecrate what'er they look upon."

This curious taxonomy of phenomena displays the connection between the romantic sensibility and Carruth's understanding of bestowal. "Real things" are relatively autonomous in their reality; they require little or no bestowal on our part in order to have full existence,
for they are more generous than mere human intelligence. Shakespeare exists in this
celestial realm because he is an unacknowledged legislator; he has
promulgated laws that cannot be recognized as having positive (human and
subjective) force because they act on us like natural (unconsciously or inescapably
suffered) events.3

Love is semi-real; it requires "a greeting of the Spirit," which in turn, or simultaneously,
freed the Spirit in self-creation. It is the freedom of making rather than the freedom of
affirming Things Real. Love shares this category with the Clouds; they both have a
heterogenous identity which is constantly in flux.

The third category is of the completely abstract, "Nothings which are made Great
and dignified by an ardent pursuit." What exists here? If things real are external
phenomena, existing without our bestowal, if things semi-real achieve reality (if only for a
moment) by means of our bestowal, then perhaps the Nothing is really the agency or the
power of bestowal, perhaps it is the Nothing of the human intelligence, which, quite
impossibly but quite actually, that is, quite absurdly, exists only when it is bestowing, in
that moment when it is "able to consecrate what it looks upon." This is a principle of
Romantic aesthetic which also runs deep in Carruth’s master Yeats:

While on the ship and street I gazed
My body of a sudden blazed;
And twenty minutes more or less
It seemed, so great my happiness,
That I was blessed and could bless. ("Vacillation")

In fact this momentary empowerment of the Spirit is what Carruth’s writings about
personality also assert: that it can exist only if it grants and actively participates in the
claims of other personalities to existence, in an equal existence.

The idea of the contingency of the personality, whether it exists in "erotic
bestowal," in "artistic" activities, in plowing a field, whatever, that idea functions in much
of Carruth’s poetry as a counter to both Romanticism and to depersonalization. On one
hand, by making the ego available as an object which can be mediated by experience, art
can resist the egoism of an uncontrolled, merely individualistic self-assertion. On the other hand, the freedom of choice in bestowal, in this case a part of artistic composition, resists the effacement of the individual by the crowd. The idea of this second function is, of course, not new; it could be derived from Schiller, as well as from Keats. At any rate, the Romantic characteristics of Carruth’s poetics lead to a question which we might well address here before going on to examine the poems themselves. It is not an inevitable question, or one which can be profitably applied to most twentieth-century poets. Given what we have said about Carruth’s relation to conventions and given his Romantic affinities, is Carruth a modernist?

One of the requirements for an act of creative bestowal is the acknowledgement of a phenomenal world. For Keats it was a personal solace as well: "The setting sun will always set me to rights -- or if a Sparrow come before my window I take part in its existence and pick about the gravel." For Yeats "the shop and the street" because they are quotidian in extreme require a bestowal so deep as to be a blessing. For Carruth, acknowledgement of the impersonal world issues not as realism, "the means of expression of religious genius...or, at the other extreme, the artistic expression of monkeys," realism, "the official aesthetic of a totalitarian revolution," but rather, Carruth assents to the phenomenal world, which includes experience and memory, as one limit to aesthetic reflection. His is a style which "supposes the simultaneous existence of reality and of the mind that gives reality its form."5

Carruth depends more upon experiential reality than upon alternative, merely aesthetic realities. There is indication that he sees the later attempt as one of the failures of Modernism, a kind of failure exemplified, for example, by Gottfried Benn and Wyndam Lewis, "who would invent Being from the misapprehended dynamics of aesthetics" (WP,94). To Benn’s contention that "art as a means of producing reality... this was the productive principle of the new art" (WP,94) Carruth responds with the assertion that the consequences
in the social polity of this kind of aesthetic stance have been murder, the warring that has characterized our century, the age which has left us

beyond all play-acting and romanticizing, recognizing (his) own true damaged soul. What is left but to be sensible? We begin to confess that at last we have gone backward, not forward; into the old reality, not the new; backward to an existential origin in the lowliest domain of experienced fact -- substance itself. Poetry's misfortune is that it has not gone with us.(WP,94)

In his review, Charles Altieri writes that WP "may be one of the best histories of twentieth-century poetry we have," that "'The Act of Love, Poetry and Personality' is the best discursive essay by a contemporary poet."6 In criticizing what he assumes is an implicit, linear argument in this collection (of assignments, written over a period of twenty years) Altieri finds that "Carruth . . . becomes a symptom of the history he simultaneously reveals and covers up." Carruth holds that a work of art is a life, "provided it be true to the experiential core." Altieri finds this idea self-defeating as an attempt to overcome the kind of modernism Carruth assigns to Benn and Lewis. Altieri writes,

Unless one invokes empiricist criteria which Carruth abhors, experience becomes a tautology for conscious life in general...This claim to truth is perhaps the most dangerous antireality because it allows no criteria to check the chain of evasions it licenses.

Altieri thinks criteria can check evasions? Why is "experience" synonymous with "no criteria"? Carruth's grounding of aesthetics in phenomenal reality is a function of his basic Yankee pragmatism. It is in no way an attack on the undefined (and thus monolithic) Modernism that Altieri praises for its "efforts to exemplify mental powers," a word, by the way, "exemplify," that suggests Altieri's ideas of representation partake heavily of the symbolic, the distant, the spectatorial. Art, for Carruth, is human. Jazz is misery. When we read Carruth's introductions, his reviews and essays, his introductory paragraphs in his anthology, we see that he is an affectionate student of Pound, Eliot, Williams, Stevens, Zukofsky.
In the mid-60s Carruth was learning more about the difference between the great modernists of enter-deux-guerres and the mid-century existentialists. That was in effect the difference between his own education and what he himself was trying to do. Along with the other secular existentialists of mid-century, Carruth tried to move the affirmation implicit in consciousness back from the imagination to perceived reality, tried to reconnect the work of art to the historical fields of value, meaning, morality, and to make artists responsible again ... For[the existentialists] art was not a thing, an object, a masterpiece, but an action, a continuity of human assertion in the face of the meaningless -- never self-sustaining but instead significant only and precisely in its ongoing expressive derivation from human suffering.(SI,89)

This is not in the book Altieri was reviewing, but the are plenty of expressions there of the same idea. Altieri apparently finds suffering theoretically tractable, but for Carruth it serves as a distinct fact. Carruth attacks the optimism underlying Altieri's urge to fulfill his own theory, and so too the kind of subversion that underlies Altieri's ignorance of Carruth's acute qualifications. Altieri's is the same optimism that assumes, as in the case of Benn, Lewis, and of Finneghan's Wake, that a purely verbal antireality can be created, which will "exemplify experience," and which will ignore the facts we actually have. What Carruth says is that the poet at work is "spontaneously engendering imagery and verbal compounds from the imagined structures of remembered experience," with all of the freedom and error in "imagined" and "remembered." Does, as Altieri suggests, Carruth omit from experience "depersonalization or anti-realist formalism"? Hardly. This is what Carruth says in WP,

Poetry moves toward its own center, where the fount of language flows most freely. That is its going ahead, its renewal. It returns from the frontiers of experience bearing chaos and revolution, the rawness of events, which it submits to the regulative conceptualizing of our permanent, concrete, basic human modes; that is to language.

This is the same dynamic Aspen describes in After The Stranger, making his "working definition of personality: immense fluid congeries of experience, mnemonically constituted and metaphorically integrated." (ATS,101) This is not an attack on modernism.

Nor is the following, from WP, a "covering up"of history:
If theism was anthropomorphic, if humanism was anthropocentric, then our era is anthropo-eccentric; we exist on the edge of reality. This is no intellectualization, but a profound and popular ethnological retooling. The consequent shift in values is immense. Now we recognize that in meaninglessness we are our own sole value, and that art is our chief instrument in the imaginative creation of this value, the turning of human experience into human meaning, the making of selves.

Carruth, like Dante, Pope, and Pound, insists on "the corrective function of poetry, both in language and in society -- in basic morality" (WP, 200). Art is an instrument in becoming human. He also insists,

Art is also our mystery...So be it...If the mystery is ever penetrated and art becomes a matter of objective or a priori understanding, that will be the end of seriousness and the end of humane, as distinct from technological, civilization. (Humane civilization began in the caves of Lascaux.)

Carruth is not a theorist but he is communicative enough to speak directly about the high seriousness and practicality of his art -- as well as about the implications of his stance; he is, as he admits in another essay, as much a product of Arnoldian cultural optimism as was, say, Pound. This makes him seem available to Altieri’s true objections, which depend on the unstated critique of what he perceives to be Carruth’s humanism, Carruth suffering from his "pathetic need to find some haven from scientific versions of that [experiential] truth."

His point is the same one that Marcuse makes in his critique of Sartre, "in short, to say, 'Reality alone counts' could be the motto of total conformism; or worse: of a 'healthy' acceptance of reality." Marcuse calls attention to the idealizational qualities of Sartre's philosophy; it "must of necessity explain the inexplicable, rationalize the absurdity and thus falsify its reality." Perhaps this is an inherent danger in the optimism that assumes a coherent (man-made) system is possible. Camus rejected Sartre's philosophy at least in part because of this tendency. Carruth, in turn, is particularly attracted to Camus' stoic, pessimistic concept of lucidity, to his clarity "which refuses all short-cuts and escapes, the constant awareness that life has to be lived without appeal and without protection...Man accepts the challenge and seeks his freedom and happiness in a world where there is no hope, sense, progress, and morrow." This is how Marcuse describes Camus. In Camus'}
writing Carruth found a strong counter to his own tendencies to optimism and romance, and we will discuss his interest further in a consideration of After The Stranger, directly.

Carruth answers Altieri’s objections to his dependence on an "experiential core" in "The Defeated Generation," (SI) where he defines his ideological predicament. I quote at length because many are unhappy about this and few communicative enough to say why:

How is it that those who wished forty years ago to desanctify the imagination, reduce it from the vatic role it had acquired in the romantic idealization of human intelligence from the fourteenth century to the early decades of the twentieth, how is it that these writers are today derided as Humanists by the advocates of deconstructive criticism, those who now call themselves Theorists? This is an old Marxists ploy, of course, though Theorists are not all necessarily Marxists; yet, for most of them, anyone who is anti-Hegelian enough to speak up for individuated consciousness is a de facto Humanist with a capital H. (90)

H as in Hayden. This is not an attack on theory per se, or on Modernism or on the academy directly; it is part of an attack on meaningfulness and ugliness in society and on the affirmation of that meaningfulness in theory and in action. Theorists may accept the idea that a meaningless society must produce a meaningless art, but for Carruth writing is an act of love, a bestowal toward wholeness, action in service of peace and restraint.

###

North Winter (1963)

**North Winter,** a poem in 58 parts, is a powerfully painterly vision of the outer and the inner north, a poem one might expect from a writer who had just moved north into the woods of northwestern Vermont. In NW the bestowal of Keats and of Singer is evident in the co-penetrations of human mind and landscape. Winter, like personality, is defined by its particular qualities as they exist in relation with other, in this case natural and climatic, states of being.

In spring this mountain was a fish with blond scales
in summer it was a crab with a green shell
in fall it became a leopard
This is another indication of what Carruth says about the textures of his imagination in "The Ravine" (Snow), "Unlike my bright admonitory friends I see relationships I do not see things." As in the poem above, changes keep the time. Though W.C. Williams's music in informative of these short apercu, they are far far from his objectivist dictums (as far as some of his own best poems).

The visual imagery in NW is startling in its brilliance and in its service of a palpably and tenderly curious imagination:

Caught in the briery stars
a lunar scrap
like paper flickering in a gale
blurred
carrying away a scarcely remembered
poem of a summer night. (6)

In his omnibus review Richard Howard, along with is praise for Journey, wrote that NW was a "humanist recuperation of nature." One might say instead it is a "co-recruitment," in the way that Meriwether Lewis uses the word in his Journal, "We stopped to recruit our men..." that is, to restore them. This recruitment however seems to be a restoral to lucidity, rather than a sentimental, fantastic restoral to some essential state of natural grace. Yet, the co-penetration of the poet with the season and with the place is profound. Is this a case of over-bestowal? Is it personification, that anthropocentric trope, to assert, "the stove/ nibbles a few frozen sticks?" To write, beginning as he will extensively in Contra Mortem, two words together, "snowapparelled" (a gambit which has here at least three effects: the musical sound of the word; then the logopoetic, that is, the snow on as tight as apparelle, so the space is omitted; and then the visual double "I", II, in apparelle, ideogram of spruce trunks.) The speaker recognizes

A winter's tale is told in
rumors of snow

with a burnished coat
in winter the mountain is a bird
with lavender feathers
and a still heart. (2)
sneaping winds

the frail flux of identities
tardy recognitions
the living stones.(11)

Are we like the natural world in our "frail flux of identities," which are full of "tardy recognitions;" by the time we have named ourselves, have we already changed? What are "living stones"? Is this a symbol, or an objective evaluation, of the intractable nature of any other identity, blank as a stone? How does it echo Yeats's "The stone’s in the midst of all?" What are we to make of the affective abstractions and the metaphorical qualities of

The song of the gray
ninepointed buck
contains much contains
many contains all
a whole north for
example the sweet
sharp whistling of
the redpolls caught
overhead in the branches
of the yellow birch
like leaves left over
from autumn and at
night the remote
chiming of stars
caught in the tines
of his quiet exaltation.(13)

Can a deer have "tines/ of quiet exaltation?" Too metaphorical? ... unless... "tines" is accurate in describing antlers. "Of" is the key. If an animal exalts, and that’s given, how would that exalting, in self, be bodied forth? In a mammalian dendroanatomical structure like antlers? An attractive proposition. This speculative empathy is somehow an affirmation of "the facts we actually have." And the poem is full of this kind of acute poetic inquiry-through-the-limits-of-description.

In 11, an arctic owl is "the arctic owl" only for the moment when he is acting as such, "a white thought of love/ moving moving over the pasture to home." In 16, the snow is seen as a sea, and in 19 there is a "time-lapse" image of a fallen doe as she is eaten and
disintegrates; the normal apperception of human time has been informed by earth-time, so-called "geologic" time, change occurring across a longer space than the objectivist eye could admit. These "tardy" recognitions allow a seeing-into, an introspection of phenomena, in which, it seems to me, identities are discovered, rather than asserted. If there is meaning for man, it exists in this world:

Blizzard trampling past has left
the birches bent as in humiliation
the soft scotch pines laid down
as in subjection the beeches snapped
at the top as in a reign of terror
the balsams scarred but upright
as in the dignity of suffering an all
the woods in sorrow as if the world
meant something.

The speaker surveys the damage from the storm as if he cares. The choric "as" mitigates, in the poem, the appropriations of a metaphor; "as" functions as a grammatical limit to the violent appropriation that the equivalence metaphor might have made. These perceptions seem more like metempsychosis than expressions of a romantic doctrine of correspondence. They are ironical, functioning as a riposte to the metaphorical impulse, especially in the subjunctive tone of the ending.

Section 29 is a perfected example of "Natural surrealism," if that term means anything at all:

Tracks of the snowshoe rabbit across the
snow
are a ridiculous ominous alphabet of skulls.

The concern with tracks, with visual evidence results in one of Carruth's only "shaped" poems, 32, a descending right to left, slanting poem about the vertical layers of vegetation on "the wintering mountain." And the supernumerary quality of human intelligence is evident in another section concerning, spoor-evidence:

In freshfallen snow
marks of pad and paw
and even partridge claw
go delicately and distinct
straight as a string of beads
but marks of a heeled boot
waver shuffle wamble
ruckle the snow define
a most unsteady line

then spell it out once
so
death knowledge being heady
it hath not the beasts' beauty
goeth tricksy and ploddy
and usually too damn wordy
but drunken or topsyturvy
gladhanding tea'd or groovy
it arriveth
it arriveth
o you pretty lady.

As in all the other poems in NW, he has not made any punctuation marks except at the end of the poem. The speed of voice created by that lack of graphic punctuation is accentuated by the articulated words, like "freshfallen." The punctual notations are controlled from the inside, by the diction and by meter and by line -- and Carruth uses them all with an expert variety. In this poem we see the terseness of tone in the first strophe, a terseness which accentuates the pun of "heeled boot," give way to an anglo-saxon logomachia worthy of Joyce or Cummings, but actually more reminiscent of Roethke or Patchen.

NW is fragmented but not open-ended. The very last section of the poem is an "Afterword: What the Poet Had Written." It begins with an ellipsis, indicating that the afterword comes somehow from an affect that has accumulated in reading the poem proper, so the afterword is not objective commentary; it is instead a responsive revision and reconstruction of each and all of the other sections. It is also indicative of the theme: personality has a destination, but one cannot know any of the characteristics of that destination before arrival, that is, the journey is fragmented, but not infinite. Winter ends.

The end of the journey in this case is, as a note tells us, "the poet thinking of the arctic expedition of 1909, lead by Commander Peary, who had preserved for himself and
his negro servant,' Matthew Henson, the honor of the final dash to the pole." What they reach is the lonely interior pole:

...nothing they were nothing
afloat on nothing frozen by the winds of
nothing under the meaningless glare of nothing's
eye there where the compass points down
there where the needle turns in...

The interior north is a real place. The afterword directly raises the question of what that fact means, what is it, how am I, how can I know. How can I know?

They drew back not in
fear for fear had consumed itself
but as the painter retreats from his canvas
and so they saved themselves now seeing
how this was the only virtue the withdrawing
mind that steadies before reality and they
turned slowly together through the whole
arc of absurdity with outstretched hands
bestowing cold benediction on the north
and then sank down Another confrontation
murdered them as they peered in each other's eyes...

In Carruth's next book, After The Stranger, the painter-protagonist Aspen will literally retreat from his canvas in order to steady his mind. And both visions are relentless and scary. There is a moment of being, as they bestow "cold benedictions on the north" (futile though that might be). Upon the advent of the sense of community this bestowal incites, the mutual gaze, each sees his own hollowness reflected in the other. If true north is an interior state, of absolute zero, of blank landscape, if, as NW's last lines say, "...north is/ nothing...," then it is a nothing that in desperation rebels against its own nothingness:

...north is a horror from which a horror grows
a purity and a fervor to which in opposition
an equal purity and fervor supervene north
is the latitude of the near remote lying
beyond hope beyond despair lying in destination...

In an essay, "Who I Am," (Sulfur 1, 1981) Carruth begins by quoting among others Andre Breton," There is too much of the north in me to be a man who complies entirely."
purities and fervors of metaphysical rebellion create constant change, constant change in,
given the journeying topos, destination. It is "in the latitude of the near remote." The
ideal, the goal, gives the sense of being distant, no matter how close. This is the nature of
the self; self is the destination, the only point where man may stand in the chaotic
complexities of his relations. It is here, beyond hope or despair, we are.

###

After The Stranger: Imaginary Dialogues with Camus (1965)

To the existential task of making his own rebellion Carruth brings his understanding of the
concepts of bestowal and his insistence on responding to the obligations of the world
outside himself and his art. He also brings a sophisticated understanding of the existential
movement in Western literature. His introduction to Sartre's Nausea (New Directions, 1965)
is a thumbnail sketch of existentialism in America after WWII and of existentialism in
literature. On Carruth's account, though it had precursors far back in Western thought and
culture, existentialism is primarily a modern impulse, springing primarily from Nietzsche
and Kierkegaard, with their "profound concern for the fate of the individual person," and, in
literature, from Dostoevsky. Yet despite evidence of existentialism in the twentieth century,
in Heidegger, Jaspers, Sartre, Ortega, Berdyaev, in Kafka, Lawrence, Hesse, Camus,
Faulkner, et al., it resists, by its very nature, pinpoint definition; it is "not a product of
antecedent intellectual determinations, but a free transmutation of living experience," or in
the summary existential dictum, existence precedes essence (and moral authority precedes
aesthetic strategy). That it is is more important than how it can be described, but, to
accede to the demands of the objective realm of our study, we can perhaps define Carruth’s
position, for the moment.

Without rejecting reason, he insists on the limits of rationalism. In this he is
explicitly anti-Hegelian:

Hegelianism was the philosophy of history and the mass. By projecting a Final Reality toward which all history flows in a process of ever-refining synthesis, Hegel submerged the individual consciousness in a grand unity of ideal mind.

(intro to Sartre)

We can see the drive toward unity in some of Carruth's poems, in "Ignis" (Journey), and in the existence of the Afterword in *North Winter*, which though it is fragmented is not open-ended. These unities are not seen as final, but are contingent; they are not ideal but actual. They assume neither a terminal perspective nor an ideal organization of parts, in fact their existence is fortuitous. Here is Carruth's Jamesian quality. In ATS Aspen believes that William James saw

a world which contained contingency, discontinuity, and in which the centers of experience were irreducibly plural and personal, as against a "block" universe that could be enclosed in a single rational system.

For Carruth, the victory of the logical over the illogical, the definite over the indefinite in a rational unity is not only an illusion, it is morally wrong:

For the Existentialist, who insists that reality is only what he himself knows and experiences, this [rational unity] is meaningless. Not only that, it is cruel and coercive. The Existentialist knows that the self is not submerged, it is present, here and now, a suffering existent, and any system of thought that overrides this suffering is tyrannical.

(intro to Sartre)

Despair arises from the acknowledgement that the self may be formless, inconceivable, that existence is inherently valueless. Yet, from that despair, not the least part of which is its loneliness at not finding a place in the history of Platonic metaphysics, comes an existential integrity that finds, in love, a basis for action in the face of absurdity.

Carruth's brand of existentialism is not a humanism if, as Sartre writes, by humanism one means "a theory which upholds man as the end-in-itself and as the supreme value." For Carruth, as we have seen, this anthrocentric vision of reality is untenable.

But existentialism is a humanism insofar as it reminds man that there is no legislator but himself, that he himself, thus abandoned, must decide for himself; also ... it is not by turning back on himself, but always by seeking, beyond himself, an aim which is one of liberation or of some particular
realization, that man can realize himself as truly human.10

This is not the romantic impulse that seeks the self in nature, instead it seeks a self in the
delicate, suspended flux of rebellion, in the moment, in action.

Carruth ascribes to Sartre "a classically brilliant French mind," which functions in
the Cartesian tradition, that is, it assumes the cogito, "the self-that-is and the self that
observes the self-that-is." This duality generates other dualities, "knowing-doing, being-
becoming, nature-freedom, etc." In short, Sartre has not totally abandoned rationalist
categories; he is a trained philosopher and he advances his theory logically. Camus is
different and for Carruth the poet, more attractive. I won’t address the question of whether
Camus is properly an existentialist, but clearly Carruth perceives a difference between him
and Sartre. Sartre’s elaboration of the structure and the ethics of existentialism is
philosophical in that "it abstracts from the historical factors which constitute the empirical
concreteness."11 Carruth rejects this method because, as we noted above, it tends to
"falsify reality." Camus emphasizes the personal correlative of philosophy; each man is
exemplary of moral values, as opposed to the idea of an incarnation of values. (We will
discuss this idea more, in terms of its meaning for representation, in chapter four.)

Camus, however one describes the content of his thought, is, in method, not a
theoretical philosopher but a moralist, his fabulous fictions in evidence. Carruth is attracted
to Camus’ concern for moral limits, his concern for the limits of philosophy in regard to
suffering, his concerns about the limits of erotic action and romance, and especially his
concern about the limits of art as a means of revolt. Carruth finds these limits for himself
(though not by himself) in a book which is perhaps the most extravagant of his career, in
itself exploring the generic limits of critical discourse and of fictional narrative. After The
Stranger: Imaginary Dialogues with Camus is most revealing of Carruth’s positions on the
concepts of absurdity, lucidity, revolt, hope, and love, and it is essential to an understanding
of the development of his poetry.
ATS is at once a work of fiction and of criticism, the story of the moral and metaphysical search of Aspen, a painter, who bears at times a remarkable psychological and physical resemblance to Carruth. The action is relatively simple. Aspen is recovering from an emotional illness that resulted in a nervous breakdown. He paints alone in his one-room studio, making hundreds of drawings and paintings of a 9x5 "loaf-shaped," smooth, gray stone, by which he is entranced. He reads the newspapers, Partisan Review. He goes outside in his suburb or into the city only at night. "As for the internal aspects of his life, they were indescribable." He is also entranced by Camus' The Stranger, with the meaning of the book and in particular with Meursault's motive for killing the Arab, the act which precipitates his incarceration and trial. Is Meursault completely volitionless? Aspen is intrigued because he, like Meursault, is essentially a non-participant in his own life. Aspen keeps a diary which includes his notes on The Stranger. Finally he decides to seek an answer from Camus in person. He flies to France.

Part Two opens with a conversation between Aspen and Camus, who is being sketched by Aspen as they talk. In part Three, summer arrives. Camus goes away for six months, while Aspen, somehow stabilized by the initial conversations, spends his time meditating on and developing his responses to absurdity, lucidity, death, neurosis, and personality, the topics of their conversations. In Part Four, in November, Camus and Aspen travel south in a car Aspen has bought, an act of expectation and assertion that suggests his psychic healing. They arrive at a run-down, secluded villa on the Mediterranean. It is inhabited by an Algerian, D'Arrast, and an attractive Frenchwoman, Dora. The discussion of The Stranger continues, including now D'Arrast and Dora, who becomes Aspen's lover. D'Arrast, it turns out, is a member of the FLN, and he is in France to try to convince his long-time friend Camus to make a public statement "totally disavowing the French cause in Algeria." Camus eloquently defends his refusal to do so, and thereby raises other issues, most importantly about art as action and about the aesthetics of revolt.
The final section begins just before Christmas. The group breaks up with the intention of coming together again after the holiday. Dora and Aspen go to Italy, where he breaks a leg in a skiing accident. A romantic idyll ensues, during which Dora, a former prostitute, offers her own surprisingly acute perspectives on Camus' work and personality, noting, as Aspen had not guessed, that Camus' behavior indicated that he is in the process of writing a book. They return to the villa on December twenty-ninth. D'Arrast is there. Camus returns on New Year's Eve, and after dinner that night there is a denouement. Existentially contingent, of course. A few days pass; Camus continues writing. And in the final conversation, in regard to some self-deprecating remarks he has made earlier about the social role of the artist and about the necessity of effacing romantic notions of art, Camus reaffirms art's place in revolt and the artist as "princes of lucidity." D'Arrast departs for the guerrilla war. Camus goes back to Paris. Dora and Aspen, who is no longer quaking, drive to Switzerland.

The prose style in the story is a bit odd. At the beginning it is arch, cute, too aware of itself. Carruth had already written a novel, Appendix A (1963), and the beginning of this book shares the flaws of that one. Aspen's diary, functioning in reference as a kind of internal monologue, is set off in the text by heavy brackets, a device which is not only unnecessary but distracting. There are sentences such as "Clothing hung despondently on hooks, like flayed beeves; shoes, with their protective coloring, lay doggo on the floor;" which, because of the facility of their metaphors and the emotional distance between the matter-of-fact tone of the narrative and the hysteria which might validate these perceptions, seem quite awkward. The prose becomes more literal and more forceful as the book progresses. Perhaps this is in deliberate mimesis of Aspen's increasing lucidity. More likely the unpruned metaphoricity of the writing is a sign that the book should have been written over again. Carruth was writing a great deal during this time, in addition to learning the necessities of living in the woods.
The primary significance of ATS is its full-scale elaboration of the concepts to which Carruth will return for the next twenty years, those which define his understanding of existentialism. They can be stated simply without too much distortion. First come the concepts of absurdity and lucidity. If there is no god, and death and obliteration are inevitable, what can any act mean? Action cannot change the fact of obliteration, and, short of that, its efficacy is laughable. In the face of obliteration, by all normal standards of hopeful action, existence is itself absurdly meaningless, and it becomes more absurd every time that death intrudes into life in the forms of fear, fear of death, that fear the source of "all anxiety, all terror" (ATS, 81). This fear is what creates neurosis, which is, like death, like the State, a form of depersonalization. Camus believes that with lucidity, that is, by concentrating on death, death, the mother of absurdity, we gain a sense of "values" in life. Through attention to the terminal nature of our responsibilities, through that teleology, we can resist the depersonalizing effects of meaninglessness; we can create ourselves as persons in rebellion, not against the fact of death, but against the depersonalizing forces of death-in-life.

Aspen however believes at one point that Camus’ Sisyphus is happy not because of his lucidity but because he is immortal. And if he agrees with Camus that we cannot dissolve anxieties with an act of faith, he also disagrees about the ability of lucidity to confront absurdity. Simply, Aspen thinks, lucidity is too static a notion to be realistic. Scorn and rejection of death-in-life are not enough, and lucidity is intermittent. Something else is necessary for the creation of personality. For Aspen, not coincidentally given his erotic relationship with Dora, that necessity exists in the limited possibilities of erotic love.

There will be another discussion of the dynamics of existential eroticism in chapter four, but the seminary of this espousal is here in ATS. On Camus’ account (or of course on Carruth’s Camus’ account) it is "in opposition, lucid opposition, [that] one becomes
crystallized, so to speak, one is delimited and identified." But to Carruth-Aspen this sounds a bit too neat. He is deeply involved with Dora, and it is sex that has led him to happiness. He sees that absurdity comes from within as well as without; to love is to overcome death-in-life, the anxiety that prevents the creation of personality -- but erotic engagement also creates the most dangerous and destructive consequences; it is the hotbed of human error.

For Aspen-Carruth successful revolt comes from lucidity plus strength. He needs an exterior source of strength: "it must be a fellowship which is intimate and personal and responsive. In the nature of things, this means a sexual relationship" (163). Camus, the character, believes that love leading to that kind of solidarity is fortuitous, rare, because sex is bodily, mechanical, grounded in physiological not ethical necessity. D’Arrast tells Aspen later that Camus had been bound to reject Aspen’s radical hope for eroticism because he was a romantic instinctively, deeply, "and as an artist he has to exclude it. He knows if he permitted himself to follow his bent, he’d be overboard in a minute, and he’s deathly afraid of it"(138). Again sex as a source of freedom will be one of the topics to which we will pay attention in considering Carruth’s objections to Thoreau, but to summarize it for the moment: liberated sex is not a tyranny of human physiology. Nor should desire rule life. (Erotic, like intellectual, discourse is not reality, but it contributes heavily). Presumably the decision to abstain is also an act of freedom, provided it is a positive decision and a personal decision, not necessarily an ethical necessity.

In addition to being an important account of Carruth’s erotic brand of existentialism, ATS also reveals in many ways his attitudes about literary influence. Camus is a master writer. Aspen has gone to him to find personal resolutions. As Aspen makes his own exegesis of Meursault’s character, his sketches of Camus gaze down on him in various demeanor of approbation and concern. Camus as a personality is always with Aspen, as in his writings he is with Carruth. In his afterword note to ATS Carruth says that the book is
an effort "to combine homage with inquiry," that is, to personalize the analysis. This is
how the book got its form, an imaginary dialogue, a form which is logically consistent with
Carruth's feelings about influence and the community of artists. Elsewhere he quotes
Longinus:

"similarly from the great natures of the men of old there are borne in upon the
souls of those who emulate them (as from sacred caves) what we may describe as
effluences, so that even those who seem little likely to be possessed are thereby
inspired and succumb to the spell of the others' greatness." This is [Carruth adds]
the inspiration that comes not from "originality, which in any case is a delusion, but
as confirmation, the best and only reliable inspiration we can hope for. (Ef,3)

ATS is essentially a collaboration, as are all honest critical acts save theories so pure they
do not touch the work itself. ATS is a rewriting of Camus, and the question of originality
is not an issue, though it is elsewhere for Carruth. In his "Foreword" to Stephen Berg's

With Akmatova At the Black Gates: Variations, Carruth writes,

The use of cultural reference in art is not, as some anti-intellectuals think, to show
off the artist’s learning; nor is it, a some intellectuals think, primarily to reinforce
meanings. It is to strengthen the companionship of artists living and dead so that
their action may be more cogent throughout the polity. With exactly this in mind,
Pound called his rewriting of Propertius an "homage."12

Carruth's emulation of Camus takes an even more impressive personal form than in ATS.

His next major work is a poem, a sequence of verse paragraphs against depersonalization,

Contra Mortem.
In Carruth’s critical fiction, *After The Stranger*, the painter-protagonist, Aspen, asks Camus if it is true that *The Myth Of Sisyphus* and *The Stranger* are "more or less coeval, so to speak, the essayistic and fictional sides of the same coin." Camus replies, "They come from the same sources, yes." This relationship also exists between *ATS* and the next major work of Carruth’s, the poetic sequence *Contra Mortem*, which is, according to Carruth, "in a way a versification of *After The Stranger*, as far apart as they are in style, structure, etc."

In this poem, dedicated to Denise Levertov and Adrienne Rich "who read it first," Carruth’s huge lyric talent works absolutely in harmony with his newly won and rapidly increasing awareness of existential writer. It is his first fully mature work. There are of course echoes of other poets here, but they are subsidiary; Carruth is soaring with his own voice.

Carruth wrote *Contra Mortem* (CM) in his converted cow shed at his home in Johnson, Vermont, at great speed, a 15-line paragraph a day for a month. It gives evidence of this speed not with the Williamsesque typography he attempted in the third part of *Journey To A Known Place*, "Aer," but in the many word-combinations, two words into one, that he had made in *North Winter*, and in the omission of punctuation except for the period terminating each paragraph. Instead there are space notations within the paragraphs, the same paragraphics that he used in *The Asylum*. Here he has mastered the length, the rhyme, and it seems to go effortlessly; and the effect of the writing goes beyond the former limit of the technique.

The poem appeared in its first version in a relatively huge issue of *Poetry* (v.106, 1&2, April-May 1965), which consisted of long poems in progress -- by Carruth, Wendell Berry, Robert Creeley, Ronald Johnson, Galway Kinell, and Denise Levertov, et al. Carruth published the poem himself under the Crow’s Mark imprint in 1967 in an issue of 250 copies. He has said he published himself in an effort to see if he could do as good or
better a job than other houses, large and small, had done. The poem was reprinted in For You (New Directions 1970).

**Contra Mortem** is nothing less than a discursion upon the ground, the components of being. I refrain from using the analytically determined rubric "ontological" for reasons both existential and practical. The poem is not a study of the ground of being, though its parts can be parted so; it is a being. **After The Stranger** embodied this consideration dramatically. CM is a discovery and a bodying forth of the self within and extensible of its infinite relations with wife, with child, with village, with the natural world, and, perhaps most significantly, with the inner source of absurdity, human intelligence and imagination.

In probing towards its center, or its margins, as you will, the motive historically sanctioned by ... by itself, the mind in its own peregrinations finds nothing. He finds Nothing. This mystery is confronted again and again. It becomes a consummating refrain in the lyric structure of the sequence:

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There in the huge fire
that rusts every thing away in the opening middle
where the world falls in forever There There.
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Call it a comprising
call it the center and edge of every relation
the jourmeyer's pivot and the jourmeyer's horizon.
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With a desolate
cry falling falling falling into the star
the candleflame the spark and through and out
in the noplace where all the nothings never are.
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In "The Nothing II," the third-from -last paragraph, before the affirmation that is in effect the same as the one Camus makes before his exit in ATS, Carruth locates and evaluates the end of existence as it has been, is, will be reached by rational human intelligence.

Where the child’s eyes glaze with memory where the man’s glaze
with foreknowledge and how they darken and alter
to vacancy as when the shifting breeze
ramps like a closing shutter
on the deeplighted bay look in the woman’s eyes
bravely in the moment of rapture when the skies
loom between her lashes or look there
in the mirror at those eyes bend closer
and closer still look in the black pupils
where other eyes appear
and in them others infinitely infinitely pools
of incomprehension look the fear
is nothing look the courage nothing the song
has no consequence look look it is here
nothing nothing nothing nothing nothing

No breaks. This is an ensemble of the poet’s concern for the coordinates of personality. It
assumes the burden and extends the refrain of the sequence. It is helpful to remember here
what Aspen, the painter-protagonist of After The Stranger, wrote in his diary:

the limits of lucidity are extensible . . . First through the normal effort of
concentration; second, and more important, through the faculties of anticipation and
retrospection . . . This corroborates the faculties of memory and prevision [which] have no
power to rationalize a mindless existence; but they do render it less terrifying (ATS 88).

Later Aspen writes,

If the personality is held to be a structure of memory, the past, at any rate, is
important. In a completely real sense we live in it as well as on it. Yet without
hope.

He says that for him the present has never been real, which is
radically different from Camus. He continues,

It is possible to live in time without living in history. Not only possible but
necessary, just as it is necessary to live in meaninglessness without living in
derangement. And because prevision is only memory inverted, the corollary is this:
it is possible to live in expectation without living in hope.

Finally he concludes,

Memory and expectation, not to be confused with history and hope. Happiness has
no present, lucidity no rest. Existence is without value or values. Yet it is not,
because of this, necessarily devoid of order.

In Contra Mortem Carruth has imposed poetic order on the concepts of memory and
prevision. The first two lines of "The Nothing II," above, are presaged by the three
previous paragraphs, "The Being As Memory," "The Being As Moment," and "The Being
As Prevision." The first is a phantasmagoria of images, beginning and ending with a carpet raveling on a loom," images of women, war, music. "The Being As Moment" begins by positing the present moment as "between a sea and a sea where the combers meet/ in the cancellations of their endless breaking/ between a dream and a dream where the night/ arrests in eternal waking." The present is enigma, defined not by essential characteristics but by its perceived limits. The paragraph ends with a question: "will the lovers on that continually dying/ wave of sensation ever really know/ what they know their drift and their expiring/ between a sea and a sea in the faint starglow?" The eerie crepuscular loneliness is a tone characteristic of Carruth's discursion on his understanding of self-creation, lonely, rebellious and sad. Writing is itself an act of creation, rebellious and assertive in its creation, elegiac insofar as it sets new limits on previously unlimited possibility, a lamentable act:

The pen wrote freedom's elegy nothing less than ultimate aggrievment for the cost of mind's disablement in loneliness and for the natural things so wrongly lost.

"The Being As Prevision" is a dramatization of human searching, a tragedy where being flits like a moth in a fantastic landscape which also has real characteristics. Any meaning, any understanding, all cogency is brief; "through a gap the source/ burns burns for a dazzling instant and then turns blank." The title in the original version is "The Being As Vision," and this condition of brevity might well describe also moment and memory; as Aspen noted, they are all three the same, equal in their contribution to being. They form its limits and the limits of poetic voice as well. Voice, and style, are part memory, part moment, and part expectation. With the child's memory and the man's foreknowledge comes hope, which in its constant failures of teleology finds back nothing, the same nothing in "the woman's eyes when the skies/ loom between her lashes", that is, the romantic impulse that tries to find self in other, reflective in love, is also empty. Carruth agrees
with D.H. Lawrence: "All vital truth contains the memory of that for which it is not true."

This is especially true for the erotically inclined self, which according to its own demand, shortly finds that is is no longer suffering the light of the other or of "that time."

The eyes of the self in the mirror, an image of self-sufficiency, of asceticism and its attendant narcissicism, are also a mirror. But finally none of these acknowledgements of oblivion are consequential. The five "Nothing"s in the final line resume the allusion to Lear's last words begun in "look there" in the seventh. Lear ends:

And my poor fool is hanged: no, no, no life?  
Why should a dog, a horse, a rat have life,  
And thou no breath at all? Thou'lt come no more,  
Never, never, never, never, never ...

Do you see this? Look on her. Look on her lips,  
Look there, look there.

He dies. In this aural allusion Carruth has reversed the order of the phrases in Lear's lines. This has not only a poetic, but a philosophic affect. Instead of the exoteric nature of Lear's mirage, Carruth moves from the exoteric, using the imperative to look chorically (meaning look and see), to the esoteric, the internal existence of it: "it is here/ nothing nothing nothing nothing nothing." This reflects part of the cohesive design of the larger structure of the poem. The end of time, of voice, the moment of death, if you will, is recapitualted as memory, to a primary position. (A clairvoyant and immediate acceptance of death defines Camus's concept of lucidity.) The movement of the song is then from the remembered past to the remembered present. This is evident in "the Child" and "The Child's Being." In the first the child is "Backward rocking" looking up in his immaturity and falling down, "extended a being from his arse to his three wits/ real to ideal and then gets up/ weeping..." A fabulous history of philosophy is here. In his Platonic search, his confusions of rationalism, his ideal-looking urging, he fails, falls into the real. The description of him is breech-first, like Carruth's inversions of Lear's speech. Here, crudely put, arse = real, head = ideal. The failure of Platonism, existentialism's seminary, is the
reason the child gets up weeping. Weeping into romanticism and the failures of that
response to the failures of Rationalism. "The Great Death" concludes:

The children went back
to school where a few of them comprehended
that what was called their questing was their lack.

This is another allusion, condensed, symbolic, and dramatic, this time to Plato's
Symposium, where Socrates forces Agathon to admit that love, or Eros, lacks beauty,
because that is what it seeks in the beloved.

"The Child's Being," paragraph 21, begins "Extended and always uncentered" and
says later the child is "a stranger to the pronominal itch..." That itch is of course "I." This
is a good thing. Is this another child? Yes, the first was the allegorized child, allegorized
by the poet himself. Here is the existential child who

puts on
his being as the dark world
in its necessity puts on the dawn
by turning toward it The child
trembling in halflight giving himself away
becomes sun's favor the choice of what is not willed
a being freeborn and intricate like the day.

It would take pages fully to unpack these lines, but a few comments may suffice. Carruth,
against all reason, is here asserting the necessity, necessity for him is a very important
word, of desire, the inherent impossibility of escaping desire. To want the other and to
give one's self away. To choose what is not willed. This is the paradox of existence, to
which we must assent if we will survive. Look at the line "his being as the dark world."
What else can we have of the world except each dark, darkened other? The child to the
father? The father to the child? Carruth's existentialism is not so programmatic that he
can refuse an homage to Wordsworth.

Surely the abyss of nothing, falling away on every side, invites insanity, that
reactive, often reflective chaos. But as Aspen noted, existence is not "necessarily devoid of
order." That order again is defined by its limits, not by its essence. After "The Nothing
II" the next and penultimate paragraph, "The Wheel of Being I," resounds with against the limits of words and of personalities, the "being" of the poem:

   Changing figures  The dionysian child
   the woman in her assurances the old town
   in its hallucinations spilled
   like dominoes the mountain
   and the void the moon and the sun whirled
   from mist-hidden vale to vale and the day coiled
   in the forest  A word is like an ant
   dragging a dead spider the meant
   and the unmeant ...

People come first, then human evidence, the town in its aleotropic imposition, then the natural world, in which "the void" has reality equivalent to the mountain. Is this too an inversion, a artful recapitulation? I can't say. But regardless of order, all of these exist both as they are and also in the relatively intractable medium of language. They define the self, which exists on the page, as a voice.

   So upon ragged changing seas
   the poem which is a ship
   buoyed by its hollowness on the abstruse
   coordinates of meaning carries the loop
   of its horizon forever with it  Scan
   this circle vanishing across the deep
   It is contrived it is actual it is a man.

The poem is a ship, transporting self, or being, and the cargo necessary for self-sustenance. The horizon-bound world of the poem-ship-man is an image of the radically perspectival and subjective nature of meaning. But as a poem it is an object in the real world both sensible and unknowable, the only evidence of personality. Contrivance and actuality are of course not exclusive states, nor is there a moral or phenomenological hierarchy: to be is not to be essentially, to be more or less as in the Platonic dualism between real and ideal: to be is to be made. The poem does not express or symbolize man; the poem is a man.

Searching. The navigational imagery also comes from Aspen: "Our minds and bodies are innately attuned to action, to launching. We launch ourselves upon the sea of the possible person. The point is to do it in the manner of a swimmer, not in the manner of a
The final paragraph, beautifully climactic in its rhythms, suggests the contingency, the hopelessness of lucid self-creations. We have nothing else.

Such figures if they succeed are beautiful because for a moment we brighten in a blaze of rhymes and yet they always fail and must fail and give way to other poems in the endless approximations of what we feel Hopeless it is hopeless Only the wheel endures It spins and spins winding the was the is the willbe out of nothing and thus we are Thus on the wheel we touch each to each a part of the great determining reality How much we give to one another Perhaps our art succeeds after all our small song done in the faith of lovers who endlessly change heart for heart as the gift of being Come let us sing against death.

To keep coming near to what we feel to be the moment of full being, but never arriving.

The "was" of memory, the "is" of moment, the "willbe" of prevision are themselves contrived out of nothing, as is Carruth's greatest poem, The Sleeping Beauty, a poem made "out of nothing," "by no one." There is a determining reality; it is in constant flux, composed of other realities, other personalities. Being is determined within the community where the claims to existence of each and every other being must be acknowledged. The first version of the poems reads,

thus we touch and are the coglike parts of one another's reality Each to each is the eternity of the personal source therefore some are moralists and some have faith but some who live in the free exchange of hearts as the gift of being are lovers against death.

The language here is more technical and less charming, positively analytical and normative, taxonomic, but more emphatic about the necessity of choice. The refusal to admit, with whatever degree of generosity, is what separates murderers from lovers. Heart must be changed for heart. There is no question about the moral imperative here. And hearts are a
symbol of identity in flux, flux for, that is, in service of, existence. And the directive is
change, not exchange. The difference is all about love, love which insists we sing together
against death, contra mortem.

Carruth has written over and over about the kind of self-definition he advocates, "a
transcendent subjectivity, not the ego. The absolute self in poetry is what creates and
responds to rhyme and meter, the sensual, the expressive . . . Absolute selfhood is neither
vain nor humble, for these are qualities solely of the reactive ego in the subjective world."
This absolute selfhood is evident in the extreme music of Contra Mortem, the selfhood of a
poet firmly in control of all he knows, all practical wisdom and all poetic technique. Yet
this selfhood is non-egoistic. There are 450 lines in this poem; the words "I," or "my," or
any of the forms by which the ego asserts itself in the objective world are completely
absent. This teaches the practical wisdom of the poem, which insists upon its own
usefulness from the epigraph at the beginning, from Lao-tse:

Thirty spokes unite in one nave
and because of the part where nothing is
we have use of the wheel.

Contra Mortem is a wise and useful poem, to which concerned readers of Carruth's
poetry will go again and again, not only for its force and beauty, but also because it allows
us to trust his whole work, even poems, parts of poems, to which we cannot fully assent.
It marks the beginning of the period of his best work, the best period of one of the most
accomplished poets of our time.
Notes: Chapter Two

1. Galway Kinnell in his "Introduction" to Carruth’s Selected Poems.
5. Ibid., 271.
8. Ibid., 160.
10. Ibid.
Chapter Three

"I live where Frost lived. So? It's a free country. Don't jump to conclusions." (from The Clay Hill Anthology)

From Snow and Rock, from Chaos (1973), Dark World (1974), Brothers, I Loved You All (1978), If You Call This Cry a Song (1983)
Although these four books were published across a decade, they can be seen in one way as all of a piece; they are all books heavily concerned with place, with Vermont. The poems in all were written during roughly the same period. From Snow includes poems from 1965-72, Brothers, poems from 1969-77, and Cry is, as Carruth says in the prefatory note, a miscellany of poems written as early "as 1964 or 1965, the latest in 1979." This is roughly the time from the first publication of Contra Mortem and the magazine appearance of poems in Snow to the time of the composition of poems that were written simultaneously with the final revisions of The Sleeping Beauty. Most of the poems in Cry were "published in magazines but then were mislaid among accumulations of other paper or were intentionally omitted from the books they might have gone into because there wasn’t room ... some poems that I remember, though not well enough to reconstruct them, have failed to turn up." This in no way implies the poems in Cry are inferior. They are not.

Carruth has said that on these occasions, when the publisher wanted to publish a book shorter than the one he proposed, he himself usually got to chose which poems stayed in the manuscript, or, rather, which poems went together into another book. Therefore the poems in each of these books were deliberately chosen by Carruth -- for reasons presumably other than the order of composition. The back cover of Snow, which Carruth certainly okayed (if not wrote himself) describes the book as "a selection of his best short poems written between 1965 and 1972." Dark World was originally part of the same manuscript with Snow. Brothers contains only 28 of the many 15-line paragraphs, separate from The Sleeping Beauty, which have never been published. Though each of these books has a particular thematic character, because of their similarities it seems productive to discuss them at once, and to discuss individual poems in regard to their place in the development of larger patterns in Carruth’s poetics, which will be the topics of the final
three chapters.

To grant the books their deserved integrities of response and of voice, though, we should first consider them as discreet issues. From Snow and Rock, from Chaos (New Directions, 1973) is as good an introduction to Carruth's work as any single collection. In these exquisitely fine lyrics about love, about family, about psychological incapacities and courages, about the natural world, Carruth responds with his full range of poetic perception. Each poem gives evidence of Carruth's training in the variety of lyric modes; the pace of the poetry is expert, as many readers have noted. Normally blurbage solicited by publishers is critically negligible (and negligent), but on the back cover of Snow is a response by George Dennison, playwright and author of The Lives of Children, Oilers and Sweepers, and Luisa Domic; his assessment goes right to the essential qualities of Carruth's accomplishment in this book. It is enthusiastic, of course, but also evocative and precise:

...What effects me most is the way these qualities combine, their drive toward wholeness -- its how the poet's moments of deep feeling arrive. I'll say it crudely: they're gobbets rather than feelings, flesh and thought together. But not at all in the technical sense. It's as if a piece of music were to include the felt outcries of the musicians. These moments are so alive, so immediate, that I take their context to be their actual coming about, something unmediated and direct. The effect is tension, conflict, even harshness, getting ripe and opening into resolutions that are beautiful and exciting. I think there is a very human faith underlying this process, faith not only in art but in some sort of dialectic of error, pain and virtue, the tendency of the spirit to clarify itself.

Dennison talks about the meaning of the poems in terms of their music, and of the full sensual and intellectual effect in terms of the pace of the voice, and he speaks of human faith in terms of emotional and moral, not analytical, dialectics. He is talking about process, not product; activity, not masterpiece. He notes the kind of fullness Carruth managed first in Contra Mortem, "flesh and thought together," the poet and the thinker as one, (one reason why I am treating Carruth as both.) Carruth shows that the caviling generalities about which idiom can do what, that is, whether prose, or regularly metered poetry or free verse can best describe, or argue, show ecstasy or carry mundane information,
that these arguments are extinguished in the presence of a poetry that, as James Wright wrote of *Brothers*, "is startling in its mastery." Dennison clearly feels the force of personality in *Snow*, its "felt outcries," and the immediacy of its improvisational qualities, which comes from jazz and is deeply informed by the existential insistence on process. And yet the total effect -- note his words, "ripe," "opening up"-- has somehow an organic quality, for which his response is, "beautiful." Beauty fought for, disbelieved, rejected, and finally, as a gift to the other, a gift in the objective world, this beauty is turned by the poem.

It is finally and after all beauty which Carruth achieves, despite his despair about the cost. In "Anima, for Janet," (Cry), he talks about the unambiguous attractions of beauty:

Firelight and starlight and woman,  
complete and beautiful, for only  
one place is known, ever, and this is  
there, meaning beauty, meaning  
all that is human in one fathoming,  
the passion of mind, the reflectiveness  
of spirit. I do not know on this shore  
of a shadowed field in the shadow of my  
old age, what else a man lives for.

The dedicatory nature of this poem is the one which begins *Snow*, with "Dedication in These Days" and "I Could Take." These short love poems are followed by "Reverting Still Again," a poem about "The hatch," reminiscent of The Asylum, and then "Fear and Anger in the Mindless Universe," a poem strangely Frostian and thoroughly disagreeable. A Vermonter, Evan, is walking to Cambridge junction (uncapitalized like many of the proper nouns in this book), when he witnesses a car crashing and then watches furtively as "the stranger" bleeds to death

    in ten minutes

    though the ice patch weren't his fault  
    and Evan began to feel better --

    he even begun to laugh.
That was last tuesday week in the forenoon

but now
he tells it without smiling

quicklike
looking out the corner of his eye.

Despite the strangeness of rhythm created by the broken couplets the diction is Frostian, New England in terseness as well as in its vernacular. As an exemplum of "Fear and Anger In the Mindless Universe" the action, or the inaction, is disturbingly effective. Evan lives in the same red-neck fear and anger as the miller in Frost's "The Vanishing Red," which is, on Carruth's account, one of Frost's best. The connection between Evan and the miller is their inhumanity, their nihilism. The miller puts the Indian down into the wheel housing, and

then he shut down the trap door with a ring in it
That jangled even above the general noise,
And came upstairs alone -- and gave that laugh.

This is the climax of the poem, Carruth thinks, "the Miller's laugh, and what that laugh means is the heart of Frost's poetic temperament: the blackest, bitterest despair in three hundred years of the New England Tradition." He suggests that the despair is radically Puritan, the vision of man in self-made hell; "It is the greatest absurdity, as our survival somehow in spite of it, our blind, ceaseless endurance, is the greatest heroism." If there is a ring of the Faulknerian in this, it is because this also describes Jason's laughter.


The next several poems deal with love again, and work, and with how they coordinate life. Love, work, place, lucidity create an potential unity in which the erotic solidarity of the heretofore incomplete personalities is the consolidating force:
Liebe, our light rekindled
in this remoteness from the other land,
in this dark of the blue mountain where only
the winds gather

is what we are for the time that we are
what we know for the time that we know

How gravely and sweetly the poor touch in the dark.
("If It Were Not For You")

This kind of unity has to be established not only in place but in a time. In *Contra Mortem* Carruth made a unity from the elements of human apperception of time: memory, moment, prevision. Here, in "The Ravine" for example, time is apprehended as the measure of change, change in the natural world. "The Ravine" begins as a nature morte description of the ravine: weeds, mink, snake, dead woodcock; the moment. The poet remembers,

in spring it
cascaded, in winter it filled with snow
until it lay hidden completely. In time,
geologic time, it will melt away
or deepen beyond recognition, a huge
gorge. These are what I remember and foresee.
These are what I see here everyday,
Not things but relationships of things,
quick changes and slow. These are my sorrow,
for unlike my bright admonitory friends
I see relationships, I do not see things.
These, such as they are, every day, every
unique day, the first in time and the last,
are my thoughts, the sequences of my mind.
I wonder what they mean. Every day,
day after day, I wonder what they mean.

Moment, memory, prevision are bestowed upon reality. They are revelatory of reality in the paced timing of the poem. The tone, so characteristic of Carruth, is querulous and elegiac. To see things in relationship is to see them change. The thing-in-itself, the objective moment, objectivism, the optimist of "realism," are, in art or in the artless encountering of life, illusion. But the relationships of the word are, not are symbolic of (the mind is an organization of tissues suspended in a saline solution), are the sequences of
the poet’s mind. Without alluding to the concept of bestowal directly, Philip Booth in his review of *Brothers* has found the sources of Carruth’s radical relativism:

But nothing is entirely "in itself" when met by the poet. In the poet’s consciousness of his relationship [his italics] to the actual, what’s ordinary becomes extraordinary as it is raised by the power of a voice (however quiet) which verifies the music of time’s inconstant constancy. Because poetry assumes time (as painting and sculpture assume space) poetry is by nature elegiac: by timing itself (through every tactic of rhythm, caesura, resonance, recurrence, pace, etc.) to make present the immediacy of a time out of time, a poem celebrates both its own temporal nature and (paradoxically) the timeless vitality of its own being.4

This is an intimate and clairvoyant appraisal of what Carruth has done in "The Ravine," in many other poems in this book, and in the other three books we are considering here. Carruth’s concept of lucidity, that is, keeping obliteration ever in mind, coincides with the way that a poem must necessarily unfold in time. It is the same way that a personality accretes, toward extinction. Poetry assumes time and so it assumes the end of a time. Death is in fact the mother of this beauty.

In "Homecoming" the speaker’s family returns to "the part of the world (we) had left locked/ in safety," to find "two deaths, two abstractions," a pine tree and old Steve Washer

a free-born man
who in the toil of self-creation probably wished

he wasn’t often enough, and so was like us all;
his loss, as ours will be, is irreplaceable.

That is understood. The man is gone. And the type is almost gone, the tough, hard-minded Yankee.

The qualities of independence, reticence, and practicality are those that Steve Washer passed on to his son, Carruth’s neighbor, Marshall Washer, the subject of the poem entitled with his name. Marshall is a "cowshit farmer," whom Carruth often worked with on Washer’s farm, worked in tight-lipped Yankee silence:

Privacy is what this is, not reticence, not minding one’s own business, but a positive sense of the secret inner man, the sacred identity.
A man is his totem, the animal of his mind.

Carruth comes to this stunning idea, "the animal of his mind," through his vital, often inarticulate, work with Washer.

Is the creature who is "the animal of his mind," man, going to suffer the fate of the other animals in *Snow, Brothers, and Cry*? They are dying, murdered. Carruth sees the "Birds of Vietnam,

you maimed, you
poisoned in your nests, starved
in the withered forests

O mindless heartless,
you never invented hell.

The poem concludes,

O mindless heartless, I can’t
help it, I have so loved
this world.

There is a pervasive sense of man’s ignoble bestiality here, but to say that "a man is the animal of his mind," is an odd way to put it. It is close to an idea of Breton’s, or rather to one that Breton gleaned from Novalis,

In reality we live in an animal whose parasites we are. The constitution of this animal determines ours and vice versa.4

In his insistence on admitting the equality of natural phenomena, Carruth is even closer to William James:

Who knows whether, in nature, we do not occupy just as small a place alongside beings whose existence we so not suspect as our dogs and cats that live with us in our homes.

For Carruth domestic animals are often numinous, not symbolically other than they are, but somehow more than they usually seem. "The Cows at Night" is one of his most beautiful, complexly quiet lyrics. The speaker is driving in summer in Vermont, already off the main road as the poem begins. He comes to a field where he sees cows, "Always a shock/ to remember them there, those/ great breathings close in the dark." He counts them by
flashlight, seeing their faces as somehow sad, beautiful, innocent, somehow as an image of the remembered feminine, within and other.

But I did not want to go, not yet, nor what to do if I should stay, for how in that great darkness could I explain anything, anything at all. I stood by the fence. And then very gently it began to rain.

The final epiphany here is crushingly effective. A man standing in ignorance, alone, by a cow pasture in the rain. What can be said about the technique that imbues this quiet scene with this power? There is no allusion, elision, evasion, no critical property here. The equipoise of diction, pace, and measure is so cohesive within the meaning of the poem that to talk about them separately seems more than normally fruitless, but perhaps a comparison with another poem will be enlightening.

In the way it comes quietly to its genuine beauty at the end, "The Cows at Night" is comparable to James Wright’s much-anthologized "A Blessing." In Wright’s poem the speaker and a friend have stopped to pet some ponies beside the road:

I would like to hold the slenderer one in my arms, For she has walked over to me And nuzzled my left hand. She is black and white, Her mane falls wild on her forehead, And the light breeze moves me to caress her long ear That is delicate as the skin over a girl’s wrist. Suddenly I realize That if I stepped out of my body I would break Into blossom.

These poems both display a decidedly open yearning for a merging with nature, a merging that is both invited and denied by nature. The two voices exist in their yearning, which is how they are in the world, but the way they mean is drastically different. Wright’s poem comes The Branch Will Not Break, a period, when he, like Bly, Strand, Kinnell, Merwin,
Rich, et al., was working within the imagistic surreal influence of poets like Jiminez, Guillen, Guillivec, Neruda, Vallejo, Salinas, Mandelstam, and Trakl, whom he and the others were translating.

Carruth wrote poems in this mode also, in *Snow* and in the book that was made out of poems from the same manuscript but published in the next year, *Dark World*.

I would like to compare the substance and the effects of these two poems, not in order invidiously to demote Wright's poem, but to suggest certain of Carruth's accomplishments. Wright's speaker is "just off the highway," Carruth's is "on the bottom road through the mist of mountain dark," both ideationally marginal, in the geographic metaphor. Carruth sees the cows at some distance in the dark, then he remembers their presence. They turn their faces, animae of history, to him. Wright says the Indian ponies "love each other. There is no loneliness like theirs." This might strike some, not me, as dangerously close to the fatuous, to pathos, or both. My point is that the loneliness bodied forth much more convincingly in Carruth's poem is never named.

The epiphanic endings which seem similar are less so on examination, and again the difference is telling. In Wright's poem, the pony approaches, nuzzles his left hand (the attention to detail is what moves this poem so quietly and effectively to its end), and then he touches "her long ear/ that is delicate as the skin over a girl's wrist." Like Carruth's cows, the ponies are a reminder of feminine youth, or rather "youth/ Feminized, sexual but eternal" (SB,78). The end of Wright's poem does arrive "suddenly" and mysteriously. The speaker "realizes" (an intellection) that if he stepped out of his body he would break into blossom. Why the conditional? And why the ecstasy first and then the inflorescence? Wouldn't that stepping out itself be a blossoming? The touch of the pony seems to satisfy the initial yearning, and the finale seems to be a statement of satisfaction, completion, unity, but one which creates another kind of yearning, which is indicated by the conditional, which awaits another set of possibilities. This cycle can go on as long as one likes, "a
series in which desire obliterates itself and the self posits repetitions of the first moment of desire" (Kierkegaard). What can end this cycle of desire except true ecstasy, death?

Carruth, on the other hand, is, in his poem, in the moment between going (forgetting) and staying (satisfaction). But Wright has stepped "over the barbed wire into the pasture." Carruth, although off the road, remains separated from the cows by the fence. He remains as ignorant and unsatisfied as ever..."And then..." The tensile strength of the tercets sets up an expectancy here which Wright forfeits both with his irregular lines and by already having used "twilight," "softly," "kindness," "gladly," "happiness," "shyly," "loneliness," "light breeze," "caress," and "delicate."

And then
very gently it began to rain.

The invitation of nature (and the concomitant invitation to romantic solipsism) is on one hand refused, an heroic refusal because appropriative desire is and has always been tragic. On the other hand it is accepted; the speaker has a simple reaction. He turns off the flashlight. He assents to the void both within and without and, without guilt, to the absurdity of his desire. And then...and then he writes a thunderously quiet line which evokes the whole Romantic tradition of correspondence. The line break before the final line is the selvedge of a basic paradox: opposites, the intellection about "what to do" and the natural action in possible answer, the rain, are held in a rigorous tension. This is what Denison sees as the "tension, conflict even harshness... opening into resolutions that are beautiful and exciting."

Again, none of this is meant to demean Wright's poem. Carruth's own high regard for Wright and his poetry is unquestionable. He has written that Wright "tried hard to avoid the forcing and the self-conscious allusiveness of heavy-handed emblematicism. Instead he was close to nature, especially to small things in nature, and he wanted them to come into his poems naturally and to assume their symbolic functions with a certain
delicacy or shyness" (SI, 118). Naturalness, then, the attempt at natural delicacy in the
making of symbolic elements of a poem is something Wright and Carruth share.

This delicacy and respect for the integrity of things and of words, especially in the
realm of the symbol fabricated from the natural world, is of course a dilemma for the
imagination. Carruth found the concept of bestowal did not dissolve that dilemma, but it
was as good an intellectual paradigm as any for describing how he wanted to handle the
dilemma. This bestowing touch is evident in the poems of this period. There is an attempt
to show both the thing and the emotional valence of the thing, and therein also to show
somehow the dynamic of the bestowal itself, emotional, and, yes, self-consciously artistic.
In "I Know, I Remember, But How Can I Help You," a doe’s presence under the northern
lights becomes a moment which, greeted by the wonderful yearning of the man, is
complicated of all of the elements of being: memory, moment, and prevision; and beauty,
fear, desire, remorse. And inevitable solitude:

I remember but without the sense other light-
storms
cold memories discursive and philosophical
in my mind’s burden
and the deer remembers nothing.
We move on our feet crunching bitter snow while the
storm
crashes like god-wars down the east
we shake the sparks from our eyes
we quiver inside our shocked fur
we search for each other
in the apple thicket --
a glimpse, an acknowledgement
it is enough and never enough --
we toss our heads and say goodnight
moving away on bitter bitter snow.

The supernumerary nature of human intelligence does not preclude its impulse to find a
correspondence with the doe’s temporally one-dimensional imagination. Impossible. Yet
there is a shared world, shared imperfectly; it is "enough and never enough." Impossible
for either to come all the way into the spirit of the other. The pragmatic element of
Carruth's mind compels him in the transaction between reality and imagination to realize the limits of the later, a limit which potentiates the entire exchange. The personalizing urge insists that he negotiate the schism, up to the point where it becomes, for him, morally and therefore aesthetically untenable. Poetry becomes an intermission, an act of creative imagination which is an act of personality, an act of love, an intermission between the inner and outer void. It exists both as a time and as a place where change and affirmation can justifiably occur. This notion is as central as any to Carruth poetics:

It [poetry] returns from the frontiers of experience bearing chaos and revolution, the rawness of events, which it submits to the regulative conceptualizing of our permanent, concrete, basic, human modes; that is, to language....(WP,200) It follows that poetry is social, though not in any sense of the term used by sociologists. It follows then that poetry is political, leaving the political scientists far behind. Maybe it even follows that if the substance of a poem, or part of it, is expressly though broadly social or political, this fact will reinforce the subjective communalism of the poet’s intention in his transcendent act; but that is a question -- the interrelationship of substance and the vision of form, or of moral and aesthetic feeling -- to which twenty-five years of attention have given me no answer...Finally it follows that the politics of the poet, in his spirituality, will be a politics of love. For me this means non-violent anarchism, at least as a means; I know no end. For others it means something else. But we will share, at least in our spirituality, far more than we will dispute.(WP,288-89)

Poetry is, in other words, (Carruth's), like the strange thing given to the speaker in "This Decoration" (Snow):

How
exquisite, flowers
of imagination from this
real world, made and given
for lovingkindness

Note how the ear must meet and transform the normal syntax of "real world made and given" by attending to the comma. The affect is itself thus already made (in the ear's expectance of regularity) and given (by the poet’s bestowal of the comma.)

Carruth rejects deliberate and sadly abhors de facto assumptions of artistic autonomy. He insists on the demands of experience. And he has said this repeatedly.

See, for example, his comments on Blackmur’s dictum that poetic language should "add to
the stock of available reality," an idea which was taken up enthusiastically (and disastrously on Carruth’s account) by poets, for example John Berryman. Language, Carruth says, cannot create meaning. (Ef,197) In the view of some of his critics, Carruth has successfully resisted this fallacy, a fallacy which Carruth without doubt, given his huge verbal facilities, was inclined, but again his resistance to verbal realities was deliberate: entre-les-guerres modernism revised in light of post-war existentialism. In reviewing Snow, Wendell Berry wrote,

> When the worlds of so many poets are made out of words, as though poetry were accessible to no more than talent and ambition, it is a moving reaffirmation of the power of poetry that Snow does not make a world of its own. It does not attempt or desire to do so. Instead it accepts the obligations of the world outside itself that it did not make.  

Again, Berry, like Carruth, puts the emphasis on necessities, obligations. As Booth remarks, Carruth’s imagination, like Steven’s, struggles with reality, with "the necessary angel." (This tension is nowhere more apparent than in "Concerning Necessity‘ (Snow) to which I will devote a large part of the next chapter.) The dilemma is the same one that concerns Kierkegaard, especially in Either/Or. As David Stern puts it, there are for the complete aesthete no material limits, he has broken them

> by means of the various modes of active formative poiesis ... But he is thereby led to misunderstand himself, to suppose that he is wholly unfettered, free to poeticize in any way he desires, and thus he fails to appreciate the way in which he is dependent upon immediacy, a tie which is subtle and elastic, constituting not an immediate but a formal limit that cannot be severed.  

It should be noted that the limits of language are material as well as formal. For Carruth the solution is not therefore, as we have said, realism, "the official aesthetic of a totalitarian revolution."

His rejection of realism is quite apparent in Dark World, the book which Carruth picked out of its original place in the manuscript with the poems in Snow. New Directions would not publish the entire collection because of space limitations. The doppleganger was published by George Hitchcock, that polymath impresario of surrealism,
And Hitchcock's interest reflects the strangeness of the book. The poems have a static, low-pressure eeriness and metallic dreamy chiaroscuro effects. It is clear that poems from Snow have affinities with the poems in Dark World: "The End Again," with its vision of frozen apocalypse, and the desiccate nature morte landscape of "Rimrock, Where It Is," where the stillness of generations find expression in the plastic image of

a small woman, small as a girl, black with time,
lies and lies, always raising her head, her charred face

always raising her knees in a mock of childbirth,
always opening her mouth that is gagged with dust,

always screaming...

This is the image of the same eternal feminine force that will become the Sleeping Beauty.

In "Abandoned Ranch, Big Bend," (Snow) one of the most startling of Carruth's poems for its other-worldly effects -- other-worldly because the boreal sensibilities of the speaker, restless even when incorporate in its native New England landscape, is here in the desert as ripe as an ovary -- any and all contact detaches a gravidity. The normal limits of the sensibility have burned away, as if they were skin, and the self seems to be in a kind of helpless solution with the acrid, ominous landscape:

Summoned
From half across the world, from snow and rock,
From chaos, they arrived a moment ago, they thought,
In perfect fortuity....

Again and again among the dry
Wailing voices of misplaced Yankee ghosts
This ranch is abandoned to terror and the sublime.
The man turns to the woman and the child. He has never
Said what he meant. They give him
The steady cool mercy of their unreproachful eyes.

"Fortuity" is as loaded a word as "necessity" in Carruth's technical vocabulary. Here the assumption of its perfection is an error; fortuity is complicated with fatality, and both impinge upon the human relationships, which are in constant revision. Here in the stark
light of the desert the speaker feels the impossibility of perfect expression of self in language, of saying what he had meant. That impossibility is reinforced in the final image, as it is in the final vanishing in "Coming Down to the Desert at Lordsburg, NM," the companion poem in Dark World. The slightly menacing aspect of human mercy suggests the ambivalent nature of mercy: often it is only another style of domination. The effect of distance, so impressive in the desert, becomes the operative effect in the description not of the inner man, the ego, but of human relations.

The sense of distance and detachment is characteristic of many poems in Dark World. The epigraph ("What a good and bright world this is if we do not lose our hearts to it, but what a dark world if we do") suggests the omnipresent temptation to abdicate from worldly responsibilities through fear, anger, insanity, love, logorrhea...all of the ways of shunning necessity. But how can a poem brighten the world of the heartless, or of the bereft poet himself? Is there a way? Or is it too hard?

It is impossible. Our inclination is rather to abdicate from the real world, sometimes in favor of a sur-reality. Dark World is full of poems which show the attraction of this capitulation in varying degrees of surreality and loneliness. In "Two Silences" we are told that the heartlessness of the world is the reason for song: "in a universe/ regulated by magnanimity poetry/ would disappear." "The Chase In Spring" shows us the volatility of identity, a sense of identity that is instantaneous and fleeting. "Something Was There" is a companion poem to "Concerning Necessity" (Snow). It affirms the existence of "something" not in "sweet Spinozan/ meadows or in/ Kantian monumental/ forests" but rather in his "moments of unmeritable/ luck with Rose Marie..." Luck again; as Camus says, solidarity is erotic love is fortuitous, not necessary.

"The Existing Pool" can be taken, with some enlightening results, as a Carruthian version of Frost's "For Once, Then, Something," which Carruth finds skillful, but too contrived and evasive. Carruth's poem begins at a real pool, "below the Shinglemill
Bridge..." The conventional symbols of the situation, the pebbles on the bottom, the clarity of water, the reflections of face and sky, are resisted here as much as they are asserted in Frost's poem. Again, this is a reflection of Carruth's vision of the human mind separated, across the fence, as it were, from nature. He sees the particulars of nature with great acuity, but the layers of images have

neither originality
nor grace, and the others too,
these inventions of yours,
guardian trees, mosaics, windows, dancing --
all absent. Reality and unreality
are your ways of looking into the pool
for the pool has neither.
The pool "has" nothing at all.

The "you" here could be the speaker, talking to himself, or the reader, or, since Frost asserts a mystifying "something" at the end of his poem, the "you" might as well be Frost.

"Spring 1967," whose title is reminiscent of Paul Goodman's sonnets on political occasions, like many of Goodman's poems also shows the emotional process of de-escalation, from anger into illusion ("your mind/ wrenches across the world, tearing the dirty/ shimmer of blossom from every bough") to self-pity, to despair ("your innocence is like cold spit in your mouth, eject it or swallow it -- you cannot/ use it."). A dark world indeed. A real world "where we are said to live,/ who have done with living," says "Senior Citizen," who speaks, as in the voices in The Sleeping Beauty, "words given to me)/ by women. They are women who die far away/ of stinking illnesses and malnutrition --/ these words, gasps, and wails of love."

Dark World also contains some of Carruth's most obviously experimental poetry, the broken and staggered quatrains in "Discourse," "Thaw," a sonnet "for Allen Ginsberg" not of fourteen or fifteen lines, but, as I can roughly count, 20 lines of rambling rhapsody, a stylistic homage. There is a series of eight "Poetical Abstracts:" "Chronological," a
bricolage, elegiac, as Booth suggests about *Brothers*, in its sense of the loss of time.

"Metaphysical," "Classical," "Scenic," "Meteorological" (for JL, fellow allergy-head.) JL is, I assume, James Laughlin, for the section looks like one of Laughlin’s "typewritten" poems, "in which each succeeding line could vary from the typewritten length of the first line by no more than one space either way, or in rare emergencies two spaces" (Ef,139). In "Rhopaloceral" the careful reader may discern the affinity with Jim Harrison, whose "Letters to Yesenin" was published in the preceding year. "Political" is a gruesome weaving of warfare, fat-boiling, napalming. "Introspectional" concludes the collection with its final lines: "the dog/ raises his head// and howls."

###

In his review of *Brothers, I Loved You All* Philip Booth notes that the structure of the book suggests a lacuna in the implicit experiential narrative of the poems, "some event between 1969 and 1977 which Hayden Carruth does not yet want to publish or has not yet written." Booth did not know Carruth personally at that time and could not have known that from 1972-80 Carruth was writing *The Sleeping Beauty*, putting much personal experience into that poem. Booth’s comment springs from a perceived disjunction among the poems in the first part of the book, the Frostian poems in the middle, and the final "Paragraphs," and a disjunction between that structure and the subtitle, "Poems 1969-1977." Booth of course also could not have known that five years later Carruth would publish *If You Call This Cry A Song*, a collection of poems from this same period, many in the same modes. Yet, Booth’s sense of disjunction, especially the stylistic shifting, not only suggests, as I have, that these books are complementary, it points to the highly various stylistic strands in Carruth’s poetry after 1975.

Whatever the events of the years immediately preceding, 1978 and 1979 were
important years both personally and professionally for Carruth. Stanley Moss, editor of Sheep Meadow Press, brought out *Brothers*, and it won the *Saturday Review* (annual) Lenore Marshall Poetry Prize awarded by Alastair Reid, Galway Kinnell, and (voting in the minority) Mark Strand. Reid admired the book's "Richness and variety ... burly energy ... courage and gusto ... [Carruth's] work teems with the struggle to live and to make sense, and his poems carve out a kind of grace for us."10 This prize, along with the nomination of *Snow* for a National Book Award, was instrumental in attracting a wider audience. But even more important, both professionally and for what it meant in terms of his continuing recovery from his emotional incapacities, in 1979 Carruth came out of the woods to join Philip Booth, George P. Elliott (who were joined in the next year by Tess Gallagher and Ray Carver) on the faculty of the Creative Writing program at Syracuse University, taking the place of long-time faculty member W.D. Snodgrass. Although Carruth had by this time begun trying to do things like read in public, a horrifying experience for him,11 the move to Syracuse and the necessities of professing poetry virtually forced him to maintain at least reasonable control over his anxieties. The full reasons for his leaving the place where he had lived for twenty years and taking the job at Syracuse are no doubt as complex in his case as in all decisions of this nature. Carruth himself says that he left Vermont because I had to. I was too old to put in the hours -- 70, 80, 90 a week -- that I had to put in to earn a living from hack editing, reviewing, etc.12

For Carruth the move marked the beginning of a period of recognition and relative financial case, if not of complete personal calm. His contact with his students and with colleagues, other writers on the staff, especially with Ray Carver, with whom he was close until Carver's death in 1988, all of these demands helped bring Carruth into the agora, and with him came an increasing sense on the part of those who knew him that his writing was far more important than it had been given credit for being.
But *Brothers* is set in Vermont, not in Syracuse. It is, as the past tense of the title indicates, full of retrospection, homages to poets and friends, remembrances of old poems, of a past time, full of Carruth's declarations of love and respect for his jazz heroes. Yet, the end of the book, "Paragraphs," is a prevision of what will come next, *The Sleeping Beauty*. Within a collection arranged by time, we have poems of memory, moment, and prevision. As Alastair Reid noted, the book is full of passionate and expert poetry. *Brothers* begins with "The Loon on Forrester's Pond." The cry of the loon, that solitary bird that needs privacy in order to thrive and reproduce, is the inhabiting spirit of the book, the totemic song of the poet’s life: "it came from inside the long wilderness/ of my life."

The cry becomes a metaphysical refrain:

The loon
broke the stillness over the water
again and again,
broke the wilderness
with his song, truly
a vestige, the laugh that transcends
first all mirth
and then all sorrow
and finally all knowledge, dying
into the gentlest quavering timeless
woe. It seemed
the real and only sanity to me.

The iconoclastic tenor of the loon’s song puts even the images of the natural world into flux, "breaking the wilderness." What about this song makes it a "vestige"? What part of it is memory? Does man remember this as his own song? And if it is a laugh, how does it differ from Frost’s Miller’s laugh or from Evan’s laugh in "Fear and Anger in the Mindless Universe"? It is an existential laugh, but not darkly so. It comes from a bird, and it is woe-begone, informed by the predicament of suffering, of inevitable destruction and the subsequent responsibility of self-making. This is the "real and only sanity to me."

The radically subjective declaration identifies the speaker with the basic solitude of the loon, as he is likewise identified with the bombed fish in the next poem, again in the past tense,
"When Howitzers Began." The third poem, "August First" also begins with a meditation on the past, the past day, and then a time more distant:

Late night on the porch, thinking of old poems. Another day's work, another evening's done.

The simplicity of statement is empowered by the pace of the line, by caesura, and line-endings. Booth's remarks about the relationship of technique to vision are particularly relevant to this poem.

Because poetry assumes time (as painting and sculpture assume space) poetry is by nature elegiac: by timing itself (through every relevant tactic of rhythm, caesura, resonance, recurrence, pace, etc.) to make present the immediacy of a time out of time, a poem celebrates both its own temporal nature and (paradoxically) the timeless vitality of its own being.

We can see how this happens in "August First" in, for example, the syntactical ambivalence suggested by the comma after "evening's." It can be read either as a possessive or as a contraction, and both give a sense of completion, weariness, finality. The world-weariness of the man possessed by time, by time's contractions, is the theme. Booth notes that "to anticipate death is to live and to write in time, the measure of change." In the poem the speaker remembers

a poem I wrote
years ago when my wife and
I had been married twenty-
two days, an exuberant
poem of love, death, the white
snow, personal purity. Now
I look without seeing at
a geranium on the sill;
and, still full of day and evening,
of what to do for money,
I wonder what became of
purity. The world is a
complex fatigue.
The continual disappearance of words, of hope, in time creates the elegiac tone here. The poem to which Carruth refers is "Essay on Marriage" (NFT), the theme of which is exactly as Carruth describes it from memory: it is a death-haunted meditation on the relationship between poetry, love, joy, and death. It is exuberant, that is, luxuriant in its expressions of commitment to his wife and to poetry, to Love and Art. The jejunie reflection in "August First" becomes exuberant itself within the limits of its own resignation. The moth that is "battering" the porch screen, "its strength spent,/ its wings tattered," and the geranium, with its "clusters of richness/ held against the night in quiet/ exultation," become natural symbols for the change in mood between the youthful poet's exuberance and the middle-aged poet's complex fatigue (Now I am fifty-three going on fifty-four,/ a rotten time of life" "Essay on Stone"). The moth's struggle, the geranium's exultation become the meaning and the music of the poem.

The emotion of these poems is grounded in the actual elements of Carruth's daily existence. At the end of "August First" in this poem written in Foote Brook Gulf,

The moth rests again, clinging.
The brook talks. The night listens.

Nearness and distance, in time and space, of personalities and of things, are the coordinates along which Carruth explores in many of the poems in Brothers. On Carruth's account, the illusion that our own consciousness is distant from that of the animals has created a horrible error, that is, as he tells us in "Essay," their extermination. But that same illusion, as it works in life and in art, creates the apparently desireable possibility of transcendent moments, as he says in the poem following "Essay,"

"The Joy and Agony of Improvisation,"

How the song is striving
and how beautifully failing -- the measure
of beauty, beyond plenitude,
never enough but always enough.
These poems are followed by occasional poems, of memories, elegies: to the friendship with Denise Levertov and Mitch Goodman, for Paul Goodman on occasion of remembering that he is dead, and laments to the poet's own sense of the meaninglessness and chaos of the universe as it is shown again to him from a strange perspective in the questionings of his son. Looking at "The Mountain," the poet remembers the Italian campaign in WWII in connection with the current war between the races in the United States.

In "Essay on Stone," the poet ("will," one almost hopes "finally" say plainly, but no, he) talks of what his (and Aspen's) profound and recurrent attraction to stone consists. Again, the force is somewhat enigmatic:

At all events the fascination
is undeniable. I

always said there could be no absolutes,
but this is stone, stone, stone --
so here, so perfectly
here. It is

the abyss inverted, the abyss made visible.

And the following poem, "After the Winter of Many Thaws," concludes:

Beauty
is the lightless light that is
the stone
in the eye of the world forever.

Is it finally stone which is both fact and symbol of itself, nothing incarnate, the impossible, that defies Carruth's imagination? It certainly fascinates him as a phenomenon for investigation; references to stone abound in his work. Perhaps the most revealing statements are in "Almanach du Printemps Vivarois" (Cry):

Am I obsessed by stone? Life has worn thin here
where the garrigue slopes down to the
vignes and luzeme. A meager surface
covers the stone -- stone so long my own
life and my song...
At the end of "Almanach," which is an extraordinarily beautiful erotic tableau, the speaker, who is also a poet (the pretense that they are different is false; it is becoming tedious for this critic to maintain in the lack of a compelling reason any disclaimers about personae) the poet writes,

Or is silence
the indispensable analogue
of brilliance? And stone is silent. Ancient stone,
glowing stone. Song in its confusions
is all extraneous, it dies away. Shreds
of time. In April when the seed sprouts,
in the Ardeche huge with silence where life is
thin, an old man and a girl are held
in stillness, in radiance, in flames of stone
for the moment of eternity.

Stone here seems to have a more profound, more enduring existence, a higher existential significance (this is somewhat contradictory) than song. Rock and stone are relatively resistant to time, not in their superface which is always being eroded, but in their simple existence. Perhaps this is "it." But perhaps it is also a mistake to bear down too hard in trying to say the symbolic meaning of stone. Perhaps Carruth’s intent is to try to allow stone to keep its attractive silence, thereby remaining the unknowable thing that it seems.

For it fascinates, enchants, as it did Yeats:

Hearts with one purpose alone
Through summer and winter seem
Enchanted to a stone
To trouble the living stream.
....

The stone’s in the midst of all. (Easter 1916)

Carruth writes about mystery, and perhaps that mystery is a justification, if one is needed, for this obsessive enigma of stone:

No matter how far one may press an investigation of expressive means, no matter how near one may edge to "final knowledge," a cognitive ending or point of rest will never be reached. An effective line of poetry, for instance, will never disclose all the elements of its own prosody. Even the most elaborately programmed computer could never find them, which is to say that every line of poetry, in all its prosodic combinations, is unique. Thus, mystery lies at the center of knowledge -- at the end or at the center, depending on how you look at it. Those who pursue
knowledge the furthest will see, not the mystery, for it is precisely hidden, but the inevitability of mystery, most clearly, though whether or not his vision is an aid to understanding I do not know. But the acknowledgement of mystery is at least salutary. (SI,123)

The lyric movement of the book builds toward "Once and Again" and "Late Sonnet," poems which are amply discussed elsewhere in this study. Then comes "Vermont," Carruth's blank verse homage to Frost's "New Hampshire," followed by the equally Frostian "John Dryden," a portrait of a local bricoleur, the mildly bawdy tale of "Johnny Spain's White Heifer," a poem about a farmer neighbor, "Lady," and then the encomium for his neighbor, "Marshall Washer." Booth, while noting "these poems are so good of their kind that, truly, they almost out-Frost Frost," finds them to be situated strangely in the book, creating a structural irrelevance amounting to a serious flaw, because "Carruth is too fine a poet to be imitating another poet's voice," (although Carruth has always done so extensively) and because "practically nothing" in the book prepares or provides context for these poems. Booth's objections arise genuinely, but from a perspective that does not entirely take into account Carruth’s voice. One limitation of Booth’s perspective is his notion of stylistic integrity. Carruth is a prolific and diverse poet. We have seen that thus far. If Frost seems an influence here, and he certainly is, one could point out a score of others --even in these "Frostian" poems, Wordsworth's influence, for example, is clearly apparent. Carruth has indeed written of Frost as a huge influence, "a figure with whom younger poets, even the most rebellious, must come to terms" (Voice,3). Frost's "combination of Emersonian spiritual aspiration with back-country Yankee pragmatism" is apparent in Carruth, both in his shorter poems and in the Frostian poems in Brothers.

In an essay on Frost (Ef,58) Carruth notes that as Frost's career progressed his poems often turned "talky, insistent, literal," and he perceives a falling off in quality due to formulaic impositions on the poems. Well, these poems of Carruth’s are also talky. When
he gives his rare readings he often reads one or two of these first. These from *Brothers* and their counterparts in *Cry* are sociable, informative, amusing, but also passionate and moving. This is part of his discursion on Vermont:

What was it like, this land of passage? Green. Remarkably green, and not in summer only but all year round. White pine was what the plant biologists call our climax -- nature’s multimillennial orgasm -- especially on the mountains: trees as tall as western pines, and brilliantly, brightly green. No wonder Champlain, looking up at Mansfield from his longboat over the windblown lake, murmured "ver'mont" and wrote it on his map.

We are reminded of what’s right with literalness. A few facts. From Lake Champlain, the west coast of Vermont, if one looks in the direction of France, on a clear day one can see Mount Mansfield, in the middle of the state. The other "fact"; Champlain’s cartography was a personal and paralogical act. His map became ours. Did Frost get this much out of mere description?

###

The second way in which Carruth’s work replies to Booth’s questions is in the structural prolepsis which includes these Frostian poems. The introductory poems though are not all in *Brothers*. Many of them, written at the same time as those in *Brothers*, some a bit later, are in *If You Call This Cry a Song* (Poems 1965-1979). "Regarding Chainsaws" and "Marvin McCabe" are much like the monologues in the previous book. *Cry* too contains many poems about Vermont and about Carruth’s neighbors and friends. It is dedicated to his neighbors Midge and Martin Parkhurst.

Stylistically it is quite clear how these poems are related to those in *Snow* and *Brothers*. "On Being Asked To Write a Poem Against the War in Vietnam" belongs with
the animadversions on violence in *Snow*: "Bouquet in Dog Time," "My Meadow," "The Countryman's Reply," "Spring Break-Up," "The Mouse," "Popple," "Mild Winter," and "Our Northern Kind" could all have gone into *Brothers* without violating the stylistic integrity of the book. Carruth is no different from many poets in having written much more than he has been able to publish, or to publish in a sensible and timely fashion. The commercial constraints of the publishing industry, "constraints" sired out of private greed and public ignorance, are thus responsible for things such as the structural "faults" Booth (in his impulse to see some kind of organic unity) finds in *Brothers* (and, also given his bi-narrative assumptions, one assumes he would find in the other three books of this period.) The completeness or incompleteness of books does not necessarily mean that there is a gap, a hole, whatever, in the overall integrity of a poet's work (though of course many writers work precisely to create and investigate such rifts).

Other poems in *Cry* also have direct connections with those in other collections. "In A Year of Increasing Adversities" is highly reminiscent of "The Spanish Civil War," from *Snow*. "Song: So Often, So Long Have I Thought" is in the manner of "Song" and "This Song," also from *Snow*. This "Song" in *Cry* begins, "So often, so long have I thought of death/ that the fear has softened. It has worn away." It is a poem about the limits of lucidity and, in that context, the potential freedoms of love and work, Aspen's theme.

*Cry* also contains three poems, "A Little Old Funky Homeric Blues for Herm," "Who Cares Long As Its B-Flat," and "The Cowshed Blues," which directly exhibit Carruth's concern with using jazz as a structural paradigm (this is jargon, Carruth would say jazz is poetry) for poetry. The compositional aspects of jazz are operative in many of his poems both explicitly, as in "The Joy and Agony of Improvisation" (*Snow*), and implicitly. Carruth believes that jazz technique is or can be directly related to the central line of poetry written in English ("Jazz improvisation is paradigmatic of the evolution of all the arts in the
"The Cowshed Blues" especially is a lesson on Carruth's notion of the paradigmatic aspect of jazz and blues. His structural notations (Intro, Vamp, 16-bar theme, piano break, 12-bar theme, stop-time chorus, trombone, etc.) gloss in technical terms changes in pace and movement of the poem. It is a pedagogical gambit; all poets who want to include material from other disciplines in their work, e.g., Pound and Olson, must be pedagogical to some extent. Carruth is directly so here, and the notations make sense.

Among the most interesting and impressive of the poems in Cry are those that were published previously in separate limited editions. "Loneliness: An Outburst of Hexasyllables" was published first by the Janus Press. It is a significant poem for several reasons, the first being simply its beauty. It is elegant and straightforward. The tense seven-syllable line holds the attack firmly through the eleven sections. The theme is also a favorite of Carruth's. "Loneliness" is a moment arrested, an "outburst," in his perpetual discourse with the intractable solitude and beauty of winter. The poem is full of intense, highly lyrical moments, pristine almost in their exact saying of what it means to be a human and to pay the price of presence of mind in a world that affords no support for the human compulsion to find value. In the "thick newfallen snow" the speaker walks to a hidden field, a place lit only by the moonlight, "pale," "ethereal," bright but "not daylight; it is/ the visible aspect of stillness: the two are/ one." This direct, emotive, affective association between light and feeling is something that Carruth does often and does very well. We will see it more poems shortly. One might call the effect metaphorical, except that that equivalence is not being asserted, there is no tenor separate from the vehicle, they are one. One might call the effect "painterly," but the images are often, coming within a fully developed context as they do, far more indicative of personal voice, subjective feeling, than most paintings (I grant all individual protests to the contrary, since this is a subjective generalization). In terms of painting, however, one is inclined to think of deChirico, whose
atmospherics are akin to those in many of Carruth's poems, in "Abandoned Ranch," and especially in "Eternal City," the first poem in Dark World. Carruth often makes quite original visual effects not by way of "abstract" style (vis a vis, e.g., those who really go for the visual effect via that route, Ashbery, Blackburn, O'Hara, Padgett (sometimes), and Stevens before them, a few of the better poets of the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E "school" in the generation after Carruth), instead Carruth's effects come by way of "tone, phrasing, free play of feeling" ("Late Sonnet") . The result, the emotional valence of sensual, visual impression, is almost stunning here. Moonlight is "the visible aspect of stillness."

The speaker's loneliness is a result of intelligence, that same accident that has produced his capacity for woe: "Cursed, cursed from childhood with/ incapacity with/ the vision of the void." He longs for a world full of beauty and devoid of mind, knowing also the impossibility of that longing. But this world offers itself -- offers a snowy aesthetic at least, by which the speaker would be known, within whose paradigms the poet finds his way:

The snow sculpts this object, a snow-tree, and does it neither by carving nor by molding, for there is a third way nature knows and a few men besides (who will not give themselves to the controversies of theorists). Rather this sculpture is made by the whole of motioning, all in a concert, which condenses out of air -- out of universal substance -- the exact form this tree must take. Never a flake too many or too few: it is exact. All growth is a kind of condensation, like these intense words gathering here. Its exactness is all that we understand of perfection. Yet it
cannot last. That dream was a folly, for the sun's first minutest degree of heat at dawn, the wind's least pressure, will change it irretrievably. This snowy space is good for these few hours only, in a quiet winter's night.

A dendronatomy of poetry. Is this "organicism," that old bugaboo of romanticism? Yes or no. The rubric is demolished by the poem, which is not structurally arborescent in any important way, but the ramifications of the conventional structure "branch out." Look at the phrasing, "this sculpture is made by/ the whole of motioning." What might another poet have written, "by all movement," or any number of less charming and less acute phrasings, who knows? But the nearly awkward exactitude is Carruth's metier. Finally, the 231 line of "Loneliness" conclude,

The cold weight of my body pulls downward and I feel as if my years were heavy, and I feel a drop of moisture sliding down my nose, cold and weighted, until it meets the glass. I know that I am a fool and all men are fools. I know it and I know I know it. What good is it to know?

The final question is one whose answer, or the potential for a positive answer, has not been expressed in the poem; it is the poem. The self-consciousness here is not wholly intellectual. It is the case of a mind, sometimes sane sometimes insane, always in flux, in a dying body; foolish to grieve over that but impossible not to.

As an accompaniment to "Loneliness" there is an essay, "How a Poem Was Written" (Ef,105), in which Carruth explains exactly, or inexactely, how this one was written.

All the actions are given a specificity that is fictional in the poem; though all of
them may have occurred at one time or another in my life, and though some of them have in fact occurred many times, the unity they have in the poem is invented.

Carruth goes on to explain that he chose hexasyllables almost arbitrarily because he wanted "freedom, but freedom within a limiting frame." This kind of aesthetic decision is consistent with his more theoretical views on freedom, which we will look at at length in the next chapter. Carruth thinks this poem is simple, straightforward, and he also surmises that "readers, who, for whatever reason, do not read it in the spirit in which it was written will find it too simple or revealing." And then, in an addendum to the reprinting of the original essay, it is in Effluences but I do not know if it was in the original, Carruth states,

Now I've reread what I've written, and I should like to say, briefly, that I don't believe in this way of talking about a poem. It gives the wrong impression. The truth is that this poem, like most of my poems, was written in a state of mind very close to trance ...in extreme emotion -- agitation, depression, bitterness.

There was a first trance, "then a second lesser one in which amplifications are made ... I called the poem an "Outburst" and that's what it is." What it "is," he says, not "was." So much for a retrospective, objective appraisal of improvisation.

One almost wishes, aside from the intrinsic attraction of "Loneliness," that Carruth had chosen "Almanach du Printemps Vivarois" for an explication of process. Published in a limited edition by Nadja, the poem contains events which seem, so complete is the effect, to be unified in fact. The scene is the Ardeche, in south central France, arid, rocky, sparse, the "republica de miseria," Occitania, land of trobar clus and the troubadours. It is not unlike an Old-World northwestern Vermont. The place is important beforehand to Carruth not only because of Pound's transmission of the troubadours, but also because of the love-themes of those poets, love-themes intrinsically connected with war. It is the landscape of paragraphs 81-85 of The Sleeping Beauty, the "Basse-Ardeche -- Labeaune, Burzet, Roche-Colombe, Balazac/ Towns lichenened in ancientness,/ Their crumbled chateaux, walls that a troubadour took/ With a song, blood-dark still where the Languedoc/ Shed
fierce heretical blood. He wandered? Beauty is pain plus time” (81). “In the Midi,”

Carruth says in 85,

was where it began, dear sleeping princess,
This stony land with its stony great chateaux,
Your dream's origin and focus,
The sweet song that somehow rose
As from the stone itself, rime clair et douce,
To sing old joi, valor, mesura, -- oh, loveliness
Beyond all preconceiving. This,
This land of oc is where your kiss
Awaits you ...

land of blood, of class, of hunger.
For here a song could nearly
Make nature from the world's pain, sex from anger,
A woman from death.

But knowingly, drearily
Now we bear -- so far, so near -- the troubadour
Sing, Oc, Dieu d'amor -- wistfully, wearily --
Quora me donas joi, quora m'en ven dolor.

But in "Almanach" there is joy, not pain. An old man, rejuvenated by the previous night's
lovemaking, is writing his poem al fresco while a woman, younger, his companion, paints
the landscape. It is one of Carruth's most beautiful poems, and the ending is spectacular:

But my song
is old, my stone song; I patch it up from shreds
of Latin grandeur and trobar rhyme,
old, conventional, wrong -- who knows it better? --
though all conventions are old as soon
as they occur. They are always occurring.
The song is all in my head. Shreds of
culture. Confusions of time. It is noon now,
my shirt goes to the pillow, I look
at my own white skin, almost parched it seems, creased
with age lines. And it gleams! Suddenly
the republic of misery is blazing,
the old stone is glowing, and as if
at a stroke of some cosmic tone everything
falls silent, the finches, the tractor,
the cuckoo, the wax crayon squeaking, even
the small wind in the grass, yet nothing
has stopped. Am I deaf now too? Or is silence
the indispensable analogue
of brilliance? And stone is silent. Ancient stone,
glowing stone. Song in its confusions
is all extraneous, it dies away. Shreds
of time. In April when the seed sprouts,
thin, an old man and a girl are held
in stillness, in radiance, in flames of stone,
for the moment of eternity.

This great ending is an epiphany of Carruth’s themes: song and stone, convention and illusion, time and art, and of course love. The nature of the silence here evokes the stillness in "Loneliness," and also the monumental stasis of the final image evokes the form and the function that the woman’s sculpture (of the woman) will bear in The Sleeping Beauty. Form (the evidence of human intelligence) and function (the practical responsibility of serious art) are "the indispensable analogue of" not only brilliance of image, but Carruth’s own intensities of perception.

One of the themes of this poem, that of despair about the capability of an to capture a fluid reality (though for once in "Almanach" Carruth without irony defies the futility with an all-out display of technical power) is a theme that was dear to another of his masters, Mallarme, and Carruth has included his translation of "L’Apres-midi d’un Faune" in Cry. The original edition (Ironwood Press, Box 40907, Tucson, AZ 85717) includes a "Prelude" by Carruth, a tender facade in which the friend of a "Stephane" encounters "the most beautiful woman (I) have ever known" at Stephane’s home. Even though they have a passionate affair, he is sad because of his inability to merge completely with her. Sometimes he see both Stephane’s face and his own face in hers, and, once, she murmurs "Stephane" in her sleep. All of this is related after "Stephane’s" death; it a hair-raising introduction to an already emotionally and verbally charged work. One can see why Carruth is attracted to Mallarme’s poem. It is romantic, sexy, elegiac, and the language is dense; the music of the lines, which seem carved out of granite, so perfect is each syllable, is, like stone, entrancing. Carruth makes an attempt to reproduce the movement of the half-dream of a half-human reed player (and is it Carruth translating the dream of himself as a clarinetist?) The translation is full of Carruthian touches, sometimes for the effect of the eroticism ("itch" for "veux"), sometimes to emphasize the
metaphysicality ("Aimai-je un reve" as "Was loving a dream").

There is no use in any normative evaluation I can make of the translation. It is not a "version" or a free translation, but there is a real attempt not just to give a sense of the original but to make it go as a poem in English. Without offering alternatives, which those who are interested can readily adduce, I pick a translated passage almost at random, from the third strophe:

Something arcane chose to confide
Below the azure in this great twin reed we play on,
Which dreams in a long solo, taking to itself
The cheek's shamed blush, how we were amusing
To the beauty around us through false confusions
We conceived between her and our credulous song;
And how also in song's sublimity a purging
Might strike from our worn fantasy of a pure
Back or flank, pursued by my half-closed eyes,
One sonorous and vain and monotonous line.

I know of no better English translation, not only of this passage, but of a rendering of great for great, and Mallarme is difficult. If other critics know of translations that convey both the original and accomplish another, additional, beauty in the translation, given all the levels of difficulty here, let them bring them forth. Carruth has done away with the original coupled hard rhymes, as they sound in English, and linked the ends of the lines with vowel rhymes and alliterating last words. And nearly every element of Carruth's own poetry is here: mystery, music, improvisation in service of individual voice. The longing confusions of love and beauty and art are expressly in this syntax. Read it again. There is a dense but lucid drive, drive, amounting in its virtuosity to a verbal attack, for poetic, not objective, understanding.

In the "Postlude" Carruth writes, "I find in this poem and others by Mallarme many things that answer deeply and closely to elements of my own poetic nature. The work is a homage, a reverence, for a great master." A "homage," a formal and public acknowledgement of allegiance, or, as Carruth describes it elsewhere, "praise of the dead for
the glorification of the living.” 14 Carruth to Mallarme, Duncan to Pound, Pound to Dante, Cavalcante, Propertius, and so on.

The primary subjects of Carruth’s homage are closer in time than Mallarme, or Nerval, or Lamartine, whom he also translates in Cry. In "Paragraphs," the final poem in Brothers, and our final topic in this chapter, Carruth tells us exactly who his brothers and sisters are, who he has chosen or who has chosen him and why. The poem is a sequence of 28 of the fifteen-line paragraphs which he had used before in The Asylum and Contra Mortem. The lines here are broken, irregular in typography, yet intensely musical. James Wright’s blurb calls the poem "startling in its mastery, surely one of the great poems written in English in recent years." From our later vantage point the mastery is less startling, but in the poem’s combinations of voices and history and in its high lyricism we can see what Wright meant. It takes jazz improvisation as its model. It begins in Lamoille County, Vermont, "on the Campground Road," a significantly ordinary and remote place for a "paragraphic." In his review, Booth speculates that the title comes from "'paragraphia," a mental disorder of which the primary symptom is writing words or letters other than those intended." Well, perhaps. Error certainly has a large place in the theme of the poem, but Carruth has said that he intended the more mundane meaning, i.e., paragraph as the line or stroke in the margin indicating a break in the text. Marginality is the functional concept.

What is humanly useful has been driven into the margins. The destruction of the landscape coincides in the poem with the deaths of Henry Rago (Carruth’s immediate successor as the editor of Poetry), M.L. King, Malcolm X, and George Jackson. The hilltop farms of New England have been replaced by trailer parks and ski-lodges. Pigeons and otters exterminated, "the braves castrated, the stretched squaws/ bayoneted up their vaginas.” Why? A vision of My Lai runs into the fact of Verdun and back to an a.d. 843 treaty dividing France from Germany. Paragraph 11 then, a litany of the great blues and jazz men and women concludes, "Brothers, I loved you all." Booth is bothered by the past
Is Carruth suggesting that all he once loved is dead, or that his own love has entirely ceased? If such possibilities apply to the whole book as they apply to section 11 of "Paragraphs," does Carruth intend "Paragraphs" to be his final mourning for all that time makes irretrievable?

If not all, much of what Carruth had loved is gone. That’s clear. Most of the people he mentions in the poem are dead. I think it is that simple. Nor is this a final mourning. That will come only with the poet’s own obliteration. Meanwhile the changing: from elegies to celebrations, from violence (12) to intense beauty (13), from the "shabby and fictitious liberty/ extolled by the school of J.J. Rousseau and the other/ schools of bourgeois liberalism" to the anarchism of Bakunin. These changes keep the time. Thus personal life and history fit together. In 24 and 25 the napalming of civilians, an atrocity which is echoed later in the Sleeping Beauty’s dream of napalm’s creator, Honeywell, is both poetic prelude and human error; it accounts for the inability of the speaker in 25 to find his own personality. It has been destroyed by hate.

The poem ends with the making of "The Bottom Blues" in New York City, February 12, 1944:

(while I kneedeep elsewhere in historical war was wrecking Beauty’s sleep and her long dream)

This is a proleptic parenthesis. The poet was in the Army Air Corps in Italy. Somehow he feels, not only that he would like to rather have helped make "The Bottom Blues," but that he somehow is responsible for the cataclysm which drove Beauty, that is, Sleeping Beauty, that is, his wife Rose Marie Dorn, from her home in Silesia to America, to him. In this nexus of passion for music, for beauty, of love, guilt, and violence, Carruth begins The Sleeping Beauty.

The end of the book, the final paragraph, is an assertion of the self-transcendent effect of making, of making in this case music, the blues (and the poem).15
And it was done
and they listened and heard themselves
better than they were for they had come

high above themselves. Above everything, flux, ooze'
loss, need, shame, improbability/
the awfulness
of gut-wrong, sex-wrack, horse and booze,
the whole goddamn mess,
And Gabler said "We'll press it" and it was
"Bottom Blues"
BOTTOM BLUES five men knowing it well blacks & jews
yet music, music high
in the celebration of fear, strange joy
of pain: blown out, beaten out
a moment ecstatic
in the history
of creative heart and mind/ not singular, not the rarity
we think, but real and a glory
our human history shining, shekinah. . . Ah,
holy spirit, ninefold
I druther've bin a-settin there, supernumerary
cockroach i'th'corner, a-listenin, a-listenin,,,,,
than be the Prazedint ov the Wurld.

As one gets through, as one is supposed to, llte pauses and the rapid shifts in diction, the
music of this, let alone the passion, come through clearly. Even the puckish ending.

"Paragraphs" is stylistically and thematically the prelude to The Sleeping Beauty.

But having moved so far straight through Carruth's career, it is necessary here, before
continuing directly on, to consider what is at work conceptually in all of the poems of this
last period, and in doing so to survey across his career and build a sense of some of the
larger implications of his work. Those larger themes, the "Existentialism" and the "New
England" of my title, are revealed in Carruth's response to regional literary thinkers. In
Paragraph 5 Carruth asks querulously,

Once at Walden
it was the "morning star" calling us to the order
of this world.
Tell me Henry David are you still called?
Carruth’s response to Thoreau’s vision is telling in regard to his relationships with regional traditions, to tradition in general, and to his pragmatic, existential philosophy, and it is to Walden that I go now with Carruth to find what is possible there.
Notes: Chapter Three

1. Interview with Robbins, May 1989, Munnsville, NY.
2. Janet Hewitt, wife of the writer Geoff Hewitt, Carruth's neighbors and friends, to whom along with Lois and David Budbill, he dedicated Effluences. They live about thirty miles away from Johnson near Calais, "rhymes with palace only/ there is no Calais, just East Calais and/ West Calais, the center having vanished." ("Vermont," Brothers).
12. Ibid.
13. Carruth uses this line as an epigraph to his essay "Duncan's Dream" (SI), about Robert Duncan's poetry. It points out the natural affinities between the three of them. See, e.g., in Duncan's Ground Work:

   when into that liberty
   descending like a lightning flash
   a woman
   strangely harmonious with my
   condition
   in character and person...

15. These final paragraphs are in SI without numerical divisions.
Chapter Four

Carruth’s Existential Revisions of Walden

He has an angry wrenlike vigilance,  
a greyhound’s gentle tautness  
he seems to wince at pleasure  
and suffocate for privacy  
-- Robert Lowell, "For the Union Dead"

###

Every individual, however original he may be, is still a child of God, of his age, of his nation, of his family and friends. Only thus is he truly himself. If in all of this relativity he tries to be the absolute, then he becomes ridiculous.--S. Kierkegaard, Either

###

Is a voice crying in the wilderness  
the same as an existential  
denial and validation  
in the mindless universe?  
-- Hayden Carruth, "Picking Up the Beer Cans"

In his essay "The New England Tradition," Hayden Carruth approvingly describes among Thoreau’s personal qualities "his stubbornness, his voluntary poverty, his distrust of organized society . . . in short, his dyed-in-the-wool Yankee character." Carruth suggests that the primary importance of Walden is its "autobiogenetic" quality, Thoreau "in a sense constructing or re-constructing himself, or at least his image of himself, from the fragments of day-to-day experience . . . far more sophisticated, for example, than the Romantic notion of the autobiographical poem, as Wordsworth’s Prelude or Byron’s Childe Harold." This

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type of personal construction is immensely important to Carruth, whose psychic
disintegration in the early 50s and a subsequent lapse of identity due to electro-shock
therapy, necessitated a self-renovation. Carruth accomplished this re-construction not only
through writing, but through the maintenance of useful relations with the members of his
small community in Northern Vermont and with his family, the people with whom he
shared a daily life in common. In fact Carruth had gone to his small house in Foot Brook
Gulf in Johnson, Lamoille County, Vermont in much the same spirit as Thoreau ostensibly
went to Walden: to live deliberately, to seek a life of meditation and repose, "plain-living
and high-thinking." Part of Carruth's decision to go to the woods with his family was
surely dictated in part by the omni-present fact of his biography, his people phobia, the
specific manifestations of which are discussed in The Bloomingdale Papers (see
esp. pp.19-20). This kind of terror prevented his career as a jazz musician and for years
severely inhibited his ability to promote his poetry.

Carruth's withdrawal has a personal dimension which informs his writing in general
and especially his criticisms of Thoreau. In 1976, five years after the essay above was
published, Carruth published "The Man in the Box at Walden." In this essay, while
explaining his reference to Thoreau as "an idiot" in his poem "Concerning Necessity," (a
poem that I will examine at the end of this chapter) Carruth explains why he finds it

extraordinary that a people should adopt for their favorite Great Work a book
written in disdain for the people themselves. That's what Walden is: a work
conceived in rancor and composed in scorn. It is an elitist manifesto, a cranky,
crabby diatribe. Its victims are its readers, and none escapes. Its author was
sanctimonious, self-righteous, and ungenerous to the point of cruelty. (EF,64)

While agreeing with Thoreau's basic ideas of independence and of living close to nature,
and his "insistence on the need for meditation and repose," Carruth strongly objects to the
rhetorical violence of Walden as well as to what it asserts in regard to the possibilities of
erotic love, to the necessities of labor, to the Thoreauvian ideal relationship between man
and nature, and he objects ultimately to the kind of careless individualism that Walden has
encouraged in American life. In his celebrated appreciation of Thoreau, The Senses of Walden, Stanley Cavell has asked what it means to be a reader of Thoreau. In "The Man in the Box at Walden" Carruth wonders what it says about the American people that they have taken Walden as their social contract. What I wish to find out here is what Carruth’s reading of Thoreau tells us about Carruth. His criticism of Thoreau is consistent with his thinking and writing in general. First, it reveals what Carruth believes about the nature of the relationship between art and the social polity, specifically, between literary style and environmental issues, or, more precisely, how poetry is a moral epistemology. Carruth sees that the degree of reliance upon metaphor reflects the degree of willingness to expropriate and destroy the identity of external objects. And furthermore, the willingness to make this appropriation is characteristically, congenitally American. Secondly, Carruth solves the conflict between work as a necessity and work as a source of oppression. For Thoreau and his followers work is, in general, a reifying force contributing to a lack of freedom, but for Carruth there is a resolution of this in his vision of work as an act of love. Thirdly, though not actually separate from the first two, Carruth’s response to Thoreau elaborates his particular vision of how anarchism can co-exist with Yankee independence and democracy. Instead of Thoreau’s self-defeating, transcendental individualism and the guilt that its rigidity engenders Carruth proposes a kind of existential independence based on love and work. A focus on these aspects of Carruth’s thought will allow us to examine both his poetry and his criticism.

###

On the surface Carruth and Thoreau have much in common. Both are loners, Yankees. Carruth went to live in the woods by choice, "seeking/ What [he] had once known in Southern New England/ Now destroyed" ("Marshall Washer",Brothers,64). He went to the woods to be alone, independent, free from the urban ugliness and its encroachments everywhere. More recently he has moved in person to this urban landscape
and he evokes the details of it, in Asphalt Georgics for example, with the horror and understanding that only a countryman could feel and summon. Carruth appreciates Thoreau’s amateur naturalism, "his affection for particular trees and rocks, meadows and groves" — his sense of writing as husbandry. Their work shares as well the inclination of the voice, the speaker, to inhabit and be inhabited by a place, the place, a tendency to evoke by various means the genius loci of their own worlds — an almost supernatural belief that there is a spirit of place. This belief allows them "to honor what omens and intimations flow from nature," though Carruth never crosses the line into "dark and discontinuous fantasy," the impasse and deadly consequence of romanticism. In both writers there is a co-penetration between paysage and personality, and an almost totemic response to certain animals -- owls and loons. The personae of Carruth’s poems and the man at Walden move among the hills and fields with a comprehensive feeling that invests the land with a poetic dignity. For both, New England "is a region of the heart . . . the forest is cosmopolis" (MLD,1). Yet they are not "local colorists. . ./ at any rate, not keepers/ of quaintness sake." The kind of realism that they attempt means, as Carruth writes, "place, and place means/ where we are. We name it, with all its garbage/ and slaughter, and its comeliness too, and then/ it is our center -- where we are. We try,/ in our own unobtrusive way, to make it/ a center of everywhere, a center for/ everywhere (and thanks to Ted Enslin of Maine/ for saying that)" ("Vermont," Brothers,47).

Furthermore the characteristic elegiac tone of many of Carruth’s poems about New England is presaged by Thoreau’s complaints about the intrusion of other men into the woods. In their expressions of loss, of indignity at the senseless violation of our only world, there is a certain continuity of vision that, although twentieth-century Vermont is a far cry from nineteenth-century Concord, connects their work. They share a profound alienation from industrial society, from the hostile, dehumanizing environment that the rational human intelligence was creating in the former’s and has accomplished in the latter’s
time. For example, Thoreau's authentic disgust at the "wasted life" of the Irishman, John
Fields, and his starving family leads him to a statement with which Carruth, despite
Thoreau's concurrent and nearly debilitating condescension, might partially agree:

the only true America is that country where you are at liberty to pursue such a
mode of life as may enable you to do without coffee, tea, and meat, and where the
state does not endeavor to compel you to sustain the slavery and war and other
superfluous expenses which directly or indirectly result from the use of such things.
This passage displays what Carruth calls "Thoreau's native Yankee anarchism," and also his
patriotic idealism. In Northern Vermont in the late twentieth century Carruth sees the
economically and politically oppressed descendants of the Fields:

Two fat women, maybe nineteen
Or twenty, issue sidewise
From Tomlinson's Deli, eating without smiles
Something from the sacks clutched to their snowmobile
Jackets. Their breath is steam. They climb
Into an object of rust, which has five
Kids in the back with a black and white shepherd dog,
And one sack passes rearward.

Carruth's companion, the spectral, dead Vermonter, Amos, remarks,

Notice them children? They'll eat the mice
Out of the mousetraps when that there candy
Gives out, of course unless
Their old man poaches them a half of venison
And sneaks it up some morning about 4 A.M. (SB, 115-16)

But Carruth and Thoreau respond in very different ways to this kind of oppression.

Thoreau seeks to isolate himself while Carruth insists upon understanding how poverty is
connected with environmental destruction and psychic disintegration, how "a broken land
makes broken people. The poor know this" ("Song of the Two Crows," Cry, 69).

Carruth sees what the Puritans and their immediate descendants did to New England,
the destructive consequences that occurred when "the elitist ethic of the Puritan fathers
became an imperialist attitude toward the land and the Indians, while their doctrines of
individual election and the perseverance of grace lent themselves to a laissez-faire attitude in
commerce." The otter, white-tailed deer, moose, caribou, wolves, mountain lions, and
beavers were exterminated quickly. The white pines were felled, the soil blew away. "It was at best carelessness and at worst deliberate exploitation, the inverse of Puritan responsibility; and the worst was far commoner than the best." And when the Puritans moved west they took this exploitation with them. Carruth's disgust here is as much at the compulsion of the human intelligence to expropriate as it is at the actual ruination of the land. It is a disgust at self-destruction. It is an outrage tempered by a sense of relative worth, a sense which refuses the sentimentality of value. Ultimately, Carruth has written elsewhere, natural objects and man-made objects, the rock and the sky-scraper, are equivalent in reality. The notion of relative value is "an illusion, an invention; at its best it is a sick joke, and at its worst an inexpressible sorrow." This claim certainly should bear on considerations of Carruth as a nature poet, and it also suggests part of his disdain for Thoreau, for what he calls Thoreau's "expropriative, solipsistic view of nature" and, on the other extreme, for Sartre's systematic disdain for nature. Certainly also it informs his disgust at Walden's reception as the touchstone for middle-class America's response to nature.

In "The Man in the Box" Carruth writes that "the matter of Walden generated a manner which negated the entire enterprise." Other recent critics have assumed the same stylistic approach in pointing out the limitations of Walden. Michael Gilmore has charged Thoreau with generating a similar consequential error:

Though Thoreau begins with the conviction that literature can change the world, the aesthetic strategies he adopts to accomplish political objectives involve him in a series of withdrawals from history; in each case the ahistorical maneuver disables the political and is compromised by the very historical moment it seeks to repudiate.

This unwitting self-compromise functions not only in politics but in ethics and morality. "Moral feeling," according to Carruth, "is the prior condition of aesthetic feeling," (Ef,153) and therefore the determinant of aesthetic strategy, of style. Style is the man, and through the mediation of man, style is experience (WP,68). The consequences of Thoreau's
kind of social and moral withdrawal are not only then a denial of society, but they create a
denial of the self, of the man, and of man. By merely asserting himself as an individual
Thoreau has thwarted himself. The consequence is a stylistic violence generated by
frustration and guilt. For Carruth part of the evidence of this self-defeating meanness lies in
Thoreau’s stylistic exploitation of nature.

"Bright cupreous fishes which looked like a string of jewels"

Along with Thoreau’s characteristic "unconnected assertions . . . non-sequiturs . . . bad
manners and violence of feeling," Carruth also suggests that we take a look at Thoreau’s
stylistic response to nature. It is not difficult to see that it is essentially metaphorical, and
to the extent that it is so, it is expropriative. Descriptions are made in terms of extraneous
objects without regard to the distortive consequences. Though perhaps inevitable, perhaps at
the heart of language, metaphor is for Carruth nonetheless an inherently dangerous rhetorical
mode, the literary correlative of "the general exploitation of the world for human ends."
Metaphor reflects the human will to dominate. On the other hand, Thoreau seems
generally to endorse the kind of domination of which metaphor is both cause and effect.
Despite his own keen accounts of how man is ruining nature, Thoreau continues to assert
that he is the ultimate thing in nature, that "nature is hard to overcome, but she must be
overcome." Part of this overcoming is the denial of the reality of objects, ignoring their
identity and converting them into fodder for moral allegory. This impulse is pervasive in
Thoreau, in A Week on the Concord and Merrimac Rivers, as much as in Walden.
Thoreau finds nature "a restorative, a tonic, by which we must be refreshed and by which
we are cheered" (339). The "crowing of cocks, baying of dogs, and the hum of insects at
noon" (A Week), a dead horse (Walden) become "evidence of health." The food chain is a beloved drama because "tender organizations can be serenely squashed out of existence like pulp" (339). Holding "a rare mess of golden and silver and bright cupreous fishes which looked like a string of jewels" (are these brook trout?) Thoreau claims to have proof of his own mortality. He frequently distorts nature so that he may be elevated by his own response to it. But as we can see from the last passage, he ignores its reality, in this case the smelly proof of obliteration at the end of his own stringer.

Not only is Thoreau compulsively metaphorical, his metaphors are largely anthrocentric. A passage from A Week will suffice:

The shining pebbles, not yet anxious to better their condition, the chips and weeds and occasional logs and stems of trees that floated past, fulfilling their fate, were objects of singular interest to me, and at last I resolved to launch myself on [the river's] bosom, and float whither it would bear me (32).

Certainly, Thoreau’s figures here are conventional. Carruth knows this, but he would also have us realize the moral consequences of the unthinking use of literary conventions. Can pebbles be transcendent? If so, what can this kind of transcendence mean to humans? Are the wood chips interesting to Thoreau because in his perception of them they connect him both with nature and with human activity? If they are fulfilling their fate as they move on the water, where did their fate begin? Doesn’t Thoreau mean that he is willing to "launch" his ego into the world without regard, to impose his own image and meaning on nature without considering his responsibility of his readers? Are we so far removed from primary experiences of nature that we can find it true of this passage and hundreds like it, as Stanley Cavell suggests, that Thoreau’s "readings of nature do not feel like moralizations of it, but as though he is letting himself be read by it"?10

These observations can be made by anyone who will take Carruth’s brief account of "The Man in the Box" seriously, and one could on this count endlessly prosecute Thoreau, his critics, and many other writers. But that is not necessary to understand
Carruth's basic objection. It is perhaps easier for us today to see the effects of this particular kind of ignorance of the fragility of the natural world. Perhaps it is easier to admit now the necessity of refuting Protestant utilitarianism, to see that the casque flower has outdone and always will outdo our contrived elegance. Carruth thinks it is important to remember that Thoreau was working without "a knowledge of psychoanalysis, a background in the existential authors," and a concept of writing as action. He quotes Leslie Fiedler; Thoreau was creating himself "archetypically, against the Massachusetts wilderness."

Perhaps this is an inherent reason for the aggression which is embodied in his style. And in quoting Allen Tate Carruth acknowledges that Thoreau was writing within an atmosphere where the doctrines of election and grace "gave to the experience of the individual a heroic proportion, a tragic mode." Carruth finds particularly dangerous the consequences of that same assumption in modern writers of his region -- Lowell's tendency to assert personal experience, a personal tragedy based on guilt, as national mythology, or in Olson's term, a "precis of national experience." Carruth published his objections to Walden because so many readers take the book whole, an bible of social and ecological behavior. Thoreau is their priest. Americans are able to ignore that his vision is in large part fantasy, an expression of "the whole romantic, Hegelian, utopian current of his time." If Thoreau saw a danger in, in the "Hegelian concepts of mass consciousness and determinism," he nonetheless failed to realize the dangers in his own responses to it.

##

In his essay, "The Fantastic of Philosophy," 12 Cavell asserts a claim of originality in his discovery of elements of the fantastic in Walden. He provides evidence of fantasy from the third paragraph, in which Thoreau finds that his neighbors are having to work for living "incredible and astonishing." Cavell goes on to compare this "vision" with the vision of
Rousseau in his *Social Contract*, of men "as born free and everywhere in chains," and he also links Thoreau with Plato, Kant, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Wittgenstein by way of asking (but not attempting to answer) "what it might betoken about a culture’s literature that its founding works are works of the fantastic." Carruth finds not just *Walden* but much of Thoreau’s work fantasy indeed. And long before Cavell Carruth directly tried to answer the question of Thoreau’s work in literature and in the social polity. In "The Man in the Box at Walden" Carruth writes,

> The fact is that Thoreau acted out, for a short period of time and in a limited, easy way, a primary and perennial fantasy of the American male. To escape, to be on one’s own, without the anxiety of sex or the clutter of responsibility: it is the dream of the failed man.

A dream, a fantasy. But who does not dream? Even Carruth, with what James Wright called "his clear mind, Lucretian in its exact intelligence," admits in his poem "Loneliness, An Outburst of Hendecasyllables* (*Cry*),

> Everyone now has thought
how it may be when soon
universal death comes
down the mountainside, creeps
up from the sea, appears
out of the air like snow
and how one lucky or
unlucky person might
escape the multitude
and survive alone. This
is the archetypal dream
or daydream of our years.

The fact of potential universal nuclear demolition increases the propensity to escape through daydreaming. That same propensity with its refusal to deal with reality increases the probability that demolition will occur. This is one reason Carruth in his criticism and especially in his poetry means to be antidotal to the effects of Thoreau, to *National Geographic*, to television, "to the twin American idols: Walt Disney and John Wayne."14

In his attempt to point out the toxic effects of Thoreau’s argument Carruth notes that the topic of the first chapter of *Walden*, "Economy," is contained in a couple of pages;
the rest of the section is "given to a protracted scourging of the evils of mankind." It is an attack based on the assertion that he, Thoreau, has made the ultimate moral decision, "built his own cabin on borrowed land and lived for a couple of years in leisure, eschewing every obligation except to himself." This brings Carruth to the passage where, in considering the ideal dwelling, Thoreau sees a large tool box by the railroad. It suggests to him

that every man who was hard pushed might get such a one for a dollar, and, having bored a few auger holes in it, to admit air at least, get into it when it rained and at night, and hook down the lid, and so have freedom in his love, and in his soul be free. (126)

This is Cavell's "soul of practicality." He seems to have overlooked a number of features in the ideal dwelling. Nor is Thoreau being figurative here. He says, "I am far from jesting." But how can one have freedom of love in a box? What Thoreau really means -- and here it is easy to anticipate the nature of Carruth's objections -- is freedom from love. This fantasy is a perversion of the concepts of freedom and of love and additionally of the votive actions that make them possible --work. For Carruth this statement of "philosophy" means that "Thoreau solves the problems of sex by masturbation and the problems of all humanity by isolation." This is the kind of transcendentalism, the kind of individualism which, through its refusal to accept responsibility, Carruth connects with the adolescent, immature violence and irresponsibility that has characterized American life from the settlement of the frontier to current expeditions in foreign policy, from genocide of the natives to sexual domination to the sacking of the planet by various means. Even while distrusting the optimism that assumes complete health possible, Carruth means his own work to be antidotal to this tendency. By examining and elaborating parts of Carruth's work that are consistent with his critique of Thoreau, we can see what Carruth means by existential independence and what it means for him to attempt to be a person "free from ego, free from self-regard, and hence free from the threatening, determining forces of objectivity"
Carruth has observed that, in his own experience, all of the people who are enthusiastic about *Walden* are men, that he hasn’t found a woman who cares much for it, and that many readers, "though five women for every man," have told me that they understand my view and agree with it. What part does gender response have to do with Carruth’s antidote to Thoreauvian fantasy? If Thoreau doesn’t want a lover, why does Carruth want us to condemn his masturbation? Wouldn’t Carruth agree with Jim Harrison:

> The minister whacks off as does the insurance man, habitual golfer, sweet lady in her bower, as do novelists, monks, nuns in nunneries, maidens in dormitories, stallion against fence post, goat against puzzled pig who does not cease feeding and so do senators, generals, wives during tv gameshows, movie stars and football players, students to utter distraction, teachers butchers, world leaders, everyone except poets who fear the dreaded growth of hair on the palms, blindness. They know that even in an empty hotel room in South Dakota, someone is watching.

Perhaps Thoreau is this poet. Watching in isolation from the creative act leads to the feeling that someone must be watching you? Perhaps. But I am getting at something serious here. It is not unfair to say that nowhere does Thoreau take notice of the vast
intricacies of erotic relationships, or much notice of women at all. To the contrary -- he tries to belittle them to the point of denying them altogether. Note his descriptions of "the traveller who stops at the best houses . . , and if he resigned himself to their tender mercies he would be totally emasculated." Note his disdain of "ottomans, sunshades, and a hundred other oriental things which we are taking west with us, invented for ladies of the harem and the effeminate native of the Celestial Empire." Note his disdain for the charitable enterprises of the women of Concord. And note his misogynistic description of John Field’s wife, "with round, greasy face and bare breast, still thinking to improve her condition one day; with the never-absent mop in one hand, and yet no effects of it visible anywhere." Ungenerous, yes, and beyond the point of cruelty.

Thoreau’s ideal universe is a universe of one; his ideal companion is "the universal fact" (367). Carruth, no doubt loves and needs women, as much as he needs and loves natural beauty. He also accepts the "moral, psychological, and metaphysical agonies arising from these loves" (SI,29). Perhaps he loves these agonies as well. And, considerations of Thoreau’s rhetorical excess aside for the moment, doesn’t his thinking at least originate in the striving for optimum favorable conditions for his own work, the kind of conditions that Carruth himself created, albeit with his family, in Vermont? As Nietzsche noted, great philosophers, including Heraclitus, Plato, Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Kant, and Schopenhauer abhorred marriage, "marriage being a hindrance and a calamity on the path to the optimum." Carruth’s friend, Ray Carver, in his essay Fires also complained about the baleful influence of his wife and children on his writing. But Nietzsche reminds us that the ascetic idealism of the philosophers is not a simple, superficial desert; it is an inner state accomplished in the midst of an active social life. Thoreau, in the extreme simplicity of his idealism comes "to the point at which he is not far from harboring the impious wish:percat mundus, fiat philosophia, fiat philosophus, fiám (let the world perish, but let there be philosophy, the philosopher, me)."
Thoreau is saving himself for his own purposes, the writing of his autobiography. The large problem is that his psychic retention becomes the substance of his effort. An autobiography that purports to be ethical should not be autotelic. We return to Carruth's conclusion that Thoreau "solves the problems of sex by masturbation, and the problems of all mankind by isolation." In the chapter on The Sleeping Beauty I have discussed what Carruth sees as the problems of sex. In brief, it is that the impulse to love generously and thereby to have freedom has led to failure, to murder and domination; "passion/ in romance must be love in action/ Lust for the ideal." Love is too often only a style of domination. In practice love produces the best and the worst, the simplest and the most difficult of human consequences. I do not suggest that Thoreau avoided erotic relationships because he understood this paradox. He arranged his whole life so as to avoid any conflict that would have produced this kind of knowing. And this very avoidance is a large part of the substance of America's favorite Founding Work. By avoiding erotic engagement, Thoreau also, on Carruth's account, misses one large opportunity at establishing not only a true personality, but the possibility of generating an ethics, a code of morals.

In After the Stranger we find Carruth's account of the positive possibilities of eroticism (I cover this in the chapter on SB) and a few comments on the topic of masturbation, both of which we can also bring to bear on his response to Thoreau. Aspen, the painter-protagonist of the book, realizes in his votive exegesis of Camus's The Stranger, the relationship of sex to freedom. Camus's character Meursault suffers from sexual privation when he is imprisoned for murder. His jailer tells him that part of his imprisonment is precisely one of the ways in which he is being punished; he is being thereby deprived of his liberty. Aspen notes,

How simple, classical. And how opposed to the accepted modernism that sex and, for that matter, all nature, far from being a liberty, are an enslavement, an inescapable determinism which creates us against our wills, first as the shapeless fruit of our parent's needs; then as the misshapen materia in qua of our own. (ATS, 19-20)
The source of many of Carruth’s objections is that *Walden* is not modern, that it is
romantic -- romantic for instance in its insistence on the primacy of immediacy over
tradition, romantic in its use of the seasons as a structuring device -- romantic and utopian
and should be seen as such. Thoreau is, however, modern in his view of eroticism as
limitation, limitation as a lack of freedom. Carruth’s existentialism, as well as his
understanding of the values of poetic forms, holds that this is not the case. He agrees with
Kierkegaard: "the more you limit yourself, the more fertile you become in invention."
This is especially true in creating a personality. This limitation also means the
abandonment of hope, "for hope precludes self-limitation" (*Either*, 228). Meursault is
more free than his jailer, who is operating on received morality, but eventually, the next
day, Meursault masturbates. "Not a very satisfactory way out," Aspen comments, "for
anyone experienced in sex, as Meursault is, or for anyone devoted to freedom, as Meursault
also is." There is a duplexity here. Is accepting limitation from without the same thing as
accepting necessity? Is the mere recognition of necessity, for instance the acknowledgement
that one is being coerced, an act of freedom? Aspen asks, "Can one be free even if one
follows the recognition [of coercion] with an act of will, ordaining necessity?" Sartre has
at times seemed to argue that all limitations of freedom are internal. Critics of Sartre’s
existentialism, Marcuse for example, have pointed out that in fact there are often external
constraints which make this position ludicrous, and that "existentialist freedom is safe from
the tribulations to which man is subjected in empirical reality."6 This is precisely the
objection that Carruth makes about Thoreau’s work, its radical removal from real life.

There are sources in Carruth’s poems for his connection of sex and freedom.
Freedom means having a woman when you want one. When institutionalized (as Carruth
was), or driven by fear into isolation (as Carruth also was), sex is not possible. In the
asylum "the calendar/ on the wall masturbated shamelessly, relentlessly" (*SB*,67). In the
isolation of his rural home, presumably after the break-up of his marriage, it is rare that the
persona is "making love in the cabin, not to himself/ This time, a visitor has come to him, has come/ With him" (SB,76). Many people might agree that two are better than one, but if Carruth’s position on masturbation were a mere assertion of that it would be of little consequence. Carruth objects to Thoreau’s vision as an ideal. Masturbation, on Carruth’s account, is the sexual analog, cause and effect of social irresponsibility. It is aestheticism masked as asceticism. Thoreau is the aesthetic man. He simply wants to watch. This is an untenable ground for a social contract.

The ascetic and the aesthetic urge pervade Walden. Asceticism is his aesthetic strategy. Everywhere his disgust at his own body and its functions is a metaphor for his disgust at society: "the bad neighborhood to be avoided is our own scurvy selves" 9130); "There is no odor so bad as that which arises from goodness tainted. It is human, it is divine carrion" (160); from Higher Laws, "The gross feeder is a man in the larva state; and there are whole nations without fancy or imagination, whose vast abdomens betray them" (264); "The wonder is how they, how you and I, can live this slimy beastly life, eating and drinking" (267); sensual urges are like "the worms which, even in life and death, occupy our bodies" (267); "Chastity is the flowering of man" (268); Thoreau’s bedfellow is "the ice in the pond" (306). In Life Without Principle this metaphorical mode becomes even more direct:

Those things which now most engage the attentions of men, as politics and the daily routine, are, it is true, vital functions of human society, but should be unconsciously performed, like the corresponding functions of the physical body. They are infra-human. (372-73)

Thoreau’s asceticism is self-disgust; his ideal response is flight. This is why he confuses liberty with freedom, and why, as we shall see in his response to work, he confuses nature with history. Freedom is freedom from, from sex, from corporeality, from social responsibility. Cavell has suggested Thoreau’s resemblance to Rousseau. Carruth concurs, and he makes the distinction between the Thoreauvian, Rousseauvian definition of freedom
and his own, which partakes consciously of the writings of Bakunin, Most, Goldman, and Kropotkin. Carruth sees the historical truth of negative freedom, that "men must be forced to be free," that belief in freedom has manifested itself most often as passion,

And passion
In romance must be love in action,
Lust for the ideal . . . oh, murderous
All you great,

All you good and terrible
Straining forever in beauty and man’s fate,
You heroes valorous in error,
Why could you not have let love be? And why
Was loving never enough?

Sing, Robespierre,
Of how your loves look, trundling past to die. (SB,54)

Hannah Arendt has remarked, "Robespierre carried the conflicts of the soul, Rousseau’s ame dechiree, into politics, where they became murderous because they were insoluble." On Carruth’s account, this kind of freedom is romantic error; the consequence of Rosseauism is tyranny, e.g., in Cuba:

He reads:
"That is one of the great tragedies
Of revolutions: you have to suppress man
In order to save him."

But o Fidel
"Suppress" means the camps.
It means "up against the wall," and good Cardenal
Who loves you and your revolution, the equalities,
The courage, the beautiful new nation,
Cardenal saw the camps, saw the oppression,
Cardenal saw the State . . . (SB,53)

This suppression is Thoreauvian tyranny over self, asceticism. In another poem Carruth quotes Bakunin to make a distinction between freedom and independence:

"I am a fanatic lover of liberty, considering it
the unique condition in which intelligence, dignity,
and human happiness may develop and grow;
not the purely formal liberty
conceded, measured out, and regulated by the State,
an eternal lie which in reality represents
nothing more than the privilege
of some founded on the slavery
of the rest; not the individualistic, egoistic,
shabby and fictitious liberty
extolled by the school of J.-J. Rousseau and the other schools of bourgeois liberalism, which gives us the would-be rights of all men as embodied in a State that limits the rights of each -- an idea which leads inevitably to the reduction of the rights of each to zero." (Brothers, 90)

Though there is evidence that Bakunin and Thoreau had much in common in regard to their psycho-sexual identities 18, Carruth sees that Thoreau's egoism, his self-hatred, tends, when translated into social praxis, toward tyranny, toward liberty for a few at the price of the enslavement of many. Thoreau's hatred of organized power is "the hatred of the ill-constituted, disinherited, and underprivileged, who destroy, who must destroy, because what exists, indeed all existence, all being outrages and provokes them."19 This is Nietzsche on anarchists, but it resonates with Carruth's objections to Thoreau. Thoreau's individualism is "only the other side of corporatism, the two blind, sick egos of the objective world" (Ef, 2). Again, this is a disastrous basis for a social contract, for it is the tyrannic will of one who suffers deeply, who struggles, is tormented, and would like to turn what is most personal, singular, narrow, the real idiosyncrasy of his suffering, into a binding law and compulsion -- one who, as it were, revenges himself on all things by forcing his own image, the image of his torture on them, branding them with it.20

This forcing of the image of the self is, as we have seen above, precisely the nature of Thoreau's metaphoricity. Santayana called this kind of anarchism one in which each man fights "to make his conscription universal."21 In short, Walden is the medium of passage from romanticism, in this case a romantic pessimism, to fascism by way of individualism.

Yet, Carruth has no doubt that the individual must be primary, that the State in all of its manifestations must be resisted. The State is the most obvious form of destructive pressure on individual consciousness. In the wake of the death of god, the state came into the void as a superperson, mindless, tyrannical, like all corporate personalities. "Against the superperson, the person is literally nothing: a no thing. The state has the goal to inform the individual that he does not exist, has no claim to exist except as an abstraction, a token,
a statistical unit of labor, consumption, revenue, or the like" (ATS,94). The task, Carruth has learned from Camus, is "the preservation of both terms in the absurd relationship, the meaningless universe in the individual consciousness" (ATS,95). Is such a preservation possible?

Thoreau seeks to resist by asserting his ego. Carruth connects this kind of egoism, "mankind comprised of only a miscellaneous assortment of egos, single nodes of consciousness endowed, each one, with demoniac self-regard." ("The Act of Love," WP), with Stirner and Nietzsche, with nihilism. The result of nihilism is a constant conflict: the ego tries to remove itself from the objective world, but this is impossible because 1) it is thus coerced by the objective world into determined responses and 2) it cannot escape into pure transcendence because it can never let go of itself. The existential answer is for the self, the ego, to create a subjective order from the phenomenal elements of objective reality. This is what creates personality, and while it is happening -- the process is what is important -- there is a state of self-transcendence, a true subjectivity, "a spiritual state of pure existence" ("The Act of Love"). This is work, and work is an act of love. Work is the source of independence. There is every indication that Carruth sees the project as purely personal, though the results are social. He asks,

Now tell me if we don’t need a revolution! Black is the color of my only flag and of man's hope.

Will revolution bring the farms back?

The answer is no, and to hope for that would be a backward-looking, sentimental utopianism.

It's true, the real revolutionary is one who can see all dark ahead and behind, his fate a need without hope; the will to resist. The State is universal, the Universe is a state. Now ask me if I am really an anarchist. (BILYA,94-5)

###
What Was Emerson Really Saying?

Carruth suggests that Thoreau was less free in his box in the woods than, "say, Thomas Jefferson wrangling in the Congress or building Monticello," and that he would have been freer if he had understood Jefferson or "even if he had understood what his neighbor, Ralph Waldo Emerson was really saying." What had Jefferson to say to Thoreau? Carruth's "Black is the color of my only flag...." above, evokes a message from Jefferson via one of Carruth's contemporaries who had a great influence on Carruth. Paul Goodman, "Flags 1967":

How well they flew together side by side
the Stars and Stripes my red white and blue
and my black flag the sovereignty of no
man or law! They were the flags of pride
and nature and advanced with equal stride
across the age when Jefferson long ago
saluted both and said, "Let Shay’s men go.
If you discourage mutiny and riot
what check is there on government?

Today

the gaudy flag is very grand on earth
and they have sewed on it a golden border,
but I will not salute it. At our rally
I see a small black flag of little worth
and touch it wistfully. Chaos is Order.23

In 1786, when Dan Shays led farmers in a desperate attempt to stop bankruptcy courts from sitting and then to Springfield in an attempt to capture the federal arsenal, his force was captured. All were pardoned or given short sentences. Jefferson, from Paris, said "A little rebellion now and then is a good thing . . . The tree of liberty must be refreshed now and then with the blood of patriots and tyrants." What Thoreau might have learned from this is, simply, tolerance. And, along with that, he might have tempered his position on working. Jefferson believed that agriculture encouraged the qualities of practicality and self-reliance essential to a democracy. Jefferson encouraged diversity, not uniformity,
enlightened and constructive rebellion, not revolution. Pride and nature (could Thoreau
know the difference) "advancing with equal stride."

What does Carruth think Emerson was really saying? Certainly, Emerson saw that
the poet, the ideal man, acts and creates from his character, and in doing so he acts for us
all, not against us all. In his Shelleyan optimism, he believed that the poet could legislate
a code of ethics. And he had the Miltonic urge to be "doctrinal to the nation." He saw
the creative artist as liberator, as vates, and in his own paens to nature he saw all life as
symbolic. In some ways none of this is foreign to Thoreau. However, in "The New
England Tradition," Carruth notes that although Emerson withdrew in a sense from Boston
to Concord, his great value was in the active soul. Despite the cloying effect of his
"gorgeous inrushes of exaltation" (D.H. Lawrence on Emerson), Emerson was trying to
restore to Puritanism "an awareness of the spiritual unity of meaning and being." If his
optimism overlooked the nature of real suffering, eventually, Carruth believes, it issued out
in an admirable kind of Stoicism

In "The Poet" Emerson writes,

> every natural phenomenon super-exists in pre-incantations which sail like odors in
the air, and when any man goes by with an ear sufficiently fine, he overhears them
and endeavors to write down the notes without diluting or depraving them. (my
italics) The condition of true naming on the poet’s part is his resigning himself to
the divine aura which breathes through forms.

Although Emerson is much nearer to neo-Platonism here than Carruth could ever be, we can
see a source of Carruth’s affinity for Emerson. Walter Benjamin has defined "aura" as "the
unique phenomenon of appearing distant, however close a thing may be." For Carruth
and Emerson this appearance of distance has a metaphysical and a representational valence.
If we are to see into the souls of things, those things must be appropriated for our scrutiny.
But we must hold in mind, consciously, that they are always other, and equivalent. We
should not, in Emerson’s words, dilute or deprave them, which is the inclination of
metaphoric representation to which Thoreau falls victim over and over. Indeed, the
maintenance of that sense of separateness, of distance, is one of the true sources of wonder, of joy, the indispensable prerequisite for our own sense of phenomenological equality. This is apparent in Carruth’s poem "Aura":

Now twilight comes; not dark but a moment’s clarity so that brute wonder drains from my eyes, relieved by the evening star, there, calm, over the horizon, a lucidity, a lucency. That light, far lavender, restores distance and measure, and inside my skull I rise tall and free again then the mountain, free too in its subduing, intercedes, a new presence now a sense given beyond color, around and surrounding -- is it shadow, is it a blue myth coming to be? Ah, wonder gone, how lovely this welcoming! I see I see the new dimension, form wavering into essence and shimmering -- oh, so slightly! -- back to new form, while the mountain looks at me.

The too brilliant light of the autumn day produced “brute wonder,” but the appearance of the evening star restores the distance and measure, the identity and perspective that had
been extinguished by that wonder. One consequence is that the man is released from his role of spectator and becomes in the liminal state of light a participant, and to the extent that he participates he is free. As the mountain changes from form to essence it is freed from being merely an object of contemplation and it becomes free also as it becomes active, subduing the appropriating sense of the observer -- essence defies and subdues visual appropriation. In its flux the mountain subdues the outrush of ego, resists in the independence of flux the static quality that the vision demands for apprehension. In doing this the mountain restores the sense of limitation and helps establish the definitive limits of the human self. The possibility of self-definition with the help of the natural world, which is granted an equivalent phenomenological reality, is one of Carruth's most characteristic perceptions. Here, unless sensory apperception is somehow subdued by the actual, the form and the essence of the mountain, there is no necessity. Without necessity one lacks "the power to obey, to submit to the necessary in oneself, to what may be called one's limit." 25 Metaphor always refuses to some extent to submit to the actual. So does Thoreau. And so Thoreau lacks the ability to define himself actually. His self is a fantastic thing, defined only in regard to the possible, the infinite, denying all actuality.

Attention to Emerson's belief in the laws of spiritual compensation might also have tempered Thoreau's vehemence. On Emerson's account, aggression begets aggression, hate begets hate. Emerson believed "when he could love his enemies, he would have none, that is, he would not think of them as enemies." 26 And, finally, we can say that the least that Thoreau might have learned from Emerson is his love, his sense of communion, the love that Emerson felt radiating from the truly great poets -- Shakespeare, Homer, Dante, and Chaucer. For Emerson "love is compatible with universal wisdom" ("The Poet"). If we can love we will find the cosmic reflected in one another, as well as in the water. Some understanding of this might have helped keep Thoreau from becoming "ungenerous to the
point of cruelty."

Yet, many critics have pointed out facets of Emerson's thought which, even Carruth admits, Thoreau was clearly listening. Carruth notes Emerson's "simple optimism in wage-earning life," his use of commerce as a metaphor, in short, his optimistic belief in commerce that led Allen Tate to call Emerson "the prophet of industrialism," and Santayana to condemn Emerson's inability to "comprehend the tragic view of experience." If Emerson's knowing does not operate on suffering, suffering remains intractable. It remains a fact. The actuality of suffering (though certainly not ignorance of it!), is something Carruth insists upon. Carruth thinks that if Emerson was a prophet of industrialism, it was the fault of his interpreters. "We cannot blame Emerson for that, anymore than we can blame Calvin for the ethics of Protestant businessmen." But Carruth largely ignores the part of Emerson that Thoreau understood.

In "Nature" Emerson states that in using phenomena symbolically the poet unfixes the land and the sea . . . and disposes them anew," that "the sensual man conforms thoughts to things, the poet conforms things to his thoughts. The one esteems nature as rooted and fast; the other as fluid and impresses his being thereon.

It is precisely in his denial of sensuality that Thoreau is uniformed in the attempt to dominate through denial both nature and the organic manifestations of society -- government, trade, work, marriage, etc.

Emerson talks of "the kingdom of man over nature." Though again Carruth is no "Objectivist," it is the deformative results of this conformity that he believes few of Thoreau's fans are aware of. Michael Gilmore points out that in "Commodity" Emerson "betrays his admiration for commerce in his conception of the soul." The body and its functions become a commodity metaphor.27 Thoreau shares this characteristic; his disdain for bodilliness is embodied ideationally in his metaphors of trade. Yet, the vehemence of his objections to trade make us wonder along with Carruth at the origin of the metaphors.
Which was primary, his disgust for his body or his disgust for trade?

Again, Carruth generally agrees with Thoreau on the insidious effects of technology and commerce. Serious writing has despised them. "As the subjugation of all our civil life by technology has accelerated, until now we are completely enslaved, so has our hatred become deeper, broader, greater in every way, a controlling thematic element in much of our writing" (Ef,149). The problem is therefore how to react without continuing to be victimized in being merely reactive. Disgust must not dictate a mean and disgusting response. The work is difficult. And as Carruth points out, working is what Thoreau like least.

###

"WORK!" --Maynard G. Krebs

Even more galling to Carruth than Thoreau's stylistic response to nature with all of its troubling implications, more than his onanistic and neurotic demand for privacy, is his attitude toward working, especially his ridicule of his neighbors who have to work because they have families. Carruth wonders why this attitude on work is part of America's love of Walden. Why do Americans want to be flayed for obeying the Calvinist directive? It may help to state here that Carruth does not naively assume a simple relationship between love and work, e.g., that work -- manual, intellectual, or other -- is a repressive sublimation or a negation of desire. There is, however, the implication that there could be a sublimation of desire for an ideal, a positive view of work. Carruth realizes, with Marcuse, that erotic power builds social order. Thoreau's projects of realization: the abolition of toil, the amelioration of the environment, the conquest of disease and decay, the creation of luxury . . . constitute work which associates individuals to greater unities; no longer confined within the mutilating domination of the performance principle, they modify the impulse without
deflecting its aim. There is sublimation and, consequently, culture; but this sublimation proceeds in a system of expanding and enduring libidinal relations, which are in themselves work relations.28

Carruth knows this, that work is the prerequisite of creation, of existence. As Sartre writes about Kierkegaard: "existence is the work of our inner life . . . resistances overcome and perpetually reborn, efforts perpetually renewed, despairs surmounted, provisional failures and precarious victories -- and this work is directly opposed to intellectual knowing"29, i.e., to Hegel and to Thoreau. Thoreau's rejection of culture, of society, his escapism, his wish to "do away with art, do away with history, abolish every civilization more complex than that of the anthill beneath your feet" is the concomitant of his refusal to acknowledge the libidinal aspect of his body, his need for love and work. His disgust for farming misses the main spiritual value of work -- that it is done not for an ideal, not for the state, not directly for the economic community at large, not even for the universal fact, but for some other human beings, for their welfare and maintenance. Work is an erotic act.

Carruth's "Essay on Love" is a meditative poem that is essential in his larger evocation of the beauty of the New England countryside. It is intense in its perception of the land, so that we understand that this kind of looking, watching with a vigilant refusal to distort, is itself hard, erotic labor. Carruth writes this poem in his middle age, literally weary of manual labor.

I used to drive this wedge in the maple blocks
with pleasure, now I wouldn't care
if I never saw another.

Yet the air so clear, utterly clear, and the blue
September sky arcing the forest's bright crown
so very deep: Come lean the sledge
on its maple block

and walk away, slow, stepping by the little brook
where shad leaves turn coral and the turtlehead
blooms late this year its petals
still perfect and white.

See, ladies' tresses, right here where they always were; kneel then to their fragrance, near
to the cool of the earth. And goldenrod,
plumes of yellow

where yellow bees mumble, and asters, blue
and purple and white, New England asters
    that are our stars, and the small
speckled asters massed

at the edge of the clearing, that are called
farewell to summer; and there beneath them
    the peeping, deep, blue shy eyes
of the gentian,

so rare a color.

There is a tenderness of visual touch here, along with the Keatsian brilliance of imagery
and the expert lyrical movement of the poem (peeping, deep, blue shy eyes!). The poem
goes on to enumerate the particular pains of failing mind, failing body. The ultimate
realization is of the redeeming otherness in daily chores:

Years, years, seasons and changes. Time,
    which is nothing but the measure of change —
nothing. No meaning.

Years, years I've driven this wedge with my big
hammer into these maple blocks for Rose Marie,
    to keep her warm and give her stovewood
for her kitchen

all winter, firesticks wrenched, split, pried
apart, each with the thought of her. I see
    so clearly, precisely, with the keen
eye of dispassion,

the trees, flowers, birds, all colors and forms,
but what good is such seeing in this chaos
we used to call our order? She
    is invisible now,

a purity, the greater loveliness for the greater
seeing. Back to the block then, back once more,
pick up the sledge, eyes down, and bend,
    bend to the labor

that is the only meaning. Farewell to summer.
Yes, let changes keep the time. I'll count
    no further, except the firesticks
counted for her.
The endurance of fatality is made possible by a practical, immediate goal. The reaching toward this goal also controls the impulse of the chaotic imagination toward fantasy.

Today, or tomorrow, is of necessity more important than the infinitely distant future, the nowhere of the utopian sensibility. In the face of chaos clairvoyance is a curse, a pain, but the narrowing of scope from the universal fact to the particular fact is a source of sanity. This is not merely a sentimental love of the land and of the woman; labor for love, including the labor of lucid attention and clear writing, is the only meaning, the only way to impose provisional unity on an immensely intractable reality. This is true of any erotic act, especially the act of writing (and of reading, with love, the product of the writer). "Let changes keep the time." This applies both to the poem on the page -- that the meter is improvised in regard to a basic, arbitrary order -- an aesthetic credo, but also it means that the illusion of time is a feature of the world of perceived change. Maya. Where does the poem go when it is not being written? Where is our world without us?

Thoreau terms attention to mundane details "moral suicide" ("Life Without Principle",368). Carruth sees that this kind of attention to detail is the only way to survive. Thoreau’s vision is of himself, numinous, in a world of facts, avoiding the filth of human contact, the difficulty of finding part of himself reflected in the joys and tribulations of others. He can never admit his own part in the mindlessness he abhors. The loss of spiritual purpose Thoreau detects in society is a manifestation of brutishness in the heart of man, and, insofar as he is a man, in Thoreau. Thoreau denies this void in himself, denies the brutal consequences of it, but he displays that very brutishness in his excessive vehemence. Carruth wishes to call our attention to this same crazy behavior in American life.

Work, doing, is a positive necessity, and a way of achieving selfhood and community which is far more practical than, say, living in a box and reading the Hindu
scriptrue. Writing is work, and Carruth shares with Kierkegaard a sense of writing as action.

In "The Act of Love: Poetry and Personality," an essay that Charles Altieri has called "the best discursive essay by a contemporary American poet," Carruth describes literary creation, at least the moments when the artist is intensely engaged, "spontaneously engendering imagery and verbal compounds from the imagined structures of remembered experience," as a spiritual moment of pure existence, a moment of personality, of love. This moment can come from any activity, from working with machines or from working the land. Carruth makes a clear distinction here between spiritualism and mysticism, between intensification of identity and ecstasy, loss of identity (ek-stasis, out of place):

The poet at work is in firmer command of what he knows, all that he knows, than at any other time. Indeed work is the key word here. The spirit of man may be capable of developmental or mutational stages beyond my comprehension -- I certainly do not comprehend visions or the antics of parapsychology --but the stage I do comprehend, which I therefore call spiritual and not mystical, is that stage that is reached through work. (WP,223)

Carruth sees some of this spiritual work in Walden. The creation of a personality, autobiogenesis, is an existential act insofar as there is no assumption of an essential self which takes precedence over the created self. There is no expression of an a priori self, but rather an improvisation. Thoreau unfortunately diverts himself from himself through his careless and fantastic egoism.

Autobiogenesis is an act of rebellion. The individual creates an image of himself not by using knowledge, but with the Kierkegaardian conditionals of belief, decision, and choice. As such a creation it is a subversive social act, egoistic in the best sense of Nietzsche's self-assertion, "setting up a real ego, accessible to [the individual] and fathomed by him, in opposition to the general pale fiction and thereby annihilating it."31 Carruth quotes Schopenhauer to put this creative egoism into perspective:

Genius, then, consists in the capacity for knowing, independently of the principle of sufficient reason, not individual things, which have their existence in their relations, but the ideas of such things, and of being oneself the correlative of the idea, and
thus no longer an individual, but the pure subject of knowledge. (Ef,2)

The capacity for being the subject of knowledge rather than the compulsion to be the source of knowledge. How different this is from Thoreau, who defines himself only in reaction, in creating *Walden*, an overheated tome of "sufficient reason."

But back to work. Carruth had to support his family in the dismal economic environment of northern Vermont by cutting wood, ghost-writing, raising chickens, and writing what he calls "hack reviews." He naturally resents being laughed at by Thoreau. Is there a "higher" dimension to Thoreau’s castigation of his readers? Thoreau works at *Walden*, it seems, only to try to validate his use of farming and working the woods as metaphors. "Our lives pass at such remoteness from its symbols, and its metaphors and tropes are far-fetched." In "The Bean Field" he says he farms the land "for the sake of tropes and expressions, to serve a parable maker one day." Thoreau wants to earn his tools, but does he? Here is a troped-up passage from *A Week*:

> We all had our daydreams as well as more prophetic nocturnal visions, but as for farming, I am convinced that my genius dates from an older era than the agricultural, I would at least strike my spade into the earth with such careless freedom but accuracy as the woodpecker his bill into a tree. There is my nature, methinks, a singular yearning toward all wildness. . . what have I to do with plows? I cut another furrow than you see.

There is much characteristic of Thoreau’s "vision" for Carruth’s objections here. Night visions are delivered by the unconscious and therefore untainted by reality. They are more prophetic of something, the future perhaps. Thoreau’s "genius" here is not his accomplishment, but his inhabiting spirit. It comes from the fantastic realm of pre-history, before agriculture, from . . . how far back, over 10,000 years? The metaphors here are unintentionally ludicrous. The woodpecker pecks for something that is already there, hardly like preparing the earth for seeding. How does accuracy enter into spading as preparation? Thoreau’s wish for careless freedom, his assignment of it to a woodpecker are telling.

Wildness, carelessness, and freedom are synonymous for Thoreau, as they are for many
Americans today. What has Thoreau to do with plows? He uses the idea of a plow to express his own Platonic desire to "cut another furrow than we can see." Good for him. But the rhetorical question is barely functional. He has nothing to do with plows, and he compounds his lack of sympathy for working folks with his view of the people who use plows, farmers. Carruth finds in his farming neighbors "the remnant of human worth/ to admire in this world and, I think, to envy." Compare this to Thoreau's statement at the end of the passage on Flint's pond: "Farmers are respectable and interesting to me in proportion as they are poor -- poor farmers . . . I respect not his labors, his farm where everything has its price." The price, of course, is work. Thoreau's contempt for farmers reaches its depth as he criticizes their living arrangements, "chambers for men, horses, oxen, swine, cleansed and uncleansed, all contiguous to one another. Stocked with men! A great grease spot redolent of manures and buttermilk." Thoreau's expression of ultimate contempt takes the form of a physical revulsion at the proximity of domestic animals. Where should the farmer live? Does he really expect that farmers should be engaged in aesthetic cultivation? The attack on Flint is senseless.

Carruth has developed a natural respect for the people who farm for their lives. They were his neighbors in Johnson, and he could not have survived there without them. One of the most moving of Carruth's poems is "Marshall Washer." Washer is a "cowshit farmer," an actual neighbor of Carruth's, a passionately private man who knows everything useful about his land. Washer's endurance in the face of the destruction of the surrounding countryside and the apparent obsolescence of his vocation, his practical skills, his shy neighborliness, emerge as truly heroic qualities. This is a piece of Carruth's song in praise of the farmer:

I see a man in bib overalls
and rubber boots kneeling in cowshit to smear
ointment on a sore teal, a man with a hayfork,
a dungfork, an axe, a 20-pound maul
for driving posts, a canthook, a grease gun.
I see a man notching a cedar post
with a double-headed axe, rolling the post
under his foot in the grass; quick strokes and there
is a ringed groove one inch across, as clean
as if cut with the router blade down at the mill.

Thoreau would call Washer's life moral suicide, but Carruth's understanding is that
Washer's relationship to his place, to his way of life, and therefore to himself is highly
moral. His morality is pervasive, reflected even in his archaic diction which reveals that

He is rooted
in history as in the land, the only man I know
who lives in the house where he was born. I see
a man alone walking his fields and woods,
knowing every useful thing about them, moving
in a texture of memory that sustains his lifetime
and his father's lifetime. I see a man
falling asleep at night with thoughts and dreams
I could not infer -- and would not if I could --
in his chair in front of his television.

Note the speaker's typical Yankee reticence to intrude, the respect for limits. Frost's fences
are, of course, psychological. History is in some sense always a limitation, and the
acceptance of history is the only way to live morally. This acceptance of history, natural to
Carruth and reinforced by his friendship with Washer is a characteristic of all of Carruth's
writing, especially The Sleeping Beauty. Thoreau's denial of history is, as Gilmore points
out, self-defeating; he confused nature with history. Thoreau believed that farm work
demeaned the farmer, that by engaging in commodity exchange the farmer, in Sartre's
words, "reduces himself to inorganic materiality in order to act materially upon matter and
to change his material life,"32 that some kind of undesirable transubstantiation occurs as a
result of work. Thoreau doesn't understand that Washer with his dungfork controls his
material and social reality, instead of being controlled by it. He has lost sight of the
subjective element in his activity. Gilmore notes that

An important corollary to this loss of person is a confusion of history with nature. By mystifying or obscuring man's involvement in the production of his social reality, reification leads him to apprehend that reality as a "second nature." He perceives the social order as an immutable and universal order over which he exerts no control. The result is greatly to diminish the possibility of human freedom.33
Here is the consequence of Thoreau’s failures in logic. Had Thoreau read and understood
Jefferson, he would have realized his potential ability to create his social reality. Had he
realized the positive aspects of working he would not have confused history with nature.
His inability to understand that history abuts with the present and is therefore malleable
leads to understanding it as nature, nature which must be overcome. This is an essentially
bourgeois perspective. The American middle class thinks that there are two classes:
"great individuals," viewed as the autocratic makers of history, and, on the other hand, the
"natural laws of the historical environment."34 Given this view, any attempt to mediate the
present has the following result (Lukacs quotes Hegel)

> Consciousness has become an enigma to itself as a result of the very experience
> which was to reveal its truth to itself; it does not regard the effects of its deeds as
> its own deeds: what happens to it is not the same experience for it as it is in
> itself . . . Abstract necessity, therefore, passes for the merely negative,
> uncomprehended power of the universal by which individuality is destroyed.35

For Thoreau this abstract necessity is the power against which he makes his stand.

Unfortunately, the experimental circumstance of his self-engagement is so removed and
distorted from everyday existence that his conclusions emerge as mere assertions of
individualism, not as help for anyone confronted with the anguishing choices of real
independence. One can deny history. Or one can acknowledge history and rebel against it,
which can be truly creative and courageous. One can diminish suffering only if one
acknowledges it, otherwise rebellion is nothing. Nor can rebellion occur without love, as
Camus says, rebellion must result in community: "If all are not saved, what good is the
salvation of one only?"36 Thoreau, and all adherents to his kind of transcendentalism,
prefer an abstract conception of man, of themselves, rather than flesh and blood. This is
proven in Thoreau’s metaphors of self-disgust. He denies existence. He would rather hate
than love.
And his withdrawal is terminal. Carruth mentions Kierkegaard's life as an example of a similarly isolated attempt to generate a moral and philosophical basis for individualism. If we consider Kierkegaard, we see, Carruth suggests, that working in a social isolation similar to Thoreau's, he realized that "to strive against the whole world is a comfort, to strive with oneself is dreadful."37

Thoreau can assert the sublimity of poverty because of his lack of compassion. He has no compassion and he hates exchange -- exchange of anything. So he cannot love. He cannot submit to love because he is afraid of limitations. He writes, "Not until we have lost the world do we begin to find ourselves, and realize where we are and the infinite extent of our relations." A particularly lucid moment, which sounds as if he has precluded hope and is willing to proceed with the immediate, not the universal fact. It sounds true. It is not at all unlike Kierkegaard, who writes in "The Rotation Method, "it is impossible to live artistically before one has made up one's mind to abandon hope; for hope precludes self limitations" (E,288). But Thoreau was content with living the aesthetic, artistic life. He was withdrawn for his own aesthetic purposes. He participates only by watching and he is satisfied with finding himself. To do so he has to look neither out far nor in deep. He has no sense of the finite self which might accentuate his desire for an eternal, infinite self. Kierkegaard knew that the self accomplishment of the "knight of infinite resignation" was possible because "he is not afraid of letting love creep into his most secret, his most hidden thoughts."38 Not only does Thoreau fear his own affectionate impulses, he derides them in others. He hides from history in his fantasy of nature.

Carruth's reference to Kierkegaard leads to further insights into the consequences of Thoreau's fantasies. S.K. again:

When feeling becomes fantastic, the self is simply volatized more and more, at last becoming a sort of abstract sentimentality which is so inhuman that it does not apply to any person, but inhumanly participates feelingly, so to speak, in the fate of one or another abstraction, e.g., that of mankind in abstractio . . . so it is with him whose feeling has become fantastic; he becomes in a way infinitized, but not in such a way that he becomes more and more himself, for he loses himself more and
more.39

This abstract sentimentality is part of what Carruth calls nineteenth-century utopianism. It abandons the present for the future. Thoreau's participation in mankind is done feelingly, with hate. One also senses that Thoreau's violent rhetoric, e.g., his statements about poverty, his declarations on women, his assertion that "there is nothing, not even crime, more opposed to poetry, to philosophy, aye, to life itself than this incessant business" (this doesn't deserve rebuttal), these are the result of the desperation he feels at his leaking self.

Yet, he feels no limit to his selfhood, his ego. Without family, without work, without social obligations, he has no necessity. He lacks the power to obey, to submit to the necessary. In fact at Walden Thoreau is not only hidden from society, in the illusions that result from his fantasy he is hidden from himself. Kierkegaard makes the distinction between mysticism and illusion that bears on both Carruth's differentiation between individualism and independence, between the spiritual and the mystical, and generally on withdrawal as a political and aesthetic strategy, or tactic: "In illusion the individual is hidden from himself; in mystification, he is hidden from others, but both cases are a result of romantic training" (E,248). If Thoreau suffers from illusion, Carruth is surely engaged in mystification. But he knows what he was and is doing. His life in Vermont was dictated by his need to withdraw, to make himself obscure. This is largely apparent in his poetry, explicitly in "Moon" (FSRFC):

> I watch you, alone and lonely,
> both of us lonely, full of this late
> fire. Then I descend once more
> to the cove, to deepening snow and the house
> that stands by the loud brook in freshet
> under the hemlock bank, finding
> my loves there, companionate and always
> careful of me. And you
> are hidden by the banked black boughs
> as I am hidden by love. Hours later

> when the night has gone to frost
again, a reversion to winter,
I walk out onto the crusted snow
and there you are, high
in the winter sky again, so clear,
like a free flake in the stream
of stars. I have found you in the depths
of cold and darkness, you always there
and yet so often hidden, as I too
am where I am always, hidden.

There is more than a hint of the romantic here, but a lucid lunacy: to identify oneself as the lover of the moon. Perhaps the speaker also feels like a "free flake," but there is no illusion. To hide in love is quite different from hiding in hate in the woods. The speaker realizes that he may not know himself, except as an object of flux, and also of potential beauty, like the moon. This sense of potentiality, of yearning towards the beautiful both as a quality of the self and as a granted endowment of loving perception, is the prerequisite of finding beauty. Other people, families, in their companionability and careful love suggest the beauty of the self. Thoreau suggests "the bad neighborhood to be avoided is our own scurvy selves." He cannot allow himself the opportunity to see that he might be otherwise. He is hiding, not creating, and Carruth wishes that Americans knew the difference.

###

**Guilt and the "twist of the Puritan knife"**

Expropriative style. Lack of compassion. Irresponsible utopianism. Abstract sentimentality. Conflation of necessity and actuality and the consequent conflation of nature with history. Disgust for the body overwhelming social and ontological conceptions. Ignorance of the difference between illusion and mysticism. These are serious charges, and serious flaws, indeed. And even worse, Carruth thinks that Thoreau asserts this vision with a kind of arrogance that makes it unbearable. Thoreau's excoriation of his neighbors is "nothing but arrogance,, and of an extreme order that [he] can explain only by believing it
defensive at bottom and motivated by guilt" (Ef, 65). Does this guilt originate in some unconscious need for punishment, because of Thoreau's minimal social transgressions? Does Thoreau at some level realize that he has given up necessity, the only tool with which he could gain the power to effect reality, and does he display such severity towards his neighbors because they are still powerful? What is this guilt?

In "A Meaning of Robert Lowell" (WP, 138), Carruth defines a kind of guilt, a regional, Yankee guilt, that elaborates not only his response to Thoreau, but his response to Puritan ethics in general. Carruth admires Lowell's poetic achievement. He admires Lowell's "hardrock Yankee pertinacity." Lowell's poem "Night Sweat" (For the Union Dead) is a poem to which Carruth is naturally attracted; it is about writing, love, responsibility, and guilt. Carruth quotes two lines from the middle of the poem: "always in me is the child who died,/always inside me is his will to die." His interpretation of these lines in the context of Lowell's poetry and of American culture is, he admits, highly conjectural. Not only is it the finest piece of criticism I have ever read on Lowell, it is essentially useful in evaluating Carruth's response to his regional culture.

Carruth sees these lines as "the expression of the radical guilt which seems to lie at the base of Lowell's poetic nature." The sources of this guilt are cultural -- the Yankee shame "over the Indians and the Salem women" -- and biological -- the Oedipal guilt over the death of the father -- and also, "finally from the horrendous events of contemporary history." Carruth says that this guilt is caused by a puritan conception of sin, that sin brings death. This is the dark, intestinal, Puritan, American superstition. Personal death comes as a result of sin. Yet, everywhere Lowell asserts his personal innocence. The only meaning then is that death is our sin, for which we pay in advance through our guilt. Our death is a crime . . . Our bodies are going to commit it, do what we will. They are going to carry out this murder inexorably, while we stand by, helplessly and aghast.

This is the ultimate Yankee metonymy, you might say. Puritan death as punishment for sin contracts, under the paradox of benign transcendentalism, to death as sin. Naturally it is a theological monstrosity. It is impossible. Yet in the
human and poetic sphere, it is a validity of staggering force. And it lies at the
heart of the American sensibility, a far more cogent explanation of our attitudes
than, for example, Leslie Fiedler's mythologized sexualism.

Lowell carries this "sin-death" inside him; the consequent guilt is an autogenetic engine.

Thoreau did also. Thoreau's disgust for his body is informed by this submerged metonymic
corporeal sin. The body is treacherous, to be denied by asceticism. Society is treacherous,
tending toward annihilation of the helpless individual, and should also be denied. This is
as impossible as immortality. But, still, all of it, society-death-sin-death-in-life, it is all
Thoreau's fault. He is guilty, defensively, arrogantly guilty. This is the source of the
vehement in Walden and in Civil Disobedience. In paragraph 14 of the latter Thoreau
seems to realize that he is associated with the state, in the same relationship to the state as
the state is to the nation. His withdrawal has not dissolved the union between the
individual and the state, and hence he is disgraced. This is a sin, a source of guilt, a
source of his useless and naive political rhetoric. His statements about political philosophies
are typically bitter and simplistic: "The government of the world I live in was not framed,
like that of Britain, in after-dinner conversations over the wine."

This same guilt functions in Thoreau's appraisal of commerce. His zealous rejection
of exchange in some ways anticipates the rejection of the meanest values of capitalism by
many serious writers. Like many people today, Thoreau perceived, as Carruth notes, "the
doom of civilization in the flaws of a specifically human nature." Does he know that he
himself is responsible? He does nothing but yowl at and accuse his fellows. In placing the
blame for this sin solely on others Thoreau falls victim to the psychic process described by
Hegel

he does not regard the effects of its deeds as its own deeds... what happens to it
is not the same experience for it as it is in itself. Abstract necessity therefore
passes for the merely negative, uncomprehended power of the universal by which
individuality is destroyed.
In denying his own responsibility, Thoreau is subscribing to the Christian tradition that traces original sin to an ancestor: evil has already taken place. This view insists upon "the impotence of will that surrounds every actual fault." Americans crave the unaccountability and the moral paralysis that his vision of sin encourages. It is directly opposed to one of the prime existential tenets: man is only what he makes of himself. Carruth knows this; he also knows well the attraction of personal paralysis. In "The End Again," (From Snow and Rock), the speaker stands in the literal and moral moonlight "metaphorical of/ Abstract perfect justice," at 40 below zero, contemplating oblivion helplessly "stiff/ Almost solid, staring with frozen eyes."

This particular kind of guilt and sin are also factors in Thoreau's refusal to admit erotic relationships. Not only would a lover put practical restraints on him, so he thinks, he feels the very existence of others as the dead-end of his own possibility -- and possibility is the realm that Thoreau wants to infinitize. The other gives him his own value and so, he thinks, creates alienation, enslaves him, makes him less a man than a thing. Sartre puts this neatly:

> By the very emergence of [the other’s] existence, I have an appearance, a nature; the existence of the Other is my original sin.

Given Thoreau's thinking, the very fact of a social order makes him guilty.

The end result of all this guilt is the vehemence Carruth decries along with the unfortunate tendency of Americans to accept that vehemence as correctly applied to themselves:

> because we return compulsively to our endeavors, our studies, our poems and paintings, we must permit ourselves to be scorned, reviled, and castigated. This is deeply, congenitally American. It is the twist of the Puritan knife, guilt returning upon desire and weakness. Thoreau was eager to do the job for us, and today we have plenty of lesser Thoreaus, equally eager. The magazines and lecture halls, though not the woods, are full of them.
What could be meaner, on Carruth’s account, than a lesser Thoreau? The tone here is typical of Carruth’s judgments on corporate culture, on the intellectual friability and the hostility toward intellectual rigor of the contemporary sensibility and on the artists who would cater to it. Although Carruth has used the words flayed, excoriated, cruelty, arrogance, castigated, etc., in describing Thoreau’s approach, he never explicitly goes to the conclusion, though he implies it in the image of Thoreau twisting the knife. Thoreau was sadistic and the American public, Thoreau’s enthusiastic readership, is masochistic. I mean this literally. We have already said that in his aestheticism Thoreau would rather watch than act. In his asceticism he would deny his body. Clearly also he means by watching to humiliate the objects of his attention. He sees social relations, like sexual relations, as a power struggle. This is what intercourse looks like to a kid. Thoreau is sadistic in both Freudian and Sartrean terms. If the experience of the other is as the source of reification, there are two responses:

1) the attempt on the part of the ego to deny the liberty and mastery of the Other and to make him into an objective thing, totally dependent on the ego; or, 2) to assimilate his liberty, to accept it as the foundation of the Ego’s own liberty and thereby to regain the free ego. The first attitude leads to Sadism, the second to Masochism.43

(This is Marcuse on Sartre.) But sadism, by destroying the other, destroys the chance of self-definition via the other; it destroys necessity. Masochism is merely reactive; by accepting the "liberty" offered by Thoreau Americans have given up the chance for true independence, the difficult chance of composing themselves in regard to reality. And again there is the question of responsibility. Neither the sadist or the masochist is fully responsible for the act of torture. Who’s to blame for the extermination of the passenger pigeon, the Crow, The Nez Perces, and the Sioux? Or do we conclude that Americans like certain ancient peoples find suffering and cruelty virtues, find well-being a danger, the craving a danger, peace a danger, pity a danger, being pitied ignominy, work ignominy, madness divine?44

Carruth cannot.
The perfect position for Thoreau's sadistic need to humiliate his neighbors is the one he has assumed, that of the solitary ascetic priest. Though Carruth grants Nietzsche preeminence as an existentialist because of his concern primarily for the fate of the individual, he also often evokes Nietzsche as the precursor of the kind of modernism that he himself abhors. But Nietzsche forcibly describes the sadistic effects of guilt and asceticism, of "guilt returning upon desire and weakness," where inflicting pain brings pleasure. Nietzsche understands it well because he is, at times, the ascetic priest:

let us have fresh air! fresh air! and keep clear of the madhouses and hospitals of culture. And therefore let us have good company, our company! Or solitude if it must be! But away from the sickening fumes of inner corruption and the hidden rot of disease! so that we may, at least for a while yet, guard ourselves, my friends, against the two worst contagions that may be reserved for us -- against the great nausea at man! against great pity for man!

Thoreau has not succumbed to great pity. But he does see himself as a priest, a spiritual sentinel. The effect of his ministrations has been to deaden our pain by producing feelings of anger. He makes us feel guilty about working, so that we see work as a curse instead of a necessity. He appeals to our meanest traits. We can hate our situation and for that moment forget our responsibility . . . but this only worsens the situation. Carruth does not say that Thoreau didn't in general mean well, only that we should understand his flaws, that we should no longer use Walden and other works to exploit our sense of guilt, our "sin," our humanity. We needn't punish ourselves for our desires. Suffering exists, but guilt is not the remedy. We don't need the hair-shirt of Walden. To say this is to begin to say no more pain.

###

**Concerning Necessity**

...and this is the sad fact, one of the saddest -- that weary tedium which the heart and the spirit feel when they no longer need that to whose need they (the heart and the spirit) are necessary. -- Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom*. 
Carruth understands that other people, rather than being merely antagonists of the ego (though any given individual can, of course, be that), are objects of love and beneficiaries of work; their existence creates the possibility of self-realization, creates some limits, some definition. For Thoreau, the other "transforms the world of the ego into a world of conflict, competition, alienation, reification." But for Carruth it is only the existence of the other which can create the possibility of the self. Again, it is Kierkegaard, so seminal for many existential concepts, who has clearly said this:

For the purpose of becoming (and it is the task of the self freely to become itself) possibility and necessity are equally essential.

If, as in Thoreau's case, one tries through withdrawal to create limitless possibility, everything exists in the realm of the possible. At the utmost limits of infinite possibility, nothing is actual, for actuality is a unity of possibility and necessity. The self is unreal and in despair, either from excessive hope or excessive dread. Thoreau's wishful utopianism results in the former, a fantastic life which hopes for better but does not act in order to achieve the goal. Manipulating actual facts is a more difficult imaginative task than fantasizing. Thoreau's response to the actual is flight, denial, even in the political realm. Despite his statement that he feels "his connection with and obligation to society are still very slight and transient," he goes on to express his wish that "government will go down on its knees to him"(372). Why? Because he ignores it! This is as idiotic as his incredible assertions that in poverty is the sweetest life, that "the town's poor seem to me most often to live the most independent lives of any"(347). These are the insensitivities of a man who, by his own admission, "never got his fingers burned by actual possession" (166). What he never possessed was compassion. It is in his poem "Concerning Necessity"(From Snow and Rock) that Carruth refers to Thoreau as an idiot:

Its quite true we live
in a kind of rural twilight
most of the time giving
our love to the hard dirt
the water and the weeds
and the difficult woods

ho we say drive the wedge
heave the axe run the hand shovel
dig the potato patch
dig ashes dig gravel
tickle the dyspeptic chainsaw
make him snarl once more

while the henhouse needs cleaning
the fruitless com to be cut
and the house is falling to pieces
the car coming apart
the boy sitting and complaining
about something everything anything

this was the world foreknown
though I had thought somehow
probably in the delusion
of that idiot thoreau
that necessity could be saved
by the facts we actually have

like our extreme white birch
clasped in the hemlock’s arms
or our bay-breasted nuthatch
or our mountains and our stars
and really these things do serve
a little though not enough

what saves the undoubted collapse
of the driven day and the year
is my coming all at once
when she is done in or footsore
or down asleep in the field
or telling a song to a child

coming and seeing her move
in some particular way
that makes me to fall in love
all over with human beauty
the beauty I can’t believe
right here where I live

This poem is in the long current of debate over pastoralism, a tradition that includes

Marlowe’s "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love," Raleigh’s rebuttal, "The Nymph’s Reply
to the Shepherd," and thereafter many others. Carruth’s use of the topic is quite
genuinely original. "Rural twilight" is a temporal and a spatial metaphor; life in the
hinterlands in and of the twentieth century live little time exclusively for meditation and
repose. In his poem "August First" (BILYA) Carruth writes, "The world is a/ complex
fatigue," and here again the speaker spends most of his time giving his time and his energy
and therefore his love to his small holding of land, in order to make his life out of "the
hard dirt/ the water and the weeds/ and the difficult woods." By adding the conjunction
here, the "and’s", Carruth has mimetically created the fatigue of the speaker. As Longinus,
the writer whom Carruth admires "maybe most of all"(Ef,2), notes, polysyndeton is effective
because

emotion frets at being impeded by conjunctions and other additions, because it loses
free abandon of its movement and the sense of being, as it were, catapulted out.48
The loss of abandon creates a discipline, creates the possibility of beauty. The emotions are
not catapulted out into the realm of possibility, but harmonized in the straits of necessity.
The opposite figure, asyndeton, omission of conjunctions, connotes the urgency of chores in
the third stanza. Yet these chores are the real occasion for this song, "ho we say drive the
wedge/ heave the axe . . ." Intimacy with one’s tools causes even the loud, stinking, tree-
eating saw to become familiar, almost an extension of the viscera. The fact of hard labor
was foreknown. This is and has always been the fact of life in the woods, but the speaker
had shared with Thoreau the delusion that nature alone could be a tonic, could actually
mitigate necessity. To say that "necessity could be saved/ by the facts we actually have"
means at least two ways: natural facts -- trees, birds, mountains, stars, and the fact of our
contemplation of them -- mitigate the pain of necessity; it also means that these facts are
where necessity is saved, in which we find our necessity and also therefore the potential of
self-creation. The trees are as ever in Carruth’s poetry a large part of this complementary
natural cohort. The hemlocks are lovers; they have arms. This is a vision of them that
persists from Carruth's early poems in *The Bloomingdale Papers*. The anthropomorphism comes from living with the trees, and personification calls into question how it is that we can have facts, our mountain, our stars, how can human intelligence have anything except on its own terms, in terms of itself? Perhaps this is impossible, but we should resist the tendency to wholly expropriate; we should be practical and metaphysical stewards of the world. Nature is not to be overcome, but is, instead, a sometimes difficult, sometimes compliant partner. Nature is necessary, but not sufficient, not enough. In the sixth stanza necessity is apposite to "the undoubted collapse/ of the driven day and the year," that is, the realm of necessity encompasses both work and time, and the end of time, death. Time constrains and defines life by giving it a term. Man must rebel against the collapse of time (collapse short of death caused by anger, arrogance, guilt) by imposing his own order. This is where existentialism and romanticism concur: Camus, in a Blakean mode, has written, "Genius is a rebellion that has created its own limits." But these limits are not created solely by or for the self. Here the "she" of the poem becomes a necessity because of her own demonstrations of love. The speaker is made "to fall in love/ all over with human beauty," meaning to fall once again, but also that he is encompassed in his own compassionate reaction and is therefore beautiful. The rather awkward syntax here ("makes me to fall in love") indicates at once the "choked up" moment of epiphany. It also indicates with "makes" 1) that there is a certain passivity on the part of the speaker, 2) that this moment is when personality is made, or 3) created for the purpose of that moment, i.e., "Makes me for the purpose of falling in love, and, 4) the deliberate and unusual adjacency of the pronoun "me" (the objective case of "I") to the infinitive "to fall" indicates that this moment is the interstice of the finite person with the infinite possibility of action (action infinite in the sense that it is without declension, not limited to person, number, or tense -- a freedom of action). The climax of the poem creates a confluence of the actual (me) with the possible (to fall), issuing forth in the necessity which is the claim of the title. This
necessity is the incredible beauty: his chaotic being and hers, endowed with a unity. It is immediate and contingent, only here in the spot of time in which he stands. Insofar as the speaker can respond to beauty he is, must be dedicated to this time, this place, to the present, to "what we are for the time that we are/ what we know for the time that we know." ("If It Were Not For You" in the same collection).

It should not go unsaid -- this is a beautiful poem, Carruth at one of his many moments of extreme technical virtuosity. The rhyming is subtle and varied (abcbdd, abcbde, abcbaa, ababcb, ababca, ababcc, ababaa). Beginning in the fourth stanza "have" rhymes with the end of the poem's first line, "live." This is sounded again in stanza 5. "serve," becomes an interior rhyme in stanza 6, and then is the dominant rhyme in the ultimate stanza: "move," "love," "believe," "live" -- these words are the thematic coordinates of the poem. The rhyming of the poem moves toward a greater regularity and unity, and to the progressive harmony is added a circular element: the final line ending with the same word as the first: "live."

This beauty is in service of one of Carruth's characteristic themes, the relationship of art and the artist to the world at large. Camus, who is important to Carruth in many ways, has put it forcibly: "Art rejects the world on account of what it lacks and in the name of what it sometimes is." The world often lacks love, so the questing of man must be for love. This means that living is essentially erotic, an erotic struggle that finds its ultimate form in art, "in a poetry that by the very tension of its striving confutes the recurrent social philosophies of expedience and claptrap" (Ef,35). The existentialist lives in the name of this struggle and of the occasional beauty in man that is discovered through lucid attention to the present and through work. Camus makes a connection between this existential aesthetic and the aesthetics of transcendentalism:

There is a living transcendence, of which beauty carries the promise, which can make this mortal and limited world preferable to and more appealing than any other.50
Some conclusions:

At the beginning of "The Man in the Box at Walden," Carruth explains that in referring to Thoreau as "that idiot" he applied the term "just as [he] might apply it in casual exacerbation to the local school superintendent or the Secretary of State. It was a put-down, an expression of annoyance." This may have been true at the moment of writing, but the annoyance was informed by a lifetime of rigorous and integrated thought. Carruth sees that erotic action is essentially human and to deny it, despite the anguish it creates, is to be less than human. He refuses to believe that a person can exist in a box, without love and work, in all their forms. Corporate exploitation, economic and political, is to be annihilated not by assertions of individuality but by true independence. The freedom from self, from love, from work, Thoreau's freedom and that of his disciples is self-defeating. With it we are finishing ourselves off; we refuse to realize that "freedom that merely turns its back is no freedom at all" (Ef, 68). In short, Thoreau's notion of freedom, shared by many Americans, is precisely the

impasse of objective egoism, as distinct from transcendent subjectivity, [which] must be eluded if we are to go forward without disaster in a condition of reality. (SI, 11)

Thoreau stayed at Walden for a little over a year. Carruth's personal withdrawal has been profound, even in the midst of intense personal and professional obligations, and it has produced a unique vision of a man in the world (in the wer-ald, A.S., the man-era). Perhaps Carruth does share with Thoreau a tendency toward asceticism. To turn Romance against Romance, as Carruth does in The Sleeping Beauty, is asceticism of a sort. Perhaps what we have in Carruth contra Thoreau is one elitist against another. But there are huge differences in the substance of their idiosyncratic visions. As W.J. Bate notes in The Burden of the Past and the English Poet, "idiot meant originally what is peculiar to a
private person (probable cognates range from the Freudian 'id' to our word 'identity')."51 Carruth wishes that we could understand the flaws of *Walden* as a social contract and come to see Thoreau as an idiot, an intensely private and anti-social thinker. Instead we should be idiots of the original variety. In this effort, in this time, Carruth has with his own work given us a lucid, rigorous, and compassionate example.
Notes: Chapter Four

3. Geoffrey Hartman, The Unremarkable Wordsworth (Minneapolis: U. of Minnesota, 1987), passim, see the index. Hartman's discursion on Wordsworth's feeling for the spirit of place is informative in regard to Carruth.
4. H.D. Thoreau, Walden and Other Writings (NY: Bantam, 1962), 57. All subsequent quotations from Thoreau are from this edition.
7. Ibid.
13. Back cover of Brothers, I Loved You All.
18. see Arthur P. Mendel, Michael Bakunin: Roots of Apocalypse (NYC: Praeger, 1981). The portrait that emerges from this book is of a man incredibly absolutist to the point of being inhuman. His social aggression, like Thoreau's, is based on a denial of his own bodiliness, that as a metaphor for his denial of society.
20. Ibid.
22. "Every externalization of an object in practice (and hence, too, in work) is an objectification. Every human expression, including speech, objectifies human thoughts and feelings. It is clear that we are dealing with a universal mode of commerce between men." Georg Lukacs, History and Class Consciousness (Cambridge: MIT, 1971), xxiv. This is the same kind of acknowledgement Carruth makes about the probable inevitability of metaphor.
27. Gilmore, 18-34.
33. Gilmore, 39.
34. Lukacs, 158-59.
35. Ibid.
37. S. Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling, 123.
38. Ibid., 52.
39. Ibid., 164.
40. Like the liability of human nature, this notion of guilt is a modern attitude. And there is good reason for seeing Walden as early in a long line of American documents including Leaves of Grass, The Waste Land, The Bridge, Paterson, and Howl, along with the collected works of Paul Goodman, works in which, Alan Williamson notes, "a suffering individual reaches out to, instructs, and excoriates the collectivity he believes could heal him in the act of healing itself" (Sulfur #14). Lowell is close to Ginsberg here, and Ginsberg remarkably close in tone to Thoreau. Precisely because of their vehemence neither Ginsberg or Thoreau produced anything as successful as Leaves of Grass, The Waste Land, or Lowell's and Goodman's poetry.
43. Marcuse, Studies, 169.
44. Nietzsche, On the Genealogy, 188.
45. see, e.g., Carruth's "The Phenotype," on Gottfried Benn, WP,37-42.
46. Marcuse, Studies, 168.
47. Even W.C. Williams is a contributor: "Raleigh Was Right":
   Though you praise us
   and call to mind the poets
   who sung of our loveliness
   it was long ago!
   long ago! when country people
   would plow and sow with
   flowering minds and pockets at ease --
   if ever this were true.

   not now. Love itself a flower
   with roots in a parched ground
   Empty pockets make empty heads
   Care if you can but
   do not believe that we can live
   today in the country
   for the country will bring us no peace. (1941)
49. Albert Camus, The Rebel, 255.
50. Ibid., 258.
Erotic Conventions: The Voices of Desire in The Sleeping Beauty and Either

The textural rhythmic and tonally modulative qualities of jazz can apply as well to my love of natural beauty and my love of women, and to the moral, psychological, and metaphysical agonies arising from these loves. (SI,29)

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[Diometa:] ...So naturally you thought of Love as utterly beautiful, for the beloved is, in fact, beautiful, perfect, delicate, and prosperous -- very different from the lover, as I have described him.

[Socrates:] Very well, dear lady, I replied, no doubt you're right. But in that case, what good can love be to humanity? (Symposium)

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...but since my whole soul is filled with you, life takes on another significance for me. It becomes a myth about you. (E,402).
The Sleeping Beauty is Carruth's most thematically deliberate and encompassing book. It was written during various periods from 1972 to 1980 at Carruth's home in Johnson, Vermont; in Temple, Maine, where Carruth's friends writer George Dennison, poet Denise Levertov, and her husband, novelist Mitchell Goodman, lived; in Lagorce in the Ardeche region of France; in Syracuse; and in Hamilton, Montana. Even though Carruth wrote the poem "in states of transcendent concentration and with great speed," or it "breaks down into parts written this way" (SI,28), and despite disjunctions caused by shifts in voice and setting, it is stylistically integrated. The poem is composed of 124 of the fifteen-line verse paragraphs Carruth developed first in 1955 for "The Asylum," which was included in his first book, The Crow and the Heart was revised and reprinted in For You. Carruth used the form again for Contra Mortem (1967) and again later, in a more irregularly improvisational way, in "Paragraphs," the final poem in Brothers, I Loved You All (1978), which was published immediately before The Sleeping Beauty.

Technically, the poem evokes its predecessors in the tradition of the lyric sequence. The fifteen-line sonnet recalls Meredith's sixteen-liners in Modern Love. The predominate and determining rhyme scheme is ababaaccdefef. The metrical scheme is iambic with lines of 5,5,4,3,5,5,4,4,5,2-3,5,4,5,5,5 feet respectively. The couplets in the second quatrain connect the similarly rhymed first and third quatrains. This interlocking rhyme scheme is reminiscent of Spenser's couplet links between the quatrains of his sonnets (ababcbeccdefde) and of the stanzas of The Faerie Queene (ababcbeccbc), but in fact the tetrameter couplet in
the middle of the paragraph was suggested to Carruth by Paul Goodman's sonnet "In Lydia," which Carruth saw when he was editor of Poetry 1949-50, (see p.210-11 of Goodman's Collected Poems). In its internal linkage and in the variations of rhyme and closure (some of the paragraphs are end-stopped, some run into the following paragraph), it is a form particularly well-suited to a long sequence. Although my primary purpose in this chapter is not to attend the relation of the poem to its lyric predecessors (nor to wobble out onto the always perilous ground of asserting direct formal influence), certainly one of the pleasures of reading this poem is the recognition of Carruth's detailed evocation of the poem's generic cohort: the dream genesis of the Romaunt of the Rose and Mallarme's L'apres-midi d'un faune ("Aimai-je un reve?"), which Carruth has translated. Carruth has written admiringly of the "fluidity and simultaneity" of Spenser's verse, which is "exactly what our poets today are striving to achieve in their purposely fragmented writing" (Ef,25), and this poem also recollects elements of the Amoretti (e.g., 77) and the erotic allegories in Book Three of The Faerie Queene. The poem gains additional valence when read vis-a-vis contemporary poems, e.g., Aiken's Preludes, which has tonal similarities with Carruth's work in general, and Duncan's Ground Work, which addresses the Heraclitian vision of war as a principle of regeneration. There are also many verbal echoes of Wyatt, Milton, Shakespeare, Yeats, Pound, and Stevens, which some readers may appreciate. However, the primary importance of the poem is its existential discursion on the great paradox of the Romantic impulse: that the will and drive to be good, heroic, noble, to achieve the ideal, the impulse to love generously and thereby to have freedom have led to failure, to murder and domination: how "passion/ In romance must be love in action,/ Lust for the ideal . . . O, murderous" (54).

On Carruth's account, the heroic striving of the Romantic personality for an individual selfhood has meant personal disintegration and social chaos. Episodes of this
destruction in personality, in history, and in contemporary society are dreamed by the Sleeping Beauty. Her dreams are the episodes of the poem. She dreams history and she dreams the poet who writes the poem. The writing of the poem, an erotic act involving a self and many others, creates a third being, the poem, in which the ecstasy and gladness of the romantic sensibility and the subsequent and inevitable consequences, depression and disintegration, or in Wordsworthian terms despondency and madness, are transcended. The poem itself has a personality equivalent in existence to the dreaming woman and the hero-prince-poet with his legionary visages, the hero who "lives/ wherever and whenever he perceives/ Himself in [her] dreaming, though in fact he is awake/ And so knows the horror of being/ Only a dream" (4). It is the poem "who must make/ Presence from words, vision from seeing,/ This no one that uniquely in sorrow rejoices/ And can have no pronoun."

The final element in the making of the poem is "as in all dreaming . . . the echo of coincidental voices." There are two ideas I would like to define and develop in this chapter. First, that the assignation of personality to the poem is an attempt to establish beyond individuality, beyond corporatism, beyond time, a ground of being in which the will to establish a self through erotic possession of another and the inevitable destruction of that desire are transcended. Secondly, I will explore how the voice of the poem, the assignation of creation to various speakers in history and ultimately to the dreaming of the Sleeping Beauty, is an attempt to let the others speak and thereby to avert the destructive will of the ego as it has been manifested in the traditional single authorial voice. Instead of this egoistic self-assertion Carruth proposes a self that exists in an indirect way in the poem, a self which exists in its subjective relations, not as the source but as the object of possible knowledge. The existence of the self is contingently other, existing only when the other dreams that it is. Carruth concurs with Kierkegaard’s definition of a self as "a relation that relates itself to its own self and in relating itself to its own self [for Carruth,] in an act of"
existential self-creation which includes but transcends history relates itself to another" (SD,146). In Chapter Two I have discussed the general nature of Carruth's existentialism and his relation to existentialist thinkers. In this chapter, after again establishing a ground of Romantic thought against which Carruth and the existentialists react, I will explore the act of writing as an act of self-creation and compare the nature of the voice in SB to ways of "other speaking" in, primarily, Kierkegaard's Either.

Selflessness is apparent from the beginning of The Sleeping Beauty, in the genesis of the poetic consciousness. The poet-speaker is dreamed by the Sleeping Beauty, who is a being created out of tradition and the actual world. She is, in fact, Rose Marie Dorn (Carruth), the poet's wife, who fled Silesia when the Red Army invaded in 1944. "Dorn" in German means "thorn." She is the Rose in the Thorn, the Dornroschen (3). In a contribution to the New American Review in 1970 Carruth gives a forcrendcring of this mythopoeia:

Tradition: a misused word. The thing itself, what the word stands for, does not exist. It is a myth, and like all myths it cannot die. It may go to sleep, like the princess of the thorny rose, and during its slumber extraordinary changes may occur; but as long as human sensibility continues, someone will always come to kiss it awake again. (WP,162)

The poet half-creates and half-receives then the story of a woman, a woman both real and mythic, who is like in her dreaming the tradition in which the poet himself exists both as dream and as an actual man. The Sleeping Beauty is dormant Tradition, which in its dreaming uses its individual elements (poets) in a re-creative autobiogenesis that affirms, at the same time, the identity of the poet. The myth is eternal but it coincidentally validates the being-in-the-moment of those who partake of it. Furthermore, the mutual affirmation here (regeneration of history as a part of self-creation and self-creation as the indispensable analog of maintaining tradition) is profoundly erotic; tradition and self can begin and end "the instant you (Sleeping Beauty) are really kissed"(48).
At the outset of the poem (paragraphs 1-4) in establishing "simply" how the poem came from life (an essential and, I think, effective gambit without which the theme of the whole poem would perhaps become obscured by its local effects) here is the paradigm for the "other-speaking" of the poem: there is a mode of self-creation which accepts all the elements of history, good and bad, mythic and actual. To deny the existence of any element would be to annihilate the integrity of that element and thereby to annihilate parts of the self. The writing of the poem is, however a denial, a destruction, and a revolt insofar as it sets up an original ego in opposition to social fictions about the self and thereby annihilates those fictions. In the poem the self turns against objective versions of the self in order to create a subjective self with an individual consciousness. This consciousness is of a transcendent variety in that it is introspective and it feels the pain of being the object of knowledge, a sensibility always alone and separate; it, like the hero, is "awake/ And so knows the horror of being/ Only a dream." The poem incorporates that painful knowledge in its mode of expression. The voice of the poem exists in the occasional moment in which it is other: eternally if it acknowledges the other, never if it fails to do so. Carruth contrasts this voice with the voice of objective egoism, the kind of willful individualism which, as we have seen earlier, he assigns to Thoreau. The writing of a poem which has this kind of voice is the decisive creative act, an act of transcendent subjectivity which allows us "to go forward without disaster in a condition of reality" (SI,11).

In regard to the absolute necessity of including the other, of making a voice which is composed of other voices if there is to be any self-realization at all, I would like to evoke the relation made earlier between Carruth and Sartre. Both insist upon mediation and reflection as the sine qua non of self-creation. Sartre:

I cannot obtain any truth whatsoever about myself except through the mediation of another. The other is indispensable to my existence, and equally to any knowledge I can have of myself.
I want you to have me. I want you in order to have me. I must have you in order to have myself. Without you I do not exist. Is this not the bedrock statement of the romantic seducer’s self-beguiling complaint? It is a facet of the paradox of the erotic urge. Isn’t this kind of erotic longing largely expropriative, i.e., primarily an urge to self-affirmation rather than a gift of the self to the beloved? If it is, then to pursue that urge is to exploit the other’s integrity and thus radically to destroy the self. But the same erotic urge is also natural; it also creates happiness. In Hegel’s account of this psychic dilemma the spirit "reduces that opposition [between self and other] to a transparent form, and therein finds itself." For Carruth this reduction to transparency is simply another side of self-obliterating domination. Earlier Hegel had written of another kind of resolution, also in a kind of unity:

Love completely destroys objectivity and thereby annuls and transcends reflection, deprives man’s opposite of all foreign character . . . In love the separate does still remain, but as something united and no longer as something separate.6

The corporate will is even clearer here, as is the urge toward an idealistic unity, an incarnation which melds opposites, e.g., voluptuousness and virginity. The existentialist rejects all such authoritative ideals of the human. (Yet, what is the nature of this other, that other, who can guarantee the self if not an idealized guarantor, a goal?) Even if, on Hegel’s account, objectivity (the sense of separation) is destroyed by the erotic urge, it is nonetheless recapitulated in the consequent concept of unity. A medieval definition of allegory was "other-speaking", alieni + loquium, speaking for the other. The impulse of the allegorist is to imbue the other with an impersonal reality. We see this impulse in the Hegelian model above. In this mode "which transcends reflection" the other is in the absolute power of the self. The allegorist says, without you I do not exist, and the melancholy of this situation causes life to flow out of [the other] and it remains behind dead but eternally secure, then it is . . . unconditionally in his power, that is, it is now quite incapable
of emanating any meaning or significance of its own; such significance as it has, it acquires from the allegorist. 7

Carruth understands that this allegorical impulse is the Romantic, idealistic, Hegelian impulse against which the existentialists, especially Kierkegaard, are reacting. The move toward unity by means of the murderous impulses inherent in erotic desire is the essential Romantic impulse. Against this, Carruth asserts that the act of self-creation can only legitimate itself by acknowledging that same act on the part of any and every other. For Carruth this acknowledgement is also necessary in the personal incorporation of human evidence in history. Any act (politics and art are one) which endangers the integrity of another invalidates the self. Even to assume sympathetically the right to speak for the other is an act of domination.

In "Speaking For Them" (Snow) the seemingly natural, epiphanic descriptions are tainted by the romantic, anthropocentric, quasi-allegorical urge:

August. Hear
the cicadas
splitting their skins.

The bleeding cow
has rubbed her neck on barbed
wire against the flies,

which return, crawling
in her eyes. She looks up,
a sorrow, raising her great
head in slowness, brown eyes rising
like pools in the earth.

Then the elms. There marching
down the knoll by the fence slowly,
a dead march. Shall we have

Memorial Day for the elms,
those veterans? Here are the oldest
stricken and proud, lifting

poor broken arms in sleeves
of ragged bark.

Black-eyed susans bow their heads,
crazy swallows
turn somersaults in the air.

There is nothing apparently ironic in the feeling, tone, and depth of perception of this poem. Yet, at the same time the flat diction and friable structuring of the "deep-image" poem popular in the late 1960s and early 70s are habilitated, the poet, with thorough irony, metaphorically attributes an anthropomorphic face to the universe. Man and his mind become the flawed and inevitable paradigm. First, the poem evokes the melancholy pity which, on Benjamin's account, characterizes the allegorist. The cicadas' carapaces become split and ruptured skins. The cow is the victim of malevolent flies and shows in her brutally liquescent eyes a sorrow. Her eyes become pools, her head an earth. The elms are mourning soldiers in rustic weeds. The elm-disease fungus is an enemy of the elms and of the elm-loving humans. By extension, the beetles that carry the disease are secret agents.

The black-eyed susans, named according to their appearance of battered humanity, have petitioning noggins, and barn swallows become gymnasts. The lyrical qualities of this poem almost hide the furtive expropriative urge, the urge of likening, of metaphor, which Carruth sees as perhaps fixed in language and in human imagination but nonetheless "intrusive upon natural order," different from "images set down in purity, without the forcing of metaphor" (EF, 101-06). If one sees elms as veterans, can one therefore assent to the logical implications of that relation? This logical falsity "ideationally embodied" in metaphor results in the kind of distortion to which Carruth objects so strongly in Walden. But it is nonetheless deeply felt; it is humanly true, but morally reprehensible. The need to speak for nature carries with it the will to dominate interpretively and, consequently, a self-destruction.

How in a work of art, especially in the "self-expression" characteristic of the lyric, can one speak for the other or let the other speak? How, when, as in SB, the theme is itself of self-creation and its history? How, when writing itself is an erotic act and full of
Carruth’s poem and Either are so profoundly similar in theme that they seem almost of a piece. Although Carruth read Kierkegaard when he was in graduate school at the University of Chicago in 1946-47 and has read commentators on the existentialist writers, Kaufmann, Bree, et al., he came to Kierkegaard in a mature way only after he had read Heidegger, Camus, and Sartre, and he has said, "As far as I am aware consciously Kierkegaard had no great influence on my ideas or feelings." Regardless of direct influence, Kierkegaard’s theme in Either corresponds with the theme of The Sleeping Beauty: how, given that the Romantic-aesthetic personality regards elements of the world as objects of desire to use for its own appropriation, thereby depriving them of their own existence, how can that personality create a perspective which will help it realize and overcome its limitations? In other words, how can the aesthete overcome merely imaginative existence and come through to actual existence? A comparison of how this question is addressed and answered is mutually illuminating. In particular, Kierkegaard’s identification of a conflict between two types of sensuousness, the psychically determined and the spiritually determined, elucidates the precise ground of existential conflict in The Sleeping Beauty.

Either is the first volume of a work that, as the "editor," a Victor Eremita (conquering hermit, secret conqueror?), writes in the Preface, was arranged by Eremita from a cache of papers he accidentally discovered in a mahogany secretary. The papers, he says, were clearly divisible into two sets according to content and style. Clearly, he asserts it is the work of two different authors, whom he calls "A," author of Either and "B," author of
Or. A is an enigma, but B appears to have a name, William, and an occupation, magistrate. Eremita arranges the papers, easily in the case of B, in whose writing there seems to be a sequential order. In the case of A, Eremita cannot determine any such order and so leaves them as he finds them, "without being able to decide whether this order has any chronological value or ideal significance" (E,8). A's papers fall into eight sections: a section of aphorisms, six "aesthetic essays," and a "story entitled Diary of the Seducer, of which A does not acknowledge himself as author, but only as editor."

I have pointed out the tactics used by Carruth to efface the traditional authorial role. He ascribes authority to the dreaming woman and to coincidental voices in the poem. Here Kierkegaard's distancing of himself from authority is even more labyrinthine, especially in regard to the fourth-hand removal of Diary of the Seducer. I leave to Kierkegaard scholars the exploration of the personal and philosophical motives for this pseudonymity. Its essential purpose (which I simplify here in order to move directly into an examination of the first aesthetic essay) is to allow the aesthetic to speak in a directly revelatory way for itself in an antiphonal exchange with the less passionate, rationalistic, ethical sensibility of B. An additional dimension of Kierkegaard's narrative framework here is that of intention and error and of intentionally admitted error: whether or not Eremita is accurate in reporting that the arrangement of Either is aleatory, he invites the possibility of other arrangements which the reader, invoking his or her own aesthetic sensibility, may authorize. This possibility emphasizes the element of subjectivity inherent in creation and interpretation. Granting then the importance of being wrong, I will proceed to the first aesthetic essay, "Immediate Stages of the Erotic," to explore how A's discourse on sensuousness and its representation in art defines the authorial structuring of The Sleeping Beauty.
On Kierkegaard's account, there are two types of sensuousness or sensuality (the Danish word is sandselig), psychically determined and spiritually determined.

Sensuousness psychically determined is not opposition, exclusion, but harmony and accord. But precisely because [psychically determined] sensuousness was harmoniously determined, it appeared not as a principle, but as an enclitic assimilated by assonance. (E,60)

"Enclitic" is a grammatical term denoting an accentual interdependence, originally in Greek grammar though also applying to other languages. An enclitic is a word that takes the quality of its accent from the last stressed syllable in the previous word. Its Greek derivation is important, for it was in the pre-Christian Greek culture that Kierkegaard posits this kind of harmonious sensuousness. Insofar as sensuousness is like an enclitic it is a constituent, non-assertive part of a whole. It is included in that whole in a manner that is like assonance, like the unity that exists between the same sound, separated by time. The evaluative dimension of the grammatical metaphor is also significant. Kierkegaard stresses again and again in this essay that of the media of expression it is writing which is most subject to ethical categories. (E,63) Language, for example, depends upon the limited definitions of words, on their truth or falsity, rather than on what Nietzsche calls "degrees of apparentness." This grammatical metaphor implies that there can be qualifications, similitudes of sensuousness that have ethical dimensions, meaning by "ethical" not an a priori category of behavior, but a state which transcends the limits of ordinary desire. In the metaphorical context this means that adjectival descriptions of sensuousness, especially this one, are more than merely descriptive; they are evaluative. Psychically determined sensuousness has a positive ethical value. But it is, in fact, A himself who makes this distinction. According to Eremita, A is the aesthete. He is perhaps coherent, but is he coherent in a way which he himself can understand? What does this imply about him and about the nature of his judgement here? Harmony existed once, before Christianity, but no longer. A divides history along lines of modes of artistic representation: "In ancient times
the sensuous found its expression in the silent stillness of plastic art; in the Christian world the sensuous must burst forth in all its impatient passion” (E,97). Is this very dichotomy between types of sensuousness a result of the limited, expropriative aesthetic perspective, and therefore at least partially an error? Perhaps there are "really" no opposites in regard to the determinants of sensuousness, but subtle gradations of harmony. A has made an aesthetic choice in choosing one aspect of culture as a means of determining historical epochs. He is therefore exclusive, oppositional in his thinking, his feeling; he "suffers" from the intellectual analog of the ethically inferior sensuousness -- a spiritually determined intellect, with all of its concurrent capacity for moral error. The entire essay itself is an attempt, A admits, to do the impossible, to "prove" that Mozart's Don Giovanni is the perfect artistic unity of subject and form.

What is the nature of spiritually determined sensuousness and its negative ethical valence? Spiritually determined sensuousness, the kind that Don Juan has, was, on A's account, introduced into the world as a principle by Christianity, which exiled sensuousness from its psyche and, by that exclusion, created it as a principle equivalent in reality to spirituality. Kierkegaard suggests that, in psychically determined sensuousness, spirit (or what Nietzsche calls will) is not yet present as such, is not yet "posited" as a "principle." In Christianity, sensuousness, or better here "sensuality," with its moralized connotation, is that which the spirit is not. The "genius," or the inhabiting spirit of spiritually determined sensuousness is a result of that "aut-aut," that absolute disjunction -- the same disjunction at the heart of A's dichotomy, and of B's, whose aut-aut is absolute when "truth, righteousness, and holiness are lined up on one side, and lust and base propensities and obscure passions and perdition on the other" (Or,161).

Spiritually determined sensuousness is essentially oppositional, reactive in a mutually exclusive conflict between two elements, the self and the other, that in pre-Christian
civilizations existed in harmony in the individual psyche and, consequently, in art and in the social polity. If, as I believe, Carruth assents to this kind of division of sensuality, he does not subscribe to A's historical applications of it. A assigns psychically determined sensuousness to chivalric love: "The erotic in the age of chivalry had a certain resemblance to the Greeks" (E,87); "Chivalrous love is also psychical" (E,93). Of course, the trappings of chivalric love may have led the aesthete into error. In The Sleeping Beauty Carruth gives explicit attention to the nature of chivalric love. In paragraph 63, Herr Husband in his "parfit gentillesse" is her "knightly teacher whom none but you had taught." In 85, a troubadour voice sings, "Oc, Dieu d'amour . . . Quora me dona joi, quora m'en ven dolor," "Oh, god of love, who has given me so much joy, who has brought me so much grief from it." Again the paradox of spiritually determined eroticism. Carruth's reviews of deRougemont's Love Declared (W,76) and Six Troubadour Songs translated by W.D. Snodgrass (Ef,281) confirm that he attributes a more spiritual eroticism to the period.1

Regardless of when each kind of love has prevailed, psychical love is faithful, spiritual sensuousness "absolutely faithless" (E,93). This faithlessness "becomes in fact only a constant repetition." The aesthete desires to have the moment of most intense apprehension over and over. Like Sartre's Genet, the typical aesthete is "a man of repetition: the drab, slack time of his daily life . . . is shot through with blazing hierophanies which restore him to his original passion, as holy week restores us to that of Christ."2 Faced ultimately with a series of self-obliterations, a serial suicide, the aesthetic self posits repetitions of the first moment: "I seek the immediate. It is the eternal element in love that the individuals first exist for one another in the moment of love" (E,376). And, one adds, therefore do not exist, to the point of being otherwise expendable.
The spiritually sensual aesthete does not participate in the world except to extract its moments of beauty for the purpose of immediate self-gratification and for a paradoxical effect, a momentary self-perpetuation:

his life is the sum of repellent moments which have no coherence, his life as moment is the sum of moments, as the sum of moments is the moment. (E,95)

But the self-perpetuation is only momentary because, unlike the psychical lover, his object is always radically other and must willfully and insistently be apprehended as such. Carruth sees the irresponsibility inherent in this type of aestheticism, willed self-destruction and its social corollaries at the heart of the Romantic-aesthetic impulse:

What
Is human authenticity then but a nullity
Striving to create a value and getting beauty
Instead, dripping with blood. Will
Is the will to exploit.(111)

To this will Carruth links Homer's Helen and her "coupling habit," "a torrid/ Duplexity of love and death (or fact/ And fancy, real and ideal)", as well as the "stupid heroic pride" of Hector (7). And so from the god of this love we get war. War, as Plato tells us is Love:

"And so, when Homer writes that some god 'breathed might' into one of the heroes, we may take it that this is what the power of love effects in the heart of the lover."13 The erotic, if it is spiritually determined, will always ultimately fail as a way of being in the world, as an ethos, precisely because of its conception of love, love which is, at its best, only pity, and pity "only domination in another style" (20).

Each of the two types of sensuousness also tends toward a separate mode of sexual identity. The psychical is androgynous. For A there is a similarity between the unity of psychical sensuousness and the "first stage" of desire in spiritual sensuousness; in neither is there a separation between the lover and the object of his desire. They exist androgynously, "in one blossom" (E,76). This kind of androgynous identity is shared by the hero of the Sleeping Beauty, who, in 43, experiences the "real thing" in his dream of male parturition.
In paragraph 76 the poet says, "Without this synthesis/ How could we be, alone or together, whole?" Androgyny is the natural state for psychical sensuousness, but an extreme state for spiritual sensuousness, in which androgyny is either dormant potentiality or pathological impotence. Carruth repeatedly uses this dichotomy between the androgynous and the exclusively sexual. The face of the woman statue which appears throughout the poem is the key to the dynamic of overcoming the error of spiritually determined sensuousness. The face is introduced in Paragraph 16:

In half-relief the head
Looks upward through the rippling water,
Askance, half-turned back, caught
As if by its origin in the earth again.
There beneath the water flow
And changing reflections, pine trees, sun, and rain,
A face, although people come and go
And Rita has gone and the secret is all that stays,
As the presences of the poem alone can know.
A woman's face looks up from the water, always.

In paragraph 17 the poet evokes the mythic valence of that feminine face: "Naiad alive in the stream,/ Ophelia drowned in eternity." And as a piece of stone she is "the eternal moment,

the feminine in a face of stone,
Unchanged, there in cold water, the face of sleep.

The face is momentary in its femininity, eternal in its stony meaning. In 46 "the charmed/ Obsessive image" appears again, partially sanded over, "a few oak leaves have collected/ For her decolletage./ She is half-taken by nature, she is half-accepted." "In all her repetitions, image on image,/ She gazes from time beyond time, from poems deep in the poem." She is "Lady of paradox, drowned and alive" (47). Carruth means to emphasize the operations of the expropriative urge, of allegorization, of mythopoeia with all of their troublesome consequences. The face in the water haunts the perceiver with its sexual and
moral plasticity. In 64, in a configuration whose poetically structural significance I will discuss later, she reflects the light of her sister, the moon. Paragraph 75 discusses the symbolic sexual identity of the face:

Why is the face in the water a woman? Because 
Rita made it? Because she said it? But it could 
Be a man, indistinct there, that gaze 
Across eternity. Would 
Other women see a man in the water, a case 
Of anima/animus? No they all always 
Know that the water-person is a woman, 
Just as the poem knows, the poem 
Which is both. Then is it convention, the cultural 
Input: Naiad, Ophelia? 
Partly perhaps. But it is more a question of structural 
Consciousness. For the image is basal, 
From before the beginning of all imagining, 
The a priori of all human feeling, ineffaceable 
For good or for ill, 
and as such it is, it must be, feminine.

Naiads are, specifically, the nymphs of brooks. Their general benevolence is not complete. The naiad Salamancis, repulsed by Hermaphroditus, son of Aphrodite and Hermes (see 62), caused herself to be united in body with Hermaphroditus. A fatal androgyny, for the lake in Caria where the union occurred received, by Salamancis' curse, the property of causing bathers to lose their virility. In the following paragraph, in the shade of this myth, Carruth questions the ambivalent nature of the sense of union that can come from making love.

Why is the feminine aspect in man hidden? How, as in paragraph 69, can desire be coincidental with sexual impotence? Why does Hamlet's "thought that someone somewhere might be free" (104) mean that Ophelia must die, and to what extent is his thought a sane or insane emanation of Ophelia's own dreaming? "And how can freedom prevail/ When every lover's gift is a day in hell" (106)?

In an essay on Middlemarch, Carruth describes the clandestine, basal way in which the full meaning of any work of art "slips" into our consciousness. (SI,156) Perhaps the full meaning of human identity is androgyny. That union, as in the androgyny of the
poem, is the only place where meaning can exist without diminution. If the a priori of human feeling is feminine, is the a priori of thought masculine? And the poem then the erotic union of thought and feeling? This is what The Sleeping Beauty suggests, that there is a third being, "the poem, who must make/ Presence from words, vision from seeing,/ This no one that uniquely in sorrow rejoices/ And can have no pronoun." Not only the poem can do this, but any truly realized work of art. The woman’s face (a sketch of which adorns the book cover) also has these qualities, created by Rita in "ecstasy: out of herself . . . the thought and feeling/ A meaning" (53).

In 107 Hermaphrodite appears in the process of metamorphosis from man to androgyne, his "body/ Altering in starlight, one and one and one." The dreamed hero of the Sleeping Beauty has, to her own horror, lost his masculinity. And finally the transition of the poetic sensibility to androgyny is complete in the penultimate paragraph:

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  there in the sky is the known face half-hidden
  In rippling lights askance, the eternal other
  Toward whom the poem yearns, maiden
  Of the water-lights, brother
  Of the snow-fields, Androgyne!
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"Askance" is used in paragraphs 16, ("half-turned" in 46 and 47), 64, and here to describe the face. It is a word with a contextual history here, e.g., from Wyatt (For as she lookt askance/ Under a stole she spied two stemying eyes) and Milton (The Devil with jealous lear maligne/ Ey’d them askance). Here the half-turned, side-glancing face invites in an ask-ance. It is a soliciting otherness. Psychical sensuousness is characterized by androgyny and by this soliciting otherness within the psyche, inclining the personality toward inner unity, toward self-love, toward giving, and toward continuance in time. In contrast, spiritual sensuousness is known by its psycho-sexual division and by a sexually exclusive mode of being; the spiritual aesthete is Don Giovanni, expropriative, endlessly repetitive, and tending to disappear in time. Carruth connects this disappearance with aging and with
sexual folk myth:

He thinks how often when his semen spews
It feels like blood. A hot leakage, burning.
How awkward! He remembers the Hindus --
Do they not wake in mourning
Invariably, their seed unrenewable? They choose
Each night between loving and dying. Then she -- does
It burn her too? Are we joined,
Victim-lovers, everyone, in this wound
Of fire forever? Do all men feel their lives
Taken in the heart of love?
Does it mean something? Anything?

Thus he contrives

Enigmas from horror. He would prove
That the simplest human realities unfold
Mysteriously, and that in this knowledge he may move
Without change. Yet daily he sees himself grow old. (25)

How awkward! But how felicitous. Pound said that the natural object (act) is always the best symbol. Perhaps, in the long run, for the aesthete with his spiritually determined sensuousness there is either loving or dying, an absolute disjunction. Perhaps this is true for any sensuous human being and we are all joined in that fate, the inevitable consequence of all sexual beings. But the knowledge of fatality does itself, as knowledge, transcend momentary limitations. The feeling of desperation combines with the thought of death or the thought of survival in a true human meaning, contrived and actual. The passage above reminds us of Quintillian's dictum that the extreme form of allegory is enigma. Horror is allegorized, made mysterious and eternal and so redeemed. This redemptive power is of an existential variety because of its attention to the allegorical process. The allegorist admits to you what he has done. His figuring becomes inorganic, artificial, but nonetheless valid. It is not only humanly exigent, but personally necessary; the poem is the only place where the allegorist exists. It is finally the poem that yearns for the other, only the poem that can include the other without destroying it. The poem has the only personality. Carruth repeats this with choric insistence: "only the poem weeps" (24); "the poem crawling upward through the dark" (30); "the poem moves north" (34); "the poem knows" (75). The poem,
the made-in-language, exists in time contingently, like music; it is the ethical ground upon
which one may go

from dreamt objectivity to the forthrightly
Seen, subjective, brilliant, undamaged.

The poem moves alone now, but without loneliness.
Self has been left among the objects that fashioned it.
Action and knowledge are one, free, far in the depths of
consciousness. (120)

Thus the voice of the poem is united and fragmentary. It shares this quality with music,
especially, for Carruth, with improvised jazz and blues, "A hot flowing of the eternal,
many-colored, essential plasm/ As they leaned outward together, away from place, from
time,/ In one only person, which was the blues" (SI,133).

The concepts of place and time are only feelings, or only thoughts. Death and life,
subject- and object-ivity, the same. To understand any of these abstractions as absolute, as
anything except conventions, is error. Carruth does not mean to purify human experience
of error, but instead to acknowledge error as a part of existence and creation. This effort
brings us again to Either. One must hold in mind that every division and evaluation in
Either is made by A, who is an aesthete, a man self-refined along a unique and relatively
exclusive vector of apperception. A’s need to differentiate between types of sensuousness is
itself the kind of error that is probably inherent in human intelligence, and is definitely
inherent in the attempt to establish a self through erotic domination of another. But A
himself cannot know this; if the aesthetic is coherent and progressing toward a higher state,
the ethical, it is doing so in a way that cannot be grasped by it. In The Sleeping Beauty
the aesthetic masking is finally dropped and there is a moment of truly existential horror
unavailable to the aesthete, the very moment which the aesthete lives to avoid:

He bends to her, the real and loving other.
She wakes,
sees,
screams.
She begins her weeping. (114)
The poem is explicit about the revelation that comes in the wake of the destruction of the mask:

   the shattering
  Of his dream-mood, all that mattered,
  The loving and lovingkindness, the steadfastness
  In existential sorrow,
  The hard and human need to share -- all blasted.
  Could he accept it?

        Sorrow, sorrow,

  The deeper wound in loving.

        That it was force,

  Power, even in the giving, this was his sorrow.
  He was man, a man, flawed in his very source. (9)

The admission of this flaw is a beginning; it comes early in the poem, and it is an essential part of the aesthetic self-critique.

In his note to paragraph 15, Carruth states, "The fragments quoted from songs were set down as remembered at the time of writing and are sometimes incorrect. The case for leaving them uncorrected has something to do with the essential meaning and structure of the work." The contingent creation of voice and personality on the page; the role of flawed memory in self-creation; self-creation as an aspect of history; the resistance of the rationalistic urge to quantify and to bring proof by comparison with some ideal standard or version, e.g., the correct words to the songs; and most importantly, the purposive admission of error into self-creation; -- all of these are elements of the existential search in both of these works. Nietzsche makes a description of this kind of admission which is salient to both works:

       I meant to say: Christianity has been the most calamitous kind of arrogance. Men, not high or hard enough to have any right to form man as artists; men not strong and far-sighted enough to let the foreground of thousand-fold failure and ruin prevail, though it cost them sublime self-conquest.15

For Carruth the admission of "thousand-fold failure and ruin" is the beginning of self-conquest. One way failure and ruin are put into the poem is by the numerous
allusions to figures from Western culture beginning with the letter "H." The hero is
demonic and his faces are legion. A brief list of his names and his qualities will perhaps
suffice to establish that Carruth accepts cultural and personal error as a part of himself:
Helen, who had "caught the coupling habit;" "the stupid heroic pride of the prime
defector," Hector; Herod, "willing to do what nobody else would do;" "litigious" Hesiod;
Hannibal, who embodied "the human idea of leniency;" Holderlin, who thought "Beauty was
worth/ Its every sorrow, mind’s fading or world’s ending;" Hermann Hesse, artist of
"music and cruel story;" Hilarity; Hegel; Heraclitus, who saw war as a process of
regeneration; Hermes; Hendryk Hudson; Hitler; the blessed Hestia; the manufacturer of
napalm, Honeywell; Harlequin; Heathcliff; Hamlet, Hermaphrodite; and Hydrogen Bomb.
Carruth rejects the optimism that assumes one has the choice of denying that Honeywell is
a part of the self. Heathcliff? "Heathcliff would kill everybody on earth in order to
possess Cathy."6 The destructive power of love is, in part, a result of hope for a
consummate union, a unity both of personalities and of the external elements of the world
in some coherent vision. This union assumes a progressive evolution of history toward

. . . toward Hegel? Hegel describes a method by which "Spirit comes into being:

this way of becoming presents a slow procession and succession of spiritual shapes
(Geistern), a gallery of pictures, each of which is endowed with the entire wealth of
spirit and moves so slowly just for the reason that the self has to permeate and
assimilate this wealth of its substance.17

This would seem to describe the structure of The Sleeping Beauty: a gallery of lyrics which
are assimilated by the self in the poem. But Hegel continues,

In thus concentrating itself on itself, Spirit is engulfed in the night of its own
self-consciousness; its vanished existence is, however, conserved therein.

The spirit then proceeds as if all of its former incarnations and characteristics "were lost,
and as if it had learned nothing from the experience of the spirits that preceded." Granted,
the poem comes "out of nothing" and is made by "no one," meaning by no single voice.
But has the poem really learned nothing from history? In the paragraph on Hegel, the poet writes,

He saw  
Straightway to the end of the brave Tristan  
And the beautiful Iseult,  
How they must die, Oh, most needfully die, their own  
Hands upon it -- for the sake o' th' higher synthesis. None  
Saw it keener, none the entire  
Realpolitik, how Romance doth aspire  
(From those souls bound and dying) to life in the mass,  
Freedom in history,  
Being in cosmos. (51)

To see "straightaway" is to see narrowly, and in constructing a vision it means that one ignores the parts that do not contribute to the organization of the whole, ignores evidence that contradicts coherence. Hegel's vision confirms the subversion of the individual in the crowd. Freedom only in history is not freedom (and the poem finally moves beyond history). Hegel's error is his belief in progression, in a higher synthesis. Carruth sees this error as "the sentimentality of progress and the motive of the progressive state" (SI,36). About the reactions of existentialists to this progressivism he has written,

For the existentialist who insists that reality is only what he himself knows and experiences, this [Hegelianism] is meaningless. Not only that, it is cruel and coercive. The existentialist knows that the self is not submerged, it is present, here and now, a suffering existent, and any system of thought that overrides this suffering is tyrannical.'8

This is the climate, then, against which Kierkegaard and Carruth react, the Hegelian reason "which is little content with the cold despair that submits to the view that in this earthly life things are truly bad or at best only tolerable."9 The existentialists insist that one must admit error, suffering, and despair.

The existentialist also fights against blind hope. In After the Stranger: Imaginary Dialogues with Camus, the character Camus makes a "distinction between legitimate, inevitable desire and illegitimate hope; a man who is truly aware of absurdity will never permit one to turn into the other." In response, the character Aspen, who is a painter and
who represents, insofar as the book is autobiographical, Carruth, replies

But then the danger, the absurdity, arises from this same natural condition, either in men or outside them. Like the natural danger of converting desire into hope. That's the whole history of religion, isn't it? And it kept men happy for five thousand years or more, and drove them to despair and frenzy and murder, too. Maybe it is the history of art, of your own writing? The natural act works both ways, in other words, creating happiness and everything that is desireable, but at the same time leading to death and all the other aspects of absurdity, including human error. (ATS, 44-45)

This is a particularly lucid moment for Aspen, who is an aesthete, and it is significant that this awareness comes as a result of a dialogue. He has made the connection between a theory of hope and his own life. The original point of departure for the dialogues with Camus is a discussion of The Stranger, whose main character, Meursault, is also essentially aesthetic. He is detached from his own life because of his aestheticism. Before his own trial for murder a policeman asks him if he is nervous. Mersault replies, "No," and that "the prospect of witnessing a trial rather interested me; I'd never had occasion to attend one before" (103). He is always watching himself, a tendency which, in his case, leads toward paralysis. "Aesthete" is from the same Greek root as "theory" and "theatre", the Greek "to sense or perceive." At the theatre as in theory, we look at things in which we are not involved. And this is the problem for the aesthetic Aspen, and for Kierkegaard's A. In the first part of Either, "Diapsalmata," A has the same type of feeling about love that Aspen voices above: "So it is with all joy; life's supreme and richest moment of pleasure is coupled with death." This insight, however, is not thought over with the degree of apperception which would turn it into a statement about A's own part in producing the paradox. Rather it is voiced aphoristically, with attention only to its truistic, ringing, rhetorical effect. Nor is it clear that Aspen can avoid turning natural desire into hope. Later in the book Camus asserts that erotic love leading to solidarity, the best that can be hoped for, is only fortuitous, not necessary. Aspen ventures that

The pain, frustrations, the transitoriness, these are the fortuities, introduced into our own erotic existences by the absurdities of death and society. But erotic love itself
is genuine, and when it is consciously and intelligently elaborated in the creativeness of the dynamic sensibility, it becomes a genuine act of revolt, a genuine self-assertion, leading to lucidity, happiness, and dignity. (134-35)

So Aspen apparently believes that erotic love can establish a real self in opposition to social fictions about the self. This is his hope. But it is certainly not the final answer. Just as it rejects a priori principles, existentialism rejects final answers, and, at any rate, Carruth, Camus, and Kierkegaard are, here at least, writers, not metaphysicians. The poet, as Sydney distinguishes him from the historian and the philosopher, "nothing affirmeth and therefore never lieth." There is no final authorial resolution of how to overcome Romance. There is no final answer. After The Stranger ends with a suspension, not a resolution in its plot. But again, in The Sleeping Beauty, Carruth suggests that there is a way out of the labyrinth of "centuries of wrong,"

from dreamt objectivity to the forthrightly
Seen -- subjective, brilliant, undamaged.

The poem moves alone now, but without loneliness.
Self has been left among objects that fashioned it.
Action and knowledge are one, free, far in the depths of consciousness.

In the final paragraphs the poem itself moves northward, into Canada, past Montreal,
"beyond earth and history, the nets of essence," toward the "eternal other," toward the soliciting otherness which is both its goal and an equivocal voice on the page. This boreal yearning is in the same direction which Frankenstein and his monster disappear. It is the opposite pole from that where the Ancient Mariner is reduced to nothing. The polar desert is the land of anti-Romance and anti-aestheticism. There are no objects to watch. Anything that man is there, he has made of himself. It is the place "beyond the north, ice, and death -- our life, our happiness," where, Nietzsche says of himself, the anti-Christ, and his fellow Hyperboreans, "we have found the exit out of the labyrinth of thousands of years."9

This cold freedom is the result of an artistic act, an erotic act. There is nothing
terminal about it. The contingency and the efficacy of the vital artistic act is the subject of the poem that ends Contra Mortem:

Such figures if they succeed are beautiful
because for a moment we brighten in a blaze of rhymes
and yet they always fail and must fail
and give way to other poems
in the endless approximations of what we feel
Hopeless it is hopeless Only the wheel
endures It spins and spins winding
the was the is the willbe out of nothing
and thus we are Thus on the wheel we touch
each to each a part
of the great determining reality How much
we give to one another Perhaps our art
succeeds after all our small song done in the faith
of lovers who endlessly change heart for heart
as the gift of being Come let us sing against death

The act of making figures, of writing, a kind of existential self-writing that Carruth, in discussing Thoreau, has called "autobiogenesis," is a way by which one realizes the Kierkegaardian "decisiveness of spirit which forms and establishes the personality" (FT, 16).

The poem, as a process of art, is a sensuous form; it includes self and other in an enclitic, interdependent way and is thus an example of a psychically determined form. The poem is the interstice of time and space, where ego and the world, desire and object come together; it is thus a convention, a psychical convention of understanding. It exists in opposition to the conventions of idealizing, spiritually determined eroticism. This rebellion is, of course, social as well as artistic; insofar as one exists only in the poem, there is no difference between the two spheres. Carruth means to be conventional:

He thinks of classical women: Helen, Julia
Thais, Amarintha . . . Amarintha? He smiles
In disdain, in love. It was mythopoeia,
The convention that beguiles
Itself and its successors in a pure euphoria
Of idealization. Julia had no wart? Or
Cynthia no straggling yellow tooth?
Then they were mere conceptions, youth
Feminized, sexual but eternal, held
In the long access of rhyme
That you, dear dreamer are inventing,

And unrelenting.

And yet that time,

He thinks, was actual; they lived, unknown women,
Flawed and misnamed, their soft rank bodies prime
For idealization. Convention is also human. (78)

Carruth is inserting his poem into the whole Western rationalistic, erotic tradition, e.g., into the Symposium, where love is seen as directed only to the beautiful aspect, not the ugly, and there is an ascent motivated by the desire to overcome this partiality in a more perfect object. Sexuality and eternity are mutually exclusive qualities which the allegorist nonetheless insists that his conventional women embody. These women are held in the long access of rhyme (and reason) so that the aesthetic-romantic sensibility may go to them repeatedly, e.g., through allusion, with the illusion of novelty and immediacy. The essential faithlessness of the spiritually determined convention appears in its violation of the personal integrities of wart, of straggling tooth, and in the constant repetition of the mutilated image.

This is all, of course, morally problematic, but humanly true. It exhibits the error of all human convention, conversion, conjugation. But the evidence of the error in the poem is antidotal. If the poem is a convention, and convention is also human, then the poem is also human -- and instructively humane, i.e., ethical. It is a means of possible solution.

Authorial voice is also a convention, a structuring of a literary work which is like the structure of grammar, like a lyric poem, where there must be a subject, an "I." But this, too, is a spiritually determined convention. Kierkegaard tells us that psychically determined sensuousness is exemplified by the Greek god Eros, whose erotic power is not in him "but in all the individuals that refer it to him; he is himself, as it were, powerless and impotent, because he communicates his power to the whole world" (E, 62). This is the
kind of determination of the erotic toward which Socrates points in the Symposium. Love is the love of something which one lacks: the beautiful is the beloved: therefore love has no beauty. Love has no power. The god of Love has no authority himself. Eroticism itself, in the psychical sense, is not abstracted and concentrated in an idealized, conventional form, a mere conception, but it emanates from a point which does not possess it. The Greek conception of Eros is the converse of the Christian doctrine of Incarnation, wherein the "incarnated individual, as it were, absorbs the power from all the rest, and the fullness is therefore in him, and only so far in the others as they behold it in him" (E,62). The incarnated god of Christian love, Christ, is the inhabiting spirit, the spiritual agent, the expropriator, the Seducer. He is Hegelian Unity Incarnate. But in psychically determined sensuousness and its representations there is no authoritative possessor. This is what the poetic voice of The Sleeping Beauty reflects. Kierkegaard sought to remove traditional authority in Either through pseudonymous authorship and the other distancing devices, including the fictional editor, Eremita. Carruth does it through admitting characters from history, each of whom has a story which reinforces the destructive and paradoxical aspects of love. Although so far I have attended mainly the authorial voice of the poet, the poem is in fact equally full of other coincidental voices. The speaking voice of the poem exists in discovering the large extent to which it is other, the large extent to which it is erotic, given the psychical definition of eroticism; the voice emanates from a point which does not possess it. The poem possesses a self only in as much as it emanates that self. It has an ethical voice only inasmuch as it is the voice of others.

In this poem the traditional authorial voice empties itself, allows itself to become, as it were, allegorized, not against its will but on purpose. This psychic disgorgement is a formal effacement of the poetic ego, a resolution consistent with the nature of psychically determined sensuousness. Desire and the object of desire exist together erotically, "in one
blossom," and the voice of the poem where they so exist is psychically erotic. The voices of the others come into the poem coincidentally, but not accidentally; they are bidden. In a medieval woman describes how she was burned alive by sexually masochistic pillagers. In Joe Turner sings, "Baby, you so beautiful and you gotta die someday." In a sixteenth-century woman sneaks out of bed at night to write, only to have her "scribing" found by her husband and burned. In Lilith appears as the typically abused woman. In the voice of a supposedly dead Vermonter, Amos, is introduced. Amos talks with the poet for a large part of the remainder of the book, and it is Amos who does much of the "preachifying" in regard to social deterioration. (Amos' attitudes are discussed fully in my chapter on Carruth contra Thoreau.) In a contemporary woman describes her sexual problems with her husband, who finally "went gay" about the time she entered menopause. In Bessie Smith sings, "Oh, I'm a young woman . . . and I ain't done nothing wrong." In a country girl who has become a member of a seraglio describes her training in the Formulary of Submissiveness. In Carruth quotes the poet Fulke Greville: "None can well behold with eyes/ But what underneath him lies." In a fourteenth-century peasant woman is raped and impregnated by vandals and her baby is butchered. In a Chinese woman describes the pain of having her feet bound, "bent backward underneath like a broken book," and she wonders if there is "another system . . . where girls run and a daughter/ Smiles." In each case the voice tells a story which is a consequence of domination. The voices are interspersed with episodes from history: a car crash, a chainsaw accident, the poet's own institutionalization and its aftermath, and the fire-bombing of Dresden. The result of this choir of voices and events is a very idiosyncratic quality of vocal presence. "Dialogic" perhaps describes the relationship of the author to the individual parts at the time he was writing, but not his relation to the poem as a whole, nor to the presence that comes from the pages to the reader. The voice of the poem is derived
organically, as it were, out of the nature of its theme. I briefly mentioned paragraph 64 earlier. Here Carruth describes the face of the woman in the water as it is seen in the moonlight:

This is a spectral insistence,
Light as it is in dreaming,
Its twice-angled remoteness a transcendence
Or an alluding sourcelessness, a seeming
Which only mythological sisters may embody
In this world. Cycle and stasis. Gleaming
and obscure. These two, together and solitary.

The voice of The Sleeping Beauty is a reflected voice. The source of the speaking self of the poem is remote; it is lunar, reflective, transcending the ego’s urge to express itself directly. Through admission of other voices and the conventional allusive inclusion of figures from history whose names begin with "H", including "Hayden," the poem attempts to transcend the rationalistic logic that would posit a controlling subject for every phenomenon. Moonlight is Carruth’s constant symbol for this quality. "reflected light, reflected again on snow/ but beauty is lonely, lonely . . ." (CM). "Lonely, lonely," the echo creates a companionship which seeks to ameliorate the human valence of the word. There is a way of expressing loneliness which counters the misery of loneliness. There is a way of expressing desire which counters the destructive consequences of that desire. This mode of expression must accommodate the paradoxes of cycle and stasis, glimmer and obscurity, loneliness and community. It must accommodate history and presence, the echo of tradition and the free play of individual talent. It must emanate from a point, or points, which do not possess it and so reveal its erotic nature. It must accommodate any and all others and admit therefore to a certain self-effacement, which is the necessary condition of self-creation and survival.

Roland Barthes defines the Greek atopos as "unclassifiable, of a ceaselessly unforeseen originality."20 "Originality" here means source, not novelty. He goes on to
explain that atopia is "linked to Eros . . . the other whom I love and who fascinates me is atopos. I cannot classify the other, for the other is precisely, Unique, the singular image which has miraculously come to correspond to the specialty of my desire. The other is the figure of my truth, and cannot be imprisoned in any stereotype (which is the truth of others)." The voice of The Sleeping Beauty comes from unforeseen sources, unforeseen even by the poet as he improvised the words on the page. For Carruth, since the poem has personality, it also qualifies as an "other," as an object of his desire and fascination, which is also unclassifiable. And destructive effects of the attempt to classify the other is the great theme of his poem. He opposes the destructive consequences of convention by using convention in a revelatory way. The voice of The Sleeping Beauty is not dialogic, but atopic. In its "alluding sourcelessness" is its preeminence not only in Carruth's work, but in twentieth-century poetry.

If the mode of voice here is a way out of Romantic error, it also points back to the impossibility of completely escaping from that error. Isn't the very urge to be someone else, to speak in their voices, especially to be the psychic ventriloquist of the Sleeping Beauty herself, a quintessentially Romantic and appropriative impulse? Doesn't it suggest that, as Kierkegaard's seducer says, "My thoroughly reflective soul enfolds your pure deep being" (E,402)? To what extent can any suggestion of irony defuse this kind of appropriation? The sensibility that creates poems is inevitably an aesthetic one, and it must use conventions, e.g., woman as vessel. The seducer reports in his diary that he perceives Cordelia like this:

She listens to another's speech, she understands it as her own; she hears the voice of another as it echoes through her; she understands this echo also, as if it were her own voice, which is manifest to her and to another. (E,384)

This is, of course, part and parcel of the seducer's allegorical and self-destructive urge. Kierkegaard means us to understand the limiting nature of the seducer's evaluation of
Cordelia -- limiting both to her and to the seducer, and consequently to and of the world at large. So there is an irony here, a romantic irony that seeks to maintain the ambivalence between natural and unnatural, between self and world: the opposition inherent in spiritually determined sensuousness. We must see even the conventional topos as ironic, employed in a manner that seeks not to obliterate but to reveal the genesis of the convention. The Sleeping Beauty acts only in dreaming; she is the reflective source. When the seducer describes feminine qualities as reflective Kierkegaard is, as Henry Sussman remarks,

drawing on a rather conventional sexual model in Western thought in which the woman is too sublime to act. "Reflection" is analogous to thought as opposed to action. The aesthete’s purely reflective women exist on too high a spiritual plane to exercise their volition. Yet the notion of reflection also exists in Kierkegaard’s work on the more general level of articulation. In this broader sense, all linguistic and erotic activity is reflected, even the most strenuous efforts at moral restraint. By implication, if the figure of the woman is the generic locus of reflection in Kierkegaard’s writing, both aesthetic excess and moral choice fall under the aegis of the feminine.21

Certainly, the Sleeping Beauty is in her sleep, dreaming all of history, "the generic locus of reflection." She has a reflective vision that creates beauty, which is always caught aging, echoed, as we say, in the eye of the beholder. She is the a priori of feeling, which, to presume upon Sussman’s lack of inclusion of feeling, must be the generic locus of action. She is the forlorn author of the poem, the poem "who uniquely in sorrow rejoices/ And can have no pronoun," no noun. She is an author of a selfless work, the female Eros, source of the referred voice. One points this out with a sense of repetition, because Kierkegaard and Carruth explain why they use a conventional concept of woman. Kierkegaard does this most directly, as he has the aesthete explain:

I use a feminine [for the tragedy] because I firmly believe that a feminine nature will be best adopted for showing the difference [between ancient and modern tragedy]. As woman she will have substantiality [immediacy] enough for sorrow to show itself, but as belonging in a reflective world, she will have reflection enough to mark the pain.(E,151)
Kierkegaard ascribes ethicality to sorrow and pain; "sorrow and pain have not the contradiction in them which is characteristic of melancholy and heaviness, nor the ambiguity which is the sweetness in the melancholy" (E,75). This is a typical Kierkegaardian hierarchy of feeling and mood. Melancholy is the merely aesthetic mood; sorrow and pain are beyond the category of "mood" because they are a manifestation of an ethos developed out of felt existence.

The speaker of *The Sleeping Beauty* is also conventionally feminine, i.e., reflective, in his realization that his loving is force; this is his sorrow, existential sorrow unremitting, in which he stands steadfast. The use of the conventional feminine creates a figure in which the poet can explore and express his own participation in the convention with all of its moral consequences. The result is a self-transformation taking place as the writing happens in the moment on the page, a transformation, in part, from an exclusive sexual being to a more meaningful being, a sexually male one whose feminine qualities are no longer hidden. This is a freedom.

Carruth turns the conventional Romantic aesthetic on itself. In order to oppose sexual exclusivity, expropriation, destruction of the other and therefore of the self, he confronts voice with echo, the voice of an aesthete, himself, with his own sad history and that of his tradition. This is not a revenge against the sexual self or against life; it is a confrontation as full of love as any act. As Carruth has written elsewhere, "Politics is love, anger is love, and poetry is love." The standard measure of the degree of psychical eroticism is love, a standard which informs Carruth’s great admiration of that other reviser of Romanticism, Pound, who insisted over and over "Amo ergo sum, and in just that proportion" (Canto LXXX). Carruth has noted admiringly the motto on Pound’s St. Elizabeth stationery:

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J'ayme donc je suis
Je soffre mais je vis
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Carruth has also written in his excellent essay to which I gave much attention in Chapters One and Two. "If the reader is an authentic personality he, like the poet who created the poem, passes into the purity of spiritual existence. His work to is an act of love" (W, 228).

In addition to his striving for community, his emotional and intellectual honesty, and his affection, Carruth's vision carries with it a belief in the power of art to generate sympathy for and a commitment to the alleviation of human suffering: an ethos. This ethos is not doctrinal or programmatic; it is improvised in the moment of composition and reception, "the instant you are really kissed." It is transmitted even to the object of poetic desire. By the end of the poem the Romantic urge to mythopoeia has to some extent been overcome, and without a diminishment of mythical beauty:

Princess, the poem is born and you have woken.  
A world's undone.  
And it is no easy thing,  
With brave romance and conquest broken,  
Still to love and sing;

To love and sing without the necessity of the destructive features of Romance, yet, nonetheless, in the environment of Romance. This is an existential lyricism, "a doctrine that affirms that every truth and every action imply both an environment and a human subjectivity."22 The final paragraph continues:

The tapestry is unthreaded, lovesong's unspoken  
Horror spills out.  
Yet you in yourself betoken  
Love's amending, for you are Rose Marie,  
Pure in transcendent being, free  
From history, though the Dornroschen is keeping  
Your beauty for us forever.  
The sun  
Will rise on the snowy firs and set on the sleeping  
Lavender mountain as always, and no one  
Will possess or defile you where you belong,  
Here in the authentic world. The work is done.  
My name is Hayden and I have made this song.
Her personality has been renovated, and she is freed from history. Yet, her personal beauty has become a determining part of the convention of History. The poem ends with a recollection of all of the presences of the poem, including the reader, into an authentic world. The writer, who in the beginning suffered to some extent from a kind of Kantian heteronomy, asserting then that the poem was made "by no one," has won through to a moment of autonomous being. Having looked in the mirror of history and seen Honeywell, Hitler, and Herod, now he can look at the mirror of the present, his poem, and see Hayden, a man self-created in his song. Self and other, the poet and his song are united in a fashion that Carruth presaged in a much earlier poem, *Contra Mortem*, at the time he was entering his mature mode:

So upon ragged changing seas  
the poem which is a ship  
buoyed by its hollowness on the abstruse  
coordinates of meaning carries the loop  
of its horizons forever with it  
Scan  
this circle vanishing across the deep  
It is contrived it is actual it is a man

The Sleeping Beauty finally creates the possibility of self-knowledge within its nexus of desire and suffering. It exhibits a way of writing that is not a representation or an expression of existence, but existence itself, "the experience of immediate sensory apprehension and simultaneous mental comprehension" (SI,49-50). Like Kierkegaard, Carruth seeks existence in the difference, perhaps artificial and conventional, between the androgynous unity of psychical desire and the exclusively sexual divisiveness of spiritual desire. Perhaps the romantic-aesthetic urge is inescapable in the convention of the single authorial voice. Carruth's assignation of personality to the poem and its atopic, other-speaking voice are an attempt to solve this apparent impasse -- as is Kierkegaard's antiphonal presentation of the aesthetic and the ethical. Unlike Kierkegaard, Carruth claims no "higher" stage of human progress. Nor does he claim the kind of direct social agency
for art proposed by the atheistic existentialists like Sartre. He rejects the first on the
grounds of the "centuries of wrong" produced by Christianity and its spiritually determined
conventions. He refuses the second because he is an author, not an agent. Any insistence
that the poet should do more than try to speak for himself overrides and obliterates the
poet's uniquely personal commitments and contributions. Carruth understands Blake's
revolutionary meaning in his introduction to Milton, "Would to God that all the Lord's
people were prophets." Each person should interpret the past and articulate that meaning in
a vision of the present. This requires a creative use of the elements of history, not a
rejection of it as, e.g. in the French Revolution, in regard of which Carruth mockingly
exhorts, "Sing, Robespierre;/ Of how your loves look, trundling past to die" (54). The
choice of Robespierre emphasizes the self-destruction of this kind of rejection. The
individuating process of the poetic revision of history is, because it is private, more
radically revolutionary that abstract political revision.

Carruth is not a Marxist, not a liberal. He lives, as he insists repeatedly, not in
Boston or Concord, but in Western Vermont (a distinction which many readers may
appreciate immediately and which I will address at length in consideration of Carruth's
relation to Thoreau, Frost, and Lowell.) His affinities with William James are more than
geographical. Carruth "was raised a radical agnostic and a relativist" (Ef,1). In paragraph
82 Carruth quotes James: "the universe has only/ The unity possessed by any heap." In
After The Stranger, published twenty years earlier, the main character holds to the same
talisman:

One of the mottos pined to Aspen's wall was: "Prima facie the world is a pluralism;
as we find it, its unity seems to be that of any collection." Such a world, the
world defined by William James, offered, Aspen thought, a place for imperfectibility
and radical failure, a place for suffering; such a unity left room for the disunited.
(ATS,29)
One of these quotations is inaccurate. Perhaps Carruth transformed James’ dictum for the contextual poetic power of "heap," and, like the fragments quoted from songs, this changing of "fact" in personal memory over time is a part of the meaning of The Sleeping Beauty and of all art. At any rate the admission of error, failure, disunion without obliteration is characteristic of Carruth’s vision. Disunity in unity, the absurdity of democracy, and his essential refusal to capitulate or, in rebellion, to intrude upon the claims of others -- these are the qualities that make Carruth an existentialist of the Yankee variety. Aside from the special lyrical pleasures of The Sleeping Beauty, it is these qualities, along with Carruth’s recognition of the destructiveness of the cult of Romance, that make his poem a significant contribution to the current of existential thought.
Notes Chapter Five

3. Numbers in the text refer to the numbered paragraphs in the poem.
3(a). For a sense of how Carruth has received and transformed elements of the sonnet tradition, compare #54 to Shakespeare’s #129, “Th’expense of spirit in a waste of shame.”
10. Kierkegaard acknowledges, in what would seem to be the inverse case, that of course sensuousness was present before Christianity (E,60). But there is an asymmetry here, since spirit is itself the power of positing, of making explicit, thus of reflection, of abstraction and differentiation. Thus, S.K. writes, “To be spirit is to be I” (Journals IV,248/ XI A487) and holds that only with Christianity does Spirit emerge.” (Professor David Stern). 10(A).
Nietzsche’s account of the purification of will by Christianity is certainly apposite here. See,e.g., Beyond Good and Evil, sections 189, 260, 219. Nietzsche’s account is one that deserves more attention her than I can give it and still maintain a primary focus on Carruth. Nietzsche’s critique of optimism is a foundation of my thesis in Chapter Five of
this study.)
11. Nietzsche also attributes the passionate, spiritually determined variety of sensuousness to chivalry and to the troubadours. See, e.g., Beyond Good and Evil, section 260.
14. Quintillian, Institutio Oratoria...8.60, 44ff.
15. Beyond Good and Evil, 62.
17. Hegel, Phenomenology, 807.
22. Sartre, "Existentialism is a Humanism," in Kaufmann, Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre, 288.222
Chapter Six

Dionysian Pessimism: The Recent Work of Hayden Carruth
On Carruth’s accounts, particularly in his critical fiction *After The Stranger: Imaginary Dialogues With Camus* (1965) and his long poem *The Sleeping Beauty* (1983), the turn against Romanticism involves a turn against hope, even though it might not be consistent with a theory of radical pessimism to believe that effacement possible. Hope is philosophical and moral error because it encourages ignorance of the depersonalizing forces in the present. So, "to hope" is closer in meaning to the friabilities of "to wish" than to the natural prospecting of "to expect." Hope is sentimentality. Sentimentality, as he shows us in *The Sleeping Beauty*, has meant destruction and death. Though it has been a theme in all of his mature work, the turn against cultural and psychological optimism has become an even more profound and radical motive in Carruth’s more recent work.

Pessimism itself has always been evident in the two main influences on Carruth’s thinking, in the Romantic tradition and in existential theory. Yet, in both, the pessimism that denies man certain consolations creates other opportunities, that is to say, it is not completely cynical. "Pessimism" was first used in English by Coleridge, but it is Blake who proposes the particular qualifications of the concept that are salient to Carruth’s thought. Jerome McGann has pointed this out in his recent book, *Toward A Literature of Knowledge*.

Crucial to Blake’s work is his understanding that art solicits error, without which
there can be no possibility of truth . . . [error] enters by the will deliberately . . .
when Blake observed that "There can be no Good Will Will is always Evil" (Ann. to
Swed.: Love), he was glancing at what we should call the ideology of art, and the
way ideology enters imaginative work.1

The "evil" (Carruth would probably say "unintentional") effects of will are those of the
aberration that is human intelligence. This is a tenet of secular existentialism from as far
back as Dostoevsky's *Notes From The Underground*, and the belief in the radical
malevolence of will is shared by another writer who has been a great influence on Carruth,
Schopenhauer. Schopenhauer's will is a blind, unintentional force, a guarantor of perpetual
struggle. As Bertrand Russell puts Schopenhauer, "Will, though metaphysically
fundamental, is ethically evil -- a opposition only possible to a pessimist."2 For Carruth, to
acknowledge this agent of constant stress is to avoid illusion, to be lucid. Like
Schopenhauer (and Dostoevsky) Carruth has always rejected the idea of human progress
through the organizations of the State.

Blake's belief, displayed for example in his "notorious personal mythology," that
"reality is what it is made to be," 3 and Schopenhauer's insistence upon an unblinking
recognition of the will connect directly with the existential ideas which Carruth found so
attractive. Existentialism is pessimistic insofar as it asserts that the universe is valueless;
man assert himself (as Blake asserted his own system) in the face of this valuelessness.
And existentialism refuses the "permanent risk for self-deception" (Sartre) concealed in
consciousness.

I have discussed the implications of Carruth's objections to *Walden* on the grounds
of its utopianism. Camus, in *The Rebel*, makes a further warning about the dangers of
utopian hope:

Confronted with the possibility that the idea (any idea) may be realized in the
future, human life can be everything or nothing. The greater the faith that the
estimator places in this final realization, the less the value of human life. At the
ultimate limit, it is no longer worth anything at all.4
This "final realization" is the error of the Hegelian system. The romantic absolute of "everything," the nihilist absolute of "nothing," are errors. And the consequence of these errors as Camus sees it, is murder, murder of the kind that Carruth has shown us in The Sleeping Beauty.

This existential response to Hegelian rational optimism is important in regard to Carruth's pessimism, especially given the current unpopularity of existential ideas and the increasing interest in applications of Hegel's phenomenology to the study of literature. Hegelian methodology is optimistic without qualification. It assumes complete comprehension, a synthetic "final reality." At the end of his preface to the Philosophy of Right Hegel asserts a relationship between Bacon's notion that true philosophy leads to God, to Truth, and his own meaning of

reason, which is little content with the cold despair that submits to the view that in this earthly life things are truly bad or at best only tolerable . . There is less chill in the peace with the world that knowledge supplies.5

To acknowledge any inherent undesirability about the real world is, for Hegel, unthinkable, despite whatever rhetorical or logical gambits are necessary to maintain affirmation. But what if, like Carruth, one sees an inherent hopelessness in the world, what if this is one of the meanings of ones vision? Constructive Hegelianism as a critical technique must either ignore Carruth's work, or, worse, distort it by a rationally selective interpretation wherein Carruth's poems seem no longer to contradict the method, the methodical, -- the institution -- the academy.

For the Hegelian critic the definite is worth more than the indefinite. Individual voices like Carruth's which are profoundly and apparently resistant to systemization are ignored because in theory everything must become rationally cogent and affirmative in relation to other parts, other voices, each and all orchestrated by the theorist. Nothing seems lost. Everything is rendered in terms of its increasing significance in the closed circuit, the class-time of the theory. And any part of the work synthesized later is eo ipso
more valuable. Value, understanding, and knowledge increase in a cumulative way through time. Again as Russell notes about Hegel’s phenomenology, "The time process . . . is from the less to the more perfect, both in an ethical and in a logical sense."6

Does the truly ethical lie always ahead of us, never here? This is utopian, and progressive, and Carruth calls this way of thinking simply the opposite side of sentimentality, which is "the motive of the reactionary state," it is "the sentimentality of utopian progress and the motive of the progressive state" (SI,36).

When the utopianism that insists on coherence is grafted onto the unexamined vestiges of the Arnoldian critical program, that is, that art is a criticism of life, and, "therefore critics could and should be assessors, instigators, moral henchmen," (SI,34) the result is a critical methodology that has huge blind spots in its view of the variety and significance of much of twentieth-century writing, especially in verse. As Carruth writes in his introduction to Nausea, "Pain and ecstasy, doubt and intuition, private anguish and despair -- these cannot be explained in terms of rational categories." The work should not be submerged in the interpretive apparatus.

Carruth’s radical opposition to optimism is also therefore an opposition to the cultural apparatus -- the literary apparatus from which he has been mostly excluded -- in part because of his opposition. And the rift is not cutting off only Carruth, some of whose criticism goes right to the heart of specialization and fragmentation in the academy, where many are miserable and few communicative enough to say why. Carruth’s remarks in "The Defeated Generation" (SI,90) are worth quoting at length:

How does this happen? How is that those who wished forty years ago to desanctify the imagination, reduce it from the vatic role it had acquired in the romantic idealization of human intelligence from the fourteenth century to the early decades of the twentieth, how is it that these writers are today derided as Humanists by the advocates of deconstructivist criticism, those who now call themselves Theorists? This is an old Marxist ploy, of course,
though Theorists are not all necessarily Marxists; yet for most of them, anyone who is anti-Hegelian enough to speak up for individuated consciousness is a de facto Humanist with a capital H. Well, name-calling is not discourse and ultimately is unimportant. What is important is just the experience of individuated consciousness that the existentialists were talking about, and we know that in reality we are collectivized, we are depersonalized, we are enslaved and corrupted and inauthentic, and all the "freedom" that we have inside our skulls is not enough to afford us any reasonable plane on which to exist. We may disacquiesce until we are blue in the face, but we are still at the mercy of every power in and out of the universe. In short, the existentialists were as right in their intentions as all philosophers are, including the Marxists, but in their technical, so-to-speak professional adumbrations of theory they foundered, again like all others, on the radical incompatibility of intelligence and actuality. The question of art and reality is at the root of every problem, and it is unanswerable.

The pretense to knowledge is the means by which rationalistic criticism occludes the social polity which it purports to serve. Its pretense to wisdom and truth creates a function which guarantees its existence only on the horizon between author and reader, as a wall on that horizon. It disqualifies itself as a cultural apparatus for the understanding of art made by increasingly alienated and ragged individual sensibilities.

Carruth, on the other hand, wants to show us how things are truly bad, and that we are responsible. Anyone who says different is not only in error, but is probably an ideologue. In the 1965 introduction to Nausea, Carruth wrote

In a universe grounded in Nothingness, the anthropocentric vision of reality that characterized rational humanism from the Renaissance to the Nineteenth Century is, clearly, untenable.

In Sitting In (1983) he writes

If the change in the ancient world was theo-centric, and if that of the Renaissance was anthropo-centric, then the change in our own consciousness is anthropo-eccentric. We are discovering the unimportance and adventitiousness of human existence.(SI,6)

This discovery has come from the area of speculation to which Carruth's secular existentialism, along his observations of what man is doing to the planet, have led
him. That adventitiousness probably means extinction, as he writes in a recent uncollected poem, "Catalogue" (Sulfur #24). It is a downward-spiraling list of destructions: desiccation of the planet due to ozone depletion, global contamination of seas, acid rain, denuding of Amazon basin, cancer epidemic, drought; "The extinction of species -- say again, the extinction of species -- continues at a daily measurable rate;' immanent exhaustion of fossil fuels, slaughtering of porpoises and waterfowl, starvation, loss of midwest topsoil, toxification of groundwater -- Carruth flatly lists the current events and concludes, "Will it ever end? Of course. Of course it will end."

Again in Sitting In he writes,

I have never doubted that the predicament of technological society in extremis is more the consequence of Hegel's ideas than of Francis Bacon's. (74)

It is possible for mastery of the natural world to be accomplished in a manner than includes stewardship, but Hegelian optimism is a terrible illusion because

fundamentally we make our choices less as human beings than as vital beings, one species among the many that are animate. It is not a question of the value of humanity, but of the value of life, the whole "ecosystem." For me this means equivalence; one kind of life is neither more nor less valuable than another. (SI,75)

Carruth asserts that the necessity of choosing without the notion of value, without the hope of appeal or of ultimate salvation is "the only alternative to suicide." This definition of the choice to endure "reconciles [his] youthful need for authenticity," that is, his existentialism, his non-violent anarchism, "with [his] experienced recognition of blindness and error," that is his pessimism.

This expression of moral philosophy, developed as a result of personal history, is even stronger in the essay "With Respect To the Infuriating Pervasiveness of Optimism." (SI) Carruth explains how Pound's entire poetic program took place within the confines of an American brand of optimism. On Carruth's account
Pound's late statements about the incoherence of the Cantos presumes the possibility of coherence and a failure of personal vision, rather than an acknowledgement (not available to the optimist) that "the incoherence lay not in the elements of the poem but in the world." Other critics have noted this also, as did Pound, implicitly, when in an interview with Donald Hall in 1960 he remarked, "somebody said that I am the last American living the tragedy of Europe." Carruth points out that the tragic view is based on optimism:

The tragic view of life and art, which pits human intelligence against the incoherence of fate and celebrates, however negatively, the authenticity, solidity, and value of human experience, this tragic view, I believe, from Sophocles to Shakespeare to Schopenhauer to Sartre, is at bottom not only a mode of optimism but essentially more optimistic, not less, that the progressivism of Hegel and Whitman and Henry Ford, to say nothing of Plato. Yet a work begun in the optimism of tragedy is self-contradictory. It must admit failure in the face of incoherence to make its point. It becomes a comedy, what we call a black comedy. And I am by no means the first to point out that the Cantos, like King Lear, are comedic.

Nor is he the last. McGann, too, points out that the Cantos are not tragic and that, as the title of his chapter on Pound indicates, Pound's was a "Truth In Contradiction." Pound meant them as a tragedy, but unintentionally they became comedic, because of their self-contradiction. But isn't it almost shockingly contradictory to hear Carruth say that Schopenhauer and Sartre are more optimistic than Hegel and Ford? The next paragraph elaborates and explains:

Is optimism then an inevitable component of any constructive human effort, meaning any effort aimed at change? . . . My own historical imagination suggests to me, however, that another mode is possible, a mode in which optimism is not present at all, either positively or negatively, a mode in short based on the ante-modern belief that time is linear and eternity is circular.

What could this other mode be? Before of course going ahead to the poems in Carruth's Asphalt Geographies, which is more or less contemporaneous with these essays, and where we might expect to find something in this other mode, it is useful to speculate on the characteristics of this mode, for that speculation, along with the
previous speculation in this chapter, will be a tool in understanding the final works of Carruth's to be treated in this study.

###

The connections between Carruth and Nietzsche, especially on the grounds of their anti-Hegelian and anti-Romantic impulses, have been discussed in previous chapters. The ubiquity of Nietzsche's genius makes him a natural companion for a myriad of thinkers and writers; I do not mean to imply more than I say about the relation between Nietzsche and Carruth, but it is Nietzsche who, in making the turn against the currents noted above, comes to a concept which, it seems to me, is remarkably similar to Carruth's qualifications of a "different mode." I shall take the liberty of making only minimal intrinsic connection within the structures of Nietzsche's own thought, which would be an entirely full and separate endeavor.

In discussing Thoreau's romanticism I referred to Nietzsche's description of the romantic and the anarchist in section 370 of The Gay Science. The section begins with an account of pessimism. Nietzsche originally thought it a great achievement, but here he recants: "You see, what I failed to recognize at that time both in philosophical pessimism and in German music was what is really their distinctive character -- their romanticism." Now he realizes that this romantic pessimism (a la Schopenhauer) comes from "the impoverishment of life." The romantic pessimist has a tragic view of life, which comes from the need to "seek rest, stillness, calm seas, redemption from themselves through art and knowledge, or intoxication, convulsions, anaesthesia, and madness." On the other hand "he that is richest in the fullness of life, the Dionysian god and man, can not only afford the sight of the terrible and the questionable, but even the terrible deed and any luxury
of destruction, decomposition, and negation." For Nietzsche Epicurus (Camus strongly objecting here) and Christians seek "optimistic horizons;" They are romantics. Furthermore,

The desire for destruction, change, and becoming can be an expression of an overflowing energy that is pregnant with future (my term for this is, as is known, "Dionysian"); but it can also be the hatred of the ill-constituted, disinherit, and underprivileged, who destroy, must destroy, because what exists, indeed all existence, all being, outrages and provokes them. To understand this feeling, consider our anarchists closely.

We have seen how this consideration of motive can be applied to a romantic optimist like Thoreau. In this passage it applies to the pessimist as well. And it applies to artists of both persuasions:

The will to immortalize [eternalize] also requires a dual interpretation. It can be prompted, first, by gratitude and love; art with this origin will always be an art of apotheoses, perhaps dithyrambic like Rubens, or blissfully mocking like Hafiz, or bright and gracious like Goethe, spreading a Homeric light and glory over all things.

Yet this same impulse can also be, as I suggested in Thoreau’s case, a mean and expropriative urge, a destruction, a romantic pessimism, really only disappointed optimism. I will continue quoting from section 370 of The Gay Science because Nietzsche makes the culminating point with characteristic alacrity.

That there still could be an altogether different kind of pessimism, a classical type -- this premonition and vision belongs to me as inseparable from me, as my proprium and ipsissimum; only the word "classical" offends my ears, it is far too trite and has become round and indistinct. I call this pessimism of the future -- for it comes! I see it coming! -- Dionysian pessimism.

The implications of this passage for considerations of many kinds of writing are immense, and especially salient to Carruth. As I have noted before, Carruth has cherished Camus’ definition of classicism as "only romanticism subdued," and that seems to be close to what Nietzsche is suggesting here. Or does he mean romanticism suffused with more energy? At any rate, romanticism modified and transformed. This "Dionysian pessimism," I assert, is indeed very close to what
Carruth is suggesting as his "mode in which optimism is not present at all, either negatively or positively." If this is so, then this mode will be also another attempt to efface the romantic self-contradictions of the tragic view, and it will include the temporal qualifications of time and eternity, as well as embodying substantively and tonally a Dionysian, dithyrambic mode. We will come back to this passage of The Gay Science as we try to find the mode in Asphalt Georgics and in his most recent poems, essays, and actions.

###

**Asphalt Georgics**

What is a "georgic"? The OED tells us that it comes from the Greek word for husbandman, or earth-, root-worker. It relates to agriculture. It is obsolete except in semi-humorous use, where it means agricultural or rustic. "Georgic" is the title of Virgil's four-volume work on husbandry. A root-work, indeed. Carruth wrote the poems in AG when he had taken up his roots in Vermont and put them back down in the industrial canker of greater Syracuse, New York. The poems are rooted in his horrification at the incredible ugliness, the waste, the depersonalization, of the place -- and, as ever, in his intellect and temperament, his sense of black comedy and his Dionysian, almost desperately energetic but lucid pessimism.

Carruth's "georgic" is a syllabic quatrain, lines of 8, 6, 8, and 6 syllables; the six-syllable lines are indented three spaces and rhymed (yes, in the vernacular "a" rhymes with "the"). The stanza creates many hyphenations, logo-clasticisms that are decorous for both the topics and the personae, people who speak in real, contemporary American speech, with a sense of humor that thrives in spite of what they live through: a black list, the worst: agonies of sickness in helpless old age; the ugliness, the evil facades of consumer society; endemic pollution, political
imprisonment and torture, insanity, impotence, poverty, indifference, divorce, loneliness, alcoholism, suicide, murder, sorrow, nuclear annihilation, racism -- every kind of death-in-life and then . . . oblivion. In short, Carruth's usual subjects, but these are unusually depressing. Some of the writing is as bitter as anything Carruth has ever written: "the saturated fats/ of so-called living filled the so-called air" ("Names"). And yet if one has already an ear or can begin while reading to hear the texture of the voices of these characters, it is impossible to keep from laughing, with and at them. The humor of these characters is not the malevolent Frostian laughter of the Miller in "The Vanishing Red," it is warm, affirmative, compassionate, and heroic. The contest between tragedy and comedy finds a human resolution:

> Tragedy (read life
> has its comic aspects,
> granted, usually produced
> by genius, the effects
> of machines malfunctioning; but
> tragedy still dissents.
> Comedy is the somehow needed poet's misfeasance. ("Names")

Genius is the malfunctioning of a malfunction, of a supernumerary thing, the man-machine. The two components of tragedy, of the tragic mode, optimism and/or lucid existential rebellion both assert man's self in the face of the void. Carruth uses "comedy" and "tragedy" with the full range of their meanings. Comedy (play, reveling, singing) is "somehow", that is, fortuitously, necessary (a paradox of course) for (is it the needed poet?) the poet's "misfeasance," his imposition, his stepping in, with a wrongful application of his (legislative?) power. What seems here at first to be a straightforward and fairly abstract dictum dissolves upon careful reading into a thicket of paradox, mal-execution and error -- which is precisely the philosophical dynamic of Carruth's poetics of pessimism.
Comedy is rebellion in both an historical and a metaphysical sense. This is implied in the poem above and Carruth says it explicitly elsewhere, in "The Guy Downstairs" (SI):

We have yet to produce either an American or an existential epic, though we have had a few near misses. (I am uncertain what to say of A la recherche du temps perdu. It might qualify. In that case we need a second, and we need an epic that deals with America and American violence.) In one way or another the Cantos, Paterson, Conquistador, and the works of American novelists (including Faulkner) all fall short; and so do the collected films of Charlie Chaplin, although I think they come closer than anything else.

A lyric epic is perhaps a generic contradiction in terms. But the existential epos of Carruth's collected works nominates it for inclusion in the short list of American existential epics.

Asphalt Georgics is at the heart of his epos. The Chaplinesque combination of sadness and humor pervades these poems. The book begins with a long poem, "Names," in which the speaker changes identities in a seemingly haphazard fashion, and quickly, effectively, as a result, he has no name. The first speaker, Sam, and his wife, Poll, are driving to the "K-Mart up in/ Seneca Mall" to return a defective electric percolator. Suddenly, Sam begins quoting Eugenio Montale, in Italian, which he translates, "the past is nothing and we/ are in love with it. Pragmatically speaking we are/ in love with nothing." (Surely this is a partial answer to one of Carruth's critics, Philip Booth, who was troubled about the past tense of the title of Brothers, I Loved You All, wondering if it meant that all of Carruth's loves were over.) Sam's anacoluthic voice shows us the vast space between any two thoughts, a space in which anything can happen. He reflects on baseball, "our venomous// American aggressiveness/ confined to balls and bats," on how an atheist can pray, and suddenly we realize how a trip to the K-Mart can become occasion for beautiful mysteries. On the way to the mall Sam "was on fire,// so was Poll
next to me, so was/ the whole world. To get through,/ get to the K-Mart, probably/
was all I asked." But even that is a huge petition, "Just a hope,/ like a rabbit
frozen/ under a bush when the hounds come,/ no sense in it." No sense in the
hope, no sense in the rabbit, no sense in the man, in man. In anything. The clerk
refuses to take the percolator back because

"You didn’t but that here." We
showed her the slip, the re-
ceipt from the cash register. "Why,"
she smiled, "that’s dated more
than a month ago. And besides
This is a different store."

Well, o.k. We went outside, wilt-
ing right off, and looked back
up, and sure enough, the sign said
Ames, though we could see black
letters on the wall, sort of scorched
there, that still said K-Mart.
I’m Arthur. I always liked that
name. Molly calls me Art.

It is absurd to keep insisting that one’s name is always changing, but is it any
crazier than K-Mart becoming Ames? In Contra Mortem Carruth wrote that the
child is "stranger to the pronomial itch," that is, to the assertion of the self in the
objective world in the form of an "I." Here everyone’s identity is unstable,
creating, along with disastrous depersonalization, a vertiginous kind of fun, an
instability which emphasizes the existential belief that we make our identities
moment by moment. The speaker changes his name again, to Ted (his wife to
Dolly), then to Julio, and then he changes gender and religious status, to Santa
Julia:

It was necessary,
this change of gender, to make such
an extraordinary
transition, as was the change from
mortality to sub-
blimnity, which I know now is
not the angelic club

I once believed bout a state of
mind at least theoret­
ically attainable by
all those who must forget

themselves completely and abso­
lutely in order to
pass through and beyond the pain that
surpasses knowing...

Julio is a political prisoner who is being cruelly tortured, made to live in a box.
He’s covered in his own shit. He is a sorrowful figure whose story is interrupted
by "Jacky," a promiscuous woman who has been mentioned in the poem before as
someone’s daughter. The poem ends with "Johan," "which is both/ John and Joan,
but mostly/ in my case the former; which is/ appropriate, I be-// ing masculine both
in nature/ and in history."

To identify oneself by naming, with a name, in a world where the system
works to depersonalize one every minute of one’s life is nothing short of heroic.
Are these Syracusans tragic heroes and heroines? If optimism is linked to the tragic
view of art and life, perhaps this pessimism, this funny business in Asphalt
Georgics, is the Dionysian kind that Nietzsche foresaw. These characters seem to
see something like that too:

There may be ground

for thinking I’m not smart, I be­
lieve there is, but I know
this: the system around here can’t
be fixed or beaten. No

way. You don’t have to be an i­
deologist to see
what’s wrong. It’s too big
nobody can agree

what it really is, much less con-
trol it, not even that
Reagan and his gang -- they're in it
thick as thieves.

This is Jake the Dope speaking. And Jake is right. He sees farm land taken over
for businesses, those businesses gone bankrupt, families falling apart, changes in the
weather due to pollution, change occurring at an inhuman rate, all rushing toward
extinction. All right there in Syracuse, beside Lake Onondaga, "the oldest/ dead
lake in North America./ Well, if you can’t be best// you might as well be worst,
that’s how/ we look at it." If these poems cannot speak to contemporary audiences
about their lives, nothing will, and then like the speaker in "Plain Song," we will all
then "won-/der what it would really take to/ grab people's attention."

"Reflections" is an explicit manifestation of the brave and almost careless
will to rebel which is summoned up in the face of the horrors of lucidity:

Dead souls! Yes we are.
We shiver in our nonexist-
ence, our rejection. Far

and near, early and late, we tried
our best to belong, some
of us, maybe the best of us;
never enough. Then come

you randy whatsit, seize us all,
fling us out there among
the false lights, I who am old, my
son David who is young:

We know you well enough to know
you do not care whether
we care or not, and so we choose
not to, now or ever.

This profound denial comes from the learning of the past, that nothing, and goes on
into the next poem, "Lost." Before, in "Names," one speaker says, Many/ paths in
the forest have chosen/ me. I go on any..." The agony of choice and the
inevitability of being lost is a choreic theme for Carruth. He shares the obsession
with Camus. In The Stranger, Meursault reflects on his own chances:

I passed my life in a certain way, and I might have passed it in a different way, if I'd felt like it. I'd acted thus, and I hadn't acted otherwise. I hadn't done X whereas I had done Y or Z. And what did that mean? That, all the time, I'd been waiting for this present moment, for that dawn, tomorrow's or another day's, which was to justify me. Nothing, nothing had the least importance, and I knew quite well why.

This tough acknowledgement of the aleotropic vectors and the radical emptiness of existence is the theme of Carruth's essay "Authenticity in the Age of Massive, Multiplying Error"(SI), and it is the theme of "Lost," wherein he rejoins the idea from "Names" verbatim in the first line, wondering whether fate or chance has made him in the moment, lost. At the end of the poem (and mezzo del cammin), he says

I think I sought it. I think I
could not know myself un-
til I did not know where I was.
Then my self knowledge con-
tinued for a while while I found
my way again in fear
and reluctance, lost truly at
last. I changed the appear-
ances of myself to myself
continually and
losing and finding were the same,
as I now understand.

The syllabics are functioning well here, both aurally and by way of establishing temporarily cogent fragments of meaning which reform and accrete into larger structures as the reader moves forward through the stanza with expectations of the conversational diction. In the first line, doubt gives way to a clipped cogito, which in the next line reverts into a paradox, accentuated by the terminal p-un (myself un = myself one). Then the third line alone implies something like the idea of "thinking oneself silly," or a failure of rationalism, or, in Kierkegaardian terms, the despair which is conscious of being despair, as it is conscious of being a self. This self is nonetheless laboring to obscure this fact from itself "with a certain acuteness
and shrewd calculation, with psychological insight," but he is not in a deeper sense clearly conscious of what he does (I speaking of the speaker here of course, not Carruth), of how despairingly he labors, etc. (SK, Sickness, 180-81). Then in the poem comes the quick ambiguity of "I changed the appearance of myself to myself continually." Changed appearance to reality? Or simply substituted another subjective illusion of self? Both. They are the same. All of the peregrinations culminate in the final paradox, that "losing and finding were the same," and the equally ambiguous "as" (adverb, or causative?) the speaker "knows."

"Marge" is a poem very complicated in its relationship to the actual events in Carruth’s life, and it is terribly moving. Margery was the name of Carruth’s actual mother, whose birth and death dates, 1896-1981, follow the title in the book. Her final, lingering illness was like that of Marge in the poem. Yet, the speaker is not Carruth but an alcoholic retired contractor in Liverpool, NY, Charlie Spaid, who, after bottoming out, rents a room in Margery’s house. He joins AA, where he meets a "little guy named Cheever," whom Charlie asks why he’s quitting drinking at sixty-five: "at your age I’d go on/ out sozzled," Charlie says. Cheever responds,

Yeah, that’s one way of looking and then there’s another. Dead

I can take, but who want’s to die puking all over some-one else’s furniture?

This is a record of an actual exchange between Carruth and Cheever, long-time acquaintances. Carruth and Cheever managed to survive their alcoholism (though not entirely intact), but Marge, not Charlie, gets cirrhosis, has a series of strokes, and dies after a horribly extended agony.

"Cave Painting" continues on the theme of extinction. Dedicated to the poet Clayton Eshleman, the poem describes how the vestiges of all of the exterminated
and deceased species remain with us:

We were with them. They went away.  
And now every bell in  
every tower in every vil-
lage could toll the tocsin

of our sorrow forever and  
still not tell how across  
all time our origin always  
is this knowledge of loss.

Then there is monologue by Septic Tanck, the only unstanzaed poem in the book. Tanck is a poet with a poetic name, he thinks, "The/ ending up place for everything, don't you/ know, everything that comes down." Tanck also published his poems in the magazine Pulpsmith (vol. 7, no.1). These poems were awarded the first Smith Series of Older Poets Award, and Tanck was given a night with a younger person of either sex. One of Tanck's songs, "About Youth and Age," concludes, "Only now in old age and bad luck/ do we see the importance of a good fuck." And this dictum is the theme of another poem in AG, "Capper Kaplinsky at the North Side Cue Club." But Capper has a subtle and, though somewhat effete, a sweetly poignant feeling for the female form:

I can still gloom onto

the things that make life worth living  
and sex still has something  
to do with it, and always will,  
even if I ain't been

too sharp at explaining.

The ultimate poems in the book are full of affection and communion. Art and Poll return from the suburbs to their old neighborhood and find the predominately black neighbors to be beautifully helpful, find that the place is now truly "gemutlich," unlike it was before with "Krauts, Harps, Hunkies, Wops going at/ each other with no mer-// cy every weekend ..."
Finally there is a eerie poem, a slipping, falling, floating monologue, "Shake, Well Before Using," in which the speaker contemplates the drifting of whispy panicles from his neighbor's smokebush:

O.K., I wouldn't
tell it to everyone,

but days like this, windy, it sort
of feels like the end of
the world, all them stiff gray dead things
blowing loose just above

the asphalt, drifting like some kind
of trash with that scratchy
sound. Can't you hear them right now ev­
en at night? You ask me,

its one hell of a scary sound.
Ora pro nobis, that's
what we used to say. Ave Ma­ria. Hissing like rats'

feet, like them smokers -- that's the sound.

Asphalt Georgics is an orison for us. It concludes:

What a mish mash -- the suburbs! You
know it. So I pray for
Crawford, the street, the smokebush, the
works. I pray for no more

Reagan. Well, you got to keep your
wig on, you can't give in
to the dead. So what if it don't
mean much. It means something.

This is an assertion of a value in human relations, in a place not unlike the settings of Cheever's stories, but from the perspective of the underprivileged; their lives are given meaning by their own contingently improvised creations against death. The message is: don't give in.

###

A "system" suggests the cutting off,
i.e., in channel morphology, the reduction,
Don't give in to the dead. "You can't give in to the dead." It has always been a temptation for Carruth, for, along with his intellectual pessimism, in a synergy, to use a popular metaphor, he has always suffered from a solemn forlornness of spirit, pathological, if we consider the sources of it in his chronic manic depression. He has constantly felt that he had to fight against his fatally passionate sense of the beauty of the world, his Romantic Weltenschmerz, his sense of beauty that is "worth its every sorrow." His existential beliefs have helped him, but the temptation to obliterate himself has always been strong:

I see you, brothers and sisters, Randall, John,
I see you all, Sylvia, Anne, your slow
ragged troupe wandering
holding your flambeaux
so listlessly, calling out, your voices wan
and quavering. I hear you. Oh, it could be done
quickly you say, only a step,
a trigger's click, a drift of sleep,
that's what you sing -- in that awful music of Mussorgsky,
you in your valley of mist,
in your smoky flame-light, calling, calling to me.
Come, you sing, come to us, listen
to this singing here forever where you belong
in this valley, we are your brothers and sisters
only a minute away, a second, or a song. ("A Paragraph,"
Cry,81)

This poem was written before 1983. As factors in Carruth's life, factors with which I am not concerned except as they surface in his work, as they worsened, the awful music in the valley of mist became more insistent. In a long poem, "Essay on

The poem begins with a horrible scene of gratuitous torture and murder. Prisoners are being decapitated and their necks cauterized as two Potentates wager on how far the headless corpses can run. From this scene, the speaker looks out "Here in this// apartment complex in Syracuse where I live" at the Christmas lights, wondering, "Is this another carnage?" Is the eagerness "for the bright impossible rationality/ which the people of the caves// thought they had glimpsed when they knew that they/ had minds" simply another horrible illusion? He writes a card to his daughter in Arizona, "miles away in a country of desiccated, smoldering/ grass." It is a loving gesture, poignant. I won't continue the paraphrase; as always, even in this scaringly painful mode, Carruth is perfectly clear. The nobility of the suffering human imagination prevails, prevails in its precise ignorance of death. It prevails with the pessimistic nobility of unsupported, insupportable, even foolish desire -- desire for life. That is the meaning of the decapitated current of corpses.

As the poem continues, Carruth abjures Jung's previsions of death; they are an illusion of Romance. Yet, he suggests that Jung's dreaming partakes of the urge toward human beauty, which is the natural movement of all creative action. But, as always, things seem to be getting worse:

Its true, a joy

is in it, joy in the power of killing, even on television. But nothing is known. Killer and killed whorl in a stupid vortex of ignorance. No story any more, no tale, no adventure. The three bears have gone to work for Disneyland, and Goldilocks committed suicide in 1962.

Even the dangerous beauty of romance seems over. "Nothing is known": ignorance
and the vision of the void finally coincide. Hope, dream, love are dead, with no successors:

Age, the romanticists say, is vision and simplicity and brightened consciousness, but I say, Fraud, fraud, blinded by the light. Even the trees are reeling.

This is the same stanza that Carruth has used in his "Essay poems" ever since his first book. Here he is speaking with in quite naturally, which is something of a triumph, but not cause for jubilation. Instead, the obscenities of the age seem to have collected in Carruth's voice, in his personality, in his vision of us. This is his importance. The reeling trees are not just a symbol of psychic nausea. The pine trees of his Vermont, assailed for generations, are now finally being killed by the rain. And we are dumb to our own suicide, as far as having "knowledge" about it.

Carruth imagines

a pair of pudgy hands, like my little grandson's hands but spotted with age, pushing against a huge gray leathery limp bag of nothing that fills the room.

The kneading of the dry teat of Nothing, the flaccid bag of imagination; it is the nightmare of age. But does it also, in its image of the infant, imply rebirth? The poem ends with that ubiquitous thing, the electronic blip. An appliance has been turned on

or perhaps the great grid of energy, civilization itself, has faltered far away. And my candle grows a tall flame that flutters and dies and leaves a rancid smell.

The poem could end here, as it could have ended anywhere all along; it was always
ending, but the sixty quatrains do finally end,

...and the Christmas lights
are bright, but not as bright as they were
a moment ago.

As we know, the moment is part memory and part prevision. And here all
the elements are dimming. "The past is nothing," and he is in love with it. The
future, as it is suggested by the possibilities and defined by the necessities of the
moment, is now nothing. And he is in love with it.

In February 1988 Carruth, as he tells us in the very last work I will
consider here, "Suicide,"9

intentionally and massively overdosed myself with every pill I possessed... I had a pretty fair collection of partly used bottles of medication. I opened
them one after another and washed the contents down with loathsome port
wine which someone had sent me from California. I was surprised, not
disagreeably, by the quickness of the effect. It seems to me that I began to
feel myself going under almost immediately and that the process itself, the
going under, lasted no more than a few seconds -- though I know from
what I was told afterward that this cannot be true -- just long enough for
me to experience a sense of relief amounting to euphoria and to tell myself
that this was the first time I'd been happy in years.

Miraculously, despite the toxic intake, despite his age, his chronic emphysema, his
heart's condition, his will to die, Carruth (obviously) survived. And what he wrote
about his experience is a stunning record of a man in dissolution. The essay is not
only true, it is almost harshly analytic, Wordsworthian in extremis, that is, powerful
feelings of non-being recollected in rebirth.

Carruth does not tell us why he committed suicide, and I say committed
rather than attempted for reasons that will be apparent directly. "The circumstances,
including peripheral actors, are private and should remain private." The document is
not a veiled public shreiving, not a gush of personal confession, but an analysis of
the actual experience of death, complete with clinical details, with close-ups of the
medical apparatus, with descriptions of the physical attenuations of the attack ("120
hours of insomnia"), how the doctors "loaded him with charcoal," which made him vomit. He inhaled the vomit and suffocated and got pneumonia. The doctors pushed a rod into his lungs; "it was a rape, it was terrifying, one of the most awful things that ever happened to me." His physical appearance is horrible. His "skin was dark and bruised, covered with tiny lines as if it were tanned cowhide. I looked 85 years old. In fact I looked like my mother when she had been 85, paralyzed by stroke and dying." It is all sufficiently gruesome, and in its most physical moments probably only of interest to intimates or horror buffs, who sometimes share perversity.

But then Carruth begins to reflect on the experience, on how he had changed. When he arrived at the hospital he had no vital signs, but he was not dead, and in that state what he saw was not Jung’s floating castle, but "blackness," a blackness which he goes on to describe in a variety of ways. He says that when he awoke he remembered the blackness, and the memory made him happy, "Not in the sense of ecstatic as we normally use the term now, meaning sexual or generally appetitive transport, but rather in the sense of blissful, a replete contentedness. It was a state of mind I had never experienced before, and I think I mean that literally." That state of mind, he says, has "the sense of strange and new, altogether astounding happiness has remained with me as well."

Carruth had become another person. The experience of death, which he claims to have no knowledge of per se, had made him happy. Happy. The resolution to die had been perfect, and so the return to life was a fortuitous return -- to another life. Of course this is not a general prescription. Carruth was crazy, by all ordinary standards. But the suicide was a success.

The free act of suicide, and the fortuitous rebirth, Carruth finds -- and finds a genealogy of precedents for his finding -- has liberated him from sequential time.
This takes us back finally to his definition of an "alternative mode in which optimism is not present at all, either positively or negatively, a mode in short based on the ante-modern belief that time is linear and eternity is circular."

As he notes in "Suicide," "

Poets and theologians have insisted from the beginning that happiness is an escape from time, human time, either through a life after death, or before death, through an experience of spiritual communion or mystical or aesthetic transport. But a third way, as mythology attests, is to die and to come back to life.

This seems to be a way based on a time system of linear temporality and circular eternity. Art, poetry and music especially, control human time by the fact of their existence in and manipulation of it, but they do not transcend it. They are in this sense less effective than action, especially the act of self-obliteration. And art that is totally unconnected from its social function has of course no effect; the artist and his product are rendered void. Art cannot bring solace to people who have no control over the time of their (slow or instantaneous) annihilation. On Carruth's account, this is the state of art in the late-twentieth century.

The eeriness of "Suicide" comes not just from its discomforting themes. There is also the irritating sense that it is true. And if it is true, Carruth has literally come back to life. And then there seems to be some kind of equality between life and death -- which is one of the tenets of Carruth's particular brand of pessimism. This kind of rebirth is, as Carruth has noted, mythological. The particular myth that applies here is that of Dionysus.

In the same section of The Gay Science in which he speculates about a "dionysian pessimism," Nietzsche talks about an "art of apotheosis" dithyrambic and blissful in tone. "Suicide" certainly has these qualities, especially toward the end. The dithyrambic tone is Dionysian. Dionysus is, in Plutarch's words, the god who is destroyed, who disappears, who relinquishes life and then is born again."9
Furthermore, Dionysus was taken as a fetus out of his mother, Semele, lover of Zeus, when she was incinerated by the fiery vision of Zeus. Zeus enclosed the fetus in his own thigh until it was ready to be born, and it is to this double birth that Dionysus owed the title Dithyrambos. Dionysus is also the Greek form of the Vedic god Soma = a drink ("that loathsome port"), a god, prince of poets, personification of the moon. At this point, I hope that I don’t have to recapitulate anything in asserting that this myth applies to the personal travails of Carruth. And, as James Hillman has written, "the mind made on the moon has lived with Lilith, so that its thought can never be naive, never cease to strike deep toward the shadows," that is, this mind, even in its dithyrambic expressions is always lucid, astringent, pessimistic, never progressive or utopian. The cult of Dionysus is ecstatic, with the implications of a profound change in personality, exactly what Carruth’s suicide accomplished.

Coda

At the beginning of "Suicide" Carruth writes about the necessities of beginning again, in a different mode professionally, because of his inability to deal with his suicide in writing. In fact he deals with it quite admirably, and in a mode, the autobiographical essay, which is a recent development in his work. He has in these essays dropped the modernistic technique of the mask, yet he has lost none of the force of his previous modes, and he has continued to write poems in a variety of different voices. At considerable personal cost Carruth has started over, as he started over after the war, after his institutionalization, after his move to Vermont,
after his move to Syracuse.

One of Carruth's most incisive critics, R.W. Flint, wrote that "the theories of autobiogenesis that seemed so provocative 20 or 30 years ago seem less so now, have begun to look like a convulsive attempt to recover the freshness and energy that marked the real evolution of nearly 200 hundred years ago." If one agrees with this, and if one agrees with many of the critics of existential theory, with Marcuse, with Adorno, with Blanchot 12, in castigating such concepts as intensity, responsibility, authenticity, etc., one must also see that in Carruth's life-work self-creation has been vital, not theoretical. As Galway Kinnell notes in his 1985 introduction to his selection of Carruth's poetry, "More than in the case of any other poet, Carruth responds to Whitman's words, 'I was the man, I suffer'd, I was there.'" And the following sentence, written before Carruth's self-annihilation, has even more meaning now: "We are lucky to have him among us."

Carruth has continued to produce poems of great beauty and force, and they appear in his forthcoming collection (Tell Me Again How The White Heron Rises And Flies Across the Nacreous River At Twilight Toward The Distant Islands, New Directions, 1989). In many places, especially in his long essay, "Paul Goodman and the Grand Community" (American Poetry Review, 1983. Rpt. forthcoming in a book of prose from the U. of Michigan Press, 1990), Carruth has expressed his great debt to and his admiration of Paul Goodman. And Goodman, in describing the qualities of one of his own masters, Kant, touches the quick of the personal correlatives of Hayden Carruth's work of the last thirty years:

Through middle age and a good old age, his work flowed on spontaneous, vigorous, brave, endlessly inventive and continually maturing, minutely attentive and boldly synoptic and with a fine rhythm of style. We have to ask if his way of being obsessional is not a good way to cope with the nature of things in order to live on a little. I repeat it: the proof of a sage is that he survives, he knows how.
Notes: Chapter Six

4. Albert Camus, The Rebel
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scheduled for publication:
"Patriot Without Parole" in Partisan Review (Jan 1990)
"Red Stick Ghazals" in Exquisite Corpse.

in print:
"Marrakesh" in Abraxas 35-36 (1987)
"Destroyers" and "Epode for the Friendly Moment" in Chiaroscuro 6 (1986)
"Argument" in Exquisite Corpse (vol. 5, nos. 6-8, Jul.-Aug. 1987)
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I am currently transcribing and editing my interview with Hayden Carruth under assignment from the publisher of the Paris Review, and I will have at least one essay appearing in a forthcoming book on the poetry of Hayden Carruth published in Spring 1990 by Hobart and William Smith Colleges Press in Geneva, NY.

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