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TEACHING A CONTEMPORARY AUTHOR TO LATE ADOLESCENTS: THE NOVELS OF JACK MATTHEWS

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

Vivian Bowling Blevins, B. Ed., M.A. in Education

* * * * *

The Ohio State University

1976

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Department of Humanities Education
Dedicated to Jack, Lance, Quent, and the memory of my first English educator, Doris Muriel Adams
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The writer wishes to acknowledge the assistance which Professors Jack Matthews, Frank Zidonis, Jane Stewart, and Thomas Woodson have so willingly supplied.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Some Initial Considerations

The most rudimentary and recurring questions which confront the reflective English educator are What should be taught? Why should it be taught? and How should it be taught? The English teacher is often faced with an investigation of his educational philosophy as it relates to the material he teaches and the general education of his students: Shall a basic function of his English classroom be to teach students to function in a democratic society? Shall it be to teach students to seek a personal definition of the good life? Shall it be to teach students to endorse Christian values in their daily living? Shall it be to teach students to find success in pursuing a vocation and adapting to a changing society? Shall it be all of the above, none of the above, or some of the above?

There seems to be a great deal of disagreement. In a national study of outstanding English programs conducted in the sixties, Squire and Applebee discovered that among the teachers surveyed, there was no clear consensus about the objectives of a literature program. ¹

Of the department chairpersons surveyed, 62 out of 102 ranked students' development through literature as the primary objective of literary study. 

"The ability to comprehend the meaning and the development of a given work . . . " was ranked second in importance but was so ranked by only 24 respondents. 

The same study reported that although literature programs consumed more class time (52.2 per cent) and were judged more effective and comprehensive than any other area of English instruction, " . . . only 33 of 218 observer reports cited the teaching of literature in their schools as outstanding." In the classrooms which were studied, it was found that approaches most favored were ones in which there was '". . . emphasis on ideas in single works, on genre, on close textual study, and on guided individual reading. . . . " Squire and Applebee avowed that there is " . . . a deliberate de-emphasis of major twentieth century American fiction" in the schools included in the study in spite of the fact that students cited the lack of the teaching of contemporary fiction as their most frequent cause for concern in their literary education.

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1Ibid.  
2Ibid.  
3Ibid., p. 93.  
4Ibid., p. 95.  
5Ibid., p. 102.
The reader might question the validity for the seventies of a study reported in 1968; however, there has been no national study of that type since the sixties, and the lag between recorded deficiencies and the reparation of those deficiencies is an established characteristic of American education. Also, the 158 high schools in 45 states which participated in the study were selected on the basis of their reputation in the teaching of English. If the best schools recognize an assortment of problems in their curricula, it is reasonable to assume that schools which were not selected have even more serious problems. The question must arise What is happening in our schools?

Even the public is aware that something is amiss, for national magazines have been reporting the declining verbal Scholastic Aptitude Test scores. (See Appendix C.) This decline in verbal achievement scores is a cause for concern, especially to literature teachers. In a study of achievement in literature of United States students, Alan C. Purves reported that the correlation between the total literature achievement score and the variable of reading comprehension was .74.¹

Where does the English educator turn when he finds that he has been judged ineffectual in past programs and when he realizes that the future in education seems even more impossible to comprehend

and manage? In an introductory note to *Deciding the Future: A Forecast of Responsibilities of Secondary Teachers of English, 1970-2000 AD*, Mr. Purves asserts that whether the author of the report, Edmund J. Farrell, has made valid predictions or not is a "... question of negligible interest compared to the question of whether the English teacher can prepare himself for such phenomena as drug-induced learning, increased student dissatisfaction, decreased privacy, speeding up of learning, sophisticated use of computers in instruction, wall television screens..."¹ and the like. The items Mr. Purves mentions will necessitate new mechanical and psychological knowledge on the part of the teacher as well as a change in the definition of the teacher's role. With rapidly expanding fields of knowledge, a teacher can no longer be expected to function as an attainer and transmitter of knowledge in order to service the academic needs of all or even most students. Prepackaged educational materials and media equipment will undoubtedly assist the teacher in accomplishing Farrell's prediction that the secondary curriculum of the future will place "... increased emphasis upon both individualized instruction and problem solving approaches to learning."² Excellent educators have


²Ibid., p. 137.
always stressed the need for encouraging students to become independent learners and to approach their problems, whether they be in literary interpretation or in plane geometry, methodically and analytically. For a student to become an independent learner, however, he must first be taught skills which will ensure his freedom.

The purpose of this study is to demonstrate a strategy for the teaching of the works of a contemporary novelist. The approach has as its objective the development of analytical readers of literature who are able to use the critical tools supplied them by secondary and college literature teachers in attacking the problems of literary criticism which they confront as educated persons. The novels of a contemporary Ohio writer, Jack Matthews, are the focus of the study.

First, there will be a consideration of the role of a writer's biography in a study of his works, followed by an inquiry into aesthetic theory, an exploration of the general character of the American novel, and an investigation of some major critical methods of interpretation. After a review of the professional critics' response to each of Matthews' novels and students' response to four of the novels, I shall demonstrate how some of the major critical approaches may be used as tools to examine the novels.

Prior to a discussion of what should be taught and how it should be taught must come a consideration of who is to be taught. A matter
of principal importance to the English teacher is the psychological-developmental process of the teenager. What concerns the teenager most? What problems are typical of the teenage years? Generally speaking, what is the typical teenager of the seventies? There will, of course, be considerable variation in what is typical for different ethnic groups, intelligence levels, and socio-economic levels, but generalizations help to initiate a consideration of the issue. Edgar Z. Friedenberg has said, "Human life is a continuous thread which each of us spins to his own pattern, rich and complex in meaning. There are no natural knots in it. Yet knots form, nearly always in adolescence. In American, British, European, Japanese, Australian, and at least the more privileged Soviet youth, puberty releases emotions that tend toward crisis."\(^1\)

In *Books and the Teen-Age Reader*, G. Robert Carlsen outlines the basic tasks which the teenager must undertake: "(1) Discovering his sex's role in our culture, (2) Developing new relationships with people his own age, (3) Achieving an easy relationship with members of the opposite sex, (4) Accepting his physical body, (5) Changing his relationship with his parents, (6) Working for pay, (7) Finding a vocation, and (8) Becoming aware of his value patterns."\(^2\) Psychologist

---


Dr. Fitzhugh Dodson concurs with Carlsen by indicating the following as basic tasks of late adolescence: (1) working out a satisfactory ego identity, (2) deciding upon and preparing for a vocation, (3) establishing sound heterosexual relationships, and (4) completing his emancipation from parents and family.1

Most English teachers realize that many of the tasks listed by Carlsen and Dodson are seldom settled finally and irrevocably even by adults, as has been elucidated by Gail Sheehy in Passages; but to realize these are prime concerns of the teenage years is important.

During the fall of 1972 I spent three days in working with a high school class of juniors using a modified Ken MacCrerie method of teaching composition. For the first day I merely read and discussed with the students some of the student writing samples in Uptught. On the second day I summarized MacCrerie's basic writing tenets2 and then asked the students to speak in their own voices about their

---


2In "To Be Read" MacCrerie advocates that (1) student writing will be good to the degree that it is honest, lively, and a vehicle for discovery; (2) teachers must be strong, well informed leaders who talk - clearly and authoritatively - about writing when the occasion demands but who are able to conduct seminar-style classes in which students assume responsibility for criticizing each other's work; (3) teachers must accentuate the positive in students' work, but they must also teach students that reworking and editing are essential.
own concerns. At the end of the period, I collected the compositions that had been completed and on the following day collected the others. A week later I returned to discuss the writings with the students. I had a mimeographed copy for each student of the unsigned writing of every member of the class. In my best, most dramatic reading voice, I began to read the selections aloud. Following each of the selections, I waited for student comment. The students were amazed that people they knew had written such beautifully alive, personal pieces. We as English teachers can talk glibly about how well we know our students, but here from their own pens and pencils, students who had been tremendously bored by writing classes and had submitted mediocre prose probed their minds and communicated their findings. Some of these first-hand accounts of teenagers' problems and concerns, which concur with Carlsen's and Dodson's assertions, are indicated in the following passages.

Many teenagers are concerned with establishing and maintaining male-female relationships:

It is a really awful thing to hurt someone,
Especially someone who is 'special.'
Until you've made up,
Time goes so, so slowly.
You wonder if that thing beating
Inside you is a heart,
Or a cold metal pendulum,
Like that of a clock.
People around you are unconcerned
And silent. Acting like they don't know.
But you know and he knows.

Then the seemingly endless time has passed
And you see him. People start laughing again.
And we did, too. ^

They are concerned about their involvement or lack of same

with siblings and with peer groups:

I suppose the most important thing to me is my brother. . . .
Since he's been going to school in Dayton and only coming home
over the weekends, I've realized how much I enjoy him. We
think quite a bit alike. I feel really happy when on Fridays
after school, I come home and hear him playing one of Elton's
(John) songs. I go upstairs, and after awhile we'll start yelling
just because we're so happy.

and

To be lonely is like a deep polluted blue sea without any fish
swimming around in it.

When you're lonely, it's like a dark night: everyone's scared
of you, no one wants to be around you, or so it seems. You're
alone: it's as if you can't talk because no one listens to you.
Like a stray cat - all the other cats want to keep away.

The thrill of the victory and the agony of the defeat concern the

athlete:

The biggest thing of any sport, basketball, football, or
whatever the sport may be, is the feeling of winning and
losing. When winning, I feel like I could do anything. . . .
I can feel the extra strength flowing through my blood as if
I had some superhuman power. I feel like I'm in the sky
looking down on the world and saying to myself that I have
accomplished something no one else has before. When losing,
no matter how good I did, I feel I could have done better than
I did. I can feel the sickness of the loss by the pounding of

^Throughout the dissertation all student writing is reproduced
as it was submitted except for misspellings and omitted words.
drums in my stomach and the thumping of my head. If I win, no matter if I'm hurt or injured, I feel super, because I have accomplished my job, but when I lose, even if I'm not injured physically, my mind is torn up by the loss.

And the irresponsible crowd brings the cheerleader close to despair:

It is really a weird feeling when I stand in front of that crowd at a football game. I consider myself an important part of the game. My job is to cheer for our team. Most of the time I feel like a moving stick in front of a mirror. Tears come to my eyes as I see the small figures in the stands become dead objects. My heart seems to open a refrigerator door and step inside. It loses all touch with reality. Sometimes I can't bear it and I will scream at the top of my lungs. My heart seems to relieve itself and calm down for a moment. But that feeling appears again and again, until I can't stand it. Out on the field we are losing the game because the dead objects in the stands will not move. Their bodies seem to sink to the ground, and it feels as if there is nobody in the stands. My body aches from the exhaustion of flips, handsprings, toe jumps, yelling, and cartwheels. Every pound of energy leaves my very own body. The tears seem to appear again. I can't find a way to express my feelings. I don't know whether to quit, scream out, or let the tears flow down my wet face. Finally the end comes and it feels as if the world has come to a stop. I realize that my job is over, and I still can't get those dead people to come alive. I am still depressed when I go home.

Many of the teenagers in the group (eight of the twenty-four students) wrote compositions which centered around their hostility for the authority figures in the school or their parents:

I'm just a number in _____ office file, a faceless record. I've been used! I've been used 2 times by the things but they are different and they are the same. They both withhold people (from themselves) but on different scales. The society kills creativity of a whole country, many generations and possibly a world. The administration kills creativity of students and teachers. . . .
It's hard to believe I'm a part of my parents. There seems to be a transparent barrier between us in which we can see each other but never really understand why we are the way we are. My parents and I could sit down together and talk, but we don't listen to what each other's saying. To me, they're too old to understand my problems. But, to them, I'm too young to know what things are all about. I won't be around the house too much longer.

The juvenile court heard my case of my father's brutality and had him put out of our house. . . . I am indeed free, I guess. Like a kid on the wrong stuff, I have flashbacks. In the midst of happiness on a golden day, I see a big man coming with a long stick and hitting me. I can feel the pain, and then I'm numb. But the hitting goes on and on.

And, as many studies have shown, the teenager, beset with a changing role and the psychological conflicts implicit in that drastic change, may even explore the idea of suicide as a solution to his problems. This composition written by a male student indicates the loneliness, the lack of direction, and the intense hopelessness experienced at one time or another by most adolescents.

I feel like the dark, dreary day it is outside. The girl I sat next to at lunch told me she felt sick, and I know exactly what she felt because I feel the same way. I feel like a person who has given up living. In the past two days I have wished I did not have to go on living. I feel so sick but I know I must live. I feel as though the world has come to an end, and I'm the only one left. The other day I was going to my locker and went on the wrong floor and could not find my locker. I felt this was a sign telling me that I did not know where I was going in life or what I was going to do. I felt lost at that moment because I didn't know where I was. I've never been lost in the high school before, but why did I this day. I keep asking myself. Is it I don't know where I'm heading. . . . [his ellipsis marks].

Some questions to which late adolescents customarily seek answers are summed up in a query by a sixteen-year-old: "I can't really
make a decision on what I want because I've been taught what to want: go to school, get a good education, get a good job, get married, have kids, and then die. What's it going to mean?"

When an English teacher acknowledges that the students he teaches daily are facing problems as complex as the responses above would indicate, he realizes he can use those concerns as a place to initiate through literature a consideration of the problems that have always been a part of the human sphere. Many of the themes which Matthews explores in his novels closely parallel the adolescent concerns mirrored in the writing of the high school students: establishing and maintaining relationships with members of the opposite sex, relating to family members and peer groups, succeeding in school activities, rebelling against authority figures, and making vocational and personal decisions. The focus of Hanger Stout, Awake!, The Tale of Asa Bean, and Pictures of the Journey Back is on young people undergoing the preceding activities. Beyond the Bridge explores an adult man's desire to be reborn and although he is 44 chronologically, he is facing anew most of the challenges of late adolescence. As a minor theme The Charisma Campaigns explores the lack of communication between the protagonist and his son, a college student.

After an English teacher has selected a novel which he thinks will serve his students well, he must teach the skills involved in intelligent inquiry into the novel, for unless a student is equipped to
evaluate the novels he will presumably read throughout his life, independent of the high school teacher or college professor, he has not been educated. He will remain an intellectual cripple, dependent upon the judgments of others for his own opinions. Therefore, the English teacher's chief function as he teaches a novel is to provide the student with those tools so that he may distinguish what a novelist is saying by exploring the manner in which he says it.

There are several reasons for my selection of the novels of Jack Matthews as the subject of this dissertation. First, there has been practically no formal criticism of Matthews' novels; criticism has been limited to reviews. This allows me to exercise and develop my own critical skills with the knowledge that I am in primeval territory. It also places me in the situation of the typical reader who will not have access to criticism, who is forced to arrive at his conclusions as to the merit of a novel on the basis of his personal interpretative skills and reading experience. Second, Jack Matthews is a contemporary novelist: his first novel, *Hanger Stout Awake!*, was published in 1967 and his most recent and fifth novel, *Pictures of the Journey Back*, was published in 1973. The advent of the paperback book in mass quantities in the late fifties makes it highly unlikely that the contemporary reader will ever again rely on established novels as his chief source of reading material. Third, Jack Matthews is an Ohio writer, I am an Ohio resident; thus, I have been able to hold
several interviews with him. This special access to the subject gives a very personal dimension to the study, a dimension often not possible in studies which rely primarily upon the printed word. Fourth, during Winter Quarter of 1973 I had the opportunity to design and teach a five-week course entitled "The Novels of Jack Matthews" to freshmen and sophomore students at Urbana College; therefore, I was able to solicit student response to his novels for use in the dissertation.

Finally, Matthews' novels deal with themes and characters which are of current interest to the adolescent and the general reading public: the world of the insane, women's liberation, the loss of innocence, alienation in contemporary society, and conflict between youth and age. The major characters are characters whom we all know, who have a certain charm for a contemporary audience: the young innocent, the drop-out from the middle class society, the intellectual who is a misfit, the used car salesman, the man whose source of recognition is no longer available.

My intent is not to suggest that the novels of Jack Matthews be taught in every, or even in most, secondary schools or colleges. I intend to demonstrate a strategy for teaching that might be used to teach a novel from any time period by any author.
A Writer's Biography

When a potential reader selects a book from a library shelf or a rack at his local newsstand, he almost inevitably turns to the blurb on the bookjacket or on the back of the paperback to read the editor's comments about the writer and perhaps to see a picture of the writer. The blurb and the picture serve as communiques to the prospective reader who says to himself, "Ah, yes, I'll like this one," or "No, that's not for me," or "Maybe I'll like it, but I'm not sure." What is involved in this decision-making process that takes but a few minutes and determines, in part, whether or not a book makes the best seller list is basically a process of a reader's determining whether or not the book has any relevance to his life or his experience.

Henry James said in "The Art of Fiction" almost one hundred years ago (1884),

I am quite at a loss to imagine anything (at least in this matter of fiction) that people ought to like, or to dislike. Selection will be sure to take care of itself, for it has a constant motive behind it. That motive is simply experience. As people feel life, so they will feel the art that is most closely related to it. Nothing, of course, will ever take the place of the good old fashion of liking a work of art or not liking it: the most improved criticism will not abolish that primitive, that ultimate test. ¹

As a reader looks at a Jack Matthews novel he has purchased for a course or borrowed from the public library, he makes some decisions concerning himself and the book based on the plot summary provided by the editor, "... the intense story of a long trip from Wichita to eastern Colorado. J. Dan Swope, weathered veteran of the rodeo, has driven his pickup truck ... to bring Laurel Burch back home before her mother dies ... a young filmmaker";¹ the biographical data,"Professor of English at Ohio University ... married, the father of three children ... reading and collecting rare books";² and the strikingly handsome, amused face that appears in the photograph.

If the book is selected, then the careful and intellectually curious reader-student begins to want to know more about the author. The depersonalization that many contemporary American writers are exploring in their works calls for English teachers to not only explain it to students but also to find a practical way of combating it. Authors cannot be separated from their works without the reader losing something in the separation. Men and women, not automatons, conceive and bring into being the poem, the novel, the sculpture.


²Ibid.
The New Critics with their emphasis on formalistic approaches to criticism have had their performance on the literary scene and must now make way for some of the older approaches to criticism. But we as English teachers must admit that we have learned much from the New Critics: we are better readers. We interpret the literary work much more cautiously now when studying the life of an author as a means of understanding his art. We have learned from Kenneth Burke's essay, "The Poetic Process," that

... it is inevitable that all initial feelings undergo some transformation when being converted into the mechanism of art. ... Art is a translation, and every translation is a compromise (although, be it noted, a compromise which may have new virtues of its own, virtues not part of the original). The mechanism invented to reproduce the original mood of the artist in turn develops independent requirements. A certain theme of itself calls up a countertheme; a certain significant moment must be prepared for. The artist will add some new detail of execution because other details of his mechanism have created the need for it; hence while the original emotion is still in ferment, the artist is concerned with impersonal mechanical processes.¹

Therefore, even if a theme, a character, an incident, or a setting does come from the author's experiences, by the time that element is altered by the demands of art, it has been removed from the real world to a fictional world. Recognition of this phenomenon helps the critic avoid the intentional fallacy in making his interpretation of the work.

Certain standard reference works for securing biographical data on American authors - Dictionary of American Biography, Concise Dictionary of American Biography, A Bibliography of American Autobiographies, Guide to American Biography, Appleton's Cyclopaedia of American Biography, and The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography - are available to the student of American literature should he seek to write a biographical criticism of a writer's work. However, oftentimes contemporary authors, such as Jack Matthews, or authors with few publications are not included in these biographies, and if they are included, the information is limited.

For the biographical information on Jack Matthews I used two sources: interviews with the author himself and interviews with his mother, Mrs. Lulu Grover Matthews. Mrs. Matthews provided information in the form of letters written to Matthews by his father during World War II, pictures drawn by Matthews during his childhood and early adulthood, and very early accounts of Matthews' successes in print. As I interviewed Matthews, I was concerned with asking him the kinds of questions that assist students in realizing that art does not exist in a vacuum. In literature classes students should be asked to consider the following kinds of questions: How does an author's geographic location relate to his work? What part do parents and other relatives play in his development? Is educational background important? Why and how? How does the reading a writer does, as
well as his exposure to other art forms, influence his craft?

As Matthews himself cautions, "You know when you look back, you create all kinds of fictions about what you were when you were young."¹ And in a moment of reverie two weeks later he says,

My father studied law under a country judge. He was born and reared on a farm, and his father Sam Matthews was a carpenter and a farmer and had a feed store at one time. One of the great poems I've never been able to write is one which I can remember: my father picking me up and putting me inside the feed store, the loading dock, and seeing all of this chaff from the wheat, floating in the sunlight, and these big beams of light. I remember this marvelous feeling - the sunlight in the feedstore, and this security of having two fathers there, the deep and pungent smells of feed and the rats rustling in the dusty corners. And I've tried to write a poem about this, but I really don't have the poem -- I just haven't mastered it yet. I can't write that poem, but I suppose it's waiting there to be written.²

A more pragmatic Matthews avows in a journal article entitled "The Writer's Search," "... those of us who write live variously fragmented, humble, plodding existences..."³ Among the fictions lie the non-fictions and the biographer must search for these.

Jack Matthews, author, critic, professor of creative writing, was born John Harold Matthews, July 22, 1925, in Columbus, Ohio.

¹Interview with Jack Matthews, Ohio University, Athens, Ohio, 2 May 1972.

²Interview with Jack Matthews, Ohio University, Athens, Ohio, 19 May 1972.

He was the second child and the only son of John Harold Matthews, an attorney, and Lulu Grover Matthews, a one-time country school teacher. His early interest in literature began showing itself not through the conventional reading that many children do, but through oral story telling. In the Columbus suburb of Clintonville, he frequently sat on the street curbs on summer evenings with the smell of tar from the freshly coated streets permeating the air and told stories to the children of the neighborhood. As a mature writer, Matthews analyzes his childhood interest in narration in this way: "I think children have enormous mythic instincts. Everything they do has a kind of mythic quality because they can't see beyond it. Yet they [children] look strange to us: they live in a very strange and warped world in which time is and Sunday afternoon is infinite." The stories which Matthews told his childhood friends were often of the supernatural; and he asserts that adults overadjust in their accommodation to the world and lose the sense of the mysterious, the spiritual, which is in the most commonplace. This affinity for story telling, the mythopoeic instinct, later found a vehicle for expression through his writing.

From his father, Jack Matthews developed his appreciation for and facility with language. John Matthews was an attorney who studied

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1 Interview with Matthews, 2 May 1972.
law under Henry Cherington, a country judge. Matthews makes artistic use of his father's profession in his short story, "The Sea Wall."
The author moves into the mind of the protagonist, a young man who has just returned from the army: "At times he was careful to build up indictments against his mother and father in his mind so that if someone should come up to him and say 'Why all this resentment?' he would be able to itemize their sins to him, to recite them in a firm voice like a prosecuting attorney."¹ John Matthews kept an unabridged Webster's Dictionary in the home and used it frequently. His interest in words and his concern with the particular word, the precise word, appealed to the young Matthews. A tradition of good fathering is important in the Matthews family, and John Matthews' devotion to his son was largely responsible for Jack's interest in language. Matthews maintains that he first realized he was identified by his facility with language during a meeting of a high school social club. There was a heated discussion at the meeting and someone said, "Well, I think that is immaterial, as Matthews would say."²

In addition to his interest in the legal aspects of language, John Matthews was also intrigued by its artistic, fictional uses. He wrote


²Interview with Matthews, 2 May 1972.
temperance poems and prior to his move to Columbus from Gallia County in 1925, he had several poems published in the Gallia Times. He also wrote short stories, essays, and sermons and was writing a novel entitled The Voice of the Hills at the time of his death in 1947.

This concern with the potential of language and the fascination with the printed word (Jack Matthews is a rare book collector and according to Mrs. Lulu Matthews, "When John and I were married, the first thing John wanted was a library. He bought glass-fronted, sectional bookcases, and as soon as the cases were filled, he'd buy more.")\footnote{Mrs. Lulu Grover Matthews, interview at her home in Columbus, Ohio, 15 June 1972.} were a most important part of John Matthews' legacy to his son.

Lulu Grover Matthews was a literate woman who attended college but did not read a great deal. A shrewd woman with a fine sense of humor, Mrs. Matthews referred to herself in her later years as "kind of prudish."\footnote{Ibid.} In speaking of The Tale of Asa Bean, she said, "I don't care for all this intimacy that he [Jack Matthews] writes about. I don't like his last book. There's too much gutter stuff in it. I told him, 'Jack, I want you to write a good book. I know you can. I know what you're doing in those books. You're hunting for the real person. You're trying to get these scums of the earth' - that's what I call them
'cause we never used stuff like that in the home - 'you're trying to bring out that they are real, down-to-earth people but I guess they need help or something.'" 1

In spite of her disapproval of some of the characters which Matthews creates in his novels, Mrs. Matthews, as a former school teacher, was highly supportive of his artistic achievements throughout his childhood. Until her death in January of 1976 her home was a storehouse of Matthews memorabilia: drawings, oil paintings, letters, newspaper clippings, and the like. She reported that he loved music, played the trumpet at North High School in Columbus, and delighted her by identifying operas as he listened to the radio on Saturday mornings. Mrs. Matthews recalled Jack Matthews' first drawing at the age of "four or five." 2 It was a surprisingly accurate, one-dimensional sketch of a Seth Thomas chiming clock and two ornamental vases on the mantel in their home. Matthews' mother reported that his art talents were so outstanding - he was offered an art scholarship to the Columbus School of Art and Design the year he was graduated from high school - that Miss Abernathy, an art teacher, said to her, "I want you to encourage Jack with his art. You know we may

1Ibid.

2Ibid.
have another Grant Wood in him.¹

This fascination with art, with the arrangement of scene and details, was to serve Matthews later in his writing career. In his work visual imagery predominates:

After the breakfast rush, I walked down the street and crossed it by the Texaco station, where a gasoline truck was filling the pumps. Like some cumbersome female beast giving suck, its tubes screwed tight to the valves of the storage pumps, and waves of fumes wiggling like ghosts of gelatin the air above.²

In commenting on the effect of his early interest in art, Matthews says that one of the things he must do as he selects words for a story is to visualize a scene. Training in art develops the eye for the telling detail, the configuration of things. He believes that a particular scene in a story, for example, the scene of a woman lying cruciform, drunk, on her bed with her arm thrust over the side of the bed, is an illustration of the artist slowing the camera, desiring that the reader should see the scene and interpret the metaphor.

Taking with him this interest in language, music, and art, Matthews enlisted in the United States Coast Guard following his graduation from high school in 1943. He was assigned to a 125-foot cutter, The McClain, as part of an antisubmarine patrol out of Alaska. He wrote

¹Ibid.

only a few lyric stories during his two-year stint and read little. One of the novels that he did read was an Armed Forces Edition of Jack London's *The Sea Wolf* which he says was a marvelous thing to read in that time and place with the ocean whipping against the cutter. He also read H. L. Mencken's *Happy Days* while aboard ship, and he had several cartoons published in military magazines.

The humor and interest in common characters which readers find in his novels are demonstrated in the following incident which he recalls from his Coast Guard days in Alaska. He was playing a Baccaloni record from *The Barber of Seville* which was interrupting "Rum and Coca Cola" by the Andrews Sisters being played in an adjoining Quonset hut. At the conclusion of the Baccaloni piece, Matthews began to play a recording of the apotheosis scene from *Faust*. A chief and several men were playing poker at a table in the hut. The chief, who had a cigarette hanging out of the corner of his mouth and one eye closed, leaned back in his chair, shook his head, and said, "Dat's beeyoutiful!"1

When Matthews was released from the Coast Guard in August of 1945, he attempted to make artistic use of his experiences in the service. He wrote several stories, none of which was published, and some poems about the sea, one of which won the Vanderwater Prize at The Ohio State University.

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1Interview with Matthews, 19 May 1972.
In September of 1945, Matthews began his undergraduate college work at The Ohio State University. He told his veterans' advisor that he was interested in philosophy, but the advisor told him that there were no job openings for philosophers. Matthews decided on majors in classical Greek and English literature and was shocked to find that at the end of four years of study, he was no more employable than he would have been had he pursued the major in philosophy. By the time of his graduation from Ohio State in 1949, he was married and had one daughter, so in 1950 he took a position as clerk in the United States Post Office in Columbus which he held for the next nine years. Prior to this position, he had held a variety of jobs: produce worker at a Big Bear warehouse (Asa Bean), Fuller Brush salesman, private detective, and piano salesman. By the time he began working in the post office, he was committed to writing, although he was not publishing except in an insignificant magazine called Scimitar And Song. He spent afternoons and evenings at the post office, which left the morning free for writing. He worked on short stories almost exclusively and began publishing about one a year in literary quarterlies beginning with "The Lieutenant," published by Envoy, an Irish review of literature and art. Between the years of 1952 and 1954, he enrolled part-time in the master's program in English at Ohio State and was awarded the M.A. in English literature in 1954. He continued with writing and working in the post office until the spring of 1959 when he added
another activity - college teaching. He taught an introductory literature course at what was then Urbana Junior College at Urbana, Ohio. He enjoyed teaching, so he resigned from the post office and began teaching full-time at Urbana in the fall of 1959. By this time he had two more children, another daughter and a son.

At Urbana he learned much by teaching. He was forced to read for the classes he taught, he was forced to organize a given body of material, and he was disciplined by the experience. But within the experience was a great freedom: Urbana was in a state of transition, there were no established curricula or approaches, so he was free to experiment. Sometimes he taught general semantics as part of the freshman English curriculum or he taught formal logic. There were only thirty students enrolled in the college and Matthews found the experience "... interesting, kind of quixotic, and kind of wild -- it was an adventure." ¹

He had written a few poems while in college, Petrarchan sonnets which he called "literary exercises." While at Urbana he began writing poetry seriously and discovering his own form and his own subjects: the people in the houses on Urbana's Scioto Street;

¹Interview with Matthews, 2 May 1972.
I'm not depressed, as I walk along this street, by the age of these old houses; it's not their weight of years that bothers me. 1

the cheerleaders at the Urbana-Worthington football game:

Six girls in red skirts and sweaters, screaming by the field's pool table green for the ghostly crowds on the grandstand hill to print on silence their tumultuous will. 2

and his childhood;

One memory I have from childhood is this: a heavy man trudging in boots, ahead of me, a lantern bumping at his knee. 3

During his tenure at Urbana College, his acceptances from publishers expanded from the one-story-a-year of the fifties to many stories and poems a year in such publications as the New York Times, the New York Herald Tribune, Southwest Review, Discourse, and the New Republic.

The year 1964 celebrates the real beginning of Matthews' success as a writer. In that year Ohio University offered him a position


as professor of literature and creative writing which meant more time for writing: he had been the only English teacher at Urbana College; Charles Scribner's Sons published a collection of his short stories, Bitter Knowledge, in hard back and paperback; and the Ohioana Library Association awarded him the Ohioana Award for Fiction for Bitter Knowledge.

First, there had been the position at the post office which took fifty hours per week. Then, there was the position at a small college which had freed him from the inflexible schedule at the post office but still required large amounts of his time. Finally, the position at Ohio University where there was a demand for creative writing courses and where he had increased freedom to pursue his writing became available to him. The increased freedom for Matthews meant the beginning of a long series of literary successes: the publication of a volume of poetry, An Almanac for Twilight (1966); the publication of five novels, Hanger Stout, Awake! (1967), Beyond the Bridge (1970), The Tale of Asa Bean (1971), The Charisma Campaigns (1972), Pictures of the Journey Back (1973); and the publication of numerous stories, poems, and articles.

His publishing success was a means to even more freedom. He was invited in 1970 to become Distinguished Writer in Residence at Wichita State University for the 1970-71 academic year. Teaching responsibilities were limited to one day per week. That year was a
richly productive one, for he composed many short stories and began several novels. While at Wichita he delivered a paper entitled "Book Collecting and the Search for Reality" at a meeting of the Wichita State University Library Associates. The text of the paper, together with the humorous asides which Matthews used liberally throughout the presentation, were published by the Library Associates of Wichita State University in 1972.

Following his year at Wichita, Matthews returned to Ohio University and resumed his duties there as professor of literature and creative writing. Because of his reputation as a writer and teacher, he was invited by several textbook publishers to edit two college texts: The Writer's Signature: Ideas in Story and Essay (1972) and Archetypal Themes in the Modern Short Story (1973). In May of 1972 Matthews addressed the Sixth Annual Comparative Literature Conference at the University of Southern California; his subject was "Fiction As a Counter Life." In 1972 he received the O. Henry Award for Best American Short Stories for "On the Shore of Chad Creek."

A Guggenheim Fellowship for the 1974-75 academic year allowed Matthews to make a three-week trip to Norway where he researched an idea for a novel. During the remainder of the academic year he was free to work on his writing and complete a volume on investing in rare books, to be published during the winter of 1976 by Putnam. He also has a collection of short stories entitled Logical Persuasion and
**Others** which is scheduled to be published during the spring of 1977 by the North Carolina Press. A further recent accomplishment includes the appearance of "The Burial" in *The Best American Short Stories 1975.*

At the present time, in addition to his regular teaching assignments at Ohio University, Matthews is actively conducting workshops and readings throughout the United States. He lectured at the Writer's Conference at the University of Utah with Ann Stanford and George Garrett in the summer of 1972; in 1975 he lectured at the Indiana University Writer's Conference. He has also lectured at the Cape Cod Writer's Conference, The Utah Writer's Conference, and the Eastern Kentucky University Writer's Conference. He thinks that the readings and workshops are valuable to him as a writer, for he learns about what he is doing by being forced to talk about it. Further, he is reaching people with his work who would otherwise not be exposed to his craft. A third value of the readings and lectures, according to Matthews, is that the oral reading of a work of art is a valid realization of that art. A dimension of a story or poem is that it is, among many other things, a sequence of meaningful sounds. He, as artist, enjoys the established American custom of the visiting artist, lecturing about the country, bringing culture to the American people.
Mr. Matthews also is actively involved in writing. He has recently experimented with a genre that is new to him, Gothic fiction; he has explored the questionnaire as an art form; he has written a long essay on the Jesse Hill Ford case; he is working on a sixth novel entitled *Randall McCoy's Diary*; and he is continuing to tap his extra-ordinarily rich supply of materials in writing short stories.

Matthews thinks that the seventies is an inopportune time for the fiction writer. The cultural ideal in American society, he feels, is not to be wise or perceptive but to be well informed, hence the popularity of *Reader's Digest*. To be well informed is good and is needed in the contemporary world, he asserts, but as a cultural ideal it is lacking. He laments the fact that most people no longer go to fiction to have their lives clarified. He longs nostalgically for the thirties when magazines like *Cosmopolitan* published thirteen short stories and four novellas in a single issue, and the market for fiction was wide open. But even in the limited fiction market of the seventies, Matthews is enjoying a success which he certainly could not have anticipated when *Envoy* accepted his first short story in 1950.
A Writer's Aesthetic Theory

Many students manage to matriculate through required courses in literature on all academic levels having little or no idea regarding the genesis of a work of art. Those who are able to discuss a writer's approach to a creative piece often assume that the process has nothing whatever to do with them, with their lives; it is just something gifted talented artists do, something ordinary people do not and cannot do.

In a recent issue of *Psychology Today*, Howard Gardner and Ellen Winner reported that very young children offered the following kinds of explanations for the origination of art: "'All pictures are made at the factory,'" or "'stories have always existed...'" or "'songs are 'made by God'...'" or "'paintings 'just begin...'" These children also felt that artistic creations came from the physical materials used by the artist: "'... a poem comes 'out of a pen...',' a painting comes '... from paper and paint...'"¹ Of the children surveyed, not one noted the integrity of a work of art, its uniqueness.

The authors found that adolescents were not as naive as the younger children in their conception of the origins of art; however, adolescents were unconcerned with the aesthetic issues involved in

meddling with or altering an artistic work. When these same adolescents, however, were asked to evaluate art, their responses were akin to the responses of very young children. They concluded that evaluations were relative, "... all a matter of taste." It is not unrealistic to expect that with a moderate amount of reflective thinking and discussing, students and their teacher might become more cognizant of the aesthetic development of a literary work.

During the final exam time of a course which I taught recently in creative writing at Urbana College, I asked my students to record for the class the origins of an individual selection they had composed or to write generally about the origins of the work they had produced during the preceding ten weeks. Although I made no attempt throughout the quarter to present a systematized, formal study of various theories of the genesis of art, I did, when the time seemed appropriate, discuss various writers' theories or contrast the way a student in the class had handled a theme or character with the way an established writer had treated a similar theme or character. We used the class sessions as a forum to present and discuss students' work. I, as a teacher, and, in turn, they, as students, were interested in inquiring into the sources and processes involved in the artistic process.

1Ibid., p. 42.
If a student seemed reluctant to discuss those sources and processes, the group respected his right to privacy.

The final papers revealed that the students had distinct ideas regarding the origins of their work and were able to articulate those ideas. Generally their theories contrasted sharply with E. M. Forster's. Forster asserts that in the creative act

... a man is taken out of himself. He lets down as it were a bucket into his subconscious and draws up something which is normally beyond his reach. He mixes this thing with his normal experiences, and out of the mixture he makes a work of art. ... And when the process is over, when the picture or symphony or lyric or novel (or whatever it is) is complete, the artist, looking back on it, will wonder how on earth he did it. And indeed he did not do it on earth. ¹

Forster's esoteric theory contrasts with Fielding's view that Genius, Humanity, Learning, Experience and more are essential to the arduous task of writing. No student stated that he required Fielding's Famous Five ingredients, neither did any student state that he left a piece of his flesh in the ink-pot each time he dipped his pen (Tolstoy); however, these students were not writing for fame or bread. They were not tortured souls, but instead products of a liberal arts tradition that promotes a belief that one's own humanity is enhanced through sensitive exploration of the humanity of those characters and situations which surround him, both real and imagined.

In describing the aesthetic process, a sophomore social rehabilitation major at Urbana College prefers to depict his room, the physical environment in which he produces his manuscripts:

there is a bottle of GREEN KOOL-AID
in the refrigerator, the television shines under
a cross-eyed red light bulb, talking to
the walls,
somethin' 'bout
"mary hartman, MARY HARTMAN!"
the curtains are silent photographs
the stairs steep and narrow.
it is late at night and the roaches are playing in the bathtub.
telekineses
in my bedroom wrapped in a blanket
on the floor
ears full of kinky reggae
the moon filters through the walls
i wear no underclothes in this room and my shoes I do always remove
nocturnal tears nourish the plants as they yearn to go home
to the mother LAND
i am hurt because I had thought for sure they liked it here.
i think i will set them free.

The poem reveals the physical room of a young college student, but even more it reveals his poetic imagination. In his refrigerator he has a bottle of what is generally considered a child's drink, Kool-Aid, but is also known to those of meager finances as a not totally unacceptable adult's drink. This symbolic green beverage is the magic drink which will loosen the tongue so that the poet's words may flow freely. The television is playing, but it seems only to be a maternal heartbeat, assuring the fetus that all is well. The
patterns of the folds of the curtains suggest photographs, ideas, and impressions. The stairs to the abode of the writer are "steep and narrow," indicating effort is involved in reaching the creative place. Night, the traditional time for the muse to appear, is mentioned several times as the writer sits unencumbered by restrictive undergarments (literary conventions), in bare feet (he treads on holy ground), and nourishes his ideas (the plants), which he must set free.

A more prosaic approach is used by another student who details what she has discovered concerning the creative process. Her discovery was late in coming (the tenth week of the quarter), yet the piece she discusses entitled "The Homecoming" was an outstanding effort.

You asked us to sit down and write about the creative process. Several people in the class obviously have writing talent and can produce one piece after another with quality results. I look around at the outstanding people in the class and ask myself what makes them tick. What excites their imagination and incites the creative energies to flow.

Sandy stands out in my mind. You mentioned her ability to create through literary allusions. She often mimics styles, themes, motifs, etc. Her ideas are usually not spontaneous but are developed carefully within her over a period of time. Like her ideas the actual work does not come about quickly. She writes, rewrites, works, reworks, and changes and grows with her materials.

I admire her willingness to change and improve something she has completed. Spontaneous writers will usually never do this. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . For myself, I like to get some of my ideas from personal experience, but lately I've really enjoyed taking ideas from the
newspapers. My better selections are usually those that incorporate ideas divorced from my personal experience. I can be more objective in choosing attitude and mood, and it is easier for me to be more objective with the actual story line.

While reading the newspaper I will catch an idea that allows my mind to transcend the written fact. I will daydream of an alternate outcome, or I will fill in details or change the mood or give it an emotional quality that does not exist in the story as is.

This is hard to explain. Let's take an example. I wrote my interior monologue "The Homecoming" from an idea that I pulled from The New York Times. The article was about adopted children who suddenly become aware of their situation and have a natural desire to locate their original blood. Psychologists suggest that it is not always a good idea to attempt to locate natural parents but when these children become adults, they should have the right to know even if they'll be disappointed or hurt by the outcome. With this idea I built a monologue around a determined teenager, incorporating her into a theme of alienation with a mood of disgust and a feeling of rejection.

I liked the idea and so I wanted to do the best job possible. After I had written it the first time, I went back and changed the verb tense of the whole piece. I made it more direct; I added some emotional lines. It took two days to write and rework and reword. It was not hard, but it was sometimes frustrating.

This student has learned the value of objectivity in writing, the absolute necessity for objectivity. With the distance she achieves through taking her ideas from non-personal sources (Henry James achieved this distance, in part, through the use of third-person reflector), she is able to examine more critically those elements of her writing which work together to produce a unified work. She need not be faithful to any plot as it occurred in actuality; she need not fret if
she maligns a character. She has freed herself to create.

A different focus was reached by a young black student:

I sit and think of the world and how it would be if it were good. . . . I try to create a world that is open, free, and ready for change. I like free style writing because then I can be as open as the world and my mind is free to roam from one experience to another.

He perceives the role of literature to be, in part, a vehicle for social reform. During the quarter's work, he often explored philosophic issues which many black families are currently examining.

A biology major sees the role of the artist as fabricator but within the facile fabrication is a view of a glum world:

What has happened?
But my life's a bore!
Let me remember the time . . .
An unsightly deformed
place of wretchedness
Exaggerate a little
Twist a few facts
Might even make it mean something
It didn't then!
And if I can't recall
Because I'm trying to
I go to the bathroom:
After all,
One of my best pieces
Came to me
When I flushed the toilet.
Yeah, it was negative,
But what do you expect?
I write no happy stories
On rainy, gray days.
And usually not on sunny ones
Either.
But don't get me wrong,
I have my share of happiness,
It's just that it's like my work study check -
Doesn't come often enough,
So naturally my ideas aren't bubbling over
with smiley faces.

A young black woman finds herself:

Staring out the window
Suddenly electrical shocks
Surround my brain bringing
forth an idea.

My eyes open wide
I search for pencil and paper,
My only material needs

Words appear desperately
Visions race across my mind.
My heart beats in rhythm with
The speed of my writing

My room soon becomes the scene
No longer am I Connie,
Instead two different characters.

I become the idea or story
I am the characters
I have directed, acted, written
and been my idea.

Now, back into Connie - LOOKING

She presents an almost mystical version of the process: the pen
writes automatically, her room becomes the setting of the story, she
becomes the characters. Following the release of the trapped idea,
she becomes the objective evaluator.

The following two students approximate the mechanical nature
of a Trollope as they describe their process. One, a physical edu-
cation major, writes,"As a coach chooses his first and second teams,
I, too, choose my players." The other explains in the following fashion:

Time to lock myself up and shut out the world. Now if I can only get my mind to do the same. I set up my working arrangements, so I won't have to be wandering all over. Finally, ready, I sit back on my bed with a blank sheet of paper staring at me... It's time for some discipline.

I finally must cage my mind into reflection on some limited subjects that will hopefully help me create some masterful work of art.

A young man sees all of experience, both the positive and the negative, as worthy subjects for poetry:

Poetry is the vending machine over in the CCC when it has eaten your third quarter, and still not given you a coke.
It is the bookstore in Oak Hall on the first day of classes.
It is the knocking sound of woodpeckers in the trees by the library.
Poetry is the archway between Barclay and Bailey on an autumn night.
It is a Monday afternoon in "The Hub" on a rainy day at about one o'clock.

Poetry is a student checking his mailbox and finding it empty for the fifth straight day.
It is spending a last Friday in the Knight Club with friends with whom you've gone to school for three years.
It is now having to say goodbye to them.
It is the enthusiasm being shown every day by a young man in class as he reads his thoughts and emotions.
Poetry is the love being expressed through a story spoken gently and carefully in class by a young woman who feels satisfied within when she is finished.
All the above are fragments written by students who have just begun to explore creative writing, but this final statement is a rather comprehensive one, written by a young woman who writes extremely well and is very concerned with process.

I live in a flat world 97% of my day. I know its 'necessities,' 'habits,' and 'accepteds' well. The other 3%, irregular, but insistent, comes to me suddenly. And with this momentary new 'vision,' I can see or, at least sense, beyond the flatness. What I see is still to be defined. I interpret each glimpse differently.

Some would call this momentary glimpse 'inspiration.' The word is too shallow. What I see/sense is a reality I am not able to grasp. My powerlessness is frustrating, especially when I realize I may never grasp it or, if I do, I may not be able to communicate my find. To communicate is to be able to transform this insight into an understandable, tangible form for personal satisfaction, and to release the mounting frustration.

For a moment, I live with a vision. That moment's tease defines inspiration. I want to utilize the inspiration, but my goal is to identify the reality, not glimpse it. I want to use every ability I have to sustain and examine that vision.

Exercise inspiration. Examine it from all perspectives, through observations and sensations created by the flat and unflat worlds, but don't call it the finished product. A glimpse is revealing, but it is not the total reality.

Many writers would disagree with my use or definition of 'inspiration.' To be unable to return and use the insight makes it more legitimate, more pure, to some artists. They believe to recapture or clarify the vision is bastardizing their art. The vision, somehow, loses its magic, and the writer receives only an echo of his/her previous wonder with examination. Not only is my curiosity triggered by this glimpse, but it also evokes a certain amount of fear of failure and success. What could I find? What might it cost to continue looking out the window?

Throughout this course, I've observed as well as heard my fellow writers. In many of them I've seen displayed the two essential qualities of a writer: to be a reader and an observer.
I firmly believe to be a good writer you must read and read critically. The writer must be able to analyze what, in literature, he/she likes or dislikes. To read improves vocabulary, it triggers ideas, it sets guidelines in studying a particular style, and it can instill confidence. And too, if every self-called writer or poet would read/buy self-produced books, poets, young and old, would not die of starvation or lack of support.

Aside from reading, a writer must be a sensitive observer. The best and worst writings I've encountered (including my own) have been based on personal experience, including background, and observations. The successful personal writings dealt with familiar themes but from an objective viewpoint. They utilized a sensitive eye for small detail. Those unsuccessful writings were either too subjective or the writer hadn't the experience or patience to write.

Originality is a strong word in writing. Ability, style, and perspective may be original, but it's difficult to capture an authentic 'truth' without being influenced by people, literature, environment, situation, the weather, age, etc. Any writer who doesn't make use of such influences (in fear of being called a fraud) is doing him/herself a grave injustice.

The following is a brief outline of the procedure I follow when writing:

I. become inspired -- read/observe

A. READ
   1) check literary allusions
   2) check other writer's word control, style, etc.

B. OBSERVE
   1) draw from experience
   2) analyze people around (appearance, routines, abilities, etc.)
   3) piece people together to make a new character (a physical model can help in developing a character's personality or situation)
II. write down the initial idea/feeling --
don't try to pinpoint insight, but use an image or a few choice words to remind or trigger initial idea/feeling

III. allow idea/feeling to set in mind
think about it; move with it
no pressure to be spontaneous

IV. collect images
A. outline idea/feeling
   1) use specific images
B. use simple, active sentences

V. WRITE, WRITE, AND REWRITE

What is important with the students' responses to the assignment is that they are dealing with some very essential, artistic issues in ways that are significant for them.

After a student has explored his own creative process, he is ready to examine the professional writer's theories. The novelist's aesthetic theory provides a tool for exploring his work. The English teacher must raise questions such as the following: What does the novelist regard the function of the novel to be? How much responsibility does the novelist have for reproducing a scene or a character in lifelike detail? Should the novelist present a moral? Is the omniscient novel a relic? Is stream of consciousness an effective point of view for use by modern novelists? In what instances? How should a novelist manipulate or control time? Which is more important, plot or character?
A student may discover an artist's aesthetic theory by several methods. The author may write essays to present his esthetics to the reading public or to other novelists. He may, as did Henry James, compose elaborate prefaces to his novels which 'explain' his art. Or he may, as did Melville in The Confidence Man, devote chapters or sections within his novels to an exploration of his artistic theory. Finally, a novelist may have a character or characters within the novel give voice to the author's own esthete as does the character-writer in Hemingway's "The Snows of Kilimanjaro."

To understand an author's work is to have some sense of the literary premises out of which that artist works. A student of literature may examine the works themselves to determine if he can find consistent approaches to delineation of character, exploration of particular themes, a particular writing style, or a preponderance of work within one genre or sub genre. This approach is a legitimate one that involves careful research on the part of the reader or critic. Another approach is to refer to particular essays of criticism written by the author who is being examined. The student may then thoroughly examine the author's works to determine if the works themselves reflect the author's stated literary theories. A third approach is to question the writer concerning his literary aesthetic. The research in this section is a combination of the three approaches just cited.

Particular items that will be discussed are the role of the artist, the
function of literature, how the function of literature is realized, how the function of literature is not realized, and the role of the audience.

The artist's role is multi-dimensional from Jack Matthews' point of view: he functions variously as reader, as experimenter, as trickster, and as man of moral responsibility. Matthews believes stories are, in a sense, things that have happened to people who have become writers, and that one becomes a writer by writing stories. A writer is ". . . one of the people on whom nothing is lost," 1 but he is also a person who ". . . makes strange and telling connections between events." 2 He plays with experience building.

In his own classes in creative writing, Matthews often does the assignments that he gives to students. Frequently stories begin for him with the play involved in the making of hypotheses. He takes a given situation and seeks out the implications of it. Matthews asserts that this process becomes exciting for the writer. If he can see a whole from the parts, he is likely to have a story, which is the major concern from a writer's point of view.

When the writer toys with possible hypotheses, he is a trickster: he uses trickery to get a story started. Once a story begins, how it

1 James, "The Art of Fiction," p. 821.

2 Interview with Matthews, 2 May 1972.
began becomes unimportant. Matthews feels a story is either genuine when completed or not genuine, but "The most crummy kind of little word game trickery . . . might lead into the great poem of our age. . . ."  

The writer must be willing to engage in trickery, in experimentation. He must be an adventurer if he is to learn by discovery. A mysterious quality is present when the author makes an heuristic adventure into the world of fiction that is absent when stories are done perfunctorily. Matthews says of his penchant for experimentation:

I like to experiment when I write. I've done a couple of short stories in the form of questionnaires because one of my abiding ideas is that once you understand the signature of a person, this is the total complex of his encoding and decoding habits, you understand him. The whole way the world seems to administer fate is implicitness, the Sophoclean idea, you know, that man's character is his fate. And whether this is true literally or not, . . . is a moot point because you don't really know that much about anybody, including yourself. But still we do know that we conspire in incredibly subtle ways in working out our own fates.

His novels become an exploration of character, characters as diverse and as similar as Asa Bean, Hanger Stout, and Rex McCoy. And in each novel Matthews is intent on tracing the implications of the characters of each, of how that character determines his own fate. To detect the subtle as well as the obvious ways in which Matthews' characters assist in working out their fates is an important

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1Ibid.

2Ibid.
aspect of examining a Matthews novel. In exploring character, the writer is writing to clarify meanings for himself as well as to communicate:

I think one writes to clarify meanings for himself, but it isn't autistic. I mean you do it to communicate, too, but you do it primarily to articulate. This is why you write a story or a poem, because these things have to be made clear. They have to -- this is what the mind is for. After you do this, then it is only human to say, 'Look, this is something I did; this is a part of what it is to be me and I want to share this.'

As he articulates meaning, the artist must also be morally responsible. This moral obligation is exclusively to his craft, to the material or the story that is being written. Matthews says, "At the moment I'm writing, I'm not really concerned with readers at all and my sole obligation is that of articulation. The minute a writer begins to think of an audience when he is writing, he is concerned with rhetoric and not art." Matthews admits that he wants the audience to admire his work "But I don't want to please them. That's wrong headed I suppose. I suppose in a sense I do want to please them, but I don't take pains. I'm not conscious of modifying anything I do to suit a particular Edmund Wilson or somebody."

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1 Ibid.

2 Interview with Matthews, 19 May 1972.

3 Ibid.
In fulfilling his moral responsibility, "The writer is not striving to do something extra-human, but he is intent upon the essential human act of both rendering and recognizing the individual facts surrounding him as symbolic of some larger dimension of life." ¹ The writer creates a model in every poem or story, a model that does not lie about the world outside that model but brings to life that world beyond.

And as the artist creates that model, he somehow believes that what is true for him is also true for writers other than himself:

Needless to say, when I am speaking of 'the writer' I am speaking of myself, and as we believe our deepest personal convictions are somehow true of others, and as we create stories and poems with the conviction that we are participating in an elemental human act . . . so do I believe that these things [theories presented in an essay entitled "Literature is Living"] I have tried to express are true of writers other than myself. ²

Matthews sees literature as an art form, superior to music, painting, and the film. He acknowledges the power and importance of music and painting, but asserts they do not present a " . . . sustained


²Ibid., p. 162.
moving image of human life as do the narrative arts."¹ He defines 'narrative arts' as film and fiction and then asserts that in spite of the enormous advantages of the film - it is able to utilize both music and painting - there is ''. . . distortion or vapidness. . .'' caused by, for example, custom-made characters and pre-programmed timing. The film is ''. . . at most a factitious dream.'²

On the other hand, Matthews asserts, "For the past five hundred years the printed book has . . . led a counter life in tension against the quotidian immanences and confusions of 'real life.'"³ Fiction is superior to other arts, for in fiction, Matthews feels, the counter life is ''. . . most vividly presented, least obliged to refer to independently verifiable facts.'⁴

Literature or fiction serves to order and clarify life. This clarification is brought about through the writer's presenting the reader with examples of human behavior, human alternatives. Matthews

¹Jack Matthews, "Fiction As a Counter Life," paper read at the Sixth Comparative Literature Conference, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, 12 May 1972.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.
asseverates that "... deep unavoidable truth is that life does imitate art"; therefore, there is a certain legitimacy in looking to art for clarification.

Since art does imitate life, literature further serves, according to Matthews, as a means to seek out the implications of position. Each of us has a stance, an attitude toward his experience: and as the artist sees the theatrical in our lives, he transmits that into art. Through that art we are to explore the "what ifs" of the existence of others and by correspondence, our own "what ifs."

To explore these hypotheses, Matthews prefers the first-person point of view. He feels it is a natural act of the imagination for a writer to pretend to be another person. He enjoys the mimicry, the way of escape in assuming the role of someone else as he says, "What would it be like to be a used car dealer in a small town, to be despised by everyone as a crude, loud flamboyant bastard who is dishonest and bigoted?" or "What would it be like to be a non-verbal boy with an impossible snotty girl friend who is a tense overachiever in college?" The writer, he feels, is liberated by the hypotheses which he formulates. He engages vividly and vitally in an adventure by assuming or putting on a mask or a series of masks.

1Interview with Matthews, 2 May 1972.

2Interview with Matthews, 19 May 1972.
A philosophic thread that runs throughout the masks or characters which Matthews creates is the Sophoclean idea that a man's fate is determined by his character, that a character conspires, consciously or unconsciously, to make things happen. Within the Sophoclean idea is "... a beautiful and profound sense of human destiny because it implicates us in interesting and strange ways...." Matthews presents characters in the most intimate situations. They are known viscerally and neurally and are placed under the slide for microscopic examination.

This close examining reveals what Matthews sees as the essential innocence of characters as diverse as Hanger Stout and Rex McCoy: "I think we're all innocent. I think we develop incredible arsenals to cope with the world, to attack the world, to conceal us from ourselves and other people." To Matthews, to write deeply about a person is to somehow connect with this essential honesty. In searching for this honesty, the writer must realize that much of the experience of an event happens after the event itself as the experience sifts through the mind, accommodating itself to the contours of what we are at that moment: "This is the central, literal validity of existentialism, whose epistemological tenets show forth as truisms to the

1 Ibid.

2 Ibid.
As a setting for his characters to act out their fates, Matthews prefers a mythical town of twelve to fourteen thousand. He thinks that much can happen in a town of that size that cannot happen in a big city or in a very small town. In defending this premise, he refers to an essay by a British biologist, J. B. S. Holding, entitled "On Being the Right Size." Matthews extends the biological implications of that essay to social implications and finally to literary implications. In his settings Matthews is free to create characters who can explore his concept of territoriality, the virtually instinctive "... proprietary connection [that man has] with his home, his community, the land about him."²

To further explore some of Matthews' concepts of how the function of literature is realized requires examination of such literary terms as 'stereotypes,' 'metaphor,' 'symbol,' and 'irony' from his reference point. Matthews says that he likes to take stereotypes, clichés, and banalities, alter them a bit - "... turn the knob slightly and refocus them a little"³ - and discover what is interesting and vital

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²Ibid., p. 140.

³Interview with Matthews, 2 May 1972.
within them. He believes that within stereotypes or clichés is something very close to the "... common consciousness. ..." 1 Some stereotypical characters are almost archetypal figures, and a reader's and a writer's awareness of them opens lines of communication between author and audience. Other devices which Matthews feels are efficacious are the metaphor and the symbol. He avows that "The power of metaphor consists in its figure/background structure, compressing two contrarieties within the molding power of a single idea." 2 The force of the symbol is accomplished in much the same way by "... utilizing the unique power of a referent that is in itself undefinable, inaccessible to the mind, but presented by implication in the figure of the symbol." 3

Matthews acknowledges there are two kinds of writers "... a putter in and a taker out..." 4 and he asserts that he is a "putter in," an elaborator. He likes to take a story line and search out its implications, but he feels that as a writer he must guard against

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1 Ibid.

2 Matthews, "Fiction As a Counter Life."

3 Ibid.

4 Interview with Matthews, 19 May 1972.
elaborating too much. The story is implicit in the opening scene of his novels where characters are introduced and setting and tone are established, and the novel becomes an elaboration of that opening scene.

The function of literature is not realized in long novels; therefore, the writer must avoid undue length. Matthews feels that most modern novels are sadly over-written: "I can't think of any modern novels of great length that couldn't be vastly improved by cutting. There is something so right about a novel of 45 to 65 thousand words."¹

Neither is the function of literature realized when an author strives to be original. He states that there is an enormous cult of originality today. He finds originality to be "...sacred...", "...fine...", and "...essential..."² but only if it is honest. According to Matthews, "The writer who strives for originality is likely to end up with nothing more than novelty and a story that does not rise above mere novelty will be superseded immediately by the next novelty."³ Genuinely creative work has origins; one can often trace its influences:

Somebody makes a Grecian urn and a poet comes along and writes a poem about it. It carries the sacred germ and

¹Ibid.

²Ibid.

it will inspire countless people. I think this is true with certain archetypal motifs in literature that people want to celebrate again and again because there's something so vital, so real in them. ¹

Further factors that interfere with achieving in literary endeavors are repeating what one has done successfully, inbreeding intellectually, and allowing reality to interfere. Matthews asserts,

I think we are so success oriented that if we do something right we are so damned grateful . . . we drop to our knees and pray and thank God and keep on doing it again and again the rest of our lives. There's a kind of death in that, so you have to risk doing other things. ²

In "doing other things" the writer risks the possibility of readers saying that his talents have diminished, but such risks are a part of a writer's growth. A particular type of author who does not involve himself in risk taking, according to Matthews, is the bright, sensitive, young college student who writes stories about bright, sensitive, young college students. The familiar academic short stories produced by these writers use irony in a particular way, and it all adds up to a sterility.

When Matthews speaks of reality interfering with fiction making, he is referring to the occasions when a writer gets an idea for a story from a non-fiction source. Often the facts in the story will impinge

¹Interview with Matthews, 19 May 1972.

²Interview with Matthews, 2 May 1972.
on the writer's creative powers, insisting that they be represented accurately. The truth of a story, Matthews insists, comes from taking a person or character and freeing him of documentary reality and then giving him a fictional reality.

Matthews finds "... a lot of fiction happening now that is impoverished of both control and direction."¹ This control and direction is essential for presenting the depth of perception possible to the reader, the second eye that is required for "... balance, wisdom, and sanity."² Depth of perception is possible for the reader if he enters the art experience with a receptive mind and if he has selected a novel that is appropriate for him.

In Book Collecting and the Search for Reality Matthews says,

To read a novel by Anthony Trollope is to gain familiarity with a remarkable man and to understand through the words he wrote something of the world as he uniquely experienced and conceived it; it is to 'see things through his eyes' and to take on some of the shrewdness and wisdom that were the particular signature of this fascinating writer.³

¹Matthews, "Fiction As a Counter Life."
²Ibid.
As a rare book collector Matthews believes that to gain an even closer access to the world of Trollope, one must have his novel in the first edition, the physical book as Trollope knew it. "If," Matthews says, "in a short story I convey the madness of a world to you, your reception of my message establishes a sane connection between us, and this connect is lucid and real. It is also stable and referable in the symbol."¹ By "referable in the symbol" Matthews means there is a permanent text from which the discussion of the meaning in a story can ensue.

Some texts require a particular audience. Matthews reflects that the text of Asa Bean almost requires that a reader be an English major. He finds that there are many audiences, some of which he does not attempt to reach. Although he concedes that to the Eastern literary establishment "... Ohio is like the boondocks,"² he finds advantages in being from Ohio in spite of the fact that generally books are not read in midwestern culture. He feels that he is a much freer person as an artist and as a man because he is not lionized excessively. In the matter of according recognition to an artist, Matthews objects to an audience's reading a novel and then assigning grades to the

¹Matthews, "Fiction As a Counter Life."

²Interview with Matthews, 19 May 1972.
author. He says,

Dreiser is not to my particular taste, but if he were, I would collect his works uncompromisingly and pity those who did not. I would not, of course, have to grade him, coordinately assigning grades to all his contemporaries: I would merely have to believe that in his novels Theodore Dreiser said something important in a unique way, and that this particular message has not been, and could not be, duplicated by anyone else. It is this above all that we honor in a writer, not something accessible by means of that perniciously delusive attitude that would assign a grade of 97.3 to Hemingway, 98.1 to Faulkner, 98. to Henry James, etc.  

Matthews admits that he has written stories which he terms "crashing failures" and stories with which he is much less happy than others; therefore, he is frightened by the tendency among readers to say, "I tried to read him [Matthews] once and he wasn't any good."

The reader may interpret Matthews' objection to the very human practice of grading authors as a writer's defense against attack of his works or as a realization that with each creation, an author brings to the act a set of background experiences and abilities that make each work unique, distinctly him at a given point in his life. This basic fact cannot be changed: as there are myriad authors who produce artistic works, there are myriad audiences who may or may not be receptive to a given work at a particular moment in time.

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1 Matthews, Book Collecting and the Search for Reality, p. 5.

2 Interview with Matthews, 19 May 1972.

3 Ibid.
A Brief Characterization of the American Novel

To become educated as a student of the novel is, in part, to have an understanding of the evolution of the novel, to have a sense of the theory of the novel. High school and beginning college students cannot be expected to have comprehensive backgrounds in the novel, but English teachers should have some broad sense of the development of the English novel and a more particular sense of the evolution of the American novel to communicate to their students.

To parrot the theories of famous American novelists such as Hawthorne, James, and Hemingway is not significant. To understand how new works under consideration are a reflection of, or a refutation of, those theories is significant. Considerations of structure, narrative technique, characterization, dialogue, style, and point of view are all important to knowledge of the whole of literature. One ultimate goal in the study of literature is for the student to comprehend literature as a whole, to see that certain archetypal themes pervade literature, to realize that within these themes are common plots and characters, and to discern that an artist works within conventions which are established by the cultural milieu of which he is a part. As Northrop Frye has said, "... literature can derive its forms only from itself. ... People coming to Canada from, say, England in
1830 started writing in the conventions of English literature in 1830."¹ As students come to realize that artists work within established frameworks, they are ready to explore the nature of their responsibility as readers and interpreters of literature. Frye has defined this task:

The critics' function is to interpret every work of literature in the light of all the literature he knows, to keep constantly struggling to understand what literature as a whole is about. Literature as a whole is not an aggregate of exhibits with red and blue ribbons attached to them, like a cat show, but the range of articulate human imagination as it extends from the height of imaginative heaven to the depth of imaginative hell.²

To develop this perspective in students is what English teachers seek.

The student of the American novel comes first to an awareness of the works of Brockden Brown, an eighteenth century American novelist. He observes the awkward attempts at psychological analysis of character, the use of the Gothic mode, and the exploration of Calvinism. As he then reviews the nineteenth century American novel, he sees the same characteristics played out in contrasting fashion in authors as diverse as Melville and James. Although the externals are admittedly radically different, the sense of damnation, the Gothic, and the psychological probing are still key concepts. Throughout


²Ibid., p. 105.
many American novels are two additional elements: the overriding question that St. Jean de Crèvecoeur asked in 1782, "What then is the American, this new man?"¹ and the expressed hope for redemption, for a return to the original innocence and prosperity present in the Garden of Eden. As the student explores the nineteenth century, he discovers the idealism of Thoreau, Emerson, and Whitman contrasting with the cynicism of Melville, Hawthorne, and Twain. While the former speak of the natural goodness of man, the latter group is exploring the idea that "Evil is the nature of mankind."²

Beside the conflicting views of life explored by the American novelist is the concept of the conflicts within man as he struggles to cope with an outer, objective reality, composed of his physical self and societal forces which would dictate his behavior, and an inner, subjective reality of the self which sometimes seizes upon perceptions which are at odds with the outer reality. Novels such as Fennimore Cooper's Leatherstocking Tales emphasize the outer reality and thus present comprehensive portraits of characters as representatives of


²Nathaniel Hawthorne, "Young Goodman Brown" in Major Writers of America, p. 377.
American society at a given time. A novel such as The Sound and the Fury explores the inner reality of the children in the Compson Family and dramatizes the struggles of the characters' inner selves. Some novels such as The Winter of Our Discontent dramatize the battle of the two realities to gain dominance in a character's life.

This diversity, these contradictions, have always defined American literature but have been especially noted since the end of World War II. In discussing the state of the American novel since 1945, Marcus Klein asserts that it has been

... nihilistic, existential, apocalyptic, psychological; it has asserted the romantic self; it has recorded the loss of self; it has explored the possibilities of social accommodation, it has withdrawn from social considerations; it has been radical and conservative. In form it has been loosely picaresque, it has returned to its beginnings in myth, it has been contrived with a cunningness of technique virtually decadent, it has been purely self-reflexive and respondent to its own development. 1

At few times has there appeared to be a united American literary front. One of these times was the early twentieth century when literature was "... a cause ... that had a job to do. ..." 2 It was the writer's duty "... to save civilization, particularly by


2 Ibid., p. 10.
exposing the hypocritical and valueless pieties of modern civilization. "1 Another such time was the thirties when art was used as a weapon to fight the injustices of the society.

Pervading the whole of the American novel has been a romantic element. The word "romance" signifies

... besides the more obvious qualities of the picturesque and the heroic, an assumed freedom from the ordinary novelistic requirements of verisimilitude, development, and continuity; a tendency toward melodrama and idyl; a more or less formal abstractness and, on the other hand, a tendency to plunge into the underside of consciousness; a willingness to abandon moral questions or to ignore the spectacle of man in society, or to consider these things only indirectly or abstractly.2

Matthews' novels exhibit many of the general characteristics of the American novel which Klein and others have identified: the Edenic theme; the conflict within man between an outer, objective reality and an inner, subjective one; the tendency to plunge into the underside of consciousness; a probing of the psychological; an exploration of the possibility of social accommodation; the willingness to abandon moral questions; a loosely picaresque form; a return to the beginnings of story in myth; experimentation in technique; and an existential philosophic position.

1 Ibid., p. 11.

In Matthew's early novels, *Hanger Stout, Awake!* and *Beyond the Bridge*, the two protagonists actively seek a retreat from the confusion they find in their customary worlds. Rigolo's junkyard to which Hanger escapes is Edenic: it is described as "... quiet and cool...", "... kind of soft,"¹ and "... peaceful..." with "... bees buzzing..." and "... birds chirping in the long grass..."² Neil's flight is achieved through a mental divorce from reality, and his garden is constructed within his own mind where he returns to original innocence. That world is "... a horse you ride, laughing in the wind," "... something distant and inconceivably lovely," with "... mists that turn all colors into pastel shades."³

When Matthews' characters are not within their gardens, they are faced with a social world which demands decisions. Asa Bean best epitomizes a Matthews character who is torn between his personal view of the ironies of his existence and the reality upon which societal voices insist. He outwardly yields to the objective reality, that is, he makes social accommodations as do all of Matthews'


²Ibid., p. 121.

³Matthews, *Beyond the Bridge*, p. 144.
characters except Neil whose accommodations of the past have
driven him to his present madness, yet the last words of the novel,
"... eluding the vulgar entelechy of communication. A veil,"¹ 
indicate that he is not as content with his decision as his earlier
effusive comments might lead the unwary reader to believe.

In exploring characters such as Asa Bean, Matthews delves
into the underside of their consciousness as he explores their psy-
chological makeup. Asa's recorded thoughts are centered around
an obsession with sexual matters; Hanger has hallucinations in
which he sees a lighted casket on the ceiling in an upside down
world; Neil visualizes "... a filthy pale possum [who] noses in
garbage, looking for the gold in my teeth and the rings on my rott-
ting fingers. I am a poisonous corpse, and I glow in the dark";² 
and Rex McCoy has anxiety attacks during which everything becomes
"... real dark and kind of unreal." A salesclerk at a department
store looks to Rex as if she is "... wet, but on fire and standing
at the bottom of a deep well."³

¹Jack Matthews, The Tale of Asa Bean (New York: Harcourt

²Matthews, Beyond the Bridge, p. 151.

³Jack Matthews, The Charisma Campaigns (New York: Har-
Although the reader may make moral judgments concerning the thoughts and behavior of Matthews' characters, only in the first novel, *Hanger Stout, Awake!*, does Matthews seem to attack attitudes or actions of characters. Free from moral censure, his characters enact their fates in plots which are loosely picaresque. Each is involved in a journey of discovery in which Matthews uses archetypal figures and images to present a fundamental belief that all modern stories are retellings of older myths. The quest (*Pictures of the Journey Back*), the scapegoat (*Hanger Stout, Awake!*), escape from time (*Beyond the Bridge*), the trickster (*The Charisma Campaigns*), and taboo (*The Tale of Asa Bean*) are some of the archetypal patterns which he explores in his novels.

The picaresque plots are handled in a rather conventional manner with first-person narratives in *Hanger Stout, Awake!*; *Beyond the Bridge*, and *The Charisma Campaigns*. The experimentation with point of view begun in *The Tale of Asa Bean* and expanded in *Pictures of the Journey Back* is a vehicle for presentation of a philosophic stance, a stance iterated by the fictitious poet Karaji in *Hanger Stout, Awake!*: "I am alone."¹ This existential theme of man's alienation from self and others pervades Matthews' novels and is a common position of twentieth century American writers.

¹Matthews, *Hanger Stout Awake!*, p. 81.
Not only do Matthews' novels have a general relationship to the American novel, they also have some particular relationships to specific American novels as reflected in his characteristics as novelist versus the qualities of other twentieth century writers. In Matthews' concern with chronicling the lives of many residents of a particular area and their interrelationships, he is similar to Faulkner and his Yoknapatawpha County saga. In the descriptions of the thwarted lives of midwesterners, the influence of Sherwood Anderson's Winesburg grotesques may be seen. Except for the racial theme examined in The Charisma Campaigns, Matthews, as do most white twentieth century writers, writes of a white world uncomplicated by the presence of minorities. The colorful major and minor characters of Matthews' fictional worlds remind the reader of Twain's personae. In Matthews' understanding of the language and attitudes of youth he is akin to Salinger, Updike, and Knowles. Although he is more selective in his use of artistic details than was Sinclair Lewis, Matthews has the same flair for depicting the particular features which define a cultural milieu.

His Bellow-like realism and depiction of a twentieth century world where people meet, touch briefly, and go their separate ways is treated comically rather than tragically. For the twentieth century writer, tragedy implies that a universe has meaning, is
a place where individuals pursue significant action. For the modern writer, man becomes a comic figure performing absurd acts in a senseless universe. Herein lies the irony of Matthews as well as the humor, for as his entangled characters play their roles, the audience laughs, but oftentimes the laugh turns into a smirk as the hopelessness of the situation presents itself to the reader who acknowledges, if he is honest with himself, that he is or might be in a similar dilemma. The resultant ironic tone of his novels may also be observed in the works of Salinger, Roth, and Kesey.

To help students to see the similarities of the whole of American literature as well as the disparities within that whole is one of the responsibilities of the English teacher, and an author like Jack Matthews may be used to illustrate Frye's affirmation that writers work within conventions established by their culture. As a student studies A Farewell to Arms, he should be encouraged to seek relationships between that novel and other war pieces he has read; and if a student is reading Matthews' Beyond the Bridge, he may be encouraged to peruse Hawthorne's "Wakefield," Plath's The Bell Jar, Green's I Never Promised You a Rose Garden, or James's The Turn of the Screw to see how other writers have dealt with the themes of escape and insanity. Fragments need to be joined to other fragments as the student of literature moves toward perceiving relationships and the wholeness of literary experience.
The student has a right to reject the relatedness, but he also has the right to know that from the perspective of some, the relatedness does exist. One method by which English teachers assist students in making connections and in defining relations is by providing them with a set of interpretative tools. This set of tools must be portable, able to be taken to the college classroom, the local library, or the student's living room.

Last week a senior English major in the small private college where I teach said to me, "I've learned practically nothing about literature in my four years here. When we were discussing The Human Comedy [William Saroyan] in class the other day, I didn't see all that you saw. Academically, my four years here have been a waste."¹

As I talked with him I convinced him, at least I think I did, that his four years at Urbana College had certainly not been a waste, that he had much critical insight into literature, and that he merely lacked confidence.

But as I considered why he lacked confidence, I concluded that the problem in his literary education was the same problem that I had experienced in my own in the late fifties and early sixties. My esoteric literature professors had led me to believe that one comes to understand what a work means through some mystical process. Now

¹May 25, 1975.
there may very well be a good deal of mysticism, intuition, or what have you in the superior critic's coming to grips with a work; however, there are also basic approaches to criticism, critical tools, that we seem to hide from our students or reserve for the five-hour course entitled 'Literary Criticism.'

By some osmotic process we expect our students to become skilled readers of literature. Without special effort on our part, we expect the material taught in the literary criticism course to transfer to all literature courses. More often than not the osmosis fails to occur, and we send students out to teach who panic without a teacher's guide, a set of college notes, or a critical essay; and too often the storehouse of criticism, the college library, is not available to classroom teachers. Even when armed with notes and authorities' interpretations, these teachers are often unsuccessful because they cannot respond intelligently to the bright student's query, "Is it possible that . . . ?"

Further, many contemporary students are not so interested in reading Anderson, Hemingway, and Faulkner as they are in reading Vonnegut, Hesse, and Tolkien. And those teachers who have searched for comprehensive criticism of Breakfast of Champions realize that the search is as futile, at least in 1975, as was the quest for the Holy Grail.
To locate reviews of contemporary novels, students may be directed to indices such as the following: Book Review Digest, An Index to Book Reviews in the Humanities, Current Book Review Citations, and Book Review Index. They must be made aware, however, that the extensive explications available for more established works are not generally found in book reviews. Reviewers are working under time pressures which often force them to limit their commentary to a plot summary and one or two valuations concerning aspects of a writer's technique. Also, among reviewers there seems to be the tendency to follow the lead of the more established critics such as those who review for the New York Times; therefore, some critics, fearful of going against ensconced reviewers, merely reiterate already articulated views. Another problem seems to occur when contemporary authors review the works of their peers. Unqualified praise is often copiously bestowed, and the reader wonders if the reviewer is hoping that the favor will be returned.

Occasionally, however, the student will locate a review in which a critic, such as Jay L. Halio, believes that one of his responsibilities, when given several novels to review, is to develop a structure for his presentation. A theme, a definition, or an exploration of style may be used as a basis for comparing and contrasting several novels. The process of synthesizing which is required of the reviewer in this approach often means that interpretations will be more thoughtful and
comprehensive. Frequently the critic who assumes this type of responsibility is also familiar with other works by the authors under consideration and this gives an important dimension to the interpretation. In addition to recognizing the limits of the reviews of contemporary novels, students and teachers of literature should be aware that the last word has yet to be said on any and all literary works. The history of the criticism of a work such as Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* or Herman Melville's *Billy Budd* is convincing evidence of this basic phenomenon of literary interpretation.

As approaches to writing literature change, so do approaches to interpreting literature. Much of the criticism in American literature prior to the mid-1950s was limited to plot summaries and biographical comments on the author. What we need for the seventies are literature teachers on all levels who bring to their reading of literature the ability to apply varied critical approaches to new works as well as to older ones. We need teachers who themselves are literary detectives, excited by the quest, involved in the mysteries, patient with the process, and eager to share their knowledge and excitement with students.
Some Critical Methods of Interpretation

The tools involved in learning to interpret literature include the development of a vocabulary which is applied to particular critical approaches. Special vocabulary development gives specificity to our language whether we are a student of art and learn to use words such as 'ocherous,' 'blonde,' 'flaxen,' 'lemon,' 'saffron,' or 'ivory' for 'yellow' or whether we are students of literature and feel comfortable in using words such as 'motif,' 'archetype,' 'symbol,' and the like. The critical concepts and vocabulary an English teacher introduces to his students are not restricted to use in literature alone but are functional in film criticism, theatre criticism, and art criticism.

All of us are critics and have particular critical approaches which are used dominantly by us whether we acknowledge our responses as criticism per se or not. When a student listens to the Stones' "Sweet Sweet Connie" and begins to talk of Connie of Little Rock and rock groups associated with her, he is making a biographical criticism. When a person walks out of a theatre after having seen Robert Redford in The Great Gatsby and says, "That was a fraud, a rip off; nobody is that stupid," he is applying mimetic criticism to his experience. Somehow that film did not imitate reality for him. Students should be conscious of the processes they are using and the advantages and limitations of those processes.
The following are some critical approaches with which teachers of literature should be able to deal:

The **Appreciative Approach** is the point at which most readers begin to criticize and is the most elemental of all criticisms. This critic asks himself whether or not he liked the work. There is probably no way of ever escaping this approach, because initially all readers respond either verbally or silently with "Why did I waste my time on that novel?" or "That was a fine novel."

A problem arises with students who use this approach solely, because oftentimes they have a limited reading background and may not be in a position to make a valid judgment. When a student gives an appreciative response to a work, an instructor should solicit additional information by asking questions, thus leading the student into a more comprehensive analysis of the work.

The **Mimetic Approach** asks questions such as Does the work of art, that is, the novel, the poem, the play, the television show, the sculpture, the film, the painting, imitate reality? Does it reflect life as I the observer have experienced it? The beginning student of literature must be careful with condemnation of art if he is using this criterion and has not come to the point where he realizes that "Humanity is immense and reality has myriad forms. . . ."¹

The **Moral Approach** asks questions such as Does the work of art enrich my moral life by teaching me a previously unrecognized truth or does it reinforce a moral perception that I already endorse? Does it give guidance to my life? Is there a moral center that is obvious? Does it depict good as the victor in the struggle against evil? Is good identified by its endorsement of Christian virtues?

There are several dimensions to the problem of this approach to criticism. If Western or Christian values only are endorsed, what does this imply about the literature of Hesse that endorses Eastern values? Is that literature unacceptable to the didactic American critic? To the serious student of literature, the moral structure of Eastern literature presents no problem, for he has read sufficiently in world literature to know that Eastern versus Western values is probably not the important criterion in using a moral approach to literature. The well read student finds a moral issue in most literature, contrary to what Oscar Wilde maintained in his early period of literary productivity. The moral issue or question is Does that work of art endorse humanism, either explicitly or implicitly? If a novel or other art piece endorses activities that deny man dignity, deny man humanity, then for the moral critic, that work of art has failed. In "Literature is Living," Matthews writes: "As different as all of us are from one another, it is the faith of a writer that we all share deep and important
values and meanings in our lives.¹

The Ludic Approach asks the questions Does this work of art amuse me? Does it take me away from the problems of living that I must face? The person who endorses this approach as his chief approach to art is asking that art serve as an escape for him, and he generally responds only to very superficial melodramas or comedies without significant social statements. This is not to imply that humor cannot be used as a vehicle for presenting significant theses: a work may be humorous and still have import. Although Washington Irving’s avowed purpose was to wipe the care from the brows of his gentle readers, one finds very important statements in works like "Rip Van Winkle," "The Devil and Tom Walker," and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow."

Sherwood Anderson, with his prime approach of mimeticism, points out the problems of the ludic approach in his letter of August 27, 1938, to George Freitag:

It is true they [Anderson’s stories] were not nice little packages, wrapped and labeled in the O. Henry manner. They were obviously written by one who did not know the answers. They were simple little tales of happening, things observed and felt. They were not cowboys or daring wild game hunters. None of the people in the tales got lost in burning deserts or went seeking the North Pole.

¹Matthews, "Literature is Living," p. 161.

²Sherwood Anderson, "342: To George Freitag" in Major Writers of America, p. 975.
The reader who demands that art work solely to entertain him is also asking to be deceived. In "The Art of Fiction" Henry James also addresses the problem presented to those who would be ludic critics:

They would argue of course, that a novel ought to be 'good,' but they would interpret this term in a fashion of their own which indeed would vary considerably from one critic to another. One would say that being good means representing virtuous and aspiring characters, placed in prominent positions; another would say that it depends on a happy ending, on a distribution at the last of prizes, pensions, husbands, wives, babies, millions, appended paragraphs, and cheerful remarks.¹

The problem, then, with the ludic approach to criticism seems to be that it excludes from consideration so much that seems to be of value in the literary experience. With its focus on that which inspires, it renders impotent so much of what has been traditionally valued. All of our lives bear witness to the fact that the non-smiling aspects of life comprise a goodly percentage of one's total life; therefore, these aspects need to be recognized if one of the general aims of literature is acknowledged to be to treat man in his totality.

The Aesthetic Approach: Akin to the ludic approach, at least in its concern with absolutes, is the aesthetic approach which requires of a work that it be a manifestation of abstract beauty, of idealized form. The aesthetic critic acknowledges that human life is flawed; therefore, ¹

the artistic process should be man's attempt to overcome his imperfection through creating in art something that is superior to what he observes in nature. The aesthetic critic is concerned with the artist's attempt to present idealized beauty and form, and it is the critic's job to ascertain if the artist has achieved the goal.

Oscar Wilde promotes the aesthetic approach in his lyric poem "Hélas" and in his Preface to The Picture of Dorian Gray:

To drift with every passion till my soul
Is a stringed lute on which all winds can play, ¹

They are the elect to whom beautiful things
mean only Beauty.
There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral
book. Books are well written, or badly
written. That is all.

The moral life of man forms part of the subject
matter of the artist, but the morality of
art consists in the perfect use of an imperfect
medium. No artist desires to prove anything.

We can forgive a man for making a useful thing
as long as he does not admire it. The only excuse
for making a useless thing is that one admires it
intensely. ²


²Oscar Wilde, "Preface to The Picture of Dorian Gray," in Victorian Poetry and Poetics, stanza 1, lines 6, 7, 10, 23.
The antiutilitarianism of Wilde is, of course, in part, a reaction to the Victorianism that had dominated English literature during the nineteenth century. As far as many American artists and the general American reader are concerned, art should have utility. This is, in part, due to our Puritan heritage; and as the Puritan regard for utility has engaged our American men of letters, it has also engaged the general public. In most American literature, the art form has become a vehicle for social criticism, and this expectation is ingrained in the American literary tradition. Of all the approaches to art, the aesthetic approach is probably the most difficult for American high school and college students to understand, because it is so foreign to American thinking.

The Formalistic or Objective Approach: This approach attempts to strip the work of art of all external considerations and ask the question, How does the work of art function as a whole? Questions of the artist's background or the sociological-historical milieu from which the work came do not enter into a consideration of the work itself. The formalistic critic makes a close textual analysis of a piece of literature and from that analysis arrives at judgments about the work.

The chief problem of this approach is that it reduces the work of art to an object that has no relationship to a particular human personality. This makes the humanistic literary critic uncomfortable. The chief value of this approach is that it makes more careful
readers out of those who use it, and it is through the symbol of the word that we come to an understanding of a literary piece.

The Biographical Approach: In this approach the critic asks questions such as How does the artist's background work in terms of an interpretation of the art object or literary piece? Does the section of the country or world from which he comes play any part in what he presents and the manner in which he presents it? How does the critic's knowledge of the artist's education, his family background, and his childhood experiences increase the critic's understanding of the work? How do his psychological attitudes and his philosophy of the nature of man's experience relate to the work of art?

The chief problem with this approach is the tendency of the critic to assume that the narrator or persona of the literary renderings is always, in fact, the biographical author. This can lead to some false assumptions, and it invariably limits the range the artist had hoped to achieve.

The Historical-Sociological Approach: This approach places emphasis on the era, the historic events, the temper, the mores of a particular period and how the work that comes out of that period or is written about that period is an accurate or an inaccurate portrayal of the milieu. As the critic approaches this type of criticism, he must have a firm historic-sociologic sense of or feeling for the period, and must have a grasp of the liberal, the moderate, and the conservative
interpretations of that era.

A particular approach of some sociological-historical critics is to examine the influence of Darwinian theory in terms of the work of art. This critic asks himself how Darwin's theory of natural selection is operative in the work. He also pursues such questions as How has the environment modified human life? Why and how have individuals adapted? What particular qualities are needed for adaptation in the society that is being presented? Who endorses those qualities? Why? and Does the emergence and subsequent good health of a form validate its existence?

Another approach of the sociological-historical critic is the Marxist approach. This critic asks questions concerning Marx's economic philosophy. How and why does an industrial world produce alienation? How does the machine, although morally neutral, change human beings into 'things,' into machines? Why does man allow it to happen? Does he? How does the artistic work demonstrate man's failure to control the machine, to manage scientific-technological processes in the interests of the human species?

The Philosophical Approach attempts to discover relationships between ideas presented in a literary work and concepts proffered in traditional and modern philosophy. As the author engages his characters in conflict with other characters, he is making implicit comments about the assumptions those characters are making about themselves,
their values, and the world in which they live. To explore these assumptions is vital to a philosophic interpretation of a work.

With the contemporary observers concluding that modern man is filled with despair, a despair experienced because of a separation between himself and others and separation between himself and traditional values, it is important that students be able to label this condition in order to discuss it. It is also important for them to have a sense of the origins of existential philosophy.

The Genre Approach seeks to classify a literary work by identifying and exploring the characteristics which that work has in common with other works in the genre. A part of the criticism involved is also to point out its atypical aspects. A limitation to this approach occurs when students attempt very rigid classifications and fail to realize that definitions are almost always made after the development of a literary movement or genre.

The Psychological Approach explores and seeks to understand "... the processes of art, the unconscious intentions of artists, and the motives of fictitious characters."¹ Psychology has had a tremendous impact on the students of the seventies who are eager to try this approach once the English teacher demonstrates its use as a tool for exploring an artistic work. There is the danger of oversimplification in this approach, and students must realize that at best conclusions

¹Scott, p. 69.
are tentative. Also, some critics have objected to this approach in that they believe that the artist exercises more control than this approach to criticism would allow. Because of the high cultural interest in psychology, with this approach the English teacher is given an excellent opportunity to introduce students to the basic theories of late nineteenth and twentieth century psychologists.

The Mythological-Archetypal Approach seeks to explore the ramifications of the Edenic theme, the uses of the anthropological information recorded in works such as Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, and the evidences of the operation of Jungian theory in American literature. The wealth of information made available in this century, as well as the human interest in establishing connections between the past and the present, make this approach an especially challenging one for the contemporary student of literature.

The Linguistic Approach is a multifaceted mode of criticism in which the critic is concerned with semantics. He may focus on meanings of particular passages in a novel through an examination of linguistic signals and their meaning in a particular place at a given time. He is concerned with examining the relation between words as signs and the concepts that they denote. He may make inquiries "... about the nature of language as symbol, even as a type of symbolic action."
Is a literary work 'about' something, or is it a something itself?"1

An advantage of a linguistic approach is that it gives students the opportunity to see how words influence our choices, control our lives, and open or close our options. Students see how authors use their facility with language to communicate characters and themes to an unknown audience. This study is a way of developing appreciation for the dynamics of language, as the student becomes a more skillful reader in his discoveries.

The next five chapters in this study will be a demonstration of how an English teacher might explore some of the approaches identified in the preceding pages in teaching a contemporary novelist. A critic must be careful lest he seek "... novelties of interpretation"2 and "... 'interestingly' eccentric and surprising conceptions ..."3 and sacrifice an exploration of what most experienced readers would agree the theses to be. Also, the student critics must be assured that combinations of approaches are perfectly acceptable and often function to provide more complete insight into a work than does a


3 Ibid.
single approach. I have concentrated on the latter approach in the belief that students beginning to explore a particular field can manage simplified concept more easily than comprehensive ones. As a student's expertise increases, he is able to diversify his procedures.

Matthews has commented on the process of exploration in which English teachers and their students engage as readers and critics. He asserts that when a reader peruses a literary work, he is "... participating with the writer in forming an experience - collecting information about the characters and their plight, receiving cues concerning how the events of the story are to be viewed, how one is to feel about them."¹ This reading

... involves the staging of ever new contexts in the mind; contexts of one character mirroring another, or of one character standing in strong relief against the presence of another; contexts of various fictitious, historical, and mythological characters; and the infinitely various contexts of characters in a book somehow understood in terms of the life experience of even the most innocent reader, and then interpreted and assimilated into the understanding. This is learning. It is also experiential reading. And it cannot happen unless readers can look through, not at, the words that confront them on a page, and see the rich dramas that are waiting to be watched and participated in.²

¹Matthews, Archetypal Themes in the Modern Story, p. 4.

CHAPTER II

HANGER STOUT, AWAKE!

Professional Critics' Response to Hanger Stout, Awake!

From the professional critics' viewpoint, as well as the reading public's, Matthews best received novel thus far has been Hanger Stout, Awake! It has been the best selling of the five novels; and a Canadian film company, Guest Group, Limits, has purchased the film rights for this work which indicates something of its public appeal.

The novel is a first-person narration of several months in the life of Clyde "Hanger" Stout, a young service station attendant who discovers that he has a talent for free hanging. An alcoholic gambler arranges a match between Clyde and a hanger from Detroit; Clyde wins the contest, but does not gain the financial reward which he was promised. As the novel ends, Hanger sells his beloved car and leaves for military service.

Ernest Cady says of Hanger, "It is a measure of the author's craftsmanship that he makes the quiet crises of character involving
Hanger and the people of his little world important and significant. 1

Part of the success of this craftsmanship lies in what a *Time* reviewer refers to as "... a fine ear for adolescent patois..." 2

Another reviewer asserts that the story can be stamped "... as true" because it is "... poetry-and-not-poetry plus prose-and-not prose." 3 Glenda Todd alleges that the innocence and optimism which Hanger projects are communicated well by the spare prose. 4 Granville Hicks of *The Saturday Review* affirms the style to be "... as authentic as Holden Caulfield's in *The Catcher in the Rye* though much less colorful." 5

The novel has been interpreted in various ways: "... as a reminder of the absolute falsity of Leo Durocher's famous adage

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1 Ernest Cady, review of *Hanger Stout, Awake!*, by Jack Matthews, in *Columbus Dispatch*, 20 August 1967.


about nice guys finishing last";¹ as "... something of a literary atavism: a story about pure innocence that encounters pure evil and couldn't care less";² as "... an image of our own lost innocence";³ and as a portrait of "... a character certain to suffer defeat and disappointment throughout a barren and lonely existence."⁴

Jay L. Halio of the Southern Review asserts that Matthews presents in Hanger "... not so much a version of humankind who cannot stand much reality as humankind who has yet to discover reality." ⁵ He concludes that as the novel ends, "Hanger Stout has not awakened; he is still hanging, fairly dead to pain. But it is clear as he goes into the Army that if he does not soon awaken, he will be just dead."⁶

Evaluative responses indicate that Hanger Stout, Awake!
"... will be enjoyed by many and will give offense to none";⁷ that

¹Murray, review of Hanger Stout, Awake!, p. 191.
²Unsigned review of Hanger Stout, Awake!, Time, p. 90.
Hanger is "... the hero of one of the best novels of this or any other recent year";¹ and that in this "... unassuming but artful diversion", the author "... extends his tiny subject just as far as it will go, with the facility of a kindly Ring Lardner."² A Christian Science Monitor reviewer asserts that the "... originality and honesty of this story should have been put to larger purposes."³

David J. Gordon of the Yale Review concludes his commentary on the novel with the following statement, "But many an American writer has begun with a song of innocence and proceeded to more complex work. One may hope that Jack Matthews will find his own way of doing so."⁴ Matthews' second novel, Beyond the Bridge, might be considered a response to Gordon's challenge.

¹Cady, review of Hanger Stout, Awake!.


⁴Gordon, review of Hanger Stout, Awake!, p. 115.
Student's Response to *Hanger Stout, Awake!*

I taught a five-week course at Urbana College entitled "The Novels of Jack Matthews" during Winter Quarter of 1973. The course was a lower level literature elective and was populated by twenty-five students who were primarily freshmen. After a three-day introduction to the biography and literary theories of Jack Matthews, as well as to some basic terminology associated with the novel, I divided the class into four groups. Each group was assigned a different novel. Since Matthews' work is not available in paperback, this meant that each person bought only one novel and rotated it. The groups met one day a week, although I met a different group each day of the week. The assignment was simple: read the designated weekly novel; write a short paper on plot, character, point of view, or theme; and come to class prepared to discuss the reading and writing.

I found that there were several advantages to this method. The small groups encouraged individual responsibility for discussion - I deliberately placed students in groups in which I thought they would feel most secure and, therefore, most willing to communicate their ideas. Class attendance was uncanny, because it was so regular.

The short papers insured that the student would probably read the book prior to coming to the class and that he would have thought sufficiently about it to have a position to articulate. Too often, students finish the last page of an assigned novel - if they read it at all -
just as the class convenes. That period of the work settling with them before ideas begin to rise has not had the opportunity to take place.

The one-day-a-week class made them feel more-than-ordinary responsibility for that class. Also, the fact that the book was to be passed on to another reader at the conclusion of the weekly meeting encouraged the student to make wise use of the novel during the week it was his.

As instructor I benefited from the arrangement of groups by interests and temperaments in that I was able to see entirely different responses to the same novels by diverse groups. In the supportive atmosphere which developed in all the groups, a basic honesty was established which I as an educator find rare in introductory literature courses.

Perhaps one hour seems scarcely sufficient time to examine a novel - even a novel of fewer than two-hundred pages. When I see the reticence of all except three or four students in a class of twenty-five, I prefer the small group conversing earnestly one day per week to the larger class that does not by its nature facilitate intellectual and personal involvement.

At the conclusion of the five-week class, I arranged a two-hour Wednesday morning session with Jack Matthews during which students discussed their responses to the novels and asked questions. He found the audience to be lively and admiring, although he ascertained
from the nature of certain questions that the group members were not English majors.

Toward the end of the five-week period, Harcourt published Matthews' fifth novel, *Pictures of the Journey Back*. The students became very excited about the publication, and several class members read my copy. One of the chief things they learned from the course is that literature is a living, breathing, ongoing affair, not something that happened years before they were born.

From the short papers which students brought to class came rich discussion, improved critical skills, and abundant delight. These are valuable objectives in any classroom experience.

In reading *Hanger Stout, Awake!*, most of the students were able to find parallels between the character as Matthews presents him and themselves or young men they knew. If, as Northrop Frye has maintained, the "story of the loss and regaining of identity is . . . the framework of all literature," then a responsive chord in the collective unconscious is struck when a reader examines Hanger's world. Even the famous scholar has felt the insecurities which Hanger feels as he stumbles through experience.

\[^{1}\text{Frye, p. 55.}\]
One young man in the class responded, in part, in this way:

The events of Hanger's life until the novel begins are simply illustrated. Hanger, who has just left high school, is totally unaware of the world except for his knowledge of cars. He is in a way the emotional victim of everyone around him. For example, his mother always checks for him around town by telephoning the garage, the stores, and even the Dairy Freeze. His boss, Pete, takes out his grief of marriage on his employees, and finally Hanger's girl Penny regards him as somewhat inferior to her standards. In other words, Hanger is being used as a scapegoat for those people who need one.

By his selection of examples, he has revealed the concerns of a teenage boy. He has discovered in Matthews' novel a way of relating to a character in literature.

Another student in the class wrote the following:

This story was quite refreshing to read because people like Jack Matthews' characters are often forgotten. I suppose I can relate my life to a lot of his stories and feel he is writing about people I know because I come from a small community where people know everyone and come into contact with and know a variety of personalities. Readers from a large city would probably look upon Hanger as a stupid gas jockey; whereas, people from a small community would accept Hanger as the guy next door. There are a lot of drawbacks living in a small community but it also has its advantages which outweigh the drawbacks. People know each other and most of the time can relate to each other. Whether they are a doctor, lawyer, or gas station attendant, they recognize each other as people.

In keeping with that same idea is the final line of a student's paper on Hanger Stout, Awake!: "It is saying, look beyond language and status; every man has a dream; we all need something to grasp
so we can have a hold on reality and judge a person for being himself."

A young woman wrote,

His only real communication is with cars: he can tear them down and put them together and is proud of it. Any extra time or money he gets is spent on his car. He seems to actually communicate best with the cars in the junkyard. They become almost animate for him. He knows each special part and how it smells and feels. He likes to think of the metal as bright and shiny under the coats of paint and rust. Perhaps he would like people to realize that underneath he is smart and shiny, that he isn't only 'the Hanger' and a good mechanic, but a responsive, feeling person.

Of course, in a formal sense no communication can occur between the animate and the inanimate, yet the writer has identified accurately and responded to the need some people have to relate to the inanimate. Her symbolic interpretation of Hanger's longing may be sheer invention in that Hanger does not articulate a desire for others to see him as he feels or knows he is, for he really is not aware of his own qualities.

A young man writes,

I especially like the way Mr. Matthews ended his story. Hanger was looking forward to going in the service, and still he was very innocent. We will never know what happened to him in the Army. Yet at the end, Hanger writes home and wonders why the millionaire hasn't sent him the promised money.

Although this student has not used the word 'irony,' he has a fine sense of the ironic ending of the story.
In the following paper, a social rehabilitation major explores her response to the novel, a response which I feel epitomizes its appeal to youth:

"A Man Against the World"

"In Hanger Stout, Awake!, we see an individual whose ultimate problem is the world. He cannot fathom the possibility that he is being walked on as his friend, Jim Boynton, points out. In fact, Clyde stands up for the very people who are putting him down.

'Like that squirrelly old broad at the Dairy Freeze.

I knew he was talking about Phyllis but I didn't say her name. I just said, she's not so bad. '

... Pete was saying she is always getting you over there to the Dairy Freeze to give you advice and bawl you out.

Yes, but she has a good heart, I said.'

"There is no tenderness in Stout's life, and yet, he is compassionate towards and genuinely unshaken by the rest of his acquaintance's hardness. His father being a truck driver, Clyde goes for months without ever having contact with him; then gladly welcomes his father's arrival for one day and spends his time retracing the trucker's journey across the states. This is what his father enjoys and Clyde is willing to share it with him without regard for himself. His mother constantly nags at her son concerning his personal affairs as if she has a right to know and control the experiences of his life.

'Why Clyde, mother said. It must be from Penny.

I told her it probably was since she was the only P. Barker I know at Camp Wildwood.

Should I open it? She asks.

But I told her no, it was my letter and most likely personal.'
"Even the men that he works with seem obligated to pick at Clyde's personality until Pete and Bo actually turn on each other out of desperation and the need for a victory. Meanwhile Clyde simply writes off their cantankerous dispositions as the outcome of mean-tempered wives.

"Perhaps the turning point of the novel comes when all of Clyde's worldly pressures realize that their scapegoat has been inducted into a fiercer and more worldly apparatus, the Army. Suddenly their manners become dejected, hysterically sad, and almost savage in their attempts to readjust to a world without Clyde Stout. Even the nickname, Hanger, is dropped by his oppressors in their search for a way of retaining this individual's naive simplicity for their very own destruction. The irony in the situation is the fact that for nineteen years Clyde has maintained a loving attitude for mankind that was not kind to him, and yet, he remains unchanged under the pressures of a much more ominous void ahead; while those around him are destroyed by their own selfishness and revenge. Matthews teaches us a stinging but worthwhile lesson in living and loving through the placidity of a well adjusted Clyde Stout."

Once students have examined their own responses to a literary work, or parallel to that examination, the English teacher has a responsibility for taking them beyond their present position into a more comprehensive one. One method by which this is accomplished is through reflective questions by the instructor which elicit reflective thinking.

There are many starting places in a discussion of a novel, and the wise teacher, confident that reflection and examination are important, will ignore Susan Sontag's comment to the contrary: "To interpret is to impoverish, to deplete the world - in order to set up a
shadow world of 'meaning'. A good place for beginning is a point at which the instructor's own intellectual inquiry is triggered. To enter a classroom thinking that there are five basic points to be covered in a day's discussion of an aspect of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is to shortchange oneself as an educator: it is to lose sight of the process of discovering with a group of other learners by mutual exploration. In this mutual exploration, an instructor's preconceived interpretations seem to surface as a matter of course and thus complement the discussion. Another place to initiate an inquiry, and an excellent place at that, is with a point raised by a student during class discussion or in a writing assignment.

The procedure of this study will be to examine questions that might be raised and conclusions that might be reached in the first novel to be considered, *Hanger Stout, Awake!*. In the discussion of subsequent novels, it is assumed that the format suggested for *Hanger Stout, Awake!* indicates how the study of a novel might be approached; and to propose questions for each novel would be unduly repetitious.

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Some Critical Approaches to Hanger Stout, Awake!

Archetypal Approach

The student paper entitled "A Man Against the World" might be an appropriate place to initiate a discussion of critical approaches to the novel. Although the paper has strong suggestions of a moral approach to criticism, it is basically an archetypal criticism that explores the theme of the scapegoat. Guerin and others discuss this archetype as it is reported in Frazer's The Golden Bough:

Corollary to the rite of sacrifice was the 'scapegoat' archetype. This motif centered in the belief that, by transferring the corruptions of the tribe to a sacred animal or man, then by killing (and in some instances eating) this scapegoat, the tribe could achieve the cleansing and atonement thought necessary for natural and spiritual rebirth. Pointing out that food and children are the primary needs for human survival, Frazer emphasizes that the rites of blood sacrifice and purification were considered by ancient peoples as a magical guarantee of rejuvenation, an insurance of life, both vegetable and human.¹

Matthews as editor of Archetypal Themes in the Modern Story says:

No one can grow up into a full-fledged, card carrying Human Being without having experienced the bitter taste of innocence-wrongly-abused; accordingly, we have a great capacity for understanding the Scapegoat in almost any situation. The dark counter truth is that we have all participated in the persecution of an Innocent, performing actions that seem almost beyond our control and so we can readily understand the vicious mechanism at the heart

¹Guerin, pp. 124-25.
(or heartlessness) of this kind of projection. 1

The defining by Matthews and the summation of Frazer's definition by Guerin and others seem to provide adequate definitions of the scapegoat for classroom use. To initiate discussion, a teacher might ask the question What is a scapegoat? and proceed to What qualities must the scapegoat have if he is to fulfill his role? How does the process of the persecution of the scapegoat work to the psychological benefit of the persecutors? How does it work to the benefit of the one being persecuted? What examples of this process do you see at work, in your own family, in the church you attend, in schools, and in local, state, and federal government? What does this motif or archetype say about human psychology or the nature of the human being?

The motif has operated throughout the whole of American literature and is explored perhaps most thoroughly by Melville through the character of Billy Budd, his divine evolution, his crucifixion, and his eventual deification with the typical religious rituals attached to his worship. A more modern character which contemporary teenagers might know is Fitzgerald's Jay Gatsby. The current film and various

1Matthews, Archetypal Themes in the Modern Story, p. 79.
mediums such as the comic book, the television show, the short
story, may be used as vehicles to demonstrate to the late adolescent
reader the use of this universal theme. A story which uses this
theme and which wreaks a never-to-be-forgotten impact on even the
most reluctant reader is Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery."

From a discussion of characters in art who are victimized as
scapegoats, students and teachers through an inductive process can
arrive at a list of the characteristics of the scapegoat. The list
would read something like this:

(1) He or she may be of any age but is generally past
childhood. The dramatic intensity of a situation
would be reduced if the victim were not conscious
of his fate.

(2) The victim is essentially innocent. He may have made
some false moves in his life, but they were not initiated
by dishonorable motives, at least not from his point of
view. His innocence is the primary factor in his availa-
bility as a scapegoat. Were he to be aware, sophisti-
cated, he would see the mechanics of the situation, its
inevitable outcome, and extricate himself from it.

(3) He is, at least to some extent, a sympathetic character.
The audience may be angered by his innocence, but ulti-
mately the audience is hostile to the forces which oppose
him and is angered by his helpless position.

Jack Matthews thinks that "A first-person story by one who has
been wronged is a natural, in some ways; but its danger is that of
special pleading - the character complaining too ardently of how he's
been wronged and thereby depriving the audience of its right to sympathy." Part of the success of Hanger Stout lies in its use of first person, yet we as readers feel that Hanger has no sense of the use others have made of him, of the wrongs he has suffered at the hands of the men at the service station, Penny, Mr. Cominsky, and even his father. Each has used him in a way that, if not condoned, is at least excused by our society. But though Hanger is no complaining character, the message from the author through the voice of Hanger is ironically clear and it chastises those suave beings who know and use that knowledge with smug self-satisfaction.

This process of reproving the scapegoat has a cathartic effect on the other players in the story as well as upon the audience. Through the story, the audience is allowed, or permitted, to discharge its pent-up, socially unacceptable feelings. And although we may disdain a Cominsky or a Penny, somehow we are relieved of all the guilt we as Cominskys and Pennys harbor when we see this disapproval that Matthews is able to awaken in the reader's disapproval for all our sins. With our renewed, cleansed selves, we are able to re-enter the arena and continue the battle. When the burden of our own sins begins to weigh heavily upon us, we relieve ourselves by assigning that sin, that guilt, to another and then punishing or destroying him.

\[ ^1 \text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 80.} \]
The scapegoat himself may benefit from the process in that he becomes a martyr to the cause of honor, virtue, and morality. Through death or persecution he rises above or transcends the mundane. Even in death he may say, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

As students turn to their own familiar world, they will find myriad examples of the scapegoat archetype: the family who heaps the brunt of the family's abuse upon the passive sister, the church which regularly finds that the minister or god king no longer defends the church doctrine (whether real or imagined) and must for the future well being of the congregation be heaped with abuse and driven out of the kingdom; the school teacher and students who single out some student and wreak destruction on him; and finally the American soldier who infuses the Viet Cong with epithets like 'dirty gook' and 'subhuman' and then in an inhuman act drops the bomb or fires the rifle. These examples seem to point to some kind of human need that exists in family units and expands to international warfare to have scapegoats in order to cope with a universal heart of darkness.

_Sociological Approach_

Another way of exploring _Hanger Stout, Awake!_ in conjunction with the archetypal is the sociological approach. What norms, values, mores in our society permit the scapegoat motif to operate? Why do we place 'gas jockey' on the eligible list as fall guy? These
are questions which should initiate a discussion of social structure and resulting mores which will assist students in realizing that art does not exist in a vacuum. It comes from a particular culture and is fashioned, in part, by that culture. To seek the implications of the influence of a culture on its art is worthwhile in learning how to approach literature.

Hanger Stout is, during the world of the novel, engaged in a low prestige or no prestige occupation - service station attendant. His occupation is associated with fumes, grime, and grease. He performs menial tasks - tasks that require limited education. His communication with the consumer is reduced to the level of simple ritual:

"Hello,"

"Fill it with regular," or

"Two dollars of unleaded."

For his job he is paid low wages; he can be replaced easily, yet his job is necessary in our motorized society (at least until the advent of coin-operated service stations). And all of us who have had our cars serviced by rude attendants realize the pleasure in being assisted by a helpful, friendly one.

Early in the development of the country, when there was a demand for manual labor, occupations which involved physical toil were respected. The industrial revolution came to America in the
nineteenth century and as the factory system began, so did the hier-
archical structure that we now find in all elements of American society.
With the factory system came increased leisure and wealth for people
at the top of the ladder. This leisure left time for their children to
further their education. College educations, and even high school
educations in the early twentieth century, became symbols of status.
The Puritan ethic in early American society endorsed education as a
means to know God, and success in work was a sign of His favor.
Success in work resulted in accumulation of wealth, accumulated
wealth made investments possible, and in turn, executive or mana-
gerial positions. Those in American society not intellectual, not
in possession of money, or the power to secure money, remain
fixed on the bottom rungs of that ladder.

Hanger is a case in point. His father is a truck driver, (an
occupation lacking social status regardless of income); his sister
Judith has a mysterious brain disease and is in a nursing home; and
Hanger himself has flunked high school English (the idea of his at-
tending college - at least at the time this book was written - is
absurd). When Hanger departs for the military at the closing of the
story, it is to that branch that is assigned the lowest of all prestige -
the army. Because, then, of historical reasons, our society has
disdain for the Hanger Stouts of the world and even condones their
mistreatment.
A personal anecdote should serve to conclude this section.

During the 1974-1975 academic year, I taught English to auto mechanics at Ohio High Point Joint Vocational School in a classroom of Bellefontaine High School. As I waited to speak to the counselor one day, a college preparatory student began to talk with me. When she discovered the nature of the group I was teaching, she began to employ a very condescending tone with me. I quickly assured her that I didn't appreciate that tone. Her next tack was to begin to belittle the students I taught. When my disapproval registered, she blurted out, "But I feel so sorry for them . . ." to which I answered, "Why?"

She responded, "They're retarded, they'll never know what it's like to read and understand a play." (Her big interest was theatre.)

I replied, "Will you ever know what it's like to tear down an engine, repair it, and put it together again?"

**Genre Approach**

Along with an examination of the culture which produces a work of art, students and teachers will want to explore the qualities of a work as it relates to works of the past in presenting themes and characters. One way of doing this is to look at Hanger Stout as an allegory, to define 'allegory,' and to ask students to identify what the characters represent and what conclusions may be drawn from an exploration of allegory.
C. Hugh Holman defines 'allegory' in *A Handbook to Literature* as

A form of extended metaphor in which objects, persons, and actions in a narrative, either in prose or verse, are equated with meanings that lie outside the narrative itself. Thus it represents one thing in the guise of another - an abstraction in that of a concrete IMAGE. The characters are usually PERSONIFICATIONS of abstract qualities, the action and the setting representative of the relationships among those abstractions. Allegory attempts to evoke a dual interest, one in the events, characters, and setting presented, and the other in the ideas they are intended to convey or the significance they bear. The characters, events, and setting may be historical, fictitious, or fabulous; the test is that these materials be so employed that they represent meanings independent of the action in the surface story. Such meaning may be religious, moral, political, personal, or satiric.\(^1\)

*Hanger Stout, Awake!* is a modern exemplum, a subtype of the allegory. Holman defines 'exemplum' as "A moralized tale. Just as modern preachers often make use of 'illustrations,' so medieval preachers made extensive use of tales, anecdotes, and incidents, both historical and legendary to point morals or illustrate doctrines."\(^2\)

*Hanger* represents innocence; the hero, savior, and deliverer who must perform impossible tasks (hanging for extended periods) in order to save the kingdom. In his hanging posture Hanger reminds the reader of Christ on the cross.

*Mr. Cominsky* represents experience; the evil trickster who takes pleasure from his chosen vocation of exposing the innocent to the dark side of the world. He uses alcohol to escape the world as he finds it, yet he wants the

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\(^2\) Ibid., p. 212.
uninitiated to have his same vision.

Rigolo represents the kindly but ineffectual man of inaction. He has retreated to his junkyard where he is undisturbed by the reeling of the world.

Men at Service Station are the baiters; they entice their prey in order to torment him. Inadequate in their own lives, they seek to ridicule, to belittle the innocent.

Phyllis is the fumbling protector. She would like to shelter Hanger from the cruelties of experience but is able to supply little more than thick milk shakes.

Penny is the opportunist. She is willing to exploit opportunities without regard for ethical principles. She is shallow and egocentric.

From this morality tale emerges a fable of modern society inhabited by residents on all steps of the hierarchy who seek to address their own selfish concerns, fulfill their own drives at the expense of those around them. Throughout this cosmos the hero Clyde Stout is used by them as the butt of their jokes and games. He does not allow himself to imitate their patterns. He seems to retain his innocence, his faith in himself and in his ability to find a side mirror that is without blemish so that he may continue to view the world from his innocent stance: "I want to get one that's just right. I want it to be a nice one, without bubbles in the chrome."  

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Subsequent references to this volume will appear in the text.
Each man must select his own reality. Since the advent of *Don Quixote*, authors have explored illusion versus reality. To Hanger his world of romantic hope and faith is to be preferred to the world of the Cominskys.

**Linguistic Approach**

The thing that first captures the attention of the reader of *Hanger Stout, Awake!* is the semi-literate language of the implied author, Clyde Stout. To explore the effect of his language on teenagers with teenagers should provide a valuable linguistic exercise. Almost all individuals, students included, feel they have a novel somewhere within them, a story waiting to be told, and through the telling to be made real. This desire to tell one's story may be used as a vehicle for getting students to examine Hanger's story rather closely.

The reader notes that Hanger's linguistic frame of reference is primarily cars. The novel opens with Hanger's comment, "The first thing I notice was they were driving this Caddy and it was a new one" (p. 3). He continues with, "The tire bell rang and I went out to fill the tank of a '63 Corvair" (p. 7). The pages are dotted with references to cars until finally Hanger asserts, "I didn't like that crack about my Chevy and he saw it" (p. 21). "I mean, you don't criticize a guy's car. Not if you know how much work and sweat and thinking he's put into it" (p. 22).
As the student observes Hanger's metaphorical language, he notes that the metaphors are simple homespun ones, free from affectation or ornamentation. Hanger writes, "That tire bell rings like the bell on a drunken cow" (p. 16), "My arms felt like they was being stretched way out like you see some kid stretch bubble gum out of his mouth" (p. 9), and "The Plymouth came out of the ditch like a soft tooth out of an old dog's mouth . . ." (p. 33).

Hanger demonstrates a basic honesty in language. He has no comprehension of the clichés that distort our language into dishonest meaningless ritual: "I remember Penny saying something about us being friends always, but I thought that was her way of saying she really liked me. Because why else would you want to be somebody's friend" (p. 18)?

The affectation of Penny's letters serves as a foil for Hanger's candor. Compare Penny's response to Wuthering Heights with Hanger's response to Karaji's poem:

It is always a pleasure hearing from you and getting news from home. Life is indeed pleasant here at camp and the days pass swiftly by. I have been doing a lot of swimming and playing tennis. Also, I have been, in my spare time, reading Wuthering Heights, again (for about the fiftieth time). I simply love that book and as long as I live I will never, never tire of reading it (p. 37).

I opened the book to a section called Sayings, and read one of them as follows,
They told me I was alone,
Alone in a whirling world
Of chance.
Of mystery,
Of servitude and death,
But that was ere
I saw Thee.

I read it out loud two or three times. Then I turn to a section which said, Farad Karaji Recommends, and there was a picture of him, or some other man, sitting on a horse and holding his hand over his eyes. One of the things he recommended said,

'Never let a day pass but what you record some portion of that day on paper. Never live without keeping a diary or journal. No matter how dull your daily life seems to you, there is that part of it upon which the mind may seize, illumining it until you will be astonished at the depth you possess and exalted by the poetry you find dwelling, humble and unannounced, in your soul. '

I also read that over once or twice and thought about it. It sounded a lot like Miss Temple in English class, because she was always saying that people should keep a diary. And if you write a little everyday, you would learn to write better.

Penny told me one time that she thought the sun rose and set on Miss Temple.

Before I went to sleep that night, I thought a lot about Farad Karaji's recommendation, and I decided to keep a diary like he said. And that is why I am writing this, only a lot of it was done at the end of each day. That is one reason why I am so sure of how things happened, because I wrote it down every night before I went to bed. (p. 18-19)

As indicated by Hanger, Penny has asserted that "the sun rose and set on Miss Temple," yet the intensity of feeling that Miss Temple demonstrates for language is completely absent in Penny's letter. Hanger internalizes what he reads and seeks connections between the old and the new. His response to literature and to the written
word is of consequence.

Despite Hanger's lack of knowledge of the formal aspects of language, he has a flair for selection of details. Examine for a moment his description of Rigolo, the manager of the junkyard:

Rigolo is sitting there at his old desk he use. He look up and sees me and nods. He's a man about fifty with stomach trouble. Every time I go up to him his breath smells like milk of magnesia tablets. He is bald all over and got black eyes, like somebody hit him there, in both eyes, only they are that way all the time. And real white skin (p. 25).

His poignant use of significant details demonstrates his sense of what is significant in human character. He has appealed to the reader's visual and olfactory senses. We see Rigolo as a middle-aged, physically unattractive man with stomach pain. His treatment of Hanger reveals him as a sympathetic obliging sort of person.

Further consideration of Hanger's language reveals to the reader who writes and has struggled to find a word, that that same struggle has occurred with Hanger: "And then I look at the man's name who wrote it and his picture on the back. He had one of those Arab things over his head and a mustache" (p. 18).

The patient reader continues beyond the first page of illiterate structures to eventually discover the character of Clyde Stout. If this novel is an honest index of what lies in the minds of some of the young people who sit quietly in the back row of the vocational English classes, then it is time to plumb those minds and to discover and
encourage that sensitivity, insight, and honest goodwill. And if we are really concerned about teaching, maybe we can persuade the college prep Pennys to eliminate the "Engfish" and speak freely and candidly.
Beyond the Bridge, Matthews' second best selling novel, is a fictional account of what might have happened to a man who sat in his car waiting to cross the Ohio River to Point Pleasant, West Virginia, on December 15, 1967, the day the Silver Bridge collapsed. Matthews avows that this man is entirely fictional: "The characters, along with their names and personal conditions in which they find themselves, are all totally invented."¹

Written in a diary format, Beyond the Bridge is primarily the account of how one Jonathan Neil (known only as Neil in the novel, later referred to as Jonathan Neil by Rex McCoy in The Charisma Campaigns) tries to begin his life anew, how he seeks to wipe out a past which included all the proper accouterments of the good life. The tale is also a story of the failure of that attempt.

¹Matthews, Beyond the Bridge, Author's Note.

Subsequent references to this volume will appear in the text.
Those reviewers who disparage the novel seem to do so out of a concern for the sensibilities of the readers or because it is not in the same vein as was Matthews' first novel. Jerrold Orne maintains that although the book is easy to read, "... it is not likely to arouse enthusiasm for either style or content."1 Ernest Cady reports that Beyond the Bridge will "... not be every reader's cup of tea ...," because "... it is essentially a grim, almost a despairing narrative with none of Hanger Stout's warmth and bouncy humor."2

Jay L. Halio of the Southern Review maintains that Beyond the Bridge continues the theme of regeneration begun in Hanger Stout, Awake!, but where Hanger "... succeeded in arousing both our imagination and moral awareness ...," Beyond the Bridge does not. He asserts that the fault may lie in Matthews' attempts to work with the "... stereotype of the poor suffering rich man trying to get through the eye of a needle ..." or "... in the failure of the book to become either a novel, a collection of poems, a regimen of meditation and discipline, or a combination of all of these."3

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2 Ernest Cady, review of Beyond the Bridge, by Jack Matthews, in Columbus Dispatch, 18 January 1970.

The theme of withdrawal and revitalization, however, seems to have an appeal for many of the reviewers. This appeal may stem from Matthews' exploration of something that is fundamentally present in most readers, the desire to be reborn. In *Best Sellers* Joseph P. Lovering reports, "Beyond the Bridge is a convincingly good book. It not only is provocative in its central situation and interesting in its chief characters, it carries the reader's curiosity with it." A *New York Times* reviewer, Martin Levin, asserts, "... the idea of a grown man running away from home, to seek primal identity ..." still "... retains its freshness in our stale society." Levin, however, faults the novel for failing to have a strong personality to which the statements made in the novel may adhere.

Reviewers of *Beyond the Bridge* have said that it offers "... arresting visions and impressions"; affords "... the reader and Neil the opportunity to reflect on some significant questions"; and is

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3 Ibid.

4 Lovering, review of *Beyond the Bridge*, p. 398.
"... a philosophical reflection on human frailty and guilt-born human folly. ..."¹ The narrative has been asserted to be "... a story close to the most private thoughts and fantasies of countless people."² "What fascinates in Beyond the Bridge is the hero's deceit and dilemma ..."³ reports the Athens Messenger. The Virginia Quarterly Review reports that "... the novel is handled with conspicuous ease and effectiveness."⁴ The serious intentions of Matthews as a writer are indicated by several reviewers: "... a young writer who has serious intentions and a dedicated concern for the human condition in all its implications"⁵ and "The author has fused the heroic and the mean and for this he is to be singled out as a writer of considerable accomplishment and very serious intent."⁶

¹ Cady, review of Beyond the Bridge.


⁵ Cady, review of Beyond the Bridge.

⁶ Unsigned review of Beyond the Bridge, Athens Messenger.
Beyond the Bridge is undoubtedly the most difficult of Matthews' novels for late adolescents to penetrate, because it involves a theme which they tend to label 'desertion' rather than 'rebirth.' Adolescents often set unrealistically high standards for parents, and as the class members evaluated Neil's decision to abandon his old life, they saw themselves as the teenage children whom he left. Matthews does not assist the reader by supplying him with reasons for condoning Neil's behavior: the author allows Neil to report only that the former life had become intolerable. The reader does not get a recitation of the injustices Neil has suffered at the hands of his wife and children.

Another element to which some class members objected was Neil's adultery. This objection corresponds to the one mentioned above in that both behaviors are threats to the adolescent's security in his family unit. Teenagers can empathize with the sexual patterns of fellow teenagers as well as with their desires to take to the open road; however, they often find these same acts reprehensible in adults.

In spite of the students' personal responses to incidents in the novel, they were able to record their perceptions of Matthews' intent from oftentimes diverse angles.
One student examined how each of the characters is somehow involved with death. Her most penetrating analysis is of the C & J waitresses, Billie Sue and Wanda.

Each of the characters in one way or another is concerned about some phase of life or death.

One of the cafe waitresses is obsessed with birth dates, the other with death. Wanda keeps wanting to know Neil's age: he tells her the length of time since the bridge collapsed. She asks everyone their birthdate and if she finds anyone who has the same birthday as hers is ready to throw a party, and she talks about it for days.

Billie Sue, the other waitress, loves funerals. She goes to every one in the area and enjoys a good cry. She is superstitious and knows many superstitions about death and bridges. Neil encourages her to quote them. Billie Sue helps in Neil's rebirth, as a love object, when she comes to him in the old house.

Other students focused on the relationship of Billie Sue and Neil. This student objected to the relationship between Billie Sue and Neil on the grounds that it was not entered into in the proper spirit:

Billie Sue and Neil had consummated a union which is supposed to express honor and love and be a communication between two people which only they can share, but after their union, they became strangers to each other and never shared the warmth and love that comes from such a union between man and woman.

When Neil's search for meaning in his rebirth crumbles and he finds he cannot obtain the self-control, reason, love, and honor in his second life which evidently was no better than his first, he loses touch with all reality and becomes insane.
This young woman, on the other hand, emphasizes Billie Sue's role as a symbol of what Neil seeks:

Billie Sue especially, was essential to Matthews' theme of rebirth. Despite her obeseness and crossed eyes, she represents the very things that Neil is striving for in his new life. At one point in his diary, Neil fantasizes about a lake full of 'devils and violence and terror' with an island in the middle where there is 'sunshine, and man is reasonable and kind.' And as Neil progresses in his new life, he speaks of Billie Sue as that 'sweet island' and later as 'an island of silence and health, and breathing spices.' Neil is able to see beyond her physical self, to the more important inner truth and peace that Billie Sue possesses. She is the very model of life Neil wants beyond the bridge.

Several students responded to the themes as they discovered them in the novel: "I think Beyond the Bridge is a story about what all of us would like to do at least once in our life and that is to start over."

In my eyes the book was great and illustrated some of the many complicated problems which pass through the imaginations of many everyday people. It also brought about the fact of how hard it is to cope with the hustle and bustle of today's complex world. Everyone wants to escape now and then, but for some people the hustle and bustle is too much and they escape forever.

Mr. Matthews brought across beautifully the point that whenever we go where there is order and routine, there are going to be pressures and responsibilities. Although Neil stripped himself of his identity and most of his responsibilities, there is always going to be that certain madness which one has to cope with. In Neil's case he also had to cope with his past which strengthened the pressures against him. Conclusively, I feel the main downfall of Neil was his lack of real communication on an honest basis with others. If he could have found this communication, he would have probably have found himself and, consequently, his inner peace.
In informal papers most students shy away from a discussion of style, but a young female student wrote, "Matthews' style in Beyond the Bridge is also conducive to the feeling of the temporariness in life. Written in diary form, emphasis is placed on the fact that life can only be lived one day at a time." She also is aware of the egocentricity which keeps Neil from escaping his obsessions and responding positively to those around him:

Only after a long period of readjustment and intensive searching does Neil begin to find peaceful existence. He realizes that he needs to love others and share communication with them, but he is not capable of fully understanding himself. Outwardly he feels that giving the girls he works with presents will win their affection. Inwardly, however, he is still too caught up in himself to give without the attitude that he should receive in equal amounts. Neil does reach a freedom of sorts, but one cannot be certain of its duration as the story closes.

Another student commented on the duration of the freedom:

Matthews did allow Neil to be reborn, although perhaps Neil never realized it. Neil says himself 'that being saved . . . is possessing truth . . . if only for a few hours and minutes.' Matthews leaves Neil feeling that he is still trying to make his way 'across the river of time toward truth,' when already Matthews has allowed him to experience honor ("work is honorable and real" - "I [Neil] glimpse at the other side and it is lovely!") momentarily. So in many ways Neil has already passed 'beyond the bridge.'
Some Critical Approaches to Beyond the Bridge

A Combination of Approaches: The Mimetic, The Sociological, The Historical, The Psychological

Questions arise time and time again in secondary and college literature classes: How much of what a writer writes is from authentic experience and how much is imagined? If a writer uses an historic person or event in his fiction, under what obligation is he to present the character or event factually? On December 15, 1967, the Silver Bridge across the Ohio River between Kanawha, Ohio, and Point Pleasant, West Virginia, collapsed. Forty-four persons were killed. Less than three years later, in 1970, Jack Matthews copyrighted his second novel entitled Beyond the Bridge. The publisher's note on the book jacket says, "Neil, the man in question, chooses to jettison his old life, letting all his family and friends believe that he and his car have gone down with the collapse of the Silver Bridge over the Ohio River (December 15, 1967)."

Then, in a disclaimer entitled "Author's Note," is the following:

In the following narrative I have referred to the Silver Bridge crossing the Ohio River at Point Pleasant, West Virginia, which collapsed on December 15, 1967. I have used the actual date of the event, the actual dimensions of the bridge, and have paraphrased a few newspaper accounts of eyewitnesses' impressions of the tragedy. Beyond this, however, I have not gone. I have not heard of, read of, or acquired anything in the way of surmise or information that the condition of my protagonist resembles that of any real person, living or dead. To the
best of my knowledge, I do not know anyone who was connected in any way with the Silver Bridge collapse, nor have I heard any accounts whatsoever - firsthand or otherwise - recording information of firsthand impressions of that event. My information about the tragedy was gotten entirely from newspaper stories at the time of the tragedy. In short, the characters, along with their names and personal conditions in which they find themselves, are all totally invented. Any resemblance between them and real persons, living or dead, is completely coincidental.

How may a student of literature interpret a note of that sort?

There are several conclusions that may be reached concerning Matthews' explanation which can be considered valid and there are several conclusions which can only be considered highly tentative and hypothetical. Students realize that authors do not exist in a vacuum. Their art comes from the life they experience around them or some perception of, manipulation of, or management of that life. Even the highly imaginative story has its beginning in something real or imagined, but something that is a part of the author's conscious awareness. How closely an author mimics or details his actual life is determined by his aesthetic philosophy and particular type of talent. A Sinclair Lewis seemed intent on including every small detail of what is or of what might be a real room, a person, or an incident. On the other hand, an artist like Henry James believed that art is principally selection but selection that is typical. In "The Art of Fiction" James makes an interesting observation about the artist's perception of real life
and his presentation of that perception. He speaks of an English novelist who had been lauded for her authentic presentation of the life style of French Protestant youth. She reported to James that her actual experience with French Protestants had been limited to a glimpse of some young people seated at a dinner table. As an artist she had "The power to guess the unseen from the seen, to trace the implications of things, to judge the whole piece by the pattern. . . ." She was able, as James would have said, to discover the figure in the carpet.

Matthews has the same kind of imagination. The event itself sets the creative process in motion which leads to the hypothesizing which he has indicated is an important part of his approach to writing. From the question of "What if?" comes the answer, the novel itself.

The more tenuous assumptions revolve around a consideration of the social milieu out of which the novel was produced. At the time of the collapse of the bridge and for the three or four years that followed culminating finally in the May 1970 killing of four Kent State University students, there was a revolution in American society, a revolt against the traditional sources of honor - family, wealth, and education. The institutions of the family, the school, and the business world were under severe attack. Jack Matthews,

1James, "The Art of Fiction," p. 821.
as a college professor, was in the middle of the ferment. Many
college professors were asking some of the same questions their
students were asking. In 1967 Matthews was 42 years old; when
the book was published in 1970, he was 45 years old. Neil, the
protagonist of the novel, was 44 years old during the time span of
the novel. The question that surfaces is Was Jack Matthews ex-
ploring a very personal, hypothetical "What if?" through the ve-
hicle of the novel? Freud argued in his lectures on the creative
act that other men feel the same discontent that the artist feels with
the renunciations demanded by reality and that the artist's experi-
ence of exploration becomes one shared with the audience. The
artist's work becomes the imaginary gratification for the uncon-
scious desires of writer and reader.¹ Is this a plausible explana-
tion of the origin of Beyond the Bridge? In speaking of stories con-
cerned solely with dark and painful matters, Matthews says "... the story affords symbolic existence for something that we know is
psychologically possible, and may soon exact the price of actual ex-
istence in our lives. If it is allowed to exist out there in the symbol,

¹Ernest Jones, The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud, vol. 3:
however, it may not be forced to manifest itself actually, in our real lives.\(^1\)

Whatever the answers are to the questions asked initially in this section is relatively unimportant. What is important is that Matthews has skillfully portrayed at least one consequence of one man's flight. The audience can only guess where Neil's life might have led had he not crossed the bridge. Would there have been increased dissatisfaction, more alcohol, and finally a safe dullness? Who knows?

Philosophical Approach

One of the primary philosophies to be articulated in the twentieth century is that of existentialism, "A term applied to a group of attitudes current in philosophical, religious, and artistic thought during and after World War II which emphasizes existence rather than essence and sees the inadequacy of the human reason to explain the enigma of the universe as the basic philosophic question."\(^2\)

In *A Handbook to Literature* C. Hugh Holman explains the basic characteristics of Existentialism:

1) the philosophy assumes that existence precedes essence, that what is significant is that we and those things about

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\(^2\) Holman, p. 212.
us exist; however, those things about us have no meaning unless we through acting upon them create meaning.

2) Because meaning can only be created through action, existentialism is concerned with the personal commitment of each unique individual to action.

3) Existentialism attempts "... to codify the irrational aspect of man's nature, to objectify non-being or nothingness and see it as a universal source of fear. ..."¹

4) Further, existentialism distrusts concepts and emphasizes experiential concreteness.

5) Existentialism asserts that man is totally free, but also totally responsible for what he does with himself. This freedom and responsibility cause man intense anxiety.

6) Existentialism maintains that the action man perpetrates in his absurd world is the source of even greater despair and loneliness because of the intellectual knowledge of the meaninglessness of the acts.

7) In spite of the pessimism that pervades the philosophy, existentialism has a positive side in its assertion that

¹Ibid., p. 213.
since there is no absolutely fixed 'human nature,' our recognition of human attributes is subject to change if we can agree on other attributes. Even if a single man agrees on an alteration and acts authentically, the possibilities for altering human nature and society are unlimited.

Once students understand the tenets of this basically atheistic existential philosophy, they can articulate how and why this theme is so much used in twentieth century fiction. Questioning leads them to confront the idea that when one looks at the history of the United States, he finds that the Eden which seemed to be promised at the outset of the country's development quickly decayed and disappeared in the face of reality. Those who came to escape persecution for religious convictions persecuted those around them of different or no religious convictions. When land became scarce on the East Coast because of the flood of emigrants, these creatures of Eden did not hesitate to destroy the race which preceded them. When the issue of states rights arose in the newly formed country, the nationalists did not hesitate to turn to members of their own race who opposed them and beat them into submission. Moreover, when evidence appeared that industrialization was the key to wealth and the development of the country, those in power exploited emigrants, poor whites, and poor blacks. With Darwin's _Origin of the Species_
in 1859, the thought that amends would be made in an afterlife for injustices suffered in the present life seemed no longer possible.

As the American man entered the twentieth century, he viewed a vile factory system, successive wars, violent crime, depression, graft in government, and general disillusionment. All that he had assumed had given order and focus to his life - the church, the government, the possibility of sound education - came tumbling down into a pile of rubble. Man still stands on that rubble trying to glean from it something that will provide a hub for his universe. He has looked at socialism, modern psychology, and human rights as an answer to his dilemma, but he has always found each of these wanting as a panacea.

When students apply American history to literature, they can readily see the source of the despair felt by most twentieth century writers. This despair leads to Neil's decision to attempt to be reborn. Somehow by committing a free act, an act that violates collective societal norms, he is making the statement "I exist." For his statement he is labeled 'odd,' 'unusual,' 'insane.' (Harvard anthropologist Jane Murphy reported in a recent article that "remarkably similar actions are labeled crazy in remarkably different societies."1)

An examination of the world as Neil perceives it in Beyond the Bridge will demonstrate that he is undergoing what one writer has called "the dark night of the soul." He examines his old life and finds it to be "... futile, impossible. ..." (p. 47) a life where "For all his wealth, there was drunkenness, madness, and apathy. He was circumscribed and therefore, imprisoned by all their [his family's] expectations" (p. 59). He had "An inert and meaningless existence, when deep in his heart he wanted honor and beauty and truth" (p. 59). He finally asserts, "The old life was irrelevant. That's the most damnable thing you could say about it" (p. 74).

He has a deep need to be reborn, to leave the old life and pursue one that has the potential for honor:

Honor is the main thing. I would sacrifice my hands. Not my mind, though, because intelligence is necessary for honor. You have to have an understanding of alternatives every time you choose, but always you choose the honorable one. Therefore, you can't have honor without pain, and maybe a little sadness. But honor is the thing" (p. 22).

He feels that he is at an existential point, a point at which he must affirm a course of action and pursue that course straightwith.

Neil feels the void, the nothingness around him, as he stands at each moment in time. The water dark, cold, and void underneath him symbolizes that world. Later, after he has opted for the life of a dishwasher, he stands by the garbage cans behind the restaurant and thinks, "That's what we are. Flies, and filth. Filth and flies" (p. 103). Even in his leap of faith from the old life to the new, he
is able to find only a heightened despair and alienation.

As the novel ends, he has affirmed that he will move on to still a third world, the world of the insane. He has found life intolerable in his present world. Of the cross-eyed girl Billie Sue he says, "Your eyes are straight. It's the world that's crooked" (p. 151).

He cannot accept the world as it is viewed by the masses. A cynical wisdom comes out of the mouth of the insane Neil as he proclaims that all of life is an imprisonment, that "We take on new imprisonments when we despair of understanding the old" (p. 162). He has endorsed an alternative, however, that from a rational point of view must ultimately be rejected.

**Archetypal Approach**

*Beyond the Bridge* may be examined by students as an exploration of the quest motif in which the hero undertakes a long journey to secure or achieve something. His path is replete with dangers and problems or riddles which he must overcome or solve if he is to achieve transformation, metamorphosis, or redemption.

Several archetypal characters may be identified in the novel: First, there is Neil himself who is the hero, the man of honor searching for a way to live honorably. Like the typical hero, he is handsome, intelligent, and sensitive.

Opposite Neil is Billie Sue who is the earth mother associated with warmth, fulfillment, and fertility. These qualities are
symbolized by her thick waist and shapely hips. She and the little girl with the white hair function as lost innocence and as incarnations of inspiration and spiritual fulfillment.

The foil for Billie Sue is Wanda, the witch, the sorceress, who is associated with fear, danger and death. The unpleasant odor which emits from her body and her hard flat chest signify sterility and spiritual aridity. She asks prying questions, questions which will send Neil back to an earlier confinement.

Harlan represents the spiritual father, the teacher. He has answers to all riddles. He nurses Neil back to health early in the novel, feeds him, gives him a place to sleep, and offers him sustenance.

The river under the Silver Bridge represents mystery, birth-death-resurrection, and the possibility for purification and redemption.

These archetypal motifs become highly significant in a student's education when he realizes that similar patterns and meanings have been identified in many cultures, in widely separated geographic positions, and over diverse time periods. One task for the teacher of literature is to introduce students to significant and relevant scholarship in criticism. For example, Frazer's study *The Golden Bough* which depicts these parallel mythologies can illuminate universal themes for the reader of literature.
Complementing Frazer's findings are the theories of Jung which should also be a part of the student's general literary knowledge. Jung asserts that behind each individual's consciousness lies the blocked-off residue of his past, a collective unconscious of the human race. This racial memory calls to our minds a group of 'primordial images' which are given voice in saga, song, religion, and art.

As students become acquainted with the work of Frazer and Jung, they may experience some discomfort if this knowledge disarranges a belief system which they hold. However, the teacher may point out that their beliefs are theory, subject to dispute. A very positive outcome of knowing Jung's and Frazer's theories is that this knowledge is one method whereby students can understand the almost mystical response they sometimes have to a work of art. Further, it opens an avenue for exploring Matthews' use of Christian myth in Beyond the Bridge, for Matthews uses the New Testament theme of every man's need for rebirth. The class may profitably examine his ironic application of the theme.

 Neil represents the lost soul groping in darkness, looking for the light, searching for honor and meaning in a world that is, at best, hostile, at worst, void. His delight in his task of dishwashing symbolizes his need to be reborn, to be cleansed of the contaminating influence of the past. He asserts, "Everyone wants salvation, so
why should we pretend otherwise? Is it a loss of face or something, to want to be saved? And it seems to me that being saved is tantamount to possessing the truth. If only for a few hours or a few minutes" (p. 109). His monologues are punctuated with references to God, such as "God help me" (p. 26)! and "God, you are more real to me now than anyone who has ever existed" (p. 127).

In his search for God the Father, he turns to His symbolic incarnation Harlan. God [Harlan] helps him initially, but he is ultimately not to be trusted, not to be relied upon. He becomes a "damned ridiculous clown" (p. 77), "dead" with "eyes open and sightless" (p. 95). Neil finds proof of the "arbitrariness of God" (p. 125). In his own imaginings over which he has no control, he finds parallels between his imaginings and God's:

Which might be like God, who imagined man. And, given omnipotence, merely imagining the existence of something is the same as creating it. And this would be a terrible fate. Because, he, too, would not have control over everything that happened in his imagination, and we are all acting out fantasies in the mind of a neurotic God (p. 134).

As Neil first perceived God, God was an active viable agent in the world. He comes to conclude that God has no control and is as mindless and sightless as he. What he had been led to believe would provide insulation from the world provides no such protection.

As God deserts him, so do his boss and even Billie Sue as he escapes through the next door into psychosis where "It is lovely
and exalting beyond all words" (157). He laments the tragedy
of man, that in the absence of God man should turn to man, "Harlan,
there were words we should have said to each other and things we
should have heard from each other" (p. 162). But here we are "... all demons and crusaders, changing roles every minute, and lost in
a jungle of cross-purposes" (p. 163). He must finally conclude that
once man's life is set in a particular direction, "... there is no
turning back" (p. 163).
CHAPTER IV

THE TALE OF ASA BEAN

Professional Critics' Response to The Tale of Asa Bean

The Tale of Asa Bean has several forces mitigating against its possibility of ever making the best seller list. It was released in March of 1971 and did not receive the critical attention which Matthews feels is necessary for a best selling book; the story is laced with what Matthews refers to as 'naughty words' and thus estranges a particular audience; and the obscure allusions alienate the audience which would read it because of the four-letter words. The audience that remains is a small one as is attested to by the sales: Asa Bean is Matthews' fourth novel in terms of sales.

The novel depicts Asa Bean, a warehouse employee with a tremendous intellect and a famished libido. The story develops around his escapades as he attempts to fulfill his sexual needs and disentangle his confused psyche. His final decision is to marry a leader of a women's liberation group and begin a family.

Matthews said of the novel that in the five weeks required for the first draft, he was often stopped by the force of his laughter. In typical Matthews fashion he said at a reading at Urbana College, "I would hope that the reader would have as much fun with this book as
I did, but I suppose that's asking too much." Matthews has also said of Asa Bean, "... it is a somewhat naughty book (I prefer the word "lusty") ... [Matthews' ellipses] rather it is a clean dirty book, or a healthy dirty book, whose satiric tone may not be evident in a brief reading."  

The criticism primarily reflects an amused, vigorous approbation. Dorothy J. Smith of the Boston Public Library reports that Matthews has presented "... a wide variety of well realized characters. ..."  

The Virginia Quarterly reviewer asserts that "High styled low comedy in prose fiction requires a sensitive, acutely appreciative approach. ..." He concludes that Matthews writes "... spiritedly with tongue in cheek ..." and is "... witty, urbana, civilized, vulgar, and inescapably funny." An Urbana Citizen article states that "Matthews' narrative describes vividly what happens to Asa Bean as a result of the action to which he is committed and his encounters with people who do not belong to a  

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2Jack Matthews to Ann Entorf, 14 February 1971.


world peculiar to him."

M. H. Moody reports that Matthews' talent "... seems strangely misdirected. Always he seems to be writing about the wrong people." She refers to the novel as "... brilliant, amusing ... a tour de force ... a feat of skill or ingenuity." She also says that The Tale of Asa Bean is "... a minor literary exercise, an interim novel, meaning one coming in the meantime, while we wait for the major work of which an author is capable."2

In contrast to Mrs. Moody's criticism is Mason Smith's, author of Everybody Knows and Nobody Cares, who thanks Matthews for a "... permanent picture of this husky galoot with the golden tongue, this compulsive analytic with the beer habit, who chases after waitresses and carhops and then drives them to tears with his intellect or drinks himself too blind to function." Smith also avows that "Banality rendered with full affection is one of Matthews' most appealing talents." He concludes that The Tale of Asa Bean is "... a short, sweet, jam-packed, writerly and very winning book."3


Students' Response to *The Tale of Asa Bean*

*The Tale of Asa Bean* would be a controversial novel to teach in many high schools and colleges because of its explicit sexual subject. It is also a difficult novel for the late adolescent primarily because of the classical influences and the popular culture references throughout as well as because of the confused psychological conditions of the narrator of this first-person tale. Matthews himself has said that a reader must almost be an English major to understand the novel. However, after the reader gains a grip on the novel, the excitement generated by the narrative is so intense that he will continue to read. Granted much of the interest comes from the question When and how will Asa achieve sexual satisfaction, but the novel has some unusual attributes that are worth consideration.

As a teacher of literature I see *The Tale of Asa Bean* as does Matthews as a semantic comedy. It is an entertaining, lively example of the power of language, a power that seems to be weakening yearly in our culture as editors of news magazines and publishers of college texts lower the reading level of their publications to accommodate the increasing number of Americans reading at lower levels than did Americans in the past. Asa delights in his understanding of the intricacies of language and although as some students in the class pointed out, Asa is imprisoned by language, nevertheless he exerts a certain amount of control over his life through his
facility with language.

A second quality that the novel possesses is that it provides a picture of a character whose life is less than perfect, whose life in many respects mirrors our own. Few of us have not considered destroying something valued highly by our society, so Asa's wish to destroy the Rubens is not as atypical as it might appear at first glance. Moreover, Asa's multiple roles and the resultant problems seem highly familiar.

How do adolescents respond to the novel? The following excerpts indicate some reactions of members of the Jack Matthews' Novels class. Many were especially concerned with Asa's isolation from the mainstream because of his intellectual abilities. A female student writes:

Asa Bean . . . is a wry symbolism of that intellectual part of everyone which we all must realize. His poignant approach to all matters frustrates those around him, even as our own manners oftentimes frustrate. He felt he could not communicate with his peers simply because they did not possess the intelligence level of his own. To be sure, however, he chose the background which would be least likely to produce any such relationships of mutual desire for intellectual growth. He wanted to be mystical as a means of continual admiration and speculation by those he lived and worked with.

Another student reiterates Asa's problem:

Asa's supreme intellect is constantly working which makes him philosophical in everything he does. He is constantly trying to be logical in illogical things. The irony in this is backed up by Asa being ironical to everyone: his friends and his family. In addition to this, he has a craving for a female, but he has no approach and is muddled at all attempts because
of his intellectuality and his linguistic ironicism.

Students' responses to the cause of Asa's dilemma were generally superficial, and conclusions as to how, or if, Asa's problems were solved differ:

Roy is the first to tell Asa he is a 'screwed up misfit' and that Asa 'needs to get laid.' Then Durango encourages Asa to do the same when he and Asa go to the Fifth Wheel. Next, Earlene tells Asa he is 'victimized by his own IQ' and that he can't even look at a woman without glossing a 'thousand texts from Aristophanes to Chaucer.' But Matthews doesn't allow Roy, Durango, or Earlene to really understand just how much truth lies in what they say, so that Matthews' audience is still left guessing at what makes Asa act so strangely. One just worries over him like Roy and Earlene.

Asa was unable to relate to Veronica. They were only capable of sharing sex; whereas, his sexual union with Madge Hunter went deeper. It was each sharing needs and desires which enabled them not only to have sex but also to communicate.

Asa thinks everything and everybody is ironic. As soon as he takes his clothes off, he becomes real.

It would be a mistake to say that sex solved the problem of Asa's loneliness, as Asa's friends said it would. Asa's loneliness was ended when he found a complete relationship with a woman and thus found himself.

As the book draws to a close we find Asa and Madge get married, and fall into the mainstream of American society.

In the end, Asa and Madge get married and settle down to be like everyone else. Madge gives up women's lib and becomes the wife image, which sort of makes fun of women's lib. Asa's sister settles down to taking care of her family and everyone is bright and happy. So it just goes to show that most of the things you make out to be big, and important, really aren't and life is nothing but one irony after another.
One student approached the novel from a feminist position:

Asa has a poor attitude toward women and sex. First of all he considers them as something to be used. He describes one girl as though she is a geographical region to be explored and conquered. Whenever he describes intercourse, it is a merciless and almost malicious act on the part of the male and an ignorant submissiveness for the female. There is no real love in Asa's conception of sex. Asa's friend Durango and his brother-in-law Roy have these same attitudes and they influence Asa. They believe women are inferior to men in every way.

And one male student related the tale to modern man's universal loneliness:

I enjoyed the novel because every person who has ever felt loneliness must understand some of the problems Asa experienced. It is painfully noticeable that the sixties created a society of lonely people which Jack Matthews clearly illustrates. As the patterns of living grow more and more complex, it becomes harder and harder to find personal peace - which is sad. I don't presume to know the answers but I believe they must evolve from love, hope, honesty, and trust. In conclusion, I think that each and everyone of us must search for our own truths.

Some Critical Approaches to The Tale of Asa Bean

Mythological Approach

One of the best known myth critics in literary circles is Northrop Frye. Although much of what he writes is too technical for use in high school and college freshman literature classes, his basic concepts provide such intensive insight into the interrelationships of literature, that literature teachers would be remiss if they failed to familiarize students with the theories. We would be remiss
because we all feel confused somewhat by literature, at least initially, and Frye's theories can help us place literature in perspective. Questions arise concerning the value of reading *Cape Cod* by Thoreau and then moving on to *The Sun Also Rises* by Hemingway. Anyone with an inquiring mind wants to relate the two, to fit them somewhere in a scheme. Minds often insist upon order, structure, and pattern, because from patterns comes understanding. When a student is introduced to Frye's Theory of Myths, it is as if the instructor has given him a present. To the serious science student one gives a microscope; to the serious literature student one gives Frye's Theory of Myths.

Frye has identified four narrative categories of literature: the romantic, the tragic, the comic, and the ironic or satiric. Within each of these four categories he has detailed six phases so that more exact classification can be made within the broad categories.

*The Tale of Asa Bean* in its broadest interpretation is a comedy. Frye has pointed out that what normally happens in comedy is that a young man wants a young woman, that his desire is resisted by some opposition, and that some twist in the plot near the end of the story enables the hero to have his will. Within this simple pattern there are several complex elements: the movement of comedy is usually a movement from one kind of society to another. At the
beginning of the narrative, the obstructing characters are in charge of the story's society; and the audience recognizes that they are usurpers. Toward the end of the narrative the device in the plot that brings hero and heroine together causes a new society to crystallize around the hero. The moment when this crystallization occurs is the point of resolution in the action, the comic discovery.

As Frye indicates, the appearance of the new society is frequently signalized by some kind of party or festive ritual which either appears at the end of the story or is assumed to take place immediately afterward. Weddings, dances, and banquets are common conclusions. As the final society is one that the audience has recognized all along to be the proper and desirable one, an act of communion with the audience is in order. The resolution of comedy, Frye asserts, comes from the audience's side of the stage.

The plot structure of comedy, as Frye outlines it, follows very closely the structure of Matthews' The Tale of Asa Bean. Asa wants a woman, initially any woman, but finally Madge Hunter. Opposition to the union comes from within the protagonist as he is haunted by the memory of his wife who left him amid "furiosity and alarums, and broken sobs."¹ Independent of academia (ex-student in the Ph.D. program at the University of Chicago), set down amid


Subsequent references to this volume will appear in the text.
stock men at a supermarket warehouse, he functions inappropriately. His learned phrases disgruntle and antagonize his semiliterate co-workers. His investigations into philosophy have brought him to consider matters of free will, the gratuitous act, rebirth, and the existential leap. His emotional involvement in his inquiries leaves him confused, as he becomes lost in his own stream of verbiage and is unable to extricate himself. He seeks the real Asa Bean among the multiple selves, the Anarchist, the Shawnee, the Assassin, who approach him, demand recognition, and request solo performances.

The twist in the plot that allows a new society, a new Asa Bean, to appear is the emergence of a new social phenomenon - the aggressive, intellectual, middle-class woman. With FORCE (Female Opportunities for Revolutionary and Creative Effort) behind her, Madge is able to confront her desires, to seduce Asa, and to rearrange her world and his in a mutually beneficial and mutually acceptable way.

The new society is, as one student has indicated, Mainstream America: "Asa and Madge get married and fall into the mainstream of American society." We can see the home, the station wagon, and the children appear on the scene. When one considers the alternatives to the relatively stable relationship of the sort that Madge and Asa will maintain, one realizes that the new society is certainly
to be preferred to the old state. In spite of the enticing talk of some social reformers, for many people, even enlightened ones, marriage, children, and home are important for at least one aspect of happiness.

The new society is signaled by Asa's announcement, "We are to be married, Madge and I" (p. 173). With the message the reading audience puts the book on the coffee table with a sigh of relief, "Asa made it." After all the audience feared for his sanity: What do police do with a man who exposes himself and then slashes a Rubens painting? The audience will never have to find out.

According to Frye, comedy regularly illustrates a victory of arbitrary plot over consistency of characters. Happy endings, he asserts, do not impress us as true, but as desirable, and thus they are brought about by manipulation. In spite of our intellectual self placing a wary finger in our face and mouthing words like "Improbable" or "It's not all that easy," we still lean back and say with a sigh of relief, "Asa made it."

Sociological Approach

Cursorily The Tale of Asa Bean may be read as an exploration of a topic in American society - The Women's Liberation Movement. A teacher might initiate a discussion of the novel from this perspective by asking the following types of questions: Is Asa Bean (as implied author of the novel) a liberated male? A male chauvinist?
A moderate? Does the novel present a negative or positive view of women's liberation? What modes does Matthews as novelist use to present the expressed view?

The microcosms presented in the novel, the warehouse, the taverns, and the home of the Scobies, are all dominated by males. In these worlds women are victimized, exploited. Asa says that when one of the secretaries carries a message back into the warehouse, he keeps "... thinking of rounding a corner on my bug, driving it with the forks about crotch high, and I jam into the redhead who is on an errand of mercy ..." (p. 28). He pictures himself "... splitting a woman in half with long bestial surges" (p. 44); he diagnoses the red-haired secretary as laughing an "... I-want-to-get-screwed-right-away,girl laugh" (p. 78); and he pictures a warehouse worker sniffing up the skirt of a secretary, like a male dog seeking a female.

Asa's companion at the warehouse, Durango, sees a woman as something for conquest, someone upon whom to wreak violence, something to be used. He brags to Asa that he had Sylvia "... six times last night" (p. 80). He describes Sylvia as if she is no more than a mannequin for sexual intercourse: "Not that she ain't stacked. Man! ... God damn, she's got a pair of tits would make you drool at fifty feet. No shit. And a nice waist, and a little ass just meant
to be grabbed" (p. 138). Intellectual Asa, for all his faculties, can only respond with envy, "I sit there drinking in Durango's words, half in love with Sylvia Stevens. Envious as hell" (p. 138).

In the taverns two barmaids, Melba and Veronica, receive some commentary from Asa. Since Melba is, according to Asa "... built like a big lumpy light bulb or an enormous sack of pumpkins" (p. 53) and is "... the nearest thing in human guise ... to that primitive fertility goddess, the Willendorf Venus" (p. 53), she is worth scant attention. The words 'human guise' indicate she is a mere impersonation of a human being.

Veronica, on the other hand, is fairly new at The Fifth Wheel, has an intriguing face which is referred to as a "... Durer mask" ... (p. 122) and is endowed with a "... prodigious ass that bobs like a carnival when she walks" (p. 30). When Asa discovers that her intelligent eyes aren't paralleled by an intelligent mind, he assures her, "'Listen, a woman needs a brain about as much as she needs a third tit" (p. 126). Matthews uses Veronica's apartment as a comment on her as a character. She lives in an apartment building that is handsome on the exterior but is decorated in poor taste on the interior. The reader must conclude that both women seem to be portrayed as less than human, as facades engaged in a charade. Since Veronica is a mere object, she can be easily passed
on to the next owner, Durango, when her previous owner is able to secure a more expensive model, a model more to his liking.

In the third setting of the novel, the Scobie home, the males again dominate. Earlene is a lovable dunce, an emotional slob, who is temporarily caught up in her latest diversion - a local women's liberation group called FORCE. From her first appearance in the novel, she is undercutting the movement. She jokingly says that her friend Madge is "Not butchy at all; maybe bitchy, but not butchy" (p. 14). This propagates the myth that when women object, they are being bitchy; when men object, they are being sensible, showing concern, or pointing out possible problems. Also, the reference to 'butchy' is an insult to and an assault on another group, lesbian women.

Earlene scurries about trying to arrange a mating between Madge and her brother, operating out of another myth that all any man needs is a good woman or vice versa. When she attends her FORCE meeting, she arranges for a sitter for her young daughter as if her husband were incapable of tending to her for several hours. Her association with FORCE is terminated by an unexpected pregnancy which allows her, after her initial chagrin, to coo softly in her nest which will be sumptuously refeathered by her real estate husband who has just closed a lucrative deal. Amid much joyful weeping her last two lines of the novel are "Oh, Asa, I'm so happy!"
and again "Oh, Asa, I'm so happy" (p. 174).

Earlene's husband, a reader of sex manuals who parades about the house in his underwear, makes remarks such as, "Yes, the girls are having their monthlies" (p. 58); "And then there's Debra to think of. You know, all this feminist shit isn't about to do a little girl that age any good" (p. 60); and "But I'm thinking if maybe she didn't ... brood so goddam much over what she's deprived of, being a woman, instead of what she's entitled to, being a woman ..." (p. 61). If ignorance is bliss, Roy Scobie should be very happy.

Even Earlene and Roy's daughter, Debra, is caught in the male-female game. She is worshipped and adored by her Uncle Asa as being some mysterious, all knowing mini goddess. He says she has the wisdom of the universe in her Mona Lisa smile, as she trails about in clouds of glory. This kind of attention removes women from the realm of human beings and places them on a pedestal, a position equally as dangerous as under some man's heel.

Madge Hunter, Earlene's dear friend who "... could have been a doctor, if she'd been a man" (p. 14), is fresh from a divorce and is playing the women's liberation game until she can enter that holy state of matrimony again. To Asa, "She seems to be pantomiming the relaxed, aggressive male, walking onto an unused stage setting" (p. 63), as she examines a Cranack print. While she pantomimes,
she is also aware of and pleased by Asa's attention to her buttocks.

After the preliminaries of the mating dance, Asa arrives at Madge's apartment where she wastes no time in her analysis of him. As have Earlene, Roy, and Durango, she indicates that Asa needs sexual intercourse. Once she has silenced his flow of verbiage and given him his treatment, he is able to rhapsodize in typical male fashion concerning her attributes: "We are to be married _Mirabile dictu_. For she is a warm magician, a priestess of love. She is a wondrously skillful cook, a dopey, mixed-up, warm-hearted, shrewd, pragmatic, passionate woman, incapable of really taking men or ideas seriously for long, a natural organizer, a wobbly thinker, a devoted Forcean, full of misinformation and deadly insights" (p. 170). He continues his rhapsody with references to his "... numberless progeny seeking erudition at my knees" (p. 171). In other words, another male seeks deification at the expense of female. And the female abets the process.

In answer to the initial questions, Yes, Asa is a male chauvinist and Matthews, in spite of his ironic stance, has skillfully painted another case of Male Triumph Over Female Who Thinks She Wins. He has used Asa as protagonist and as narrator to present the view, and he has selected characters and a plot sequence which reinforce it.
Formalistic Approach

An adolescent who begins to read The Tale of Asa Bean may believe that his task is akin to that of Sisyphus'. He might ask of his instructor, "What do you expect me to do, carry a classical dictionary with me to use as I read this novel?" The student will soon discover, however, that a classical dictionary alone will not suffice. There are also allusions to popular figures in American history, to fictional characters, and to nineteenth and twentieth century literary figures. To trace each reference at the initial reading would be foolhardy and defeatist. Part of the joy of Asa Bean undoubtedly comes from the reader's own bafflement at Asa's intellectuality as well as from the reader's observation of the bewilderment of the characters in the novel. Therefore, I would recommend that the student initially join the fun, understand what he is able to translate, and discuss allusions later with other class members who have read the book. This discussion may lead to a very profitable search, and it teaches students the importance of wide reading in a variety of fields. Further, Matthews' works, like Poe's, are meant to be read in one sitting; and anything that detracts from that is not desirable.

Assuming the students in the class have read the novel, the instructor should inquire into Matthews' purpose in using such intellectual language. First, a look into Matthews' academic
background will uncover that his degrees are in classical Greek and English literature. Anyone who has spoken with him or heard him from a podium will concede that he has an uncanny command of language. He is, like Asa, the intellectual, "... that card-carrying alien in any society ..." (p. 95); he is "... a footnote, an irrelevant clown, a sneeze in church or production line" (p. 95); and he is "... essentially comic, in the frame of reference of the average man, and of course it is this frame of reference that we must all more or less accept, or be institutionalized" (p. 95). Through Asa, Matthews is perhaps indulging that desire to explore that aspect of himself that would separate him from his family, his students, and his other associates. And, Matthews, like Asa, might say of himself, "... talk is my thing, my bag. Talk is my genesis" (p. 125).

Once Matthews as author has made a decision to explore an intellectual character, then the metaphors, the allusions, the vocabulary, and the sentence structure must reflect that character and serve to develop him. The complexity of these elements in the novel parallels Asa's intellectual ability.

Matthews begins the second chapter of *The Tale of Asa Bean* with Asa's saying, "I am standing beside the statue of Boadicea and her hounds in front of the building. Behind
me, there are twenty steps; before me, there are nine. Let it be
said: I am on the side of Boadicea" (p. 4). He repeats these lines
in the introductory section of Chapter 32. Both times the lines are
followed by a section in which he fantasizes that he sees a man who
reminds him of one of the members of the Pequod's crew.

Boadicea was a queen of the Iceni of Norfolk who led an un-
successful revolt against the Romans in Britain. Upon her defeat,
she ended her life by taking poison. Matthews is using her rebel-

lion against an established power to mirror artistically and sym-
bolically Asa's rebellion against a conventional society where an
intellectual is an outcast. Her defeat foreshadows Asa's defeat.
The poison for Asa would be to become an inhabitant of the world
of the living dead who exist in institutions for the insane (Asa's
own father is a case in point). Asa rebels, but chooses not to

destroy himself.

In using the Moby-Dick reference, Matthews is saying that
Asa, clad in his U. S. Navy pea coat, can fantasize that he, too,
is a member of the famous crew of the Pequod. The Pequod crew,
led by an insane, heroic Captain Ahab, was in search of the great
white whale. In finding and destroying the whale, Ahab sought to
understand the mysteries of the universe. Ahab's attack on Moby-

Dick, an innocent yet malevolent victim, and its failure to result

in knowledge for Ahab, is paralleled by Asa's shouting out against
the stupidities and obscenities of the universe and his desire to
slash the Rubens. Although the universe remains equally ambigu­
ous for both Ahab and Asa and the voyage doomed to failure, each
of the men must undertake it in an attempt at discovery.

A corollary to the Moby-Dick allusion is the one to Don
Quixote. Asa envisions Veronica, Durango and himself "... 
marching like Dulcinea, Sancho Panza and Don Quixote into the art
museum" (p. 96). One of the dominant themes in Don Quixote, and
a subject for many novels since, is Quixote's search to define re­
ality. Just as Quixote fights windmills, Asa fights figments of his
imagination in his attempts to distinguish between illusions and
reality. Asa's concern mirrors a concern we all hold as we stand
in Prufrockian inertia.

Asa not only has knowledge of the classics, both modern and
ancient, but also makes use of popular American cultural heroes.
His namesake, Asa, king of Judah from 911 to 870 B.C., was
known as a good king who was zealous in abolishing idols. Asa's
obsession is to destroy a cultural idol, a famous masterpiece. His
surname is 'Bean' and Asa, in addressing himself, says, "... you
are fulfilling a less direct destiny, resembling that great mythic Uncle,
Judge Roy Bean, worshipping impossible Lily Langtreys in the barren­
ness of his voyeur (Pecos) solitude. Oh, the solitude of your
saloon, where you judge your life and its deception . . . " (p. 102). Roy Bean was a corrupt, self-proclaimed judge of the American west in the latter part of the nineteenth century. He held court in his bar and between drinks rendered judgment. He lusted in absentia for an English actress named Lillie Langtry who was called the 'Jersey Lily' and known for her outstanding beauty. It is obvious that through telling his tale, Asa is acting as judge: he is attempting to find the truth, to sentence himself. His worship from afar of Veronica and then Madge parallels Bean's attraction for Lily Langtry.

Thus, it is important for students to realize that careful authors do not use allusions carelessly for effect. Instead allusions are integral to the total meaning and impact of a work. They are the means by which the structure of a work may be developed and enriched.

Psychological - Philosophical Approach

Newsweek magazine reported that on May 21, 1972, an Australian naturalized, Hungarian born geologist named Laszlo Toth, ran past guards at St. Peter's Basilica in the Vatican and delivered about fifteen powerful blows to Michelangelo's 473-year old Pietà. The thirty-three year old Toth delivered the blows with a hammer as he shouted, "I am Jesus Christ!" The outcome of the attack on the Pietà was "The left arm . . . was broken off at the elbow and
wrist, the left eye gouged, the tip of the nose knocked off, the veil chipped in several places, the back of the head hacked." 1 Since this incident there have been several acts of vandalism involving famous paintings.

In 1971 Jack Matthews copyrighted *The Tale of Asa Bean*, an account of a thirty-year old dropout from a Ph.D. program at the University of Chicago and his obsession with raping a Rubens masterpiece with his pearl-handled jackknife. Because of the dates of the two events, it is obvious that Matthews does not use an historic incident as a departure point for a fictional exploration. The interest for the student of literature comes from the question of why does a person attack a revered object or person - the Pietà incident occurred only six days after the attempted assassination of Alabama Governor George Wallace. Therefore, a discussion of Asa's psychological motivation could be begun with the question, Why?

An editorial in the June 7, 1972, issue of the *Christian Century* speaks to the issue of the widespread defacing of property in our communities as well as the vandalism of city officials who endorse the destruction of architectural masterpieces to clear the

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The editorial also examines the destruction of property, especially the "... cultural achievements embodied in libraries and museums..." by anti-establishment radicals of the late sixties and early seventies and asserts the destruction took place "... all in the name of some ill-defined and misguided attempt to burn the old so that the new might appear." The editorial sums up succinctly, "No one knows enough about human motivation in general or of 'I-am-Jesus-Christ' Toth's in particular to provide truly informed comment concerning his act."¹

Richard Atcheson in a June 17, 1972, editorial in Saturday Review offers a more penetrating analysis than did the Christian Century editorial. Although his implicit conclusion is that we can never know why Toth engaged in his act of nihilism, Atcheson's hypotheses are intriguing and worth exploring with students. Atcheson asserts that Toth's attack was an assault on the "... sensibilities and dreams of Western man." He concedes the act may have been gratuitous, but it also may be read as a message to mankind that says that "... society is false, that man is lonely, that we are estranged from God."²


²Richard Atcheson, "Night Thoughts on the 'Pietà,'" Saturday Review, June 17, 1972, p. 22.
Atcheson examines the possible reactions of several groups of people to the act. Christians may feel that an act of desecration has occurred; the art lover is dismayed by the mutilation of an art treasure; the political radical may exult as he views the statue as a much acclaimed mere representation of suffering while there is much real suffering which is being ignored; the anarchist artist may rejoice with the destruction of the masterpiece which makes way for new forms.

Atcheson suggests that perhaps Toth sought union with the Pieta through his attack on it; he sought to project himself into the mystery of the dead Christ, his life, and his sacrifice. Or, he suggests, Toth might have been telling the listeners that "Marble is not so alive as he is alive, that Christ is not so present as he is, except as Christ lives in him."1 Or, Atcheson suggests, Toth might have been saying that to be a mother is torment, torment to both mother and son.

Before Atcheson writes that the Pieta should not be restored and cosmetized, he avows, "As Christ said, 'I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.' If that is so, then Laszlo Toth is me, and in me is the same rage, the same loneliness, and I must struggle to understand those shared emotions."2

1Ibid.

2Ibid.
The act, as well as the response to the act, is highly dramatic and very real: the Pietà was damaged, the world was outraged, and the Pietà was repaired. It may now be viewed by the public through a bulletproof pane of glass. In comparison to this historical event is The Tale of Asa Bean, a fictional account of a man's desire to destroy a Rubens masterpiece. But as in all powerful fiction, the reader is drawn into the world of the narrative and feels the Rubens is endangered: at any moment the knife may plunge into the canvas and with quick movements tear this way and that. The reader's concern for the canvas, however, is overridden by his concern for Asa. In the fictional world, the reader treasures him and feels a sense of responsibility for him.

When Asa first mentions his desire to destroy a masterpiece, he says, "It's a symbolic act" (p. 24). He can proceed no further in attempting to explain himself, for his brother-in-law dominates the conversation with his remonstrances. The next reference of consequence to the Act is written in one of the third-person sections of the novel. The implied author discusses Asa's education as an undergraduate. After having read the existential canon, Asa determined that the only free act is the gratuitous one "And vandalism wears gratuitous clothing" (p. 38). However, as Asa studied further, he discovered that being free is not an absolute good and that kindness is as gratuitous as vandalism.
Shortly after, Asa began to read the works of the Greek theologian, Clement of Alexandria, and became engrossed in his theories of religious change and concluded that "The old gods must go; ergo, the old images must go" (p. 38). Because Asa's religious faith had long since departed, he could not make application of Clement's Christian tenets to a religious doctrine; therefore, he was left with no option but to destroy the constant in his mind and in his culture - masterpieces belonging to the public. So to commit an outrage against a cherished public possession becomes his obsession.

As he broods about the plan, he ponders philosophic questions: "Is it possible that a man might spend his whole life dedicated to an action he does not understand in the least" (p. 42)? "Is it possible that a man might spend his entire existence without really having a point to it" (p. 42)? "Or (Aristotle) is it possible that his life would be all dynatos (mockery) rather than enteles (haunting)" (p. 42)? And of course his answer to all three questions is a distressing "Yes, yes, yes."

But he is determined to carry out the action, to stage it, to bring the drama to life in the arena of the art museum. Since freedom exists only in the irrelevant, Asa must destroy the relevant and thus test the cultural pietàs in this "... compulsively relevant time" (p. 43). His act is a rebellion against the sacred temple.
The moment in which he wrecks the destruction will be testimony to his freedom, his communication of that freedom in a society that speaks primarily of purpose and relevance.

In his incitation to Durango and Veronica, he says, "Action's the thing, Durango. Action. Believe me I'm an authority on this. All my life I've been spinning my wheels and I've finally come to the realization that I've got to get out and do something" (p. 124). And as he pleads with them, he also comes to the conclusion that he is soliciting their friendship, that he desperately needs to relate to them, and that he is alone in the world, without comfort.

Asa's actual approach to the painting provides some added insight into his motivation. Once he has selected the painting, he feels that wisdom can come only from the primitive act of tasting, devouring, and thus becoming one with the object. For Asa, the act becomes one also of sexual relating, and he has the urge to expose himself.

His action is stopped by the approach of the FORCE group and is ultimately stopped by his sexual union with Madge and her ability to disrobe him of the irony of his everflowing gab so that he can relate sexually and emotionally to another person.

As Asa has said throughout the novel, he seeks himself among his many selves. He seeks rebirth. The destruction of the painting is somehow in his half-mad mind to initiate that rebirth. But,
Matthews seems to assert through the conclusion of the novel that  
rebirth comes not through mad acts against inanimate objects, but  
through relating to other human beings, and thus another character  
has made a discovery.
CHAPTER V

THE CHARISMA CAMPAIGNS

Professional Critics' Response to The Charisma Campaigns

Promoted by Anthony Burgess as already having "... the feel of an American classic,"1 The Charisma Campaigns has received mixed reviews. Released in 1972, it has sold fewer copies than any of Matthews' five novels.

The first-person narration records six weeks in the life of Rex McCoy, a used car dealer with a gift for and an interest in language. McCoy, a typical small town businessman of the Rotary Club variety, details for the readers his encounters with a blonde buxom secretary, his experiment with a professor who is attempting to define McCoy's charisma, and his involvement in an automobile accident in which a young woman is seriously injured.

A critic for the Virginia Quarterly Review asserts that McCoy's story is told in "... forthright and captivating language. ..."2 Alan Hislop praises The Charisma Campaigns as "... a skillful, amusing, unpretentious novel about self-discovery in


middle age, a subject that has floored more than one writer. Here it comes off very well."¹ Robert Buckeye concedes that although "... the prose is workmanlike and the tone sure, Matthews is content with obvious surface impressions of the contradictions which at once characterize and generate our lives."² New York Times reviewer, Martin Levin, alleges that "Jack Matthews has a connoisseur's eye for foibles, some of which are treasured in this wonderfully effervescence life of a salesman."³

The yarn told by McCoy has been said to be of "... compulsive interest";⁴ "... a 'fun' book of no pretensions and considerable charm";⁵ "... marked by a truthful simplicity and... heir to the qualities displayed in Hanger Stout, Awake!";⁶ and a


⁴Unsigned review of The Charisma Campaigns, Virginia Quarterly Review: c.

⁵Ibid.

"... thought provoking memoir-confessional..." According to one critic, "What gives the novel its unusual sparkle is the author's inclination to be upbeat about the offbeat. Mr. Matthews presents us with a parade of failure, crazies, ingrates and fools. But he doesn't condemn them; he marvels at them. The moral of the novel is winnowed out by a professor of 'Psychology and Communications' who tries to anatomize the McCoy charisma. Like poetry, it turns out to be unmistakable but indefinable."

Students' Response to The Charisma Campaigns

Of the four Matthews novels that the class read, the one by which the majority of students were most intrigued was The Charisma Campaigns. Rex McCoys are apparently such a familiar part of the American landscape that students readily related to Matthews' character. They understood him and were alternately amused and disgusted by his actions.

A female student wrote, "The story, itself, would certainly make one very wary of used car salesmen. However, the book is so funny that one might even buy an inexpensive car if one had to in order to read this book." That is some praise coming from a

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2 Levin, review of The Charisma Campaigns, p. 41.
girl with limited income even if one concedes it smacks of exaggeration.

One young man was concerned with Matthews' structuring of the plot:

Throughout the story Rex is continually using newsclip sentences as if they were headlines on a newspaper. This is how he comments on other people, certain situations, and also himself. They are quite amusing, which is another thing about the story -- his wit. What could happen to a guy with such a good nature, personality and a way with words? One reads on to find out the possibilities of a plot.

Another young man found a contrast between Asa Bean and Rex McCoy:

I think the plot of The Charisma Campaigns was just the opposite from The Tale of Asa Bean. In this novel by Jack Matthews you have a car salesman who could bullshit anyone about almost everything. Then in The Tale of Asa Bean you have a guy who [is] so intelligent in his own field that you couldn't communicate with him.

Two students concentrated on the character of Professor Winslow, who attempts to catalog and define Rex McCoy's charisma: "Professor Winslow teaches at a college in the city. He comes to a small town to study Rex McCoy's charisma, and finds that 'some got it and some don't.'"

Quite the opposite type of character is found in the college professor who is completely unsure of himself and his goals. He, too, cannot decipher what is real in his life and what only appears to be real, so he busies himself in a worthless project in the name of science. In actuality the professor uses his project as a front to study behavior patterns which he would prefer to his current meek indecisiveness.
Most of the students' essays centered around the character of Rex McCoy: they scolded, they praised, they laughed, they despaired.

Jack Matthews' *The Charisma Campaigns* is a study of the search for 'The Real McCoy.' Rex McCoy is a used car dealer, a promoter, an optimist, a super salesman, who knows it and loves it. Even so, the six weeks of his life covered in *The Charisma Campaigns* are six weeks of self-evaluation when he learns to know and understand himself. While at both the beginning and the end of the six weeks he is satisfied with his life style, he is as he is and happy to be so.

Rex - the man to see about anything, the man to come to for money, the man who has a campaign for every season, in short, the man who has a master plan for all your needs.

The man Rex [is] a man whom you might be familiar with, a close friend of the family, a car salesman in a small town or even one's father. In fact, the world is full of men like Rex McCoy. . . .

. . . throughout the story he [Rex] tries to con every person he comes in contact with. I don't really think he's doing it to actually hurt anyone else, but I think he uses it more innocently for self-esteem. It takes a tragedy for Rex to realize this and when he does, instead of changing, he accepts himself.

There is also another side to Rex McCoy. He is not without problems or insecurities as his used car dealings would seem to indicate. Rex sees himself as being much different than he really is. He thinks of himself as a suave sophisticated shark of a man, when in reality he comes much closer to a codfish.
In *The Charisma Campaigns* Jack Matthews uses the first-person narrative approach to tell the story of Rex McCoy. This puts Matthews' audience at a disadvantage. Since one can only know the other characters through Rex, the reader receives a biased description and only a vague outline of other characters' personalities. For this reason their reactions to Rex are difficult to judge fairly.

By being constantly exposed to Rex's inner thoughts, one quickly comes to dislike him. He never has a good word for anyone (except when he puts on his honest disguise to do business). He resents his wife. Cripps and Bucky are lousy salesmen. Mr. Metzer is a 'bastard' and a 'dumb farmer.' Rex never performs an act with sincerity. Instead he performs with the idea of making money - no matter if it is honest or dishonest.

Most students felt disgust with McCoy's attempts to buy an eased conscience, and this student's words best expressed that view:

The entire novel also makes a comment on the realities of small town middle class America, and its illusion. For here we see a very corrupt individual, McCoy, cheating people out of money, beating the government's program which stocked his lake and landscaped the surrounding area, committing adultery, and ruining a girl's life as a result of his drunken state while driving an automobile. And yet, the community holds high regard for this man because he can create an illusion of fair trade and high ideals which he himself has accepted.

**Some Critical Approaches to The Charisma Campaigns**

**Mythological Approach**

In *Archetypal Themes in the Modern Story* Matthews explores five such archetypal themes: the contest, the scapegoat, metamorphosis, the trickster, and taboo. Teachers of literature have
an obligation to acquaint students with some of the vehicles for an intelligent assessment of literature, and knowledge of archetypal themes is one such vehicle. Vehicles do not limit one's approach: they enrich and enhance, helping the reader to see the fine or delicate meanings and intents of a work. There are many keys to a single literary creation; and as we engage multiple locks, we come closer to an understanding of the total work.

One of the ways in which The Charisma Campaigns may be read is as an exploration of an archetypal theme in literature - the theme of the trickster. This tradition in literature has taken many forms and has appeared comically and seriously in works as diverse as "The Road Runner" and Othello. Students should address such questions as, What are the qualities of the trickster? Is he a sympathetic character, an unsympathetic character, or a composite? What is the source of his power? From what sort of ethical framework does he operate?

Matthews asserts that at the heart of the term 'trickster' is the "... idea of manipulating others, of using them, of deceiving them for one's own material purposes or for the simple thrills of pride and wrongheadedness."¹ He concludes that identification by

¹Matthews, Archetypal Themes in the Modern Story, p. 233.
the reader with the trickster is simple because the forms, the ceremonies, and the civilities of our lives have their substance in trickery.

The sense of play is at the heart of the character of the trickster. He is often very disillusioned by life, bitter and pessimistic, as are Mark Twain's mysterious strangers and must use trickery to expose the hypocrisies of daily existence as he engages in a kind of play. He may choose an alternate track and view life as a series of jokes as does George C. Scott in *The Flim Flam Man* and consider it his special vocation to keep the laughs coming.

Rex McCoy is one of the latter. He feels a hollowness when he is not playing an existing game or devising strategy for a new one. His forte or special game is the printed word and his sudden inspirations lead him to seize a paper and a marker and within seconds he has penned another sign, "I WANT TO SELL TO YOU / I WANT TO BUY FROM YOU. / THIS IS CALLED GIVE AND TAKE / AND IT HAPPENS TO BE WHAT LIFE / IS ALL ABOUT, MY FRIEND"¹ which will entice one of the suckers on his used car lot.

The game McCoy plays best is the selling game. Whether he is selling a car, convincing Sheila Richards to have sexual intercourse, or persuading Mrs. Metzger that his activities are


Subsequent references to this volume will appear in the text.
legitimate, he is selling himself with his charisma. When the editor of the local newspaper comes to the lot, McCoy says, "The way I figure it, Harley, I pay a few bucks more than the other fellow and sell for a few dollars less. That way, we all profit. According to my philosophy, this is what life's all about" (pp. 47-48). Or as the sign on McCoy's desk indicates, "... Living is Doing, and at McCoys, Doing is SELLING" (p. 34).

Moreover, he has the selling down to a fine art:

When I turned back, old Metzger's face was perfectly composed and earnest, but I knew my joke had done the trick - it had broken the momentum of the old conversation and ended the ceremonies. Now we were getting down to business (p. 9).

I suppose it's my charisma. I love to talk to people, most of the time, and get them to see my way of thinking. Sometimes their eyes kind of glaze over, the way some people get when they're deeply affected by music. I never look three inches inside their heads at moments like this, I never look at them at all. I just kind of focus a half-inch in front of the bridge of their nose and give way to my own voice (p. 60).

Further, Rex must have reinforcement for the games he is playing. Regularly, he will shout to his salesmen, "Who's the best?" and he expects and gets the answer; "Rex is best" (p. 33)!

Rex's reaction in the concluding scenes of the novel when he has presumably been responsible for an automobile accident in which a young woman is left paralyzed demonstrates that he is seemingly unaffected by the restraints and ethical sense that
characterize most lives. As he lies in his hospital room, recovering from minor injuries, he recalls an incident from high school. In a football game he had given a concussion to another player. The student was hospitalized for several days and he found himself "... half taboo for a while" (p. 170). When his English teacher Miss Temple expressed to him her sympathy for how he must feel for having hurt the other player, he was puzzled because as he says, "... I hadn't really felt guilty ... and yet I was supposed to, obviously" (p. 170).

He feels no guilt for selling inferior cars, for committing adultery, and for drunken driving which ruins another's life. This trickster figure seems to be above a moral sense. In his naïveté, innocence, or ignorance, he can actually justify his behavior with a series of rationalizations and trite clichés: "... Photographs ... show ... that it is possible that - even though I was intoxicated - I was driving within the requirements of the law" (p. 173). He orders red roses for his victim almost every day as casually as he sends Cripps, his salesman, out to replenish the office supply of Marlboros.

After his release from the hospital, he continues his life; and the thinking which he asserts he has done about "... Winslow and Sheila and Bucky and Cripps and Gunther and Yerby and Patti Nieder. And my wife" (p. 178), leads him to conclude, "Clowns and
fools, that's what we all are. But the game is beautiful, and it sure as hell is fun, if you see it right and understand that it is a goddam game, and understand that anybody who doesn't think we're all crazy is crazy" (p. 179).

And that conclusion leads to a reinforcement of his role as trickster god, for after all what is a clown but a card-carrying trickster?

Linguistic Approach

An area that many literature teachers tend to avoid is style. The usual response teachers give when queried about this matter is, "I'd like to study style, but students get so restless when I even approach the subject. They want to discuss what a work means."

To many English teachers it is impossible to discuss content, that is, what a work means, divorced from style. The style shapes the content; and a non-restrictive definition of style would state that style is everything: sentence structure, diction, allusions, dialogue, summarized narrative, characterization, plot, theme, setting, and the like. If students go through a rather meaningless exercise in style in which they identify a series of images without ever discussing how those images are related to a theme in the total work, then it is to be expected that they will be restless.
Jack Matthews as a novelist and as a person is very much enamored with language, with the verbal plays that can baffle and delight his listeners. Language seems to be for him that which saves him from an existential void, that which gives him a reason to get up each morning and carry on. As a young man he became interested in words. His father was an attorney and as the young Matthews sat in the courtroom listening to his father and a host of other lawyers, he bore witness to the fact that language shapes our lives. It sometimes is our salvation or our damnation; it often brings us close to people or alienates us from them.

In videotaping Rex McCoy, Professor Winslow is attempting to discover this power of language, "Man, you could talk a cow through a buttonhole" (p. 46), to find the key which will unlock his own lonely existence, the key which will enable him to escape the middle of nowheresville and enter a world which he considers to be important, the world of the cities where blacks are revolting and social change is rampant.

To Winslow's dismay, he discovers that his endless weeks of taping and analyzing yield nothing, for McCoy's facility with language, his charisma, is not something that may be dissected, classified, and finally labeled. It is dynamic, alive, changing. He is perturbed that this charisma seems unavailable to him, a
college professor, and readily available to Rex McCoy, a used car salesman who was graduated from the state university.

Professor Winslow is not alone in his failure to control language. There are numerous instances throughout the novel of linguistic dilemmas. As McCoy is standing in front of a urinal in Taylor Hall, he begins to read the graffiti and discovers "Crudely etched there at eye height for every Taylor Hall customer to contemplate" (p. 55) the communiqué "... Sheila Richards Fucks" (p. 55), a communication of ill will obviously recorded by one who can articulate his hostility or delight in no other way. When McCoy's son, Phil, writes home from college, he makes several references to the distinct probability of his letters and, in turn, himself being misunderstood: "I won't go into details as to my feelings, as well as the reasoning behind my convictions, because in all honesty I do not think you and Dad would understand" (p. 78). He also adds, "This is probably all very incoherent . . . , but one of my professors recently said that it is 'an honest man's duty to make himself misunderstood by others; otherwise, he simply is not honest' " (p. 102). When McCoy's wife is traveling in Europe, she sends him post cards written in Spanish, a language she knows he can not understand. In response to her post card that does not communicate, he sends a telegram that will be incoherent to her: "Dear
Rex misuses language intentionally at times, but at other times he has no intention of miscuing his audience, yet he does. When he tells Mr. Metzger the joke concerning blacks moving into a white neighborhood, Mr. Metzger misses the verbal cues that the joke is over, so McCoy relies on loud guffaws to signal the conclusion. Further, as McCoy relates the accident which caused Patti Nieder's paralysis, he first tells his readers that the investigation of the accident showed that although he was intoxicated, he was driving within the requirements of the law. Then he equivocates and in the following paragraph reveals that he "... might have been going five miles per hour too fast, and that might have made the difference" (p. 173). He further confuses the verbal message by saying that he wasn't sure whether he skidded on the curve because he was going too fast or because he was forced to brake when Patti's car appeared "... so suddenly" (p. 173). All of these abuses of language come from a man who early in the novel says to the employees of Gestler's Lunch, "People should use words accurately, or how can you communicate? If you mean lunch, say lunch, but if you mean lunch, breakfast, dinner, and snacks, then say something else" (p. 80).
When McCoy is not using his control over language to sell a car, seduce a woman, or impress the bartender at the local tavern, he is philosophizing on the uses and abuses of language:

I want to suggest to you, by God, this is simply one humble, little unnoticed instance of the way conformity and a brainless socialistic homogenizing influence is working its way into our lives. I mean, when we reduce all Galaxies and T-Birds, all Impalas and Electras, to a single, indiscriminate word, 'car,' we have, by God, lost our ability to make important distinctions, and what - I would like to ask you - is the mind for, if not to make important distinctions (p. 45)?

Also, he boasts to his readers that he is the only one who uses the unabridged dictionary which his wife bought.

Matthews uses the ambiguous character of McCoy to express his convictions concerning the importance of language; yet there is an irony, a laughing at self, as Matthews realizes that to be human, that is, to be a user of language, is to be inconsistent, to fail to practice what one verbally endorses. Since the narrator of the tale is Rex McCoy, there are decided implications in Matthews' stylistic approach to his material.

The entire novel is in the tradition of the tale. There is an authorial ease with language as the narrator fixes upon one point in time and then moves forward to reveal to the reader a series of simple incidents in ordinary lives. He then attempts to make something of these incidents, to come to terms with them, and to discover their significance.

Generally, however, the teller of the tale shows little concern for exact replication of incident. McCoy on the other hand, is extremely
exact: he smokes a 'Marlboro cigarette'; he discusses a '66 Comet'; and he plants 'Scotch pines.' McCoy, like the usual teller of the tale, is a master of the witty epigram that is stamped with a picture, humor, and a communiqué: "... Truck Driver Swerves to Avoid Child, Falls Off Sofa" (p. 4).

There is a vitality, an aliveness in McCoy's speech patterns: "Silence. Sheila staring at the roof of the VW where her two fingers are still resting, tickling it. Another couple seconds of silence. Then she turns her head and shoots me dead with another look, and I say, with my voice suddenly husky, 'How about it' " (p. 25)? His effort is achieved through the informal word choice which approximates slang at times, "couple seconds," as well as through the use of the active voice and present verb tense. It is further achieved through an abundance of dialogue with interesting summarized narrative interspersed.

Finally, McCoy's actions enliven his narrative. "I reached up to turn Sheila's head around so that I could kiss her lips, but I jammed my thumb in her eye" (p. 27). He is the buffoon, the clumsy clown who is able to laugh at his own ridiculous behavior. He sees the humor in his situation and his lapses into self-deprecation are infrequent. He and Sheila have been discovered in their love making attempts by Farmer Metzger. As the incident comes
to a close, McCoy reports to the audience that his mind's eye sees
"... old Metzger standing there with his hands still in his overalls and his one cheek bulged out and his eyes wide open with looking" (p. 27). He is able to discern, call the reader's attention to, and elaborate on the comic, the ludicrous, in human action and behavior.

As his story unfolds, it is only reasonable that it reveals him as a literal-minded character little given to considering moral issues when they present a conflict in his mind or when they threaten to disturb the comfort of his structured world, a world where the actions of his family and associates are always predictable. He is a simple man, a graduate of the state university, a man content with material success. He is much more successful in dealing with incidents that threaten to disturb the status quo than was Babbitt in dealing with his dream world. He is what many readers would term the average American man.

**Philosophical Approach**

A subject of interest to an adolescent audience is the cliché. When their papers are returned by the English teacher, students often find 'Avoid clichés' written in the margin. A fundamental point concerning the cliché is that more often than not there is a commonly accepted truth in it; and if a student has just discovered
the truth of a cliché, what may be considered stale to his teacher is very fresh to him. Also, for the student who is struggling to learn to express himself, the cliché is sometimes a simple way to express what is otherwise a very difficult concept to convey.

Student responses to *The Charisma Campaigns* indicate their interest in examining through fiction the cliché: 'the real McCoy': "... *The Charisma Campaigns* is a study of the search for 'The Real McCoy'...," "Rex sees himself as being different than he really is...," and "The entire novel also makes a comment on the realities of small town, middle class America and its illusion." Matthews states, "I like to take stereotypes and clichés and banalities and just alter them a bit... and I think there is something terribly interesting and vital there."¹ Matthews uses 'the real McCoy' cliché as a vehicle for exploring what has been an important ingredient in the novel since its birth, the theme of illusion versus reality.

Rex McCoy is a small town used car dealer who has a perception of himself as a Lothario, a well-liked employer, a clever master of words, and a dynamic salesman. As has been indicated earlier, he is a trickster figure; and the novel is a first-person narration of McCoy's journey of discovery. Because of the point

¹Interview with Matthews, 2 May 1972.
of view used in the novel, the reader often asks himself if McCoy
is not only tricking the characters in the novel but the reader as
well as he selects what he will reveal to his audience.

In an interview Matthews disclosed that the mock heroic news-
paper headlines which serve as the chief character defining device
for McCoy are used to divulge his sardonic view of himself. Head-
lines presumably function to signal the advent of something impor-
tant to a great number of people; and in his desire to reveal himself
to a reading audience through the device of the novel, and more par-
ticularly the headlines, McCoy is making an ironic commentary on
himself: he is unimportant in the larger scheme of things regard-
less of Miss Temple's observations to the contrary. But he will
play her intriguing game if for no other reason than to fill the empty
spaces - and he has many - of his life. Through the character Mc-
Coy, Matthews is expressing one of his convictions as a writer:
"... if I communicate my loneliness to you, by just that much I
have ceased to be lonely."¹ So with a typewriter and a sheaf of
paper, McCoy employs the "... wisdom of words, grammar,
and syntax ..." (p. 169), equipment for his diversion and com-
munication.

¹Matthews, "The Writer's Search," p. 79.
In McCoy's account of his initial meeting with Professor Winslow, he reveals that in answer to Winslow's query "Are you Regius McCoy?," he has answered with tongue in cheek, "I'm the one . . . and only real McCoy, Found Living in Obscurity in Small Town" (p. 34). Winslow has designed a research project, to ascertain the nature of McCoy's charisma, in order to be able to flee McCoy's world which Winslow describes as unreal as the Never-Never Land of Peter Pan and Wendy. Winslow asserts that the residents of Never-Never Land (small town America) are escapists who ignore the problems and suffering in half the world (the world of the cities). McCoy's response to his charge is, "I don't see how one place is any more real than another" (p. 56). The argument is never settled although the reader tends to think, as does Matthews, that the truth lies somewhere between the extremes: "Overcommitment to relevance results in hysteria, silliness, and superficiality [Winslow]. Overcommitment to its opposite results in hubris, madness, and loss of the covenant of one's brotherhood with man [Neil]."¹

When McCoy views the film, he is amazed: "... was that gimpy, dark-faced, thick-bodied old sinner myself" (p. 138)? "I never realized how hoarse my voice is. Probably from whiskey and cigars. I had never realized how I could sing and chant when

I got wound up. I mean, I realized it, but goddam if I realized it was exactly like this" (p. 139). As he views the film, Rex admits that he is almost as thick in the body as his brother Randall. Later in the narrative he no longer has this small consolation, for he finds that Sheila's husband has mistaken him for "... fat, crazy Randall" (p. 151) whom McCoy has always considered a pariah. With this additional information about his appearance, he is forced to resort to defensive humor: "I kept joking with myself and saying that I was the real McCoy, no matter what Homer Winslow's film made me look like" (p. 152). His image of himself as a well-liked employer is destroyed when he overhears his salesmen speak disparagingly of him.

As the props which hold his image of himself in place are shattered, McCoy's anxiety attacks increase. He has two such attacks on the evening after discovering his strong resemblance to Randall, one of which is initiated by the country and western singer's plaintive cry, "Don't leave me out here all alone" (p. 118)! McCoy is feeling displaced; the frames of reference upon which he has grown to depend no longer seem valid for him. When McCoy reads his son's poem entitled "Paternities," he asks himself, "Was I the real McCoy? Or who is the real McCoy? If, as the poem says, Phil is part of me, is he the real McCoy then? Who is the real anything, for Christ's sake" (p. 149)?
Existentialists claim that the suffering McCoy undergoes is essential to the re-establishment of self. His nightmares, self doubt, and despair come to a climax when the automobile accident occurs. Following the accident, he makes a decision to escape his existential predicament, a decision to affirm the human capacity for adjustment: "... we adjust to whatever happens to us, and adjust to whatever we become" (p. 174). In the face of what he has discovered regarding the uncertainties and absurdities of his existence, he has determined to establish his individual personhood as car dealer, to affirm himself as genuine, as authentic, as the real McCoy.
CHAPTER VI

PICTURES OF THE JOURNEY BACK

Professional Critics' Response to Pictures of the Journey Back

The most technical and decidedly the most assaulted of Matthews' novels is Pictures of the Journey Back. Published in 1973, it is Matthews' last novel to date and is third in sales of his five novels.

Pictures is a product of Mr. Matthews' tenure as Distinguished Writer in Residence at Wichita State University during the academic year 1970-71. It is a narrative of a journey from Wichita to eastern Colorado and features an ex-rodeo clown, his common law wife's daughter, and the daughter's boy friend. The purpose of the trip, which is filled with danger and violent conflicts, is to bring the daughter to her mother's deathbed. Matthews uses extensive experimentation with the technical point of view in order to give the reader a sense of the differing perspectives of each of the three characters.

The novel has been criticised for its characters, its use of film, methods, and its general style. Best Sellers reports that the discovery of how alien each of the characters is to the other is the "... only essential worth of the otherwise worthless novel."
The reviewer also records that *Pictures of the Journey Back* is
"... 176 frames of clogged water faucet."\(^1\) A *New Republic* critic asserts that "It is perhaps too bad the boy and girl have to be
so arty; suddenly in the middle of a howling desert the reader gets
the uncomfortable sensation that he's in the next room to a writing
(or film workshop)."\(^2\)

D. Keith Mano, reviewing for the *New York Times* alleges
that Matthews' camera is "... seldom candid," it "... poses
us, willy-nilly. ..." The characters are "... no more than a
sum of their props ... which seem perfunctory, false." The
"... inconsistent present tense ... sounds lame, novelistic,
not very certain of its purpose." He accuses Matthews of presenting
"... unalloyed gibberish" and of "... painting himself into a
peculiar stylistic corner." He calls *Pictures of the Journey Back*
"A lazy performance" and concludes that Matthews "... is hoping
to get away with something or other here; he doesn't manage it."\(^3\)

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Ernest Cady admits that "Pictures of the Journey Back is a technical success within the limited novelistic framework which Jack Matthews has deliberately chosen to work. But he couldn't make me care much about its people." He concludes that many readers will be as quickly bored as he was by the "... revolving unimaginative filth which passes ... for communication"\(^1\) between Laurel and Jeffrey.

Crutwell and Westburg refer to Pictures of the Journey Back as a 'fable' which they define as "... fictions which do keep some contact with what (if we are not metaphysicians) we call reality and normality, but which convey their pictures of them through a story in itself mythic or fantastic." They identify the fable element as Jeffrey's role as character and film-maker and cite it as the problem in the novel. One of the reviewers thinks that Matthews' use of the film-maker and his meditations is parody; the other, a vehicle for "... saying something about the relationship between raw experience and art." In spite of the ambiguity which they discovered, they felt that the "Cowboy and girl and, at the end, dying mother all come to life with great vividness; Matthews has an admirable ear for the way people talk, and it is largely through their

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dialogue that these three are alive." Crutwell and Westburg conclude that the book has "... its own vision, offbeat but authentic."\(^1\) Other reviewers who respond in a positive vein mention "... characters... who emerge with a fine vividness...,"\(^2\) and strong control of "... the characterization, use of descriptive detail, and story line...."\(^3\) A reviewer for the Virginia Quarterly refers to the novel as "Charming and unpretentious..."\(^4\)

Some Critical Approaches to Pictures of the Journey Back

Formalistic Approach

In an address at Urbana College on March 7, 1973, Jack Matthews stated, "All of Asa Bean grew from seeking out the implications of the opening scene."\(^5\) Writers of prose fiction typically use the beginning pages of a work to establish themes, character, and

\(^1\)Patricia Crutwell and Faith Westburg, review of Pictures of the Journey Back, by Jack Matthews, in Hudson Review XXVI (Summer 1973) : 420.

\(^2\)Unsigned review of Pictures of the Journey Back, New Republic, p. 34.


tone. Students should be taught to examine the opening section of a novel carefully and to reread this section after having completed the novel. As the story unfolds, what is intimated in the opening section is developed, affirmed, and played out in the remainder of the work.

The first scene in *Pictures of the Journey Back* reminds the reader of the opening scene of a late forties or early fifties film. J. Dan Swope drives into the Skelly Service Station in Zimmerdale, Kansas. When the station attendant asks if he wants the oil checked, Swope replies, "I could probably use me some damn oil, but I'll let it go for now. I have got to get my ass moving on to Wichita." ¹

This bit of dialogue states explicitly what has been suggested to that point: that the novel is somehow to be concerned with time, time as experienced by J. Dan Swope whom the reader assumes is the protagonist. The opening paragraph initiates the time motif:

The bright Skelly sign shines forth like an emblem of civilization in the darkness of this November dawn. To the east, between the vaguely rising sun and the oasis of light that is this gasoline station upon a Kansas highway, lie the atavistic Flint Hills, rolling prairie land covered

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¹Jack Matthews, *Pictures of the Journey Back*, p. 5.

Subsequent references to this volume will appear in the text.
with buffalo grass and approximately one snarled thorn tree per thousand acres (p. 3).

In this passage civilization is juxtaposed with the "atavistic Flint Hills" while darkness and the rising sun also suggest the passing of time.

Several paragraphs later Matthews refers to the length of time the station has been open, to a clock which "... ticks steadily ..." (p. 3) on the back wall of the service station and to a restroom door which begins to bang "At two minutes after seven ..." (p. 3). When Swope begins his dialogue with the station assistant, he relates the timing of an accident he has just witnessed and finally states overtly, "... Time waits for no damn man" (p. 5). Of course, all the references to time reinforce and underscore the major plot line of the story, Swope's concern with bringing Laurel Burch home to her mother so that a reconciliation can be effected prior to Florence's death. In a larger sense, the novel explores the theme that as we live out our chronological dates, we are merely marking time to fill the void that is the substance of our lives.

The existential theme of the void, central to all of Matthews' works, is mentioned in the opening scene when Swope peels the newspaper - yet another symbol of time - from his leg, "... looks at it momentarily ... as if he is about to read it; but then
he lets it go, and it flaps wildly away into the void" (p. 6).

The concept of the void is reinforced by the prevailing mood of the story. The landscape is bleak: "The sight of this land in late autumn would blight the eyes of a vulture, someone once said; but no one heard him, and the hawks don't give a damn anyway" (p. 3). Even a bird which feeds on death is revolted by the death and desolation found in this area in late autumn, an archetypal symbol of death. The "... cold dawn wind blows hard and tirelessly..." and "... seems to carry blackness with it" (p. 3).

The emphasis in this section on the indifference of nature to the discomfort it produces in man will reach its epitome when Swope, Laurel, and Jeffrey are held powerless in the eye of a tornado. Within this atmospheric medium is the protagonist, a character wounded by life. He is stiff in the body from the many falls he has taken as a former rodeo performer. He has the battered face of an ex-boxer and speaks in "... hoarse, heavy voice with an almost unnatural slowness..." (p. 4). His old Stetson and decrepit Ford pickup truck complement this pathetic image of his physical self.

As Matthews ends the opening scene, he focuses in on the movement of this bruised hero, J. Dan Swope, as he climbs into the cab of the pickup, starts the engine, and resumes his travel through time and space.
Philosophical Approach

In the nineteenth century Søren Kierkegaard, Danish philosopher and theologian, posed questions with which Laurel Burch of Jack Matthews' *Pictures of the Journey Back* struggles: questions which are important to most late adolescents, questions for which the literature class offers a forum. What is the point of one's life? What sense can be made of human existence? What is the purpose of human events? How is one to live in an irrational, meaningless world?

As the novel comes to a halt following the kinds of experiences which Kierkegaard would classify as miraculous events capable of bringing one to enlightenment, that is, a tornado, a deathbed scene with a rejected mother, Laurel is no closer to acquiring knowledge than she was when she began her journey protesting, "No, no, no! I'm trying to figure out what's fucking my head up . . . ." (p. 18).

Elements of *Pictures of the Journey Back* present the thesis of the more contemporary existentialist thinkers that there is no God to lead one toward enlightenment. This thesis also holds that man is trapped in a meaningless world, an arbitrary world, a world which offers no vehicles for making sense of one's life. At the same time that no vehicles are offered, man is driven to question his existence, to confront it head on and demand answers.
Jean-Paul Sartre explores this thesis in *Nausea* as asserted through his fictional protagonist, Antoine Roguentin. Man becomes overpowered by the "nausea of existence," the realization that any lifestyle is totally arbitrary and any other would do just as well, and is confronted with "dreadful freedom." Freedom is dreadful because although one realizes that freedom of choice is totally possible, one also realizes that (1) there is no God or guide to assist in making choices, (2) there is no way to escape making choices, and (3) there is no way to avoid the responsibility for the consequences of the choices one makes.

In Matthews' presentation of the existential predicament, the three major characters are at different points on a continuum: J. Dan is on the extreme left where he has not yet awakened to the knowledge that one may ask questions; Laurel is in the turbulent middle where she is highly frustrated in her search for meaning; and Jeffrey is on the extreme right. He has endorsed a lifestyle which, although distasteful at times to the reader, seems appropriate for him and for which he is willing to accept responsibility.

As the reader examines Matthews' fictional world depicted in *Pictures of the Journey Back*, he finds Laurel saying, "... I have this terrible sense that I'm imprisoned and don't know it" (p. 36)! and "Do you ever feel like trapped? ... And don't know why" (p. 38)?
Laurel cries for assistance in a world where God is deaf or indifferent:

For this instant, she felt funky and alone, whirring in a cat's cradle. . . . Her mind fluttered and turned, and she closed her eyes and breathed deeply, whispering, 'Help me, please. Help me.' Trying out the sounds. Then she opened her eyes and walked toward the house, half frightened, half fascinated by its loneliness and the indifference of the ugly cedars . . . (p. 65).

When she and Jeffrey are searching for J. Dan, she is a typical twentieth century lost soul as she cries, "... My God, it's like things are getting out of control! We don't even know what we're doing" (p. 94). She masks her despair throughout the novel as she gains control at times with a gaming technique: the use of the old lady voice.

The film maker boy friend Jeffrey refers to himself as an "... existential entrepeneur" (p. 56). He is able to seize upon the dilemmas of characters in the novel and recognize how these moments and years of crises in their never ending circles can be packaged and marketed to bring him the recognition he seeks. This ability in filming, in capitalizing upon the tragedy of man, is what brings meaning to his meaningless world. He sees life as a lonely carnival, but he sees the potential for using that motif as a vehicle for exploitation.

In Jeffrey's current film endeavor, J. Dan, an innocent subject, becomes victim. As J. Dan proudly relates the history of
himself as rodeo clown, he is relating the history of Everyman: "Underneath that big grin, there ain't nothing funny at all" (p. 55).

Man is a clown, a pretender, a performer; and under the bulb nose is a broken nose, and beneath the glove is a deformed hand.

In J. Dan's conscious moments, life has a plan or purpose and there is a rigid code of behavior. From his viewpoint if one breaks the simple code, he must make restitution by noble acts such as by bringing Laurel to her mother's deathbed. But in the depths of sleep, the questions Laurel is asking at every turn of the journey emerge from J. Dan's subconscious to bring nightmare dreams where the adventures are frighteningly "... disconnected, unreal, and without point" (p. 166). J. Dan's common law wife, Florence, comments on this nightmare feeling by offering these deathbed words, "It's all like a muddy sort of dream, baby" (p. 137).

Peter Peters, the vagrant whom Laurel befriends, sums up the world view of the novel, a novel where "... somewhere down the existential line, a blind switchman waves the train on" (p. 50) by telling Laurel, "'Oh, I just been getting rides out of the way. ... A lot of people don't know where they're going" (p. 113). And as Laurel reaches out to touch him, she feels no substance. He is a ghost in the wasteland: "It's like he isn't inside the coat at all, because all she can feel is thick, heavy, wool. No arm, no shoulder" (p. 114).
In this absurd drama, characters have no substance, have no control over their fates and merely take their parts upon the stage. After awkward attempts at reaching out, they return to their rituals, their familiar patterns. The absurdity of J. Dan's feeding his grey hounds the raisin cake Laurel has baked because he fears she has spiked it with LSD is no more absurd than J. Dan's return to card playing, television watching, ranching, and alcohol consuming. These are the opiates he must use to make life tolerable. As he says several times to Laurel when she scolds him for his large consumption of Old Charter, "... sometimes a man needs himself a little help and comfort" (p. 29).

Sociological Approach

A common theme in the literature of Western civilization is the conflict between generations, the rebellion of sons and daughters against parents. A developmental task of the late adolescent is to gain independence from his parents in preparation for the time when he will be leaving their home to establish his own. This phenomenon in our society makes *Pictures of the Journey Back* especially relevant for study by late adolescents.

In *Pictures of the Journey Back*, a father surrogate attempts to bring a rebellious daughter to her mother's deathbed. The effort takes the surrogate father, the daughter, and the daughter's boy
friend - surrogate son - through a series of painful scenes which do not lead to the expected reconciliation but lead instead to the same, or nearly the same, place on a psychological continuum where each stood prior to the journey.

The circumstances which have led to the separation of the mother and daughter are:

(1) The natural father deserts.

(2) J. Dan Swope, the father surrogate, takes mother and daughter into his home and cohabits with mother. At the end of the second year, the daughter leaves.

(3) This arrangement between J. Dan and the mother continues for six years until the death of the mother.

(4) The daughter, who is a size 16, unkempt, and outspoken, feels ill will for the mother who is a size 9 (and never lets the daughter forget that fact), is immaculate (has her hair in rollers and is wearing perfume on the day of her death), and is hypocritical.

As the novel opens, J. Dan Swope has come for Laurel, the daughter, in order that Florence, the mother, and she may make some sort of final peace. Laurel's words sound familiar as she discovers the intent of Swope's visit:

I told you: I am not coming. That's all there is to it. There's nothing I can do, and there's absolutely no point in being like hypocritical. My proud, beautiful, eternally
well-groomed, and disapproving mother and I haven't been able to communicate with each other for a long, long time, J. Dan, and there's no use pretending this late. And you know it (p. 14).

His response to her also seems like something the reader has heard innumerable times, "She has got to see you one more time. Just once, and that is it. Forever. And the obligation is done. And that is why I have come to get you. Right is right" (pp. 14-15).

Later Swope tells Laurel,

Some things are just right, and there's nothing you can do about them one way or the other. Maybe if you are ever lucky enough to grow up you will understand. They are just right. Some things you like to do; some things you have to do (p. 36).

Swope lives in a world where issues are black or white, the world created by a Puritan ethic that endorses "Honor thy father and mother." This world has no room for modern psychological knowledge which shows that at some times it is not possible for children to honor their fathers and mothers, and it is deceitful to assume this pose when there is no substance to it. The assumption in the Puritan world was that the mother would be honorable. Laurel asks herself how she can honor a mother whose principal occupation for years has been beautifying herself; therefore, she attacks her mother's standards by allowing her own unwashed body to become obese and by wearing dingy Salvation Army vintage tee shirts and jeans. Even though Laurel lives with a man to whom
she is not married, she despises her mother for doing likewise.

As Laurel searches for her own values, she is driven to repudiate her mother's more and more forcefully.

In her search Laurel realizes that underneath she is a skeptic. She has learned that women must deceive and depend upon men, else what else is there for them, yet she rebels against this knowledge: "Only where was a woman's honesty to herself as a person? Why did she have to act like a pet dog or something" (p. 48)? In J. Dan's world women who flatter a man's ego and women who retain their good looks and winning ways are to be pampered, loved, adored.

In this exploration of the generation gap, relationships among the four characters are not reduced to their lining up on either side of a mark. As is normal in human interacting, there is a shifting of allegiances from time to time. When Jeffrey talks gleefully about the possibilities of using J. Dan in his film, of "getting to him" in order to have more to work with, Laurel responds in a low voice, "'I mean it isn't any game to him; and I can tell you it isn't to me either'" (p. 49). And shortly thereafter in response to Jeffrey's comment that J. Dan is unreal, she hastens to J. Dan's defense. "'No, J. Dan's real . . . Maybe a little defective, but he's real'" (p. 51).
J. Dan maintains that a man has to expect a combination of the good and the bad in life. After Laurel arrives at a point where she can thank him for a meal, she is also brought to his position in the case of her mother and affirms that she must face the situation.

This softening conflict between Laurel and J. Dan almost threatens to disappear at times - she bakes him his favorite raisin cake prior to leaving; however, the antagonism that J. Dan feels for Jeffrey does not abate. This conflict is dramatized physically in the deserted house. The young, who is fleet of foot and illusive, manages to outmaneuver the old who clumps about laboriously until he finally concedes defeat, "... All right, you have made a fool out of me" (p. 70). When Laurel remembers she has forgotten to make provisions for feeding the cat, she and J. Dan are allied against Jeffrey who thinks that a starving cat is inconsequential.

The tension between J. Dan and Jeffrey continues to build throughout the novel and culminates in a scene in a small town in Mecker County where J. Dan bests Jeffrey in a fist fight. He does this to the cheers of several old men who say, "... All I seen was this here cowboy knock the young one on his ass. Gave him a real good bust, I'd call it" (p. 129)! and "That's what more of them need ... " (p. 129).
The journey threatens to disturb the alliance of the two youths. After a trying day, Matthews as implied author says of them: "... they dreamed separate dreams, as separated from each other as surely as if they had been miles apart and one of them had been dying" (p. 98). Laurel comes closest to exposing Jeffrey and increasing her emotional distance from him when she says "... you sound generous and liberal-minded as hell, but do you know something? You don't ever deviate one fucking inch from what you've had in mind all along" (p. 103). J. Dan admits his stubbornness; Jeffrey pretends his does not exist. Laurel says, "See, I was right ... You are beginning to sound like him [J. Dan] ..."

(p. 105).

Laurel discerns Jeffrey is like J. Dan; moreover she also becomes aware of her similiarity to her mother, "'You drink whiskey like it's going out of style,' Laurel said. Then she paused in a moment's confusion, realizing that she had heard her mother say the same thing to J. Dan a hundred times" (p. 155).

Throughout the journey, the three change positions as they accept and reject each other. As the novel ends, however, the youth declare J. Dan the winner and depart to their own world where they can continue to be at odds with the older generation and where their feelings are not tested by elbow-rubbing circumstances.
(The destruction of the camera by J. Dan might be symbolic of the older generation’s triumph - at least temporarily - over the young, that is, the triumph of the novel over the film.) And the parent generation, represented only by J. Dan now since the death of Florence, can denigrate the daughter, thus carrying out the function that the dead mother once served: "That girl is capable of doing any damn thing. Always was. Her mother couldn't do a damn thing with her!" (p. 165)!

Mythological-Archetypal Approach

In Pictures of the Journey Back, Jack Matthews explores the archetypal motif of the quest. In the quest, "... a Hero (Savior or Deliverer) undertakes some long journey during which he must perform impossible tasks, battle with monsters, solve unanswerable riddles, and overcome insurmountable obstacles in order to save the kingdom."¹

This definition translated in terms of the novel would read something like this:

J. Dan Swope, ex-rodeo star, undertakes a journey from Wichita, Kansas, to Meeker County, Colorado, during which he drives for days without sleep (in a 1969 pickup truck with high gear ready to stop functioning), battles with his surrogate daughter's

¹ Guerin, p. 121.
boy friend who is intent on making a film instead of a journey, and finds himself in the eye of a tornado. He endures all of this in order to deliver Laurel Burch, surrogate daughter, to her mother's deathbed, and thus preserve his code of honor and uphold the society which defends his code.

Each stage of the journey is used by Matthews to establish mood, foreshadow upcoming events, develop character, or advance the plot. The following is some indication of the functions which the scenes serve:

Service Station Outside of Wichita - chiefly works to establish that storm is imminent; this section introduces J. Dan to reader.

Laurel's House - presents a suggestion of death and decay in description of house.

Restaurant - introduces explicit mention of tornado weather; references to death are continued.

Laurel's House - re-establishes death motif with chair from Greer's Funeral Home; introduces Laurel and Jeffrey; conflict between generations is established; film making is introduced.

Highway - is used to make references to "... crosses on some infinite Gethsemane" (p. 25) which suggests life as a series of crucifixions.

Second Service Station - is used to introduce Peter Peters, the nothing man who is going nowhere.
Stop to Make Film - is the place where the circle motif is presented.

Second Diner - presents the opportunity for the idea of the journey as a film being evented to be introduced.

Abandoned Farmhouse - is the site of the physical encounter between Jeffrey and J. Dan.

Tornado - is used to show Laurel's capacity for feeling; also used to demonstrate Dan's practical approach and heroic gestures in contrast with Jeffrey's egocentricity.

Motel - is place where the motif of time's inexorable movement is shown as a complement to the circle motif.

Second Fight Between Jeffrey and J. Dan - establishes J. Dan as physically dominant; the camera and film are destroyed.

Hospital - verifies all that Laurel has told reader concerning her mother's vanity and disparagement of her daughter.

Swope's House - is place where news of death comes; reader sees the epic hero is a common man living in an ordinary house.

Bill Bank's House - shows the source of the support J. Dan needs from old friends.

Swope's House - shows opposition has vanished; the crisis is at an end; and the ex-epic hero must continue his banal existence.

In this modern quest the reader finds Laurel playing the role of earth mother; and as such she is associated with warmth, protection, fertility, and plenty. She takes a stray puppy that she sees
on the journey, feeds him, and places him against her breast. She reaches out to ward off the blows that J. Dan would lay on her boyfriend, Jeffrey, at several stages of the journey. Her breasts are emphasized throughout the novel and she gives of herself sexually often and freely. She is absorbed by her own quest for personal growth, a kind of fertility, from the novel's start to its finish.

"The Terrible Mother: the witch, sorceress, siren - associated with fear, danger, and death"¹ is Laurel's mother, Florence. Laurel has frequently been chastised by her mother; and further contact with her, Laurel feels, will threaten her sanity. Her mother is literally dying of cancer, which is ironic when the reader considers the slow and painful death Florence has brought to Laurel.

At the same time Florence is the terrible mother, the witch to be avoided to her daughter, she is the Soul-Mate to J. Dan Swope. She is the princess or beautiful lady - incarnation of inspiration and spiritual fulfillment. She is the object of pampering, the queen. When she dies, J. Dan mutters, "!... God, I wish I was dead my own self" (p. 156).

J. Dan is the modern mythic hero - a misguided one to be certain - as he worships at the feet of such a hollow, beautiful lady. He is the man of principle engaged in a contest. Right is right and

¹Guerin, p. 120.
he is under an almost religious obligation to bring Laurel and lay her at the feet of Florence whether Laurel wants to go or not. Jeffrey recognizes J. Dan's position:

"'J. Dan is indestructible,' Jeffrey said in a low voice

'Nobody's that,' Laurel said. 'Not even J. Dan. And don't call him that.'

'All right, but J. Dan is. And I'm going to get everything. Everything about him. I'm going to get your mother, because she's the Holy Grail, you know what I mean? The quest motif. The whole bit. I'm serious" (p. 87).

However, J. Dan is also serious, serious enough to risk all as he struggles with the adversaries who will prevent him from fulfilling his mission. Alcohol fortifies him, gives him the will to continue. Realism is also responsible for his success. Laurel shrieks at him, "'My mother dies and all you can think of is that fucking pick up.' J. Dan wiped his hand over his eyes and said, 'Well, what else is there for a man to do'" (p. 157). This is no dreamer speaking. Although his physical strength is waning and he is wounded from numerous rodeo spills, he, like the epic hero, fights Jeffrey to the death.

In the last notebook of the novel, Jeffrey writes:

The burgeoning ESS
Still PHOTO, UR-PHOTO, At Heart of.
SLOW SHOTS LIKE VIEWER IN PENNY ARCADE
DAY, NIGHT FLASH TOGETHER.
TELEOLOGICAL PRESENCE
IN EVERY CELL.
J. DAN STRIVES TO PERPETUATE HIMSELF, OR FOCUS OF HIS PIETAS IN ACT OF VANISHING. THUS BECOMES GHOST, SEE TREES AND WINDMILLS ON HORIZON SHOWING THROUGH HIS KNEES AND THIGHS J. DAN AS HERO (p. 172).

Modern common man can only become a hero to himself and to those whom he knows for short periods when for some reasons extraordinary demands are temporarily placed on him. Meaning in life, motivation, comes during the crisis, that is, war, death, and other disturbances of the usual hum of existence. J. Dan's valiant hour has come and passed. With the disappearance of his pietas, he becomes, again, but another member of the cast of the walking dead. As the race is to the driver, as the bullfight is to the matador, the journey is to him. J. Dan's story has been recorded for the relatively small group of people who will buy the book; and his victory is seen by an even smaller group as he the charmed innocent goes out to slay all manner of dragons in exchange for the fair maiden's acclaim.

Genre Approach

Jack Matthews, an experimental author by his own designation, introduces a young film maker, Jeffrey Martin, in Pictures of the Journey Back who serves several functions. As a chorus he synthesizes the action and pronounces judgment; as an antagonist to
the major character, he serves as a foil. Finally, he is the vehicle whereby Matthews can with some legitimacy introduce the techniques of cinematography into the novel.

In *The Dramatic Art of the Film*, Alan Casty compares and contrasts the film and the novel.¹

(1) The film and the novel are concerned with content, with character, statement and story.

(2) The film and the novel have great freedom in dealing with time and space.

(3) The novel can suggest the passage of long periods of time with a few words;

...the film is best at conveying temporary, immediate, discrete conditions in time (tangible and concrete) even if these conditions are shown to be at different time periods.²

(4) The novel produces through words, conceptions which can then be turned into imaginary sense perceptions; the film "...produces sense perceptions immediately and directly."³


² Ibid., p. 4.

³ Ibid.
(5) The novel's basis in language leads it into discursive discussion of ideas, through dialogue, through thought passages and authorial comment; although the film is concerned with ideas, it does not deal with them as comprehensively as does the novel.

(6) The film dramatizes its materials, its ideas. "It gives body to these materials with specific concrete images - things, bodies, faces - and imbues these images with a more tangible immediacy by clustering them around the actions of human beings."¹

Late adolescents spend many hours of their spare time in theatres, and their special interest in film makes an exploration of this subject of Matthews' use of film techniques in the novel of special interest to them.

The reader who approaches Pictures of the Journey Back with imagination, with experience in viewing film - including both the commercial and the experimental film - and with sensitivity to the power of words to evoke images will be able to discern how Matthews has used space and time, editing and sound, color, and point of view in ways akin to the manner in which the film maker uses them.

First, there is need for examining some assertions made throughout the novel concerning the film. Many of these statements come from Jeffrey in his conversation or in his notebook entries.

¹Ibid., p. 5.
Jeffrey is taking the trip to Colorado with Laurel and J. Dan because of his fascination for J. Dan's pickup truck and the possibilities for uncanny shots with his camera from varied positions on the pickup. As the journey progresses, he sees the possibilities for J. Dan as the epic hero of the film. He then makes an effort to 'expose' J. Dan, to capture all the facets of his personality and demonstrate them to a movie audience. The journey from Wichita to Meeker County becomes the film.

As film-maker Jeffrey presents his theory of what the film should be, he makes the following statements regarding the role of the film, the role of the audience, and the nature of the film. The director of the film is God-like; he is a magician, a demiurge, a stimulator of personal reactions, and an existential entrepreneur. It is his responsibility to make his private dream available to the public, as he reduces the mentality of the audience to that of six-year-old children in order to make them unable to distinguish between the real and the unreal.

In the matter of the real versus the unreal, what is in the cave (film), Jeffrey asserts, is as real as what is outside it (everyday life). The film "... allegorizes human life itself in its continuous, terrible, dancing motion or the ceremony of evanescence" (p. 88). When intense things happen in human experience, it is the responsibility of the film maker to record them and then detect the larger
shape or form of the film that contains a real life as it works with the concept of déjà vu.

The film is a medium of forgetting; one transcribes action on film in order to render it forgettable. The film, a mystical experience, is also a pragmatic process. A film is the result of a long series of refinements which has an ambiguous beginning. As the film events, the film maker must take advantage of all chance opportunities and convert them into art. The film maker makes use of stills which are played against excess of movement. He also must orchestrate and illuminate the interstices to make them work in the mind of the audience as he works out the design or purpose that is in every cell of the film. His film is a composite of planned and spontaneous shots.

There is a musical score inherent in every film. Real orchestration occurs in silence. Each member of the audience conceives and directs his score. In this respect, Jeffrey is akin to Bergman, who has said:

I am a little bit worried about music, electronic or conventional music, because I have the feeling that film in a way is rhythm. Music, at the beginning, as Stravinsky said, is also rhythm. They are both unintellectual suggestions. I think it's dangerous to use real music. . . .

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Finally, Jeffrey asserts that the film which is the subject of *Pictures of the Journey Back* is a living film, "... we spin it out of ourselves as we're going along. The reality script. The film is the journey, and the journey is the film" (p. 45).

Contrapuntally, Matthews, as implied author, is making comments about the process of the film making. He is analyzing Jeffrey's mind and movements. He affirms that the film lies "... partially and inchoately somewhere in the camera, in Jeffrey's intention, and in the unfolding actions revealed by the light of each imploding instant" (p. 41). Also, he maintains that the film is being made even when the camera is still because the camera man-director, Jeffrey, is constantly making decisions concerning the amount of control he must exert and the degree of his awareness of the subject he is exploring.

Matthews, as implied omniscient author, functions to describe at intervals for the reader the completed film even while it is being evented. The straight narrative of the novel advances the plot, and Matthews has placed chapters strategically throughout the novel which convey a sense of the film which is being evented. These chapters convey the intensity, the emotion, the mystery, and the drama. Matthews, like Bergman, feels that "... cinematography is very, very close to dreaming, as cinematography is when it is
at its best."\(^1\) The director or creator of a work, according to Bergman, is a dreamer and there is absolute freedom in a dream. So Matthews describes the movement of characters, the montages, the lap-dissolving, the sound effects, the camera angles, and the time lapses. The plot sequences are atypical, as they happen only in a dream with the ludicrous and the wanton juxtaposed. The language often seems absurd, unrelated; yet all that is said and done in the dream reveals meaning, feeling, and sets the tone of the whole. The following are two examples:

Florence smiles beneath the hat, and then she is sitting up, looking for something, a kerosene lamp in her hand. Her jaws are struggling as if they are glued together, and she is trying to speak.

'Then he is lying down underneath a fence, and a drunken steer is stepping vaguely on his ankle, and buffalo grass is blowing through the sky, tickling his face and ears, and it is dark near the rim.

'Where is the cat? Florence cries dimly, somewhere out of sight in the darkness" (pp. 62-63).

Slow-Motion, J. Dan swims forward through an empty, darkened room, reaching for the camera and the audience, striving with each pained gesture to obliterate it, his face grotesquely troubled.

He swings his fist, and then falls sideways; but catches himself, and in slow-motion outrage pulls around to face

\(^1\) Bergman, p. 38.
the audience again, and then gathers his strength and comes lurching forward, with every lineament of murderous intent upon his face.

Suddenly the room has changed, and there is J. Dan standing motionless at the top of the stairs. There is nothing in the house but darkness. He stares downward and then, after a stop-motion, as if he's arrested in the act of hearing the beginning drumbeat (pulse time), he is plunging down the stairs, his mouth open and his hair waving in the muted light, like kelp in a deep and lazy sea (pp. 98-99).

At the onset, the stars of this film seem to be J. Dan, Laurel, and Florence with Jeffrey as camera man and director. As Matthews begins to intervene, we realize that Matthews, not Jeffrey, is the omniscient creator, the dreamer. He takes firm control of the characters caught up in this fascinating exploration of the combining of film and novel. In 1930, Eisenstein said, "We have discovered how to force the spectator to think in a certain direction. By mounting our films in a way scientifically calculated to create a given impression on an audience, we have developed a powerful weapon. . . ."1 Matthews has taken the power of this relatively new, highly popular phenomenon and wedded it with an established genre which is decreasing in popularity. The union is a highly fascinating one.

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CHAPTER VII
CONCLUSION

If we as English teachers are to expect secondary school students and college students to be critical readers, we must offer more than our own zeal for reading. We must supply them with critical tools so that when they are beyond our tutelage, they will approach their reading with intelligence and confidence. One of the most important and effective ways in which we may accomplish this end is by giving them a background in critical approaches to the study of literature.

Many recent high school graduates can say scarcely more then "I liked it" or "I didn't like it" after having read a work. These students have not met the most important goal in reading which according to Matthews "is to experience the events 'beyond the words.'" Some college students are able to use the indices in order to locate critical articles which they cleverly plagiarize or cut and paste so that the papers which they present appear to be well conceived and well executed. Then when they are reading for

\[1\] Matthews, "The Windows and Scenery of Literary Study," p. 449.
their own pleasure - maybe we would have more in this category if we gave students more confidence in their ability - they find themselves able to do little more than summarize the plot and make a statement about a key symbol or two. English instructors have the responsibility to teach these students that there are standard critical approaches available to them, and that these approaches may facilitate the critical process, while giving the critic a sense of independence. This is not meant to disclaim the importance for students and faculty of reading the response of professional critics. The professional criticism provides a way of hearing another person's interpretation which would otherwise be unavailable to the reader; however, the educated reader must go beyond the conclusions of others to interpret the work in a fresh way, to demonstrate previously undetected insights, and to become proficient in reporting the results of his personal reflective process. Also, a student of literature must realize that there are times when professional critics' essays will not be available to him: the library is closed; the work is of recent vintage and has not been criticized; or the author and his work are virtually unknown.

In 1841 Emerson called for a greater self-reliance in "... all the offices and relations of men..." including "... in their
education . . ." and " . . . in their speculative views."¹ A part of this self-reliance of which Emerson speaks involves the ability of the student of literature to define the nature of the literary problem, to collect data, to establish hypotheses, to test hypotheses, and to arrive at conclusions.

In The Writer's Signature: Ideas in Story and Essay, Matthews relates a fictional encounter in which Dr. Samuel Johnson, Lord Byron, and Mark Twain view a play and then proceed to discuss what they have seen at the theatre. After a heated argument concerning the play's meaning, they agree that each will return to his own study and record in narrative form what he has witnessed on the stage. Rasselas, the Prince of Abyssinia, Don Juan, and Pudd'nhead Wilson were the responses to the assignment. The point of the narrative is, of course, that each member of an audience responds in a very distinctive way to a work of art. Basic responses of several individuals may parallel; however, the manner of recording those responses will differ based on the social and personal milieu out of which each person comes. Students must be cognizant of this basic phenomenon of interpretation as they define the literary problem which they want to explore in a given work.

¹Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Self-Reliance" in Major Writers of America, p. 276.
Any fictional piece worth serious study has manifold aspects; and after a student has defined a literary problem, he must avoid the line of critical reasoning that reduces a work to a simple statement, "The Tale of Asa Bean is nothing but. . . ." "Nothing is 'nothing but.' " According to Matthews, facile explanations deprive authors of the complexity that we are willing to grant ourselves as persons.

In defining a literary problem, Matthews has suggested that "... the reader who begins by asking, 'Whose story is this?' and follows out all of the implications is well on the way to placing the themes in meaningful relationships to one another and arriving at the most powerful interpretation of the story." 2

Even while defining the problem, the student may be determining the approach or approaches that he thinks are most suitable for use in the explication. If he decides to use a ludic approach, he may merely judge the literature on the basis of whether or not it amused him. Once, however, he begins to ask himself why it amused him - which the English teacher hopes he will - he may be involved in a genre approach, an historical-sociological one, a

1 Matthews, Archetypal Themes in the Modern Story, p. 3

2 Ibid., pp. 3-4.
linguistic method. The possibilities are limited only by the student's imagination, his literary experience, and his general background of knowledge. As the student examines literary approaches, he should not rank them in order of usefulness or importance, apart from their usefulness or importance in his exploration of a particular work. As he determines the approach or approaches that are to be the focus of his interpretation, he must realize that "... glib labeling of any sort is the enemy of good reading," but that "... labels are essential to our ability to think abstractly."¹ Labels recognized by a group of persons intent upon exploring a given field of learning are the vehicles by which communication is assured. The student's development of competence in using labels is an objective of a sound literature program.

Once the problem has been defined and the approaches have been identified, the student begins to collect relevant data: from within the text of the literary work undergoing examination; from other literary works - if the writer is involved in a process of comparing or contrasting; and from sources outside the literary works such as critical interpretations, historical information, and psychological knowledge. He then examines the data and formulates an hypothesis which he tests in terms of the available data. If the

¹Ibid., p. 3.
hypothesis seems reasonable in the student's judgment based on his experience in literature - and development of literary expertise is not to be equated with learning to compute five-digit numbers; each student will be at his individual stage of development - he is able to express certain convictions that he holds concerning a literary piece based on intelligent inquiry into the technique of the creation.

He should attempt to make connections between the work he is examining and other works of similar theme or point of view. If he has examined several creations by the same author, he should also be concerned with relating a just-explored work to other pieces by that author. This process of synthesizing is often overlooked by the English educator who seems never to have enough time to deal with the materials of a given course.

Since technique, according to Schorer, is the only means an author has of discovering, exploring, developing his subject, of conveying its meaning, and finally, of evaluating it, technique seems an appropriate place to conclude a study of a novelist's work.¹ The educator who has just directed or facilitated the study of the works of a contemporary novelist might lead students in a

discussion to determine what elements are common to those novels, what techniques are characteristic of the particular novelist as he presents character, setting, plot, point of view, style, and philosophic position. Matthews asserts that whatever a writer does he cannot stop being himself and the stronger his signature - his manner of writing - "... the more likely it is that he will return again to certain themes, to certain ideas, to certain types of character." ¹

When particular scenes, outstanding descriptions, and specific incidents have faded from a reader's memory, the well-conceived characters in a novel continue to be a part of the reader's consciousness. They are oftentimes better remembered than those friends whom the reader knew as an undergraduate. Although he might not be able to describe their physical appearance - this is more readily done with minor characters who are often caricatured - the reader has a feeling for their essence, their substance. Matthews' protagonists are a motley group who span and represent the major developmental stages in a man's life. There is Hanger, a teenager who joins the army; Asa, a Ph. D. dropout; Neil, an early middle ager driven to revamp his life; Rex, a staid older middle ager who is only temporarily uncomfortable with his life; and the last of the

assemblage is J. Dan, an aging ex-rodeo performer.

The intellectual insight, or lack of insight, of the characters in the novels has significant impact on Matthews' working out of the Sophoclean idea that a man's character is his fate. Hanger is dull, Neil and Asa are brilliant, Rex has a particular type of cleverness, and J. Dan is slightly obtuse. Neil and Asa, either blessed or damned by superior intellects, chose different modes for contending with the absurdities they have discovered in the world: Neil retreats into insanity; Asa conforms, envelops himself in a realistic set of circumstances, and survives. With limited mental capacity Hanger is able to do little more than trudge innocently forward, unaware of the ironies that pervade his life, not knowing that he is ultimately alone despite Karaji's poems to the contrary. As he leaves for the army at the close of the novel, the reader can visualize his being the recruit who is the butt of all the pranks in the barracks. Although J. Dan would never be at the head of the class - maybe those bronc spills have scrambled his brain - he would certainly not be in the position of a Hanger. J. Dan has a drive, a forcefulness, and an elasticity that have enabled him to be a success in Meeker County, Colorado. He has demonstrated the courage and the physical endurance that are emblems of success in that culture. Only in nightmare dreams does something from within his subconscious
Rex McCoy might seem at first to be in a class of his own, yet he has features in common with other Matthews protagonists. He has the acceptance of the people in his small-town Ohio milieu as does J. Dan in his. This acceptance comes from filling his position well as used car dealer and as upright citizen. Rex is akin to Asa in his facility with language, although his talent is of a popular variety rather than a cultivated one. He is able to couple this ability in language with the drive and the tenacity which the reader finds in J. Dan and win financial success for himself. The psychological knowledge of human behavior with which Neil and Asa seem to be familiar is put to a very practical use by Rex in the marketing of used cars.

In spite of some diversity in this group of characters, there is a sameness in that each is essentially innocent. They may drink and carouse, commit adultery (or at least attempt to), answer basic philosophical questions or ignore such questions, but they are innocent. This innocence comes from their having no evil intent to cause physical or moral injury. Hanger appears most innocent because of his youth, his limited intellect, and his gullible, charitable behavior. Although Neil may have caused hurt to the family he left, he arranges the fictional circumstances surrounding his
'death' so as to cause the least amount of suffering to them. The intellectual elitist, Asa, is most comfortable with another innocent, his young niece, Deborah. Rex and J. Dan are both absorbed in a world where they know the rules and are playing the game accordingly, and a certain innocence is inherent in that unconditional acceptance.

In contrast to these memorable men presented by Matthews are the lackluster women who populate the novels. Penny, the object of Hanger's attention, is an egocentric, vicious, careless person who uses her womanly wiles to dally with his affections. The two waitresses in Beyond the Bridge are relatively insignificant human beings. Wanda is an ugly, malignant hag; Billie Sue is a vapid, cross-eyed bed partner for Neil. Earlene of The Tale of Asa Bean has a brief sally into the domain of the women's liberation movement, but her efforts are cut short by her unexpected pregnancy. The two barmaids in that novel, Melba and Veronica, are delineated as impersonations rather than as genuine human beings. The only female with color and decisiveness in the Matthews canon is Madge Hunter who razes all the reader's expectations by consigning the control she exerts over her life to a man who will provide her with two children and a house in the suburbs. Rex McCoy's wife is a silly jackass who exists for pretentions; his girl friend,
Sheila Richards, seems chiefly identified by the silver panties she wears and her efforts to excite men by brushing against them with her breast. Finally, there are the women in J. Dan's life: his girl friend Florence who is more concerned with her size nine dresses and her coiffure than with her daughter's well being; and the daughter who shows evidence of this misplaced emphasis. She is dirty, unkempt, and psychologically troubled.

This overall view of women permeates many American novels. It is a reflection of a culture where women's perception of their options is limited and where self-actualizing, and assertive women are denounced for unfeminine behavior. So as they serve supportive, inferior roles in real life, so do they in the fictional world.

These Matthews characters inhabit small town America. The setting for Hanger Stout, Awake! and The Charisma Campaigns is an Ohio town with a population of twelve to fourteen thousand. The locale for Beyond the Bridge is a town in West Virginia. Although Pictures of the Journey Back has a changing setting, the small town of Maxton, Kansas, is described in detail as is a town in Meeker County, Colorado.

In a town of the size used by Matthews, the reader may gain a sense of the town, a feeling for it. It is possible for the author to describe a service station or two, a diner, a grocery, a Dairy
Queen or a used car lot; to give a quick picture of the people who patronize these establishments and those who work in them; and thus give the reader a mind's eye picture of the physical situation in which and out of which the characters in his novel function. Authors make use of the knowledge that environments shape character; and an exploration of that shaping process provides rich material for the writer. In a manner not unlike Faulkner, Matthews is also able to develop a sense of continuity through three of the novels - Hanger Stout, Awake!, Beyond the Bridge, and The Charisma Campaigns - by having characters who appear or are mentioned in several of the novels.

Matthews takes fundamentally innocent characters, places them in small town settings, and engages them in high interest, swift moving plots. Matthews says, "My novels have to have action, they must be journeys of discovery." 1 Hanger Stout discovers he has an unusual talent for free hanging, and the plot turns on whether this talent will provide the impetus to lift him from his humdrum existence as service station attendant to a position of reknown and awareness. Neil of Beyond the Bridge finds an opportunity to use the Silver Creek Bridge disaster as an opportunity to bid adieu to

1Matthews, lecture at Urbana College, April 22, 1971.
an old life which stifled and seek a new life. The plot turns on an exploration of the possibilities and impossibilities of this situation. The third novel presents Asa Bean, an intellectual, caught in the middle of life's absurdities, desiring to take a stand, and driven to make a symbolic gesture by destroying a masterpiece of art.

The humorous, pathetic situation of a successful used car salesman forms the plot line for the fourth novel. Rex McCoy's wife is on a European excursion, and he seizes the opportunity to indulge his boyish curiosity. His adventures and misadventures lead the reader to some penetrating exploration of the thinking that goes on in the mind of at least one colorless citizen of the town of Never-Never Land. On the surface, at least, *Pictures of the Journey Back*, Matthews' latest novel, encompasses the most action. Three travelers are involved in a race with death. Two of the travelers do not want to win the race; therefore, one of the conflicts of the tale is established. A fist fight, a tornado, a chase, and a nighttime search serve to punctuate the plot.

Subplots coexist with the major plot structures in Matthews' work to develop and complement the thematic statements made in the main plots. While the journey is being undertaken in *Pictures of the Journey Back*, one of the travelers, Laurel, is attempting
to settle her mind, to place her past in perspective, and to determine action for her present and future. In _The Charisma Campaigns_, Rex McCoy's brother, Randall, is striving to live his life in a way which is meaningful to him, a way that is scorned by the townspeople in contrast to the acceptance they give Rex. Earlene Scobie of _The Tale of Asa Bean_ is thwarted as she attempts to gain a sense of self through the Women's Movement, and Harlan's efforts to heal himself correspond with Neil's efforts at the same in _Beyond the Bridge_. Phyllis and her mentally unstable husband provide a counterpoint in _Hanger Stout, Awake!_ to the absurdity of the lives of the other characters in the novel.

To narrate these plots, Matthews is fond of using first-person point of view. A fictional excuse used in the novels for this viewpoint is the introduction of a teacher named Miss Temple who has had a lasting effect on the lives of some of the students she has taught in a small midwestern town. Hanger, Neil, and Rex all record their experiences because of her influence. Neil says, "I once had a teacher in high school who urged all her students to write down their thoughts, because, she said, it is only through expression of some sort that things become entirely real for us, and all of us have valuable things to say" (p. 4). Through an act of the will of an individual - the will to record an experience and
thus clarify it - a moment in his life gains existence, becomes real.

Matthews' first attempt at using this first-person narration is in the format of a journal, Hanger's journal in *Hanger Stout, Awake!* Hanger's account is a semi-literate one of several weeks in his life. His phrasing is awkward, and he apparently does not hear, or at least does not record, ending sounds on some words. Further, he ignores many of the mechanics of English. His record is a completely artless attempt at following the dictum of a high school English teacher. In contrast to the optimism and faith recorded in Hanger's journal is Neil's diary, a diary filled with philosophic cynicism and commentary on the sordidness of man. The third use of this viewpoint is by Rex McCoy. His prose narrative is told with delight and a self-conscious cleverness.

In Matthews' remaining two novels, he continues to use first-person narrations which he alternates with other methods. *Asa Bean* moves between a first-person narration by the protagonist and authorial chapters in which the implied author makes philosophic comments which foreshadow action or interpret and respond to just-completed action. *Pictures of the Journey Back* is the most complex tale from the angle of point of view. Matthews uses the omniscient, philosophic author in certain chapters; the third-person reflector in chapters which are intended specifically to
reveal J. Dan's consciousness; first-person notebook entries for Jeffrey's unveiling; and the scenic mode, with no apparent author, in other sections. This experimentation with point of view is aimed at making a more comprehensive use of available viewpoints in order to give the reader a sense of the motivations of each of the characters. At bottom, Matthews seems to be saying that no one is guilty. The moral center that is so easily defined in nineteenth-century novels is not so readily defined in a twentieth century world which is equipped by modern psychology to prove that we are all products of and victimized by a set of environmental circumstances and accidents of birth over which we exert limited or no control. The technique of using multiple viewpoints allows Matthews a freedom to explore this idea; this freedom is not possible with sole use of a single first-person narration.

All of the aforementioned elements of Matthews' novels are presented in a fresh, brilliant style. There is an abundance of wit and irony; there is a playing with the vernacular and throughout an evident love of words and an insight into their power. This expertise and play with words is somehow related to a basic philosophic position reiterated throughout the novels. All of Matthews' characters are trapped in problems for which there is no easy solution, if there is a solution at all. They must make choices; however, there are no established guidelines for making those choices.
Therefore, life takes on an aspect of a game of invention. The characters, as game players, establish the rules and procedures for a game, abide by already established rules, or move to another game, or territory, and play games by rules currently held.

Within this gaming, Matthews has insisted on a search for meaning. He has, through Neil, explored what comes of a failure to play in one arena and the move to another arena without the establishing of new rules. Neil-Matthews as author - is an Ahab who rants internally as he asks questions his literary and human predecessors have asked for centuries, questions for which there are no answers. So Matthews' characters, rather than face the annihilation which Neil experiences, conform to established rules. To save his sanity, Asa settles down to a socially prescribed life; Rex McCoy, rather than be involved in a moral dilemma that might threaten his equilibrium, uses a standard, socially acceptable dialogue to deny his responsibility in the maiming of Patti Nieder; and J. Dan refuses to acknowledge that questions regarding his position in the universe might exist. Hanger's innocence and limited intellect shelter him from the consideration of philosophic issues.

Matthews has summarized his views in the following comment, "Life is a series of miscommunication, our glory, our fun, and our
tragedy.¹ As author he finds meaning in a meaningless world by exploring this miscommunication, using the vehicle of the written word. Thus, his characters dramatize for him, as author, the conflicts and questions which are involved in what it is to be a twentieth century man.

¹Matthews, lecture at Urbana College, April 22, 1971.
<table>
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<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tr>
<td>1943</td>
<td>Graduates from North High School, Columbus, Ohio.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1943-1945</td>
<td>Serves in the United States Coast Guard; is assigned to a cutter &quot;The McLane&quot; out of Alaska.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945-1949</td>
<td>Attends Ohio State University; is graduated in 1949 with dual major in classical Greek and English literature.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td>Marries Barbara Reese, then a student at Ohio State University.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>An Irish quarterly <em>Envoy</em> publishes Matthews' first story, &quot;The Lieutenant.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950-1959</td>
<td>Works for the United States Post Office, Columbus, Ohio.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1952-1954</td>
<td>Attends Ohio State University part-time; is awarded the M.A. in English literature in 1954.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1953-1954</td>
<td>Wins the Vanderwater Poetry Prize at The Ohio State University.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1959-1964</td>
<td>Teaches English at Urbana College, Urbana, Ohio.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>Receives the Bore Stone Mountain Poetry Award for best poem of 1959, &quot;From the Uncertainty of Our Dire Predictions.&quot;</td>
</tr>
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</table>
1964  Receives the Ohioana Award for Fiction for Bitter Knowledge.

1964-1970  Teaches literature and creative writing at Ohio University, Athens, Ohio.


1967  Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc. publishes Hanger Stout, Awake!

1968  Receives the Florence Roberts Head award for Hanger Stout, Awake!

1970  Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc. publishes Beyond the Bridge.

1970  The Ox Head Press publishes "In a Theatre of Buildings," a Chapbook.

1970-1971  Is Distinguished Writer in Residence at Wichita State University, Wichita, Kansas.


1971  Returns from Wichita to resume duties at Ohio University.


1972  The Library Associates of Wichita State University publishes Book Collecting and the Search for Reality.

Edits *Archetypal Themes in the Modern Story*; publisher is St. Martin's Press.

Addresses the Sixth Annual Comparative Literature Conference at University of Southern California; subject is "Fiction As a Counter Life."

Receives the O. Henry Award for Best American Short Stories for "On the Shore of Chad Creek."

Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc. publishes *Pictures of the Journey Back*.

Receives Guggenheim Fellowship; travels to Norway to research material for a novel.

Is a guest artist-teacher at Indiana University Writer's Conference.

Resumes duties at Ohio University.

"The Burial" appears in *The Best American Short Stories of 1975*. 
APPENDIX B

A PARTIAL JACK MATTHEWS BIBLIOGRAPHY

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II. CHAPBOOKS


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"Song for Cousin Loony." Motive, Vol. XX/8 (5-1964) : 5.

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View of the Jesse Ford Case, Georgia Review, Vol. XXVI,
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"Ohio University, Fact and Metaphor, Body and Spirit."
Average Scores on the Scholastic Aptitude Test for Students Taking the Test in the College Board Admissions Testing Program *

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* Source of information: College Board Admissions Testing Program
** The SAT "Testing Year" is defined as extending from September through August. Students ... are aggregated without regard to their level of preparation, and students are counted as many times as they have taken the SAT.
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. Review of Hanger Stout, Awake!, by Jack Matthews,  


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