Biographical Studies, 2011, Volume 9

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TOM HEGGEN

David Lester

Tom Heggen wrote only one book during his brief life. *Mr. Roberts* began as a collection of short stories about life in the Navy, was issued as a book and then became a play on Broadway. Tom disintegrated once the script for the play had been completed, and he killed himself in 1949 at the age of twenty-nine. It is interesting to speculate whether the success of his book contributed to his death. Why did he kill himself once he achieved this early success? Would he have killed himself had his first work not been so successful?[1]

Early Years

Tom's grandparents were Norwegian and had come to the farmlands of Iowa in the 1880s. Tom's father, T.O., was born in 1885 and had escaped a farm life by becoming a school teacher. He then moved into baking and finally set up a mortgage-loan company.

Tom was born in Fort Dodge, Iowa, on December 23, 1919. He was christened Orlo Thomas and was known as Orlo during his childhood. He switched to his middle name in high school. He had a sister, Ruth, two years older and a sister, Carmen, three years younger, both of whom doted on him. His family was an unemotional one. His mother Mina rarely showed affection or anger. She was concerned with being a good wife and mother, keeping a clean house and dressing her children immaculately, even though money was often scarce. Tom was frail as a child, and his mother was overprotective of him, refusing to let him go out and play with the other kids, for example, if the weather was cold. Tom was under five feet for most of his early years and weighed less than ninety pounds. He excelled at school and skipped two grades of elementary school.

At high school, he failed to get into the debating team, the tennis team, or the chess team. Since scholarship did not win peer approval, Tom began to seek friendship with others by designing and carrying out clever pranks, a habit that stayed with him all of his life.

When Tom was eight, an eighteen-year old cousin Wallace Stegner (who later became a well-known writer) lost his mother and became close to the Heggens. He fulfilled the role of elder brother to Tom. During Wallace's undergraduate and graduate years, he would visit on weekends, and his interest in writing stimulated Tom.

[1] The facts of Tom's life are taken from the biography by Leggett (1974).

During the Depression, T.O.'s business failed. In 1935 he found a job in Oklahoma City as an evaluator for the FHA. Mina was never really happy again after being uprooted and moving to a town she disliked, and Tom shared her depression and despair. During his senior year in high school there, Tom read a lot, slept a lot and stayed by himself. He did poorly in his studies and was lucky to graduate. Tom had switched from exuberance and devilishness to being moody and diffident.

College Years

The Heggens could not afford to send Tom to the University of Oklahoma, so he went to the local commuter college, Oklahoma City University. He joined a fraternity, Phi Chi Phi, but soon became discontent with fraternity life, especially since his friends were in more prestigious fraternities. Classes bored him, and he earned a succession of Cs. When his cousin Wallace won a prize with a short story, which he showed to Tom, Tom was impressed and tried writing a story based upon Wallace's. When he sent it to Wallace, Wallace told him he like it, and Tom had it accepted in the university literary magazine.

Tom sought out the offices of the campus newspaper and became a reporter. He also found a circle of friends there. He developed his wit while drinking beer during all-night bull sessions, and he pursued his reading of contemporary American literature. In his sophomore year, he was given a column in the campus newspaper.

However, his pranks got him into trouble. In his fraternity-pledging days, he had presented a skit so offensive that the Dean came up on stage to stop the performance. He had a job as typesetter at the university press, and this allowed him to substitute the name of a famous local prostitute in the guest list for the Delta Psi pledge dance. In his sophomore year, he stole the ballot box for the election of the freshman queen. The President of the university suspended Tom for the Spring semester and privately suggested to Tom that he transfer.

In the Fall of 1938, Tom enrolled at Oklahoma A&M at Stillwater. Here, he again joined a fraternity and worked for the university newspaper. He earned money by waiting on tables at the fraternity. He became disillusioned with the newspaper when a story he wrote on a communist party cell on campus was killed by the newspaper editor (because of his fear of a lawsuit).

Tom fell in love for the first time here, with a classmate and fellow worker at the newspaper, Carol Lynn Gilmer. Carol found Tom to be intense, always feeling emotions so much more deeply than other men. But she also noted his black moods. Carol Lynn was not ready for a romantic commitment, and her reservations made him feel rejected.

In 1939, T.O. found a job in Minneapolis, and Tom moved to the University of Minnesota to be with his family. Again, he worked for the campus newspaper, and again he carried out pranks, for example, herding thirty college females into the newspaper

offices to be judged by the staff for a position as “office whore” without the women being aware of what it was all about. (His jokes were particularly cruel to women.) Classes at the School of Journalism bored him, and his work was so poor that he was warned after a semester by the Director of the School to work harder. He wrote a weekly column for the newspaper and published short stories in the campus magazine.

Carol Lynn transferred to Northwestern University (as she had planned), and they kept in touch by mail. He wanted her to transfer to Minnesota, but she refused. Finally, in his senior year, he got involved with another woman, Frances Solem, and by the end of the year considered himself unofficially engaged. He got a job at the *Readers Digest*, selecting and cutting articles, and after graduation in 1941 moved to Pleasantville, New York.

Before The Book

Tom felt ambivalent about the *Readers Digest*. He admired the professionalism of the staff but disliked the conservatism and isolation. In November Tom was ordered to Minneapolis for a physical examination for military service. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, however, led Tom to enlist in the Navy as a yeoman on December 15th.

After finishing basic training, Tom was assigned to the battleship *South Dakota*. He spent the early months of 1942 in Philadelphia while the ship was fitted out. He was discontented with his assignment, and he was able to persuade a friend (Chuck Roberts) in the Navy’s Chicago public relations office to have them both transferred in April to a training program for apprentice seamen.

During the training program, Tom visited Carol Lynn, now in her senior year at Northwestern University. She was engaged but agreed to see Tom. In a short time, she realized that she loved him and broke her engagement. Tom’s training program moved from Notre Dame to Northwestern for three months, and this gave them time to develop a new relationship. This time they were both in love.

Carol Lynn was awarded her MA in June, and she chose a job with the *Readers Digest* over one with the *Chicago Economist*. Tom was assigned to a ship in North Atlantic, and they married in Pleasantville during a few days leave. However, Tom experienced grave doubts about marriage in the days before the marriage and felt no better after the wedding, though his biographer says that their sexual relationship was good.

His Navy career started off badly. During a drunken binge in Bermuda, he cut his arm so severely that he needed an operation and a two-and-half month convalescence in Boston. Carol Lynn visited, but Tom was cold and distant. Eventually he was assigned to a ship in the Caribbean, and then in June 1944 he was sent to the Pacific on the *Virgo*, an attack cargo and troop ship. Tom was an assistant communications officer, giving him an easy life on board. He had time to read and tried writing stories about life on board ship.

These turned out well. He sent some to his cousin Wallace and spent shore leaves writing rather than drinking. Tom was happy, and he felt better about his marriage now.

Tom was detached soon after the peace accord was signed. He went to visit Wallace in Palo Alto, where he found that *Atlantic Monthly* had accepted some of the stories and Houghton-Mifflin had expressed interest in publishing the collection. Tom went home to Minneapolis and learned that the book, later to be called *Mr. Roberts*, was accepted. Interestingly, Tom wrote letters to his publishers disparaging the book. He thought the stories poor and was very pessimistic about its chances for success.

Carol Lynn arrived in November and, though their first days together were fine, tension soon crept in. Carol Lynn felt excluded from aspects of Tom's life, his friends and his book in particular. In November, Carol Lynn went alone to visit her family, and Tom finished the manuscript for Houghton-Mifflin. Tom got his job back at the *Readers Digest*, and Tom and Carol Lynn went to Pleasantville in January, 1946. They brought a house and lived with a friend, Vera, until it was ready.

At the *Readers Digest*, Tom worked on condensations, but his mischievousness (such as adding dialogue to the books he was condensing) got him into trouble. At home, he avoided working on the new house and seemed content to stay with Vera. After moving to the new house, visitors would see Tom sulking and sullen, behaving in a very childish way to Carol Lynn. Tom knew that he was at fault and confessed to Vera that he knew his cruelty sprang from a fear of failing Carol Lynn and was really a cry for help.

However, he continued to provoke quarrels. He blamed his job for his inability to write. In March, Carol Lynn agreed to separate and, when Tom got a sizeable advance for Houghton-Mifflin for the book, he decided to ask for a transfer to the New York City office. He tried to write more stories, and one was accepted by *Colliers*, but another was rejected. However, his first book was receiving a lot of attention. One story was accepted for the annual O'Henry Award collection and MGM was interested in the book. When the book came out in August, the reviews were enthusiastic.

Houghton-Mifflin had received inquiries about a dramatization of the book, and so Tom decided to work with an old colleague from his Minnesota days, Max Shulman, on a play based on the book. Tom quit the *Readers Digest*, and they went to Minneapolis in January, 1947, where they wrote a draft of a play in fifteen days. Unfortunately, producers did not like it.

Living in New York as a successful novelist, Tom was considered an eligible prospect by the women there. A friend played matchmaker and introduced Tom to Helen Parker, divorced with two children, and an editor at *Liberty*. Tom fell in love with her and pursued her, and it was eventually understood by both of them that they would marry.

Tom decided to try a re-write of the play by himself. He went to Minneapolis to work on it. The producer Leland Hayward liked it and suggested that Tom get together

with Joshua Logan, a successful director, to work on the play. Tom was anxious these days, sleeping poorly and fretting about his future. He began to take barbiturates to get to sleep. The idea of getting help with the play appealed to him. He went to visit Logan in Connecticut, and they liked each other. Logan invited Tom to spend the summer with him and work on the play.

The collaboration worked well. The play progressed, and they worked so closely that Logan requested he be recognized as co-writer. Helen was outraged that Tom had let Logan dominate him, but Tom was aware that he had grown to be dependent upon Logan for his creativity. Reluctantly he agreed.

The summer of 1947 was one of the happiest times Tom had known. But once the play was finished, production began, and Tom was left out. Logan was directing the play and thoroughly involved, while Tom was on the sidelines. Although he was still involved with Helen, she objected to all of Logan's decisions. She was a hindrance as they tried to line up backers, and she began to insist that Tom and she find a house to live in. Tom, as he had with Carol Lynn, procrastinated.

He was drinking heavily and taking Seconal to get to sleep. Their sexual relationship had deteriorated. Helen was becoming more like a guardian and Tom more like a child. Tom's weight had dropped to one hundred and twenty pounds. (He was five foot eight inches tall.) he began to see a psychoanalyst regularly.

Tom was preoccupied with *Mr. Roberts,* feeling pride and possessiveness and, at the same time that it had been taken from him and was being abused. Logan seemed to be cutting the Heggen contribution to the play and aiming instead for belly laughs. Tom watched the rehearsals feeling like an outsider.

As the play neared Broadway, more cuts were made, and Emlyn Williams arrived to accompany Logan, leaving Tom feeling even more excluded. Finally, at the Broadway opening, with his family and friends in attendance and the cheers resounding throughout the auditorium, Tom refused to go on stage with Logan to take a bow. The reviews the next day stressed Logan's contribution to the play, and Tom was barely mentioned.

Tom read in the newspapers that Logan was now planning to work on *South Pacific*, shattering Tom's hope that they would work together on a new project. Much as Tom resented Logan, he felt dependent upon him.

Logan bought tickets for himself and his wife Neddy and for Tom and Helen to go to Cuba. In Cuba, however, the relationship between Tom and Helen deteriorated further. Tom was interested only in drinking and nightclubs, and he began to accuse Helen of flirting with other writers they ran into there, such as John Dos Passos.

On the fifth day of their stay there, the papers reported the suicide of Ross Lockridge. Tom had never met Lockridge, but he felt a deep sense of loss. He had read

Lockridge's book, *Raintree County*, three months earlier, and he identified with the man who might have been going through the same torments as he was. Tom's solution was to get drunk, and he spent the next days drinking and vomiting. When Helen and he arrived back in New York, Helen went off to see her sons. Tom was furious at being abandoned. They had one last furious row, and Helen walked out of Logan's apartment where Tom used to stay and out of his life.

Tom had made few friends in New York. His success had increased his sense of loneliness. At parties to which he was invited he would hide in a corner and resist efforts to coax him out. But neither could he face going home to Minneapolis where his family could not have understood his psychological distress even if he had been able to tell them about it.

Mr. Roberts was making him very rich. Weekly checks for thousands of dollars kept arriving. Yet Tom still was upset over having to share the money with Logan and Max Shulman. Furthermore, Tom could not write. Every day he would try to sit at his typewriter and write something, and everyday he would fail.

Tom met a variety of women in New York, and he started seeing Frances again, who by now had also become an alcoholic. He went home for occasional visits to Minneapolis and met twice weekly with his psychoanalyst. He was taking twenty barbiturates a day to stay composed. He decided to take a boat trip to overcome his writer's block. He travelled to Europe on a freighter but stayed drunk for the whole trip. He quarreled with a chorus girl whose fare he had paid, and he found the travelling unsatisfying. Even the beauty of Italy could not lift his depression, and this added to his hopelessness.

Back in New York, he moved into an apartment with Alan Campbell, recently divorced from Dorothy Parker. Tom's life continued as before. Logan was busy with *South Pacific,* and when Tom had an idea for a play they could develop together, Logan initially seemed enthusiastic but then excluded Tom from his future plans.

After *South Pacific* had opened on Broadway and the Logans had left for Europe without him, Tom made the decision to die. He offered to help some friends buy a house and, when the wife asked him if he was trying to get rid of his money, he admitted it. He looked up old friends as if saying goodbye to them. At the end of April, Alan Campbell, about to leave for California, noted an improvement in Tom's mood, as did Tom's psychoanalyst.

On Wednesday May 18th, he talked to several friends. He tried to get Frances's mother to take her daughter home to Minnesota. He called Frances to persuade her to see a doctor. A women he had been half-heartedly pursuing called to say she was marring some else and couldn't have supper with him that evening. He walked over to the pharmacist to pick up a new batch of Seconals. He went back and paid all of Alan's bills. In the late afternoon, another women friend came to pick him up for dinner, a dinner

which he had forgotten about. She left after a drink. Later another woman came by, instructed by Alan Campbell to check up on Tom. She stayed for supper but declined to stay the night.

The next day, the cleaning woman found Tom's nude body submerged in the bathtub. On a nearby ledge was a knife and a double-edged razor blade. Death was due to drowning with an accompanying overdose of barbiturates.

Discussion

The significant early event in Tom's life would seem to be his father losing his business during the Depression. This seemed to teach Tom that failure can follow unpredictably upon success. This experience followed upon a childhood in which he had never received the warm love that some mothers and fathers can provide for their children and in which he experienced failure at most of the activities he tried. To be sure, he could have done well academically, but that brought him no rewards.

In college, he seemed aimless. Courses did not matter, and there seemed to be alternative activities. Tom hung around with the campus journalists and wrote for the newspapers. But even there, he does not seem to have taken his task seriously. Was he trying to develop his writing skills or simply having fun being witty and provocative?

His book happened by chance. He wrote stories which he did not think highly of. But others liked them, and he seemed to be swept up by the success of his book. He wrote his book in the isolation of a ship at sea. But thereafter he was involved with girl friends, family, and friends, and he never wrote again, except for a couple of short stories. It looked like he might follow his father's pattern of failure.

His work with Joshua Logan seemed to hasten Tom's declining self-confidence and conviction that he was a failure as a writer. They worked so well together that Tom came to believe that he could work only with Logan as a collaborator. But Logan did not want Tom as a permanent partner.

Tom was unable to maintain relationships with women. Engaged to Frances, he deserted her for Carol Lynn. But with Carol Lynn, he seemed happier when away from her. Together they quarreled. With Helen, the same pattern developed. Perhaps Helen was a flirt. Perhaps she would have slept with any famous writer. But given Tom's previous pattern of behavior with Carol Lynn, it seems likely that the breakup of the relationship was also partly Tom's fault.

Indeed, it is hard to imagine anyone enjoying the company of an alcoholic drug abuser, with little self-confidence and even less self-insight, who seems happiest when he is away from you.

Where did Tom learn this inability to form close relationships with women? Or more precisely, where did he fail to learn how to form close relationship with women? At home of course, with a cold unemotional mother (who incidentally was depressed by her

husband's business failure, perhaps leading Tom to fear how his lovers would respond to his failures). And with two sisters who perhaps loved him no matter how immaturely and selfishly he behaved at home.

And so Tom sunk lower and lower into alcohol and drug abuse and depression. The suicide of Ross Lockridge clearly helped foster the idea of suicide as a way out (they even had the same publisher), and he made the decision to kill himself. (Everyone noted that his mood improved in the last week of his life, probably because he had made the decision to die and was now close to escape.) He knew Alan Campbell, his roommate, was leaving for a while. He tidied up his business affairs. On the day of his suicide, he tried a few last efforts to make contact with others. But they failed. This one was marrying another; this one had a supper engagement; this one wouldn't stay the night. Was this how life was going to go on and on and on, interminably?

Perhaps he tried to cut his wrists as he lay in the bath, for the means were there on the edge of the bath. But he didn't. Instead the barbiturates drugged him, and he sunk into the water to drown.

Reference

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ROSS LOCKRIDGE

David Lester

Ross Lockridge wrote only one novel, *Raintree County*. Over one thousand pages long, it rose to be top of the best-seller list in 1948. He killed himself just after its publication, at the age of thirty-three. Why?

Early Years[2]

Ross was born in Bloomington, Indiana, on April 25, 1914. He was the adored last child in the family, with two older brothers (Bruce and Shockley) and a sister Louise seven years older.

Just as he was about to enter Indiana University in 1919, Bruce, the oldest, drowned in a lake while trying to save a friend. Ross was five. His mother, Elsie, transferred her aspirations for Bruce first to Shockley and then to Ross. She was determined to educate them well, even starting a Montessori primary school in town. Obeying her demands, Ross excelled. From the earliest grades, his report cards praised his work.

Ross' father, Frank, had published several books, mostly biographies of historical figures for school children. He earned his living as a book salesman. His hobby was history, especially Indiana's, and he talked at men's clubs about the state's past, was active in the historical society, and every summer led a three week tour of Indiana's historical sites. When Ross was sixteen, he began to help his father, typing manuscripts, learning historical passages, driving the truck, and setting up the amphitheaters for historical recitals.

Prior to settling down, Frank had graduated from Indiana University, taught at school, been a school principal, gone back to university for a law degree, worked as a public defender and then in personnel, before becoming a salesman for the World Book Company.

While in third grade, Ross found a box of stories in the attic written by his brother Shockley when he had been seven. Ross loved them. This nurtured his desire to write. He wrote his own first story shortly after finding Shockley's and modeled it on his brother's stories. His mother liked it. In high school he wrote stories for the school newspaper and tried his hand at poems.

Ross went off to Indiana University, pledged Phi Gamma Delta as his father and brother had before him. In 1933, Ross began a year of study in Paris with a group of American students organized by the University of Delaware. This year in France was in

[2] This essay is based on the biography by Leggett (1974)

some ways a shock for this Midwestern boy who had never drunk alcohol and was still a virgin.

He showed his competitiveness by studying hard and becoming the best of all the foreign students by the end of the academic year. He also learned to drink and, toward the end of the year, lost his virginity to one of his fellow students.

His friends there noticed his competitiveness. He would reminisce about exams he had done well in. He came out of each successive exam complaining that he had done poorly, but eventually getting the top mark.[3] In the Spring of 1934 in Paris, Ross conceived of writing a novel about America, based upon his family's experiences in Indiana that would be the "great American novel".

In high school, he had met Vernice Baker who was a year behind him, and they fell in love during her freshman year at the Indiana University. After he returned from his junior year abroad, they were "pinned." He graduated in 1935 with the highest grade point average of any student ever at the university.

However, Ross fell ill during the Spring of 1935 and was diagnosed as having scarlet fever. His recovery took eight months, and his mother abandoned her master's study in psychology to care for him. Ross stayed at Indiana for a master's degree and worked as an instructor. He continued to write, even working on a historical pageant to celebrate the history of New Harmony (a former utopian community in Indiana). Ross and Vernice married at the end of the year, in July 1937.

Their first child, Ernest, was born in November 1938. In 1939 Ross was awarded a scholarship which allowed him to drop the instructorship. This gave him more time and, having tried and abandoned the novel in 1938, he began a narrative poem (*The Dream Of The Flesh Of Iron).* Having finished his master's degree, he was accepted at Harvard University for doctoral study, and he moved his family to Cambridge in the summer of 1940.

He worked on his poem and sent the finished manuscript of about four hundred pages to Houghton-Mifflin in February 1941. They did not like it, but he soon overcame his disappointment and went back to his idea of a novel.

His grades at Harvard were not outstanding (only B+) because of the time he devoted to his writing. So, with the help of a friend, he got a teaching position at Simmons College for the Fall of 1941. He spent the summer in Indiana on the novel and, back in Cambridge, he taught mornings and worked on the novel in the afternoons and evenings. He wrote at the typewriter and worked fast. (He had taken courses at typing and won a state championship for speed.)

[3] In the summer of 1943, playing chess with a friend whom he beat consistently, he sulked after a single loss.

Ross and Vernice lived frugally, rarely went out, and Ross's work so preoccupied him that he paid little attention to Vernice's needs. He seemed ashamed of his poor achievements and, for example, managed to give the impression that his father was a professor at Indiana University. He would boast of his powerful physical relationship with Vernice.

In the summer of 1942, a second child (Larry) was born, back in Indiana, but Ross and Vernice spent the next summer at the beach in Massachusetts. There he decided he had been a generation off in his novel and saw that he had to set it in Civil War days. Two thousand pages to revise.

In February, 1944, he was ordered to report for a physical examination for military service. He was declared unfit because of an irregular heartbeat, and he was ambivalent about this. He was left out of this patriotic adventure, yet he could finish his novel and care for his family. Vernice gave birth to a daughter (Jeanne) on the day of his physical examination.

By October 1944 the first part of the revision was ready for retyping, a chore Vernice tackled every evening after the children were put to bed. It took her eighteen months. A fourth child (Ross) arrived in February 1945, and Vernice finished the final copy of the book in April. Six hundred thousand words; two thousand pages. Ross took them to Houghton-Mifflin that same month. It was accepted for publication in June.

The Production of Raintree County

The rest of Ross's life was taken up with the production of *Raintree County*. He received an advance of thirty-five hundred dollars and so quit his job at Simmons College.[4] Houghton-Mifflin wanted revisions and cutting. But, in addition, Ross had lots of ideas for promoting the book and spent a lot of effort trying to persuade others to help. For example, he persuaded a friend who worked for *Life* to suggest various promotional schemes to the editors of the magazine. He wrote many letters to the staff at Houghton-Mifflin, suggesting ideas to them, fighting their editorial and production suggestions, and eventually fighting them over his contract. He saw his book, not only as a best-seller, but as the greatest novel to appear in years.

To work on the revisions, Ross took his family back to Indiana. His return after six years was a victory for him. He boasted of his success to some while patronizing others.

He decided to move to a cottage on Lake Michigan to work on the book, and family arrived in August. The book was scheduled to appear in the Spring of 1947. Ross worked hard on the revisions, but illness affected him and the family, and his energy

[4] Ross inflated the advance when telling his friends about it.

level was clearly the lowest it had been in years. In January 1947 he traveled to Boston to be closer to the production effort, and by March the book was being proofread.

Ross and Houghton-Mifflin decided to enter the book both for a prize offered by MGM (which would give MGM the movie rights) and for the Book of the Month Club. Back in Michigan, the galleys arrived in May. In July, Ross went to New York to talk to people from MGM. They would award his book the prize if he cut fifty thousand words of what they thought was superfluous material. Ross agonized over the decision but finally agreed. But he was unhappy with the decision. Had he sacrificed his literary reputation for money? Later, he (and his publisher) had to fight MGM who had thought of having co-winners of the prize, and MGM backed down. Ross was unhappy at the thought of MGM casting and directing the movie without consulting him, but his efforts to insinuate himself into the process alienated Louis Mayer, the head of MGM. He finished the cuts for MGM in August.

He began to worry about his potential tax situation and hired an adviser to counsel him. His children were ill, and he had to cope with typical family distractions. During the summer of 1947, Ross was sleeping poorly. His thoughts raced as he lay in bed. He contemplated his future, building up his expectations, but he was also frustrated by all of the actual events he had to deal with. His work on the book was compulsive. He was happy when working on it and miserable when not. After the MGM revisions were completed in August, he was exhausted. He could not sleep, had lost his appetite, and was constipated. His vision was blurred even with glasses, and he looked unwell.

An excerpt from the book appeared in *Life* in the September 8th issue. He began now to worry seriously about people's reaction to the book. What would the public think? What would the critics think? And the most important issue was what his parents would think. Ross needed to be liked and approved, and the fact that he had compromised the novel for commercial gain worried him.

Ross knew that one solution to his apathy and exhaustion was to leave *Raintree County* behind and start on a new novel. He made notes for himself on the project but could not begin writing. He began to doubt his motivation and to suspect that he would never write again. He was sleeping no more than an hour a night, and he was depressed and moody all day.

In October, he was severely depressed and paranoid. He talked to Vernice about people who were trying to harm him and his book. He felt that people were watching him.

At the end of October, the Book of Month Club accepted the book but wanted cuts. To some extent, this news restored Ross. He now had work to do on his book again, within a week the new cuts had been made. To deal with his fear of his family's reaction, he asked his mother to come up to Michigan to read the galley proofs. She did so and was

delighted with the book. She noticed his state of mind, though, and urged him to try Christian Science, which he did.

To help change his mood, Ross and Vernice decided to visit Hollywood. Once there, it soon became clear that the mood had changed at MGM. They no longer saw a prize for the best novel of the year as a sound way to get material for movies. The movie made from the first prizewinner had been a failure. There was no way of telling when *Raintree County* might appear or if it would appear at all. At meetings with the studio, Ross felt that he was given a brush-off.

However, the first copy of the book arrived while he was in Hollywood and, though he soon found out that his father liked it, he began to doubt that is was a good book. They heard about a house for sale in Bloomington, and they bought it by telephone. After only three weeks in Hollywood, they left (in December) to return to their new house. But as the train got closer to Indiana, Ross's depression worsened, and he confided to Vernice that he feared he would never get well again.

Ross, Vernice and his family decided he need treatment. He was admitted to Methodist Hospital in Indianapolis under an assumed name. He was given electroconvulsive therapy (in those days without anesthesia or a muscle relaxant), and he hated the ordeal.[5] He felt that the convulsions were destroying his mind, and he left before the course of treatments were completed.

The initial reviews of the book were positive, but by mid-January the reviews were very negative. Reviewers in *Newsweek* and *The New Yorker* hated it, and the criticism, of course, hurt Ross badly.

His mother continued to support his involvement in Christian Science. His father took him off to read and memorize inspirational literature. He put on a mask for his parents to hide his continuing depression, but sank lower and lower. (His memory had suffered, perhaps from both the depression and the electroconvulsive therapy so that he was not able to memorize even pieces that he had known well as a child.) Soon, the book was attacked for its moral tone. Friends in town refused to read it. His child was pointed out in school by other kids as the son of the man who wrote the dirty book. A priest in New York City urged that it be banned (which was reported in *The New York Times*). His paranoia continued, and he talked of plots against him and was sometimes incoherent. Vernice once found him opening kitchen closet doors, and he explained to her that he was looking for a way out.

On February 27, 1948, Ross learnt that his book was to be the number one best-seller in the USA on next week's list. His mood seemed to improve. On Saturday, March 6th, he spent time with his father who thought Ross was in a good mood. He talked of an offer from a lecture bureau, read with enthusiasm, and seemed to enjoy the radio

[5] He never lost consciousness during the convulsions.

broadcast of a high school basketball game. After dinner with Vernice, he worked on his tax return and then said he was going to mail some letters and listen to a basketball game with his father.

At eleven, Vernice called Ross's father and found out that Ross had never arrived. The car was gone, so she went out to the garage where she heard the engine running. She called Ross's father who rushed over and broke in to find Ross dead behind the wheel. Firemen and police arrived and tried to revive him for over an hour. The medical examiner said that he had died at about nine-thirty.

Analysis

Ross seems to have led a relatively uneventful and normal life until the year before his death. But there are a few signs of his future problems in those earlier years.

The loss of his brother when he was five is important, not just because of the loss to Ross, but for the pressure Ross's mother placed on her remaining sons to make up for the disappointments over her husband and oldest child. And her husband must have been a disappointment, a book salesman with a law degree. Ross usually gave the impression that his father was a professor, and Ross probably came to share the disappointment about the family status along with his mother.

Ross was very competitive. He could not lose at anything, even chess at which he was not very good. He had to be the best and, therefore, write the best novel. That he wrote a fair novel on his first attempt is impressive. But fair was not good enough; it had to be great. He changed the novel to improve its chances for commercial success, yet even the original version would have been panned by the critics. He had failed. His parents' opinion of the novel was crucial, but not sufficient to save him.

As he worked on the novel, his energy seemed boundless, approaching manic proportions. In the days of revisions, he almost seemed manic-depressive as he worked on the revisions only to subside into apathy when the revisions had been made.

He developed a major depressive disorder, with paranoid overtones. The electroconvulsive therapy failed to help (did it ever help anyone?) and was administered in the barbaric manner customary in those days. Treatment failed.

Interestingly, his mood improved in the few days before his suicide. This is commonly found. It seems likely that he had planned his death and, once the plan was formulated, he felt better. He completed some final tasks, including his tax and some correspondence. He was then ready to escape from the pain. He had set out to become an instant genius. He had done well, but not well enough.

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ERNEST HEMINGWAY

David Lester

Ernest Hall was born in 1840 in Britain, came to the United States as a teenager and fought in the Civil War. Later, he made money in the cutlery business in Chicago. In 1905 he was dying and suffering from severe pain. He was planning to kill himself with a gun that he kept under his pillow, but his son-in-law removed the bullets, and he tried to shoot himself with the unloaded gun.

His son-in-law was Ed Hemingway, a doctor. In 1928 Ed Hemingway suffered a financial loss from properties he had bought in Florida and discovered, in addition, that he had diabetes which he had failed to diagnose and treat. He suffered from terrible headaches, hardening of the arteries and angina. He feared gangrene of his feet, a result of the untreated diabetes, which might have led to amputation. Ed Hemingway came home for lunch and shot himself in his bedroom with a .32 Smith and Wesson revolver that had been used by his father, Anson Hemingway, in the Civil War. He was found immediately by his 13 year-old son, Leicester, who was home with the flu.

Leicester Hemingway was much younger than his brother Ernest Hemingway, and modeled his life after his elder brother. He shot game, tried writing fiction, and toward the end of his life grew a beard and began to look like his elder brother. By 1982, he had diabetes, had undergone five operations and was threatened with loss of his limbs. He shot himself. Ursula Hemingway Jepson was Leicester's sister. In 1966, she had three cancer operations. Depressed, she killed herself with an overdose of drugs.

But this chapter is about Ernest Hemingway, grandson of Ernest Hall, son of Ed Hemingway, and brother of Leicester and Ursula, who on July 2, 1961, suffering from diabetes and depression, shot himself in the head with a twelve-gauge Boss shotgun. In this essay, I have relied on the facts presented by Meyers (1985).

Ernest's Home

Ernest Hemingway was born in Oak Park, a suburb near Chicago, on July 21, 1899. Both of Ernest's grandfathers served in the Civil War, and Anson Hemingway in particular was always relating heroic tales of the war. Ernest grew up reading military histories, and was fascinated by the recent wars: the Spanish-American War of 1898, the Boer War in 1899-1902, and the Russo-Japanese War in 1904-1905. In his later life, Ernest went to five wars, in Italy, Turkey, Spain, China and France.

He was raised in a town that was white, Protestant, prosperous and conservative. The family was very religious, with morning family prayers, Bible reading, and Sunday church. The Sabbath was strictly enforced, and after punishment the children had to kneel down and ask God for forgiveness. Later, Hemingway moved far from those values, converting to Catholicism eventually, but their influence stayed with him.

Ernest's mother, Grace, was a talented contralto, and gave up a potential career in music, supposedly because the stage lights hurt her eyes and because she married Ed. She gave music lessons, earning a fair amount of money.

Ernest's father, Ed, was a doctor, specializing in obstetrics. He seems to have been dominated by his wife. For example, he promised at the time of their marriage that she would never have to do housework. He kept his word, cooking, shopping, doing the laundry and supervising the servants. Grace was pampered, spoiled and selfish. Although they got on each other's nerves, they were happy with each other and in love. They had six children, and Ernest was the second-born child and first-born son.

Ernest's Childhood

Ernest's childhood was relatively uneventful. Other siblings were born, he went through school and graduated, he played sports, took music lessons with his mother, and learned to hunt and fish with his father.

For three years, he was dressed in girl's clothing and had his hair long, so that he would look like a twin to his elder sister, Marcelline. Meyers dismisses this since it was often the custom to do this to boys in Victorian times. But Meyers misses the point that even common events may still have special relevance for some individuals.

Ernest's later life can be seen as the epitome of the macho masculine life style. This exaggerated style makes his early years of cross-gender identity of interest. Not only this, but Ernest had periodic episodes of impotence: when he first left Hadley (his first wife) for Pauline (his second wife), during his infatuation with Jane Mason in 1936, in 1944 in Paris when he was courting Mary (his fourth wife), and in 1960 during his depression.

In addition, Ernest was constantly fascinated by the merging of identities between a man and his lover. In several novels, the lovers resemble each other physically and switch roles. In the "Garden of Eden," Catherine wants to be a man and calls David “Catherine,” while David wants to be a woman and calls Catherine “Pete.” Ernest, himself, reversed names when he wrote to a young woman he was in love with in his old age, Adriana Ivancich. Latham (1977) suggests that Ernest experimented with sex role reversal with his wives, and Mary (his fourth wife) reported an interview in which Ernest says he likes sodomy and that his wife is a boy. Meyers suggests that Ernest had a hair fetish (though he documents only a literary preoccupation with hair), and he documents Ernest's exaggeration of his sexual conquests and sexual performance, while his wives, if they commented at all, tended to criticize his performance. Finally, Ernest often showed a pronounced hostility to homosexuals. All of this certainly points to some sexual conflict within Ernest.

Portents Of His Later Life-Style

Early on, his mother noted Ernest's tendency to be aggressive, self-confident, and courageous and to exaggerate. Meyers records adolescent fights with his parents, for example, about eating vegetables, wanting to wear long trousers at the age of fifteen, working on the family farm in the summer, and playing the cello in the family orchestra. His cruelty to animals is first shown at the age of six when he hacked a porcupine to pieces.

At school, he was competitive, developed an interest in boxing and began to write. He rejected the idea of going to college and instead went to work for the *Kansas City Star*. However, war appealed to him, and he volunteered as a Red Cross ambulance driver and left for Italy in 1918, at the age of 18.

Just before leaving the United States, he announced his engagement to a film star whom in fact he had never met. His parents believed him and were upset. This develops a theme in his life which was always been present, but eventually grew to pathological proportions. Ernest could not tell the truth about himself. He exaggerated, invented, and distorted his version of his life. In his version, he was not an ambulance driver in the First World War, but a soldier and leader. He boasts of sexual conquests that never existed, such as his "African wife" and of "irrigating" Mary four times in a night at a time when he was probably impotent. He changed his version of his life after significant events, imputing motives and actions to his relatives and wives which are false. For example, he blamed his mother for his failure to go to college (since she spent the tuition money on her houses), whereas in fact he chose not to go.

This is a fascinating trait, especially since we find it in Marilyn Monroe, who also committed suicide. It is as if Ernest did not like himself and could not accept that others would like him. He had to invent a person whom he thought people would like and surround himself with cronies who would like the person he invented. He shows the typical neurotic pattern described by Carl Rogers (1959). Rogers felt that, if children were not liked for themselves and that if conditions of worth were set up for them by their parents, then they would suppress their true selves and develop a false social self that was designed to win approval from others.

In this regard, it is interesting to note that his parents, and especially his mother, disliked his intention to write fiction and in fact threw him out in 1920. They were horrified by his published works and considered them disgusting and obscene. They were also morally offended by his divorce from his first wife and by his conversion to Catholicism. It is fascinating to read Ernest's letters to his parents in which he tries to explain his writing and justify it. He is still, as an adult, trying to get his parents to like and approve of him.

The First World War

Ernest's experiences in the war provided two critical events. First, he was injured. On July 18, 1918, a shell landed three feet from him, while he was handing out chocolate

to soldiers in the trenches. It killed a man standing between him and the shell, and he received over 200 shell fragments. Some of these (perhaps ten) caused quite severe wounds, and there have always been rumors of damage to his genitals. Again Meyers minimizes the importance of this event. However, others, such as Young (1966), noted that Ernest was passive in this first confrontation with death, and he spent the rest of his life facing death and actively challenging it. He went to wars and sometimes fought in them, he faced bulls in Pamplona, he shot big game, and in the end he caused his own death. It is as if he had a repetition compulsion, to re-experience the panic that he felt in his first experience with death and this time prove himself courageous.

Meyers quotes Ernest writing about Mussolini: ".....all his martial bombast and desire for military glory was a defense mechanism, formed against his own knowledge of how frightened he had been in the world war and the ignominious exit he had made from it....." (Meyers, 1985, p. 96). This seems so apt for Ernest himself. Peter Wykeham said that Ernest impressed him as ".....the sort of man who spends his whole life proving that he is not scared."

Although at first during his convalescence in Italy he seemed to have few symptoms of trauma, after he had returned home he suffered from insomnia and could not bear to have the lights out. To help him, his sister Ursula (who was three years younger than him) used to sleep with him at night. It is likely that the war experience was very traumatic for Ernest.

The second major event of the war was that he fell in love with a nurse, Agnes von Kurowsky. What made the experience traumatic was that, after he had gone back to the United States, believing that they were in love and would marry, she wrote to him and rejected him for another. This was Ernest's first real love, and we might note that he was still a virgin, and it led him to never trust women again. In each marriage, he was looking for the next partner should the current wife reject him, and he perhaps cast them off before they could cast him off. The situation is more complex, of course, since as each wife got to know him better, it would have been harder for him to maintain the false self that he created to deal with his feelings of worthlessness. It would have been harder to deceive his wives about the real Hemingway.

His Marriages

His first marriage was to Hadley Richardson in 1920, a woman eight years older than Ernest. This marriage came only one year after his first sexual experience, which was with a waitress. Hadley had some similarities to Ernest's mother, having also tried and abandoned a career in music. She was submissive, adopted his interests (in boxing, fishing and drinking). Meyers denies that she was a mother substitute, despite the appropriateness of the role for her. However, she used to sign her letters to Ernest as "Mummy." She clearly helped Ernest work out problems he had experienced with his mother, and he managed to create a role for himself very different from his father's role with his wife. They had one son, John. Meyers notes, however, that perhaps Gertrude

Stein served as a mother substitute for Ernest, resembling Ernest's mother in age, talent, egocentricity, and anger with and rejection of Ernest when he succeeded.

After an infatuation with Duff Twysden in 1925, Ernest fell in love with and married Pauline Pfeiffer in 1927. She was four years older than Ernest. They had two sons, Patrick in 1928 and Gregory in 1931. In 1932 he became infatuated and had an affair with Jane Mason. This ended in 1936, and Ernest met Martha Gellhorn later that year. She was nine years younger than Ernest. They married in 1940 and had the least satisfactory marital relationship of the four marriages. Martha was away a good deal of the time, working as a journalist and, when they were together, they fought violently. Martha was less submissive than the previous two wives and less willing to put up with Ernest's behavior, which was getting worse as he got older.

He met Mary Welsh in 1944 and was married to her from 1946 until his death in 1961. Mary, like Martha, was nine years his junior. He wanted a daughter, but Mary had a tubular pregnancy which left her sterile. During his marriage to Mary, Ernest had two flirtations, with Nancy Hawks and Virginia Viertel, and two infatuations with young women, Adriana Ivancich and Valerie Danby-Smith. Meyers does not think that Ernest ever slept with either of his last loves.

Meyers notes that as Ernest aged, his wives and loves became younger and younger. In his youth he married older women, and in his old age he fell in love with young women, but this is not an unusual pattern for men.

Relations With His Family

Ernest ended up on bad terms with most of his family. He called his father a coward for his suicide, hated his mother and blamed her for his father's death and much more, quarreled with his elder sister Marcelline and his younger sister Sunny, rejected another younger sister (Carol) for her marriage, reacting much like an Oedipal father in his jealousy of her husband, rejected his young brother Leicester despite Leicester's attempts to emulate and flatter Ernest, criticized his son John and quarreled with Gregory. Only Ursula (the one who slept with him during his recovery after the First World War) remained in favor up until the end.

With his sons, he seems to have ignored them as babies (as did Pauline, the mother of the youngest two). Later he seems to have been more devoted to them, but their adolescence brought attempts to dominate them and adulthood brought sexual rivalry (according to Meyers), especially as Ernest's wives and romantic figures became younger. His will left nothing to his sons.

Relations With Friends

In the 1920s in Paris, Ernest was friendly with other authors and artists. However, by 1937 he had quarreled with almost all of these friends. He found reason to attack each

of them, especially if they showed any disapproval of his writing or his behaviors. His attacks could be in print or physical. Charles Sweeny described him as extraverted, suspicious, disloyal and violent. He seemed especially scared when people got too close to him.

Meyers characterizes him as a swaggering hero in the 1930s, a drunken braggart in the 1940s, and a sad wreck in the 1950s. Ernest replaced his intellectual friends of the 1930s with soldiers, sportsmen, millionaires, hangers-on and sycophants. (With such people, drinking and engaging in sports, one can be friendly but safely distanced.) He also seemed to need a few people around him with whom he could be a domineering father/teacher. Ernest needed and liked to have around him father-mentor figures, soldier-heroes, kid brothers, surrogate sons, trusty drivers and erotic teenage females. Yet Ernest also had attractive traits. He could be generous and entertaining, and he was brave.

Literary Criticism

Ernest has been considered one of the finest writers in America in the Twentieth Century. He received the Pulitzer Prize in 1952 and the Nobel Prize in 1954. However, Ernest was always wounded by negative reviews, of which he received many. They made him feel undervalued and were severe blows to his confidence. They reinforced his doubts about his creativity, talent and future productivity. He usually reacted with anger at his critics, and he attacked them in retaliation.

This pattern fits in with our analysis of Ernest as someone who was never liked for himself as a child and who never came to like himself. When critics attacked him, fairly or unfairly, he lacked the inner sources of self-esteem to enable him withstand their attacks.

Alcoholism And Depression

As Hemingway aged, his drinking increased. He was already drinking brandy in large quantities when he was in the hospital recovering from his wounds in the First World War. By the 1930s he was drinking up to seventeen scotch and sodas a day. His drinking increased further in the 1940s. Eventually, the alcohol consumption caused physiological damage, and these problems exacerbated his physical decline in the 1950s.

Interestingly, most of his friends (and enemies) thought he could hold his alcohol well. He rarely passed out and did not appear to have developed some of the side-effects of alcoholism, such as dts, blackouts or nutritional deficiencies. He seems to have developed the French pattern of being steadily intoxicated rather than the American pattern of binge drinking.

He is reputed to have had regular periods of depression throughout his life. In the 1940s, Ernest usually woke up happy, but could not maintain this mood for the whole day. His depression was especially strong if he did not drink. He called his depressions

his "black-ass" moods. There is no evidence that Ernest ever had a manic phase. At the end of his life, he was suffering from severe depression and was given electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) by doctors at the Mayo Clinic in a fruitless effort to ameliorate it.

Other interesting symptoms apparent during his life included obsessive traits, manifest in his counting of the words he wrote, the animals he killed and, later on, daily recording of his blood pressure and weight. He began to show excessive anxiety in the early 1940s, especially about taxes and his financial solvency.

Ernest almost never accepted any responsibility for events, preferring to externalize the blame. For example, he blamed his mother for his unhappy childhood (part of the myth he created) and for preventing him going to college, he blamed Pauline and Dos Passos for breaking up his marriage to Hadley, Jinny Pfeiffer for breaking up his marriage to Pauline, and Gregory (his son) for causing Pauline's death. Gregory attributed this trait to his father's remorseful conscience. But it seems more likely to be the result of his dislike of himself. To have accepted the blame would probably have increased his sense of worthlessness and depression and made suicide more likely.

Ernest's fascination with killing is also of interest here. He learned to hunt and fish with his father. His experienced his first fighting in Italy during the First World War, and then moved on to a fascination with bull fighting. He pursued his interest in hunting, followed later wars and eventually got to kill men (German soldiers) during the Second World War.

Why did he kill? Hotchner (1966) quotes Ernest as saying, "I spend a hell of a lot of time killing animals and fish so I won't kill myself." Thus, Ernest, himself, saw his killing as a way of externalizing his anger, which fits the classic psychoanalytic theory of depression and suicide.

Mental Illness In His Family

Ernest's father showed symptoms of suspiciousness and paranoia at the end of his life. He was depressed and completed suicide. Two of Ernest's sons had episodes of mental illness. Patrick became paranoid schizophrenic in 1947 and received ECT, which destroyed his memory. Later, in 1957, Gregory, who abused drugs, had a mental breakdown and also received electroconvulsive therapy.

Thus, there is evidence of psychiatric illness in three generations of Hemingways. Believers in the medical model of psychiatric illness would see this as suggesting genetically-caused psychiatric illness in the family. However, the existence of disturbed family systems provide an equally plausible explanation of three generations of psychiatrically ill people. Crazy people not only pass on their genes, they provide an unhealthy atmosphere in which their children are raised.

Suicide In Ernest's Social Network

Suicide abounded in Ernest's social network. We have already mentioned the attempted suicide of his maternal grandfather and the suicide of his father. The father of his first wife, Hadley, killed himself in 1903. His lover Jane Mason attempted suicide in 1933 by jumping, breaking her back but surviving. One of his servants killed herself in the 1950s, and one of his biographers (Charles Fenton) jumped to his death.

After his father's suicide, Ernest said that he would probably die in the same way, and he began to consider suicide much more often. He asked for the gun his father used, and then threw it in a lake as if to prevent himself using it. Perhaps his rejection of his father's act was also a means of convincing himself not to die the same way.

Accidents And Illnesses

Ernest experienced an incredible number of accidents and illnesses. He had many concussions, shot himself accidentally, and suffered severe burns, cuts, fractures, and internal injuries.

Meyers notes that the likelihood of accidents was increased by Ernest's bad temper, recklessness, irritability, bad vision, slow reflexes, clumsiness and heavy drinking. However, the fact the Ernest would box others, both barefisted and with gloves, run with the bulls in Spain, shoot big game, and follow wars placed him in the position to get hurt. He is, in Shneidman's (1968) terminology, a death-chancer and death-hastener, and Menninger (1938) would see Ernest's behavior as a manifestation of his self-destructive impulses.

To dispel any notion that Ernest's accidents were simply bad luck and that self-destructive motives played no role, after a severe concussion in London in 1944, when it was recommended that his head be opened and the hemorrhage drained, he left the hospital and went on a bombing flight with the RAF instead, risking severe brain damage.

Final Stresses

Toward the end of his life, Ernest experienced the loss through death of many of his friends. His publishers, Max Perkins and Charles Scribner died, as did Pauline (his second wife), his mother, and his childhood friend Katie Dos Passos. In the last year of his life, he was upset by the deaths of Gary Cooper and George Vanderbilt.

In 1954, he was in Africa on a safari, and he survived two plane crashes in the space of a few days. He received very serious injuries, and this time his body seemed not to recover. The actual crash injuries included liver and kidney damage, burns and impaired vision and hearing. But more importantly, he lost confidence, and friends described him for the first time as an "old man."

After the crashes, he was believed to have died, and so he was able to read his obituaries. For those who contemplate suicide, the fantasy of how one will be viewed after death is fascinating. Ernest got to experience this before his real death, and perhaps he was pleased by this preview of how he would be viewed.

The Final Months And The Mayo Clinic

In late 1960, Ernest began to deteriorate rapidly. He was depressed and his obsessions continued. He developed pathological fears about taxes that he might owe and other unlikely infringements of the laws. He develop a paranoid fear of persecution from a variety of sources. He accused a driver of trying to kill him, Mary of trying to get rid of him in the Mayo clinic, and the FBI. (His paranoid accusations against the FBI had a basis in reality since they had kept a file on him since his days in Cuba, even talking to his doctor at the Mayo Clinic.) He became unable to make decisions, over matters such as which clothes to wear or in which motel to stay.

His physical condition was serious. He had a chronic skin disease, eye problems, hypertension, diabetes, and liver and kidney disease. In addition, his hair loss and impotence upset his image of himself. Hotchner (1966) quotes Ernest as saying that "if I can't exist on my own terms, then existence is impossible."

He was admitted to the Mayo Clinic in December 1960, released in January 1961, readmitted in April 1961 and released in June 1961. He received eleven to fifteen ECTs during the first admission and ten more during his second admission. There was no change in his symptoms. However, the ECT did damage his memory. At home between the two admissions, he was unable to write even a few sentences, and he complained about his loss of memory.[6] He was convinced that there was no cure for his psychiatric problems.

Meyers is strong in his criticism of the Mayo Clinic. He sees Ernest's treatment as worsening his life situation, deepening his depression and destroying his memory. He castigates the doctors for releasing him rather than transferring him to a different institution. He focuses particularly on the use of ECT, and notes that Ernest had never attempted suicide until after his first release from the Mayo Clinic. Indeed, Ernest made several suicide attempts during the trip to readmit him to the Mayo Clinic in April 1961, trying to walk into the propellers of an airplane and trying to jump from the airplane. Valid though Meyers criticisms are, he is writing in 1986 when our knowledge about ECT was more complete and when there were powerful anti-depressant medications available. Ernest's treatment was not unusual in 1960. Furthermore, it would not have been surprising if Ernest had killed himself even had he never been admitted to the Mayo Clinic or any other psychiatric institution. The sources and causes of Ernest's suicide lay far beyond the treatment received at the Mayo Clinic.

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[6] At a conference in 1979, I mentioned that the ECT had probably destroyed Hemingway’s memory, and several psychiatrists in the audience attacked my supposition. Within a few years, it was common knowledge that ECT does have a permanent impact on memory for many, if not all, patients.

Ernest And Suicide

Ernest had thought of suicide all his life. From his reading *The Suicide Club* by Stevenson as an adolescent, to his thoughts of suicide during marital crises, Ernest had always seen suicide as a way to die. He predicted that he would kill himself with a gun, and in the 1930s told others that a shotgun in the mouth was the way to complete suicide. He said that he had often talked himself out of it, but he saw suicide as alternative to a painful and humiliating death from a serious illness. He saw suicide as a way of going out in a blaze of light at one's peak rather than as a deteriorated wreck.

Meyers views his eventual suicide as motivated by desperation at his physical and psychological deterioration, with elements of self-pity and revenge (against Mary whom he left to find his disfigured head when she came down). Meyers also hints at elements of psychic homicide since, though Mary locked up Ernest's guns, she left the keys out for him to find. Perhaps his suicide was a welcome relief for her?

Discussion

The presence of psychiatric illness in several generations of the Hemingway family suggests the role of genetic factors in predisposing members of the family to depression. But let us assume that there was indeed a genetic predisposition to depression, and therefore suicide, in the Hemingway family. The timing of the suicides shows the influence of learning. Not all patients who are depressed kill themselves in old age when suffering from a severe illness. Many kill themselves long before this stage.

Ernest, like his father, killed himself only when he was suffering from diabetes and other physical illnesses and when under other stresses (financial reversals for his father; a creative block for Ernest). Both used guns, and both killed themselves when others were around. Ed Hemingway killed himself while his thirteen year-old son was at home; Ernest while his wife Mary was at home. This suggests that, for both of them, anger at the rest of the family was a component of the suicidal action.

From his mother, Ernest learned that she really wanted a daughter, and this affected him for the rest of his sexual life. He suffered from impotence and sought to establish a macho image that could not be mistaken for sex-role confusion. From his father, he learned not to let women dominate him the way his mother dominated his father.

From his parents, he learned that he was not very likable. Thus, he learned not to reveal himself, and he began to build up a façade self that would hide the real Ernest and present a mask to others that would get their admiration and approval. This distortion of the truth about himself became almost pathological in its extent. His low self-esteem led to him casting off friends before they could really hurt him and to difficulties in coping with reviews of his literary work.

From Agnes he learned that women could not be trusted and that you had better have a replacement ready in case your wife deserted you. From the First World War, he learned that he was scared by death so that he needed to prove to himself that he could face death without fear - again and again and again.

Ernest was exposed to suicide from a young age. He was six when his grandfather tried to shoot himself. He was twenty-nine when his father shot himself. In adulthood, many of his friends and acquaintances attempted or committed suicide, and he talked about it continuously. To take just one example, Flanner (1972) talked with Ernest in 1944 and agreed with him that liberty could be as important in the act of dying as in the act of living. They promised not to grieve if the other committed suicide. After his father's suicide, although he condemned his father for cowardice, he said that he would probably die in the same way.

The experience of reading his obituaries showed Ernest that he would be appreciated and lauded after his death. Thus, suicide would achieve escape from pain and help establish him in people's memory in the way that he desired.

Ernest knew quite clearly that he displaced his self-destructive impulses by killing animals. He felt that if he stopped killing animals, he might kill himself.

Finally, Ernest's suicide secured for him an escape from tremendous physical and psychological pain. It was the best alternative for him, given the circumstances into which he had got himself by the time of his old age.

In some ways it seems foolish to ask why Ernest killed himself because it seems like the ideal way for him to die. He lived life to the full - loving attractive women, drinking, fighting, and hunting. He had won universal acclaim as a writer. But now he was sixty and unable to continue this style of living. He was diseased, impotent, depressed and no longer able to write. It is hard to picture Ernest dying as a frail old man, locked up in a mental hospital, trying to convince others of the validity of his paranoid delusions.

Yet that is what makes Ernest's death interesting because other men move gracefully into old age and assume roles that befit them. They can become at peace with themselves and the world and serve as models for us, or they can become sources of wisdom that we turn to for their views on life and the world. Ernest could not fill these roles.

In a sense, Ernest killed himself many years before his death, when he began to suppress his true self, build up a phony image of himself and surround himself with cronies who would reinforce this phony image. As Ernest got older, his true self became more and more deeply buried, and his phony image more and more pathological, until at the end Ernest was the antithesis of the psychologically healthy person.

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YUKIO MISHIMA

David Lester

Yukio Mishima, a Japanese novelist, committed suicide in 1970 by disemboweling himself and then having an assistant behead him, the ancient rite of *seppuku*.

Early Life With Grandmother

Mishima was born as Kimitake Hiraoka, on January 14, 1925, at the home of his grandparents in Tokyo. His mother Shizue had a daughter in 1928, Mitsuko, and a son in 1930, Chiyuki. His grandparents were upper middle class. The grandfather, Jotaro, had been a senior civil servant, and his son, Azusa, Mishima's father, was also a government official. The grandfather had resigned, after taking responsibility for a scandal, and the family fortunes had been declining in recent years.

The dominant person in the household was the grandmother, Natsuko, who despised her husband. She had periodic depressions which might have been a result of having caught syphilis from her husband which had gone untreated. (Untreated syphilis leads to a psychiatric disorder known as general paresis.) Natsuko also had gout.

Natsuko was disappointed by her son's achievements and determined that her grandson would excel, so she kidnapped him from his parents. They lived on the second floor, and Natsuko took Mishima to live with her on the ground floor when he was 49 days old. Mishima's bed was placed in the same room as his sick grandmother, and he was reared almost entirely in that room.

Mishima was fed on a rigid schedule every four hours, with his mother, Shizue, being called downstairs for the feeding. Natsuko raised Mishima as a girl. He was attended by a nursemaid, forbidden to run about the house or go out. Toys were also restricted because his grandmother could not tolerate the noise. Mishima was kept inside, staying in the dark room with his sick grandmother.

When he was four, Mishima was very sick with an illness not known in the West (jikachudoku). Thereafter, he had attacks of this illness regularly (almost monthly), and he developed into a frail and delicate child. He was put on a strict diet by his grandmother, and his later fear of poisoning may have developed from her concern about his food.

Because Mishima was allowed out so rarely, outings took on special meaning for him. The experiences had a great impact on him and became vivid memories for him. In addition, because he was raised by his proud old-fashioned grandmother, Mishima heard only about upper-class families from the past. When he was five, his grandmother allowed girls to come and play with him (paper-folding and block-building) and allowed

his mother to take him out briefly if the weather was fine. Once when playing with cousins (a rare event), he felt required to play like a boy, and he described this as the beginning of his masquerade.

He read by the time he was five and liked fairy stories (especially those with princes). In play-acting with his brother and sister he often played the female role, such as Cleopatra. He says that he was in love with any youth in the stories who was killed.

In April 1931, at the age of six, he began attending the Gakushuin, a school for children of the rich and the aristocracy. In 1935, following Japanese tradition, the grandparents and parents moved to separate houses. Mishima lived with his grandparents, but his grandmother's ill- health forced her to let his parents have him for good in March 1937. He visited his grandmother once a week, and she took him to the Kabuki and No theater. As his grandmother's health declined, Mishima's visits became rarer, and Natsuko died in 1939 at the age of sixty-four.

Natsuko had created a bizarre childhood for Mishima. She raised him as a girl. She instilled in him a love of the samurai spirit of her ancestors and an affinity for the upper classes. She also suppressed a great deal of his feelings and behavior and subjected him to her conflict with his parents. Yet Mishima liked the time he spent with his loving (though tyrannical) grandmother.

Teenage Years

His Homosexuality

As soon as he began to have erections at the age of twelve, Mishima was attracted to men. Furthermore, he loved to draw pictures of young men, injured and covered in blood. When he first saw a picture of Saint Sebastian, bound to a tree and with arrows piercing his body, Mishima masturbated and had his first ejaculation. Twenty-five years later, Mishima had himself photographed in the same pose. (Mishima later referred to his masturbation practices as a "bad habit.") For the rest of his life, Mishima remained attracted to men, and his partner in his seppuku, Morita, was assumed to be his lover.

The source of this attraction to men can perhaps be seen in his grandmother's bizarre notion to dress and treat Mishima as a girl, but the association of sexuality with injury and death seems to appear quite suddenly without warning in his early teens.

Mishima And His Mother

Mishima went to live with his parents at the beginning of his teenage years. His relationship with his mother, Shizue, appears to have particularly close. Mishima seems to have loved her deeply, while she called him her 'lover.' She supported his writing and tried to get established writers to look at her son's work. (Mishima's father, Azusa, wanted Mishima to go into the Civil Service). Throughout his life, Mishima remained

devoted to his mother, taking her to plays, exhibitions, and restaurants and buying her gifts.

This attachment is of interest given his homosexuality. It is possible to see his homosexuality as, not simply an attraction to men, but also a flight from his unconscious incestuous desires toward Shizue which may have been stimulated by going to live with her when he was twelve.

School

Mishima entered middle school in 1937. His grades improved and, as his health improved, his attendance record became better. His teachers there also liked his writing better than had his elementary school teachers. Shizue encouraged her son's writing. Azusa had to work in Osaka for two years and, when he returned in 1939, he was horrified by his son's interest in writing. He tore up a story Mishima was writing, and thereafter Mishima hid his writing from his father.

At the middle school, his literary ability facilitated his acceptance by the older boys and the inclusion of his work in every issue of the school magazine. His early writings already foretold his later mature works: ironiv and elegant, alienation from the lower classes and a focus on cruelty.

By fifteen, Mishima was still pale and puny and suffered from anemia, but his health had improved greatly since his childhood. However, his parents used his ill health to get him excused from the mandatory two years of boarding at the school. He excelled at his schoolwork.

From an early age, Mishima read European literature, and this influenced him greatly. Eventually, he would furnish his house in a European style, and visitors from the West found him to be the most accessible of the Japanese writers. (His teachers at his school did not forbid their students to read European literature even though the official militarist creed at the time was that the Japanese were superior to all other races.)

His mother signed Mishima up for instruction in writing outside of school also, in particular with the renowned poet Ryuko Kawaji. At age sixteen, Mishima published his first work in a literary magazine (edited by one of his teachers). It was at this time, in 1941, that Mishima chose the pen name he would use for his writing.

The War

The war brought little change in Mishima's life at first. Azusa was too old to be drafted. In 1942, he resigned from the civil service and started a law practice. Mishima's grandfather also died that year. Mishima moved up to the senior school, ranked second out of the sixty boys in his class.

Mishima associated with a group of writers who believed that the war was holy and that death in the service of the Emperor was the highest goal in life, especially since self-destruction would lead to reincarnation. This group of Japanese romanticists (the Roman-ha) had the official support of the military leaders.

Mishima passed his army medical in May 1944, and he was drafted into the local regiment for which he had to work periodically. In September 1944, he graduated at the top of his class and was awarded a gold watch by the Emperor personally.

University

For the first time, Mishima's father exerted his will and Mishima enrolled in the law department at the Tokyo Imperial University where he was to study German law. However, the war interrupted his university education. He was drafted almost immediately to work in a factory making the kamikaze planes, the goal of which was death - a "monstrous nothingness" in Mishima's own words. The danger of death during the bombing of Japan scared Mishima, yet he also looked forward to death "with a sweet expectation." Despite the shortages of materials, Mishima had his first book published in October 1944, a rare achievement.

In February, 1945, Mishima was finally drafted for the national forces, but on the way to report for duty he got a fever. This fever, together with his lies about his health, got him rejected for service. (The army doctors believed Mishima to have tuberculosis.) This experience is perhaps critical to understanding Mishima's death. His failure to actually serve in the army enabled him to romanticize the experience in his imagination. Furthermore, although he never admitted it, his cowardice here perhaps led to his overcompensation later.

The defeat of Japan had a profound effect on the Japanese people. Five hundred military officers, including the Minister of War, committed suicide at the surrender, thereby accepting responsibility for the defeat and apologizing to the emperor. Officers overseas also took their lives, among them a writer and friend of Mishima.

Mishima began post-war life as a student again, living at home and depressed. In October, his sister Mitsuko (only seventeen years old) died of typhoid. Mishima looked after her in the hospital and felt her loss deeply. He took up writing again. He also sought and obtained the sponsorship of Yasunari Kawabata, later the first Japanese writer to win the Nobel Prize (in 1968).

Mishima's writing, however, did not win him immediate fame, and he decided to pursue his studies and sit for the civil service examination. At this time in his life, he was discouraged. His lack of direction after the war, together with his literary struggles, depressed him. He saw himself as a pathetic creature, non-human, incapable of normal social intercourse. He was still a homosexual only in fantasy, and he had no relations

with women until his thirties (although he made two marriage proposals during this period in his life).

Mishima passed his examination and entered the Ministry of Finance in 1947. But his writing went so well in the next year that he resigned to pursue his literary career. His father was furious, his mother supportive. Finally, the father gave in saying that Mishima had "better make (him)self the best writer in the land." In 1950 he was still depressed. He was lonely, jealous of others, and not physically well. He thought travel would help his mood, and so at the end of 1951 set sail for the United States, from where he went to Brazil, France and Greece, returning to Japan after six months in much better spirits.

Adulthood

Writing

His writing went well - novels, plays and criticism. In 1956 he was the leading writer of his generation in Japan, and now he sought the recognition of the world. In 1957 he was invited to the United States by his publisher and by the University of Michigan, and for this visit he worked hard at his command of the English language. He also built up his body, and he looked healthy and suntanned. He stayed away six months, but the trip ended with Mishima lonely in New York and without the public performance of his plays for which he had hoped.

In 1960, Mishima began to fall from grace. His most recent novel (*Kyoko's House*) was judged a failure. His books now sold twenty thousand copies rather than two hundred thousand. He even felt called upon to visit his publishers and make a formal apology. He took a part in a bad gangster movie, and this alienated people of good taste. In a serialized story that year, he satirized a well-known public man who then sued him. He also fell out with the literary club he belonged to. In 1961, he received death-threats from right-wing extremist groups, and for two months Mishima had a bodyguard.

During the 1960s, the trend continued. Mishima had stopped being the golden-boy. Mishima had first hoped to win the Nobel Prize for literature in 1965, and he expected to receive it in 1967 and 1968. In 1968, the Prize was awarded to Kawabata (the first Japanese author to receive it), and Mishima was bitterly disappointed by this.

Suicide had always figured prominently in Mishima's writings and thoughts, and by the mid-1960s he was beginning to seriously consider suicide for himself.

Family

Concerned that his mother had cancer, Mishima arranged a marriage for himself so that his mother would die happy. He married Yoko Sugiyama, a twenty-one year-old daughter of a painter in June 1958. They built two houses in Tokyo, one for himself and one next door for his parents. (Shizue turned out not to have cancer after all.) Mishima

modelled his house on Western colonial designs, even though the plot of land was too small to build a large enough house for the design. In the yard he placed a Greek statue of Apollo. To the western eye, the house was a little unusual. To the Japanese it was grotesque, but Mishima liked to shock.

Mishima kept his family from the public eye. No one was allowed to photograph his wife, parents or children. Mishima also departed from tradition by taking his wife with him on trips abroad, as in 1960 when they went to the United States, Europe, Greece, Egypt, and Hong Kong. Mishima had two children, a daughter first and then a son.

Mishima's Suicide

Mishima liked the romantic image of dying as a samurai. He would achieve hero status, and his death would bring together all of the threads in his life. The ideal of the samurai was the pursuit of Literature and the Sword, and Mishima set out to develop both paths.

There are several themes which were portents of Mishima's suicide. For example, in his literary endeavors, he began a long novel in four parts in 1965 that he would finish just prior to his suicide in 1970.

Mishima was concerned about his physical body. He was a small man, about five foot four, and he had loathed his body when he was young. Starting in 1955 he planned a rigorous program of exercise, body building and sun tanning. He specialized in kendo (fencing with a blunt lance), eventually receiving the rank of fifth dan. He believed that it was best to die when your body was still in good shape, rather than as a decayed old man. He viewed his body as beautiful and even had photographs of it placed in a volume about Japanese body builders. However, in 1970, at the age of forty-five, though still in good shape, his body began to decline. He was often too stiff for some of the exercises, and he was not able to keep up with younger men.

Mishima was an exhibitionist. He appeared in movies and on the stage. He wrote for all kinds of magazines and newspapers in addition to his serious writings. He delighted in shocking people with his writings and his possessions. He posed for a book of nude photographs in 1963 and in the pose of Saint Sebastian in 1966.

In this final decade of his life, Mishima also developed a hero worship of the Emperor, together with a nostalgia for Japan's imperial and colonial past, he became a favorite of the right-wing political groups.

In 1968, Mishima created his Tatenokai, a group of young men who functioned much like a private army. Using his connections, Mishima obtained permission for his group to train with the Japanese army and to be inspected on ceremonial occasions by military officers. He recruited right-wing students for the group, and at the first initiation

ceremony, Mishima and the others cut their fingers and dripped blood into a cup. Each signed their name in blood on a sheet of paper, and then each sipped the blood.

As his ideas shifted to the right, Mishima fell further out of favor with the literary establishment which leaned left. He broke with the theatrical group who produced his plays. Soon critics began to greet his new works with silence. His biographer (Stokes) felt that Mishima was essentially alone, without intimate friends, even though he was quite sociable. Mishima liked to hurt the object of his love. He found it hard to accept the love of others and could be repelled by and flee from their love. Thus, there was no one to challenge his life style and his goals. His wife would not dare, and his mother was too uncritical of him.

In 1970 he began to plan his seppuku. He recruited four students to help, including the leader of his Tatenokai, Morita, probably his lover and who shared his right-wing views. Mishima changed the plan a number of times, but in the end, on November 25, 1970, the group visited a local military unit, captured General Mashita (the commander of the Eastern Army) and ordered Mashita's officers to gather the troops to hear a speech from Mishima. Mishima tried to get them to rise up and take over the government in the name of the Emperor, but they laughed at him. He went back into the general's room, disemboweled himself, whereupon Morita tried twice to behead him. One of the three assistants, Furu-Koga, took the sword and completed the beheading. Then Morita tried to disembowel himself, but failed, whereupon the Furu-Koga cleanly beheaded him.

The assistants were ordered by Mishima not to commit seppuku, and they were sentenced to four years for their participation in the seppuku.

Why?

Many have commented on the reasons for Mishima's suicide. His suicide was the completion of his literary work; it was in defense of the Emperor and Japan; it was a sexual act or a manifestation of his exhibitionist desires; he was insane; he sought esthetic beauty in his death; his talent was exhausted; he and his homosexual lover committed a shinju (double suicide for love); he tried to trigger a coup d'état.

Stokes is convinced that the homosexual relationship with Morita was central to the seppuku, and that Morita in fact suggested it. This is unlikely inasmuch as Mishima had been describing seppuku in graphic detail in his writings for many years. It is more likely that Morita was the one who moved him from fantasy to action.

Mishima's childhood was grossly unhealthy. He was kidnapped by a grandmother and forbidden to be with his parents. He was raised as a girl and developed into a sickly child. Much of his later life can be seen as a result of this. He accepted the feminine identification and became homosexual by preference, but he rejected his frail body and sought to become tough. Stokes suggested that Mishima was impotent, but that seems

unlikely. He masturbated as a teenager and fathered two children. What role he took in his homosexual sexual acts is unclear, but he clearly would able to function in some of the possible acts. His homosexuality can also been seen as motivated by a flight from his incestuous desires toward his mother (and hers toward him).

It is the association of sexuality with blood, death and seppuku that is puzzling. The association appeared at a young age in Mishima, and no source can be identified. Was it simply by chance because he masturbated while looking at the picture of Saint Sebastian, or were there childhood experiences that shaped the theme in his life? We do not know.

Mishima would write anything for publication (for women's magazines, for Sports Illustrated, etc.) To be sure, he wrote serious works of literature, but Mishima liked writing and he liked popularity. His biographer, Stokes, described a lot of Mishima's writing as trash. Yet, Mishima wanted fame and was crushed by his failure to win the Nobel Prize. He wanted fame now and not in the future. He was aware, not that his talent was exhausted, but that his reputation was on the decline. He had alienated too many critics, and he feared for his future in the literary world.

So he killed himself, not at the end of his career, as did Hemingway or Marilyn Monroe, but rather at the peak (or just past the peak). He was almost a Nobel Prize winner (and might still have been if he lived to an old age); he was still in pretty good physical shape; his death right now might establish an image in death that would secure his name in literature.

He was often depressed in his life, and sometimes manic. Yet there is no evidence of breakdowns or severe incapacitating depressions. It is easy to suggest that presence of mental illness in people who are dead and unavailable for interview. But Mishima does not seem to have been mentally ill.

To us in the West, his preoccupation with the Emperor and his right-wing views seem odd, but not all people with extremist views are mentally ill. It is possible to be right-wing or left-wing without being mad. The particular views that Mishima came to adopt were shared by many in Japan. These views clearly shaped his choice of seppuku, whereas Kawabata, Mishima's early sponsor and the first Japanese writer to win the Nobel Prize, simply gassed himself in his apartment a year and a half after Mishima's suicide. Mishima's views may have shaped the method for his suicide rather than the decision to kill himself.

Japanese culture is tolerant toward suicide (though far from having the highest suicide rate in the world). I have already noted the mass seppuku of the military leaders after the defeat in the Second World War. Mishima spent part of the war in a factory making the planes for the kamikaze pilots who sacrificed themselves for their country.

The list of Japanese writers who have killed themselves is long: Bizan Kawakami 1908, Takeo Arishima 1923, Akutagawa 1927, Shinichi Makino 1936, Osamu Dazai

1948, Tamiki Hara 1951, Michio Kato 1953, Sakae Kubo 1958, and Ashihei Hino 1960. Thus, suicide, and even seppuku, is not an unusual event in Japanese society. Mishima had met Dazai and probably was at least aware of the other contemporary writers who had killed themselves. For someone who had developed a fascination with bloody death at a young age, these suicides must have been especially potent events.

Mishima may also have been scared of death. When faced with induction into the army, Mishima faked sickness. The fantasy was exciting, but the reality scary. Perhaps his suicide was a reaction against this fear, just as his body building was a reaction against his childhood sickliness.

Thus, the many themes of Mishima's life came together at that point in his life to make his suicide timely.

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VIRGINIA WOOLF

David Lester

Virginia Woolf was a leading literary figure in Great Britain in the early part of this Century. She wrote novels, book reviews for newspapers and magazines and literary criticism. She drowned herself in the River Ouse on March 28, 1941 at the age of 59.

Her Parents And Early Years

The Stephens were originally a family of farmers and merchants from Aberdeenshire in Scotland. Her grandfather was first a lawyer, but then joined the Civil Service in the Colonial Office, working hard for the abolition of slavery. He wrote for the *Edinburgh Review* and other journals. He was shy, pessimistic, convinced of his ugliness, and prone to deny himself any pleasure. If he found something he liked (like cigars or snuff), he avoided it altogether.

His youngest surviving child was a son, Leslie. Leslie was a nervous delicate boy, his mother's darling, and fond of poetry. He went to Cambridge University and later accepted a fellowship there, becoming an ordained minister in the process which was a pre-requisite for the position. However, he was dissatisfied by life there and moved to London where he worked as a journalist. He eventually became editor of the *Dictionary of National Biography*.

His first wife was Harriet Thackeray, daughter of the novelist. They had a daughter Laura, who was soon observed to be psychologically disturbed. (She died in an asylum in 1945.) Harriet died in childbirth in 1875, on Leslie's forty-third birthday. Leslie soon became close to a friend of his wife, Julia Jackson (Duckworth), recently widowed and with three children. They married in March, 1878. They already had four children by their first spouses, and they had two more, a daughter Vanessa and a son Thoby. They planned to have no more children, but two more were born, Virginia and Adrian.

Virginia was born January 25, 1882 in London, into the upper middle classes, though her biographer saw the family as at the lower division of this particular class. (They had seven maidservants but no manservants. They sometimes traveled in a cab but did not keep a carriage.)

Virginia was a pretty child and, although she was slow in leaning to talk, she soon showed a precocious brilliance. The children decided that Vanessa would be a painter and Virginia a writer. Virginia was later described as eccentric, prone to accidents, witty and easily provoked to furious rages by her brothers and sisters. She became the story teller in the nursery and started a family newspaper in 1891 which she produced weekly for four years.

Childhood was relatively uneventful. They all got whooping cough in 1888 from which they recovered, though Virginia seemed weaker afterwards. The boys were sent off to school, while the girls were educated at home by their parents and then by a succession of governesses and tutors. They learnt drawing, dancing, music, and languages. They vacationed in St Ives, Cornwall.

Since we know that Virginia eventually became psychiatrically disturbed, it is important to look for portents of madness in the family. In 1891, Laura was still living at home. A cousin, J. K. Stephen, received brain damage in an accident in 1886 and subsequently showed signs of madness, in particular manic euphoria and excitement. Virginia's father had very poor health. He collapsed in 1888, 1890, and 1891. He suffered from insomnia, what he called "fits of the horrors", and worries about his finances.

In 1895, Virginia's mother caught influenza. It was followed by rheumatic fever, and she died on May 5, 1895. Virginia was thirteen. Her father was sixty-three, a widower for the second time. His grief was great, and he broke down frequently in front of his children. His step-daughter, Stella, stepped in to take over the family and comfort Leslie. The oldest of the step-children, George, now twenty-seven, began at this time to molest Virginia (and continued to do so until she was twenty-two).

Adolescence And The First Breakdown

Virginia's first 'breakdown' occurred in the summer of 1895 soon after her mother's death. Later she remembered the excitability and nervousness, the intolerable depression, a fear of meeting people and hearing voices. She stopped writing the family newspaper.

Stella became engaged in 1896 and was married in April, 1897. She became ill with peritonitis and died in July. Virginia's health deteriorated during this period. There was a fear of going out in the street, also a fever and rheumatic pains, but not a complete breakdown. Soon she was back at lessons, learning Greek and Latin.

Leslie's hearing was deteriorating, and many of his friends had died. However, he recovered from his grief, though he remained chronically melancholy. He encouraged the literary interests of his family and turned to Vanessa to run the family. He continued to worry about finances which made life hard for Vanessa who had to fight with him for money to run the household.

Thoby went to Cambridge, and Vanessa and Virginia met his friends, many of whom later became the nucleus of an intellectual group centered around the Stephens' children and known as the Bloomsbury group. Vanessa made more of an effort to 'come out' in society than Virginia, but both thoroughly disliked this and withdrew from the activities as soon as they could.

On Their Own As Adults

Leslie died after a long illness in February, 1904. In May, Virginia had her second breakdown. She grieved for her father, heard voices, distrusted Stella and her nurses, and tried to starve herself. She tried to kill herself by jumping from a window which was not high enough for her to do much harm. As she recovered, the mental symptoms lessened, leaving her with headaches and neuralgia.

The three children decided to move into a house in Bloomsbury by themselves. They began to have 'At Homes' on Thursday evenings to which many intellectual friends came. Virginia published her first piece in *The Guardian* at the end of 1904, and in 1905 she began her association with *The Times Literary Supplement*. She taught briefly at an evening institute for working men. Then in 1906 on a trip to Greece, Vanessa and Thoby both became ill. Vanessa recovered, but Thoby was misdiagnosed as having malaria and died in November with typhoid fever. Vanessa became engaged to Clive Bell two days later. Surprisingly during these crises, Virginia functioned well and without any breakdown, although she missed Thoby greatly.

After Vanessa's marriage, Virginia and Adrian moved into a smaller house, and their life continued much as before with Thoby's friends as theirs and with activities being split between their household and the Bell's. Virginia's writing was successful, and she began working on a novel in addition to writing for literary magazines. Virginia also began seriously to think of marriage for the first time.

Hitherto, Virginia had been attached mainly to women, especially Violet Dickinson, who seemed to have been in love with Virginia and vice versa, although the relationship was not sexual. Virginia's first flirtation was with an older family friend, Walter Headlam, but the interest soon petered out, and he died unexpectedly in June, 1908.

Virginia was physically ill and close to another breakdown in 1910 but recovered after a rest cure. She turned down a proposal of marriage from Lytton Strachey (who was homosexual) and resisted the attention of her brother-in-law, Clive. After rejecting several suitors, in 1911, an old friend, Leonard Woolf, returned on leave from Ceylon and fell in love with Virginia. After another bout with exhaustion in 1912, Virginia agreed to marry Leonard. The wedding took place in August, 1912.

Mrs. Woolf

Virginia's life with Leonard was full, but also relatively uneventful. They lived happily together, started a publishing company (the Hogarth Press), and worked hard. Virginia wrote, eventually amassing a considerable body of work, including novels that were received with critical acclaim.

Their life quickly developed into a routine. Leonard took care of Virginia, especially during her breakdowns, but also between breakdowns as he tried to prevent

their reoccurrence. They wrote most mornings, walked in the afternoons, and read in the evenings. They entertained and were entertained in return.

Virginia was frigid which may be ascribed to the sexual experiences with her half-brother. Virginia wanted to have children, but Leonard did not. After much consultation with specialists, the majority opinion was that it was too dangerous for her to have any.

Her first novel (*The Voyage Out*) was accepted in 1913, although it was not published until March, 1915. However, its acceptance led to another breakdown. She had anxieties about her writing talent, sleepless nights, headaches, depression, a sense of guilt, an aversion to food, and fears that people were laughing at her. In September, 1913, Virginia took a lethal dose of veronal but, after having her stomach pumped, she survived -- barely. As she recovered, her manias returned, and she went from depression to violent excitement. (Leonard, and others, later diagnosed Virginia's disorder as manic-depressive psychosis.) Leonard considered putting her into an asylum, but slowly she began to recover, though with a relapse in February, 1915, just before her novel appeared.

The reviews of her novel were positive, and her recovery progressed. Virginia's novels were very close to her own private world, and she was aware that the books might be seen as crazy (or really be crazy). If they had been mocked, then this would have been a mockery of her true self. Praise for her novels was a certificate of sanity.

Her Death

Virginia had breakdowns in June 1921 (after a mild depression in August 1919 just before the publication of *Night And Day*), and mild ones in August 1926, September 1929, May 1936. She had frequent periods of total exhaustion, notably January 1922, September 1925, and July 1933, as well as many less severe illnesses.

All of her novels caused her anxiety and depression, especially during the time between the completion of writing and the appearance of the book. Also, beginning in 1934, her style was seen by critics as old-fashioned, and criticism became more common.

As she grew older, more and more friends died. Kitty Maxse killed herself in 1922 and Dora Carrington in 1932. Lytton Strachey died in 1932 and her nephew Julian in 1937 in the Spanish Civil War. The Second World War also created intense stress for Virginia. (Leonard was Jewish.) They discussed suicide in May 1940, and decided to keep enough gasoline on hand (and later morphia) to kill themselves.

She finished a final novel (*Between The Acts*) in November 1940. By January, Leonard was alarmed at her psychological state. On the morning of Friday March 28, 1941, Virginia wrote suicide notes and walked to the River Ouse where she put a large stone into her coat pocket and drowned herself. In her letter to Leonard, she explained:

> I feel certain I am going mad again. I feel we can't go through another of those terrible times. And I shan't recover this time. (Bell, 1972, p. 226)

Analysis

Virginia clearly had recurrent mental breakdowns during her life. It is possible that she indeed suffered from a manic-depressive psychosis, with periods of both depression and mania. She also heard voices and had some phobic behaviors concerned with eating (even when she was not psychotic). Her breakdowns seemed to have occurred after two types of events: severe loss (for example, after the death of her mother) and after completing a novel and waiting for its publication.

She was also prone to exhaustion, and her family thought that this was brought on by too much social activity. Typically, a rest cure was prescribed. This exhaustion seemed to facilitate the appearance of a breakdown.

Her suicide note asserted that she was killing herself because she was scared of suffering another breakdown, one with no recovery, and because of the effect of her illnesses on Leonard. Some people go mad to prevent themselves committing suicide; others commit suicide because of their fear of mental illness. Virginia seems to be among the latter.

The question that remains is one of timing. Why in 1941? She almost died in her suicide attempt soon after her marriage when her literary career was still in its infancy. By 1941, however, her novels were receiving increasing criticism, and she feared that she would not be able to write again. The war, with its threats for Leonard, was also a new stress. (Their house in London was damaged by bombs.) She was fifty-nine and perhaps no longer possessed the resiliency of her youth.

She was an agnostic, without religious beliefs that might inhibit her taking her own life. This time, too, there was no attending physician to advise them. Leonard persuaded a friend who was a physician to see Virginia but, apart from this one consultation, there was no doctor, therapist or nurse on hand. Four days before her suicide, Virginia wrote to her publishers asking that her novel not be published, indicating that her typical fears about publishing were still strong.

If she had been able to survive this latest breakdown, would she have recovered as she had in the past, and would she eventually have killed herself, perhaps during the next crisis? She was a chronically depressed person, with a history of suicidal preoccupation, and she might have killed herself at any time. As with other cases discussed in this book, it is perhaps a surprise that she lived so long.

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CESARE PAVESE

David Lester

Cesare Pavese was born in Italy in 1908, and he killed himself at the age of 42 in 1950. During that time, he became a leading intellectual, editor, translator, poet and novelist.

His Early Life

Cesare was born on a farm in Santo Stefano Belbo in the Piedmont province of North Western Italy (which borders on Switzerland and France). He often returned to his home town in later years, and Pinolo Saglione, a carpenter there, remained a friend and confidante.

Cesare was born on September 9, 1908, and it was by chance he was born on the farm since his parents lived in Turin and visited the Pavese family farm only in the summers. Cesare's father, Eugenio, worked in Turin at the Court of Justice. Cesare's mother, Consolina, was the daughter of wealthy merchants. Cesare had a sister, Maria, six years his elder. (Consolina had lost three children before Maria and Cesare, the first dying of diphtheria at the age of six.)

Cesare's childhood was spent in Turin during the Winter and Spring and at the farm in Summer and Autumn. Cesare developed an affinity and a liking for the country and, although he lived most of his adult life in cities, he was really a country boy. He longed for the summers when he could escape Turin for the farm.

When he was six, the family was about to return to Turin when Maria caught an infectious illness that forced the family to stay on the farm. Cesare attended first grade in the country school, but the next year began attending a private school in Turin. More importantly, when Cesare was six his father died from a brain tumor that he had suffered from since before Cesare's birth. Cesare felt a great sense of loss, but he was ashamed of his tears and choked them back.

Cesare's mother, long tried by tragedy, was not warm or tender but rather showed her love by working hard for the family. She was thrifty and kept a tight rein on her children. She forbad talk over meals and forced the children to eat everything she served. Cesare began to withdraw from her, and their relationship became increasingly cold. He began a lifestyle of being alone, even when among others, and of feeling sad. He was more attracted by misfortunes than by celebrations. His father was a dreamer and an avid reader of books, and soon Cesare began to follow his father's interests. He hated his school books but loved literature. Yet Cesare was not alone. He had playmates at the farm and a small circle of friends at school.

Though he loved literature, his report cards usually described him as intelligent but lazy. After elementary school, he attended a Jesuit junior high school for a year but

could not fit in with the spoiled and snobbish children of the wealthy. After three years, he switched to a public junior high school. His eyesight was poor, and he needed to wear glasses. He was tall, slender and frail, and walked with a slouch. He usually had a bad cough in the Winter, and he developed asthma.

High School And College

Cesare's life was inextricably interwoven with the rise of fascism in Italy. In 1922, fascist groups burned the trade union headquarters and two socialist clubs in Turin. Communists and trade unionists were arrested and assassinated. Fascism exalted arrogance, boldness, action and a political philosophy that Cesare could not accept. He detached himself from fascism and withdrew more into himself and his studies.

As a consequence, he began to pay attention to his teachers, to study, to write and to enjoy his school. He studied Greek by himself, and visited the public library frequently with his friend, Mario Sturani, reading all he could.

Cesare entered the lyceum (high school) in 1923 at the age of fifteen. He developed group of friends, and he came under the influence of a teacher of literature and Latin, Augusto Monti, a teacher whose students became his disciples and life-long friends, who disliked the fascists and whose students tended also to become anti-fascist.

Cesare passed the hard entrance exam to college, and his college years were filled much as the lyceum years with literature, discussions, and writing. The group of students from the lyceum stayed together and still met with their old teacher, Monti. In this environment, Cesare seemed happier than ever before. He began to appreciate films and to translate American authors into Italian. His thesis was on Walt Whitman, and initially it was rejected because his professor viewed it as a political attack on fascism. Cesare managed to change professors and graduate.

His Career

The fascists rose to power, led Italy into the Second World War on Germany's side, and were overthrown. The Germans then attacked the Italians. After the war, there was much political fighting between the various groups, especially the communists. Cesare's friends and colleagues were involved. They joined the resistance, became political, and fought for what they believed was right. Where was Cesare in all of this?

Sitting in on the discussions to be sure, but rarely saying anything. He did not join the resistance. He lived out the war in the countryside, away from the fighting. He finally joined the communist party, but was never active. He did *nothing*.

Lajolo, his biographer, characterizes Cesare's novels well. They are about vagabonds, drunks and idle people. The characters spend their lives in taverns, drinking and talking. They have no occupation, are without love, addicted to drinking and

smoking, satisfied to wander the streets aimlessly all night, and in the end they sink into melancholy. This is Cesare.

It is perhaps not true to say the Cesare did nothing. He wrote, poems, novels and essays that intellectually supported left-wing ideas. Even his translations of American literature can be seen as challenges to the fascist regime by introducing Italians to the American ideals of freedom of thought and speech. He worked tirelessly in these endeavors, and he was exiled for ten months by the fascists and was under surveillance for much of the time. But even Cesare knew that he was avoiding the real fight. At the end of the war, when he learned that friends had died fighting for the ideals he supposedly supported, his feelings of being a failure were amplified.

A few months after receiving his degree, Cesare's mother died. Although they had not been close, she had represented his roots and given him a sense of security. To replace her, he moved in with his sister and her family, where he lived for the rest of his life.

In order to earn some money, he worked at translating, mainly American novels, but a few English ones also. He chose books with subtle (rather than obvious) political significance. He was not allowed to teach in the public schools because he refused to join the fascist party. He could teach only in temporary and substitute positions, in private schools and as a private tutor.

In 1933, he began to work for a new publishing company, the Einaudi Publishing House, started by a former student of Augusto Monti. Cesare helped to decide which foreign works to translate into Italian and worked at getting the appropriate permissions. The publishing house was under suspicion by the authorities, and on May 13, 1935, Cesare's home was raided. He had at home a letter from a left-wing prisoner which he refused to explain. He was tried and sentenced to three years exile, though he was released after ten months.

His exile was spent in Brancaleone Calabro, in Southern Italy (at the toe). He was dependent on money sent to him by his sister, and he spent the time there lonely and bored. His asthma was bad, and he hated the sea and the winds. Eventually, his letters became angry and bitter, full of complaints.

He was released after only ten months, but was crushed upon his return to Turin to find out that a woman he loved had just married someone else. He fell into a severe depression. His first book of poems had not been received with any enthusiasm, and he no longer saw writing as worthwhile. What got him out of this mood was taking on a student for lessons in Greek and Latin literature. They met at 7.30 every morning for an hour, and eventually Cesare regained his enthusiasm for literature. He began work again at Einaudi, eventually helping to set up their office in Rome.

From 1928 to 1932, Cesare had been occupied primarily with translations, from 1932 to 1937 with poetry, but from 1937 until his death he wrote short stories and novels. He continued his writing during the war.

He was drafted into the army in March, 1943, having been previously excused because he was the son of a widow. However, when they discovered his asthma, he was sent to a hospital and for six months convalescence. The fall of the fascist regime saved him from service. When he returned to Turin, most of his friends had left to join the partisans in the Resistance War against the Germans. Cesare went to stay with his sister in the country, where he once more immersed himself in literature. His diaries from this period contain no mention of political events or the war.

After the war, he returned to Turin and began work again at Einaudi's. He found that many of his friends had died in the fighting. He finally joined the Communist Party, perhaps as a way of redeeming himself.

In 1947, he seemed serene and happy. He was working, dictating his novels to a colleague at Einaudi, Maria Livia Serini. But after each novel was completed, Cesare would become physically weak, asthmatic, and bitter and depressed again. He soon lost Mari Livia who was transferred to Rome.

In 1948, Cesare became nervous and anxious. He could not tolerate solitude in the city, so he hurried off to Santo Stefano Belbo, his old home, to visit with Pinolo Scaglione. He returned to Turin, went to Rome, returned to Turin. His sister became accustomed to him disappearing every week end. Suicide had been a constant theme in his writing. In his novel *Among Women Only* published in 1949, he described the way in which he would later kill himself. He began to worry about headaches and whether he had a brain tumor like his father. He smoked medicinal cigars to ease his asthma. He talked of his agitation, palpitation, sense of decay, and insomnia.

In June, 1950, he was awarded the Stega Prize for his new novel, *The Beautiful Summer*, but by late August he was dead.

Women

After the poor relationship he developed with his mother, it is not surprising that Cesare had problems with women in his life, problems which became the major sources for his depression.

Let us look at his first school-time crush, Olga. He tried to speak to her but felt too shy and inhibited. So he watched her from afar. He felt inferior to her, a simple country boy with big hands and poor vision, while his friends socialized with ease with their girl friends. One day he was walking by the river and saw a boat with the name Olga written on it. He turned white and fainted.

A second revealing incident happened while he was at the lyceum. One day, Cesare found the courage to ask a singer at a cabaret out. They set a date for six in the evening, meeting at the front of the club. Cesare arrived punctually at six. He waited and waited. At eleven, the rain began, but still he waited. At midnight he returned home, sad, humiliated and freezing. He learned the next day that she had left via the back door with another admirer. The depression and fever led to pleurisy which put him in bed for three months.

Later he would write much about his philosophy of life, in his letters, his diary, and his novels. Writing to a friend, he once asked, "Don't you agree that no joy surpasses the joy of suffering?" We can see this clearly in his stubborn wait outside the night club for six hours.

Lajolo is rather coy about Cesare's love life. Perhaps he visited prostitutes. It seems as if Cesare was impotent, probably ejaculating prematurely and so rarely satisfying his lovers. It may also be that his penis was overly small.

There were three major loves in his life, all of whom rejected him. The first is described by Lajolo as "the woman with the hoarse voice." She was studying mathematics at the university and was firm, cool, strong-willed and good at sports. While he was with her, Cesare was more natural, human, tender, and confidant than ever before. But she betrayed him, leaving him bitter and never again trusting women. Lajolo does not tell us whether Cesare and his friend were lovers.

Lajolo tells us, without giving examples, that Cesare rejected maternal or submissive women, as well as those that loved him. Rather he fell in love with and pursued those who did not love him, strong women with minds of their own, perverse and unfaithful. Cesare wrote, "The only women worth the trouble of marrying are those a man cannot trust enough to marry."

When Cesare was in exile, the woman with the hoarse voice rarely wrote to him. On the day he returned from exile, he was met at the train station by his friend, Sturani. He asked after her. Sturani told him that she had been married the previous day. Cesare fainted. Although she married another, it is important to note that before Cesare's exile, her lover was in prison and they communicated by letters sent via Cesare. (It was one of these letters that he was tried and exiled for.) She had never been faithful to him, and Cesare had been willing to accept this! From the train station he went to his room in his sister's house and stayed there for days. He refused to eat, he did not read, and he thought of suicide. But he lived on.

In 1940, Cesare met Fernanda Pivano and was in love with her for five years. They met almost daily, and he would read her poems and novels. He asked her to marry him one day, but she did not reply. In all of those five years, Cesare never kissed Fernanda! Eventually she married someone else.

In Rome in 1945, Cesare met a woman who aroused his passion. Lajolo is again coy, and we learn nothing save that Cesare made "an attempt to prove his virility. Once again he was dissatisfied and returned to his silence and to self-destructive thoughts." Back in Turin he wrote, "Again alone...you make your house in an office, in a cinema, keeping your jaws clenched."

The final woman in his life was an American actress visiting Italy, Constance Dowling. As soon as he met her, he began to fear her desertion, and he recognized that she was a flirt (she did go to bed with a fellow actor). In July 1950 he was with her in Milan and appeared “blissful.” Constance went back to America, and Cesare awaited a telephone call from her saying she would marry him. It never came.

Depression And Suicide

Cesare began to be depressed early in his life. His failures with women exacerbated these feelings and precipitated the most severe depressions. Depression would also develop after he had completed a novel.

Throughout his life he talked about feeling worthless. This idea focused on his failures with women. No matter how much he wrote or how enthusiastically it was received, he would compare himself with those who were married and had children and consider himself a failure. And his impotence! He wrote, "...a man who ejaculates prematurely should never have been born....it is a defect that makes suicide worthwhile."

He described his life as a fight with depression that he had to fight "every day, every hour, against inertia, dejection, and fear." In 1927, he wrote to his friend Mario Sturani saying that he was incompetent, timid, lazy, weak and half mad. Should he kill himself or not? But he didn't have the courage to kill himself. He was a child, a cretin, a “poseur.” More probably, he said, he would masturbate himself to death. Don't cheer me up, he wrote. Let me enjoy my depression in peace.

While he was at the lyceum, a friend, Baraldi, and his girl friend went to the mountains where they shot themselves. Baraldi died; his girl friend lived. Within a few days, Cesare decided to imitate Baraldi. He took a gun to the same town, Bardonecchia, but could not kill himself. He fired the shots into a tree instead. Cesare does not seem to have attempted suicide at all before his death.

In August 1950, his sister, staying in the country, was worried about her brother, so she returned to Turin. She found him frighteningly thin, his eyes hollow and red. For two days he burned letters, documents and photographs. He left his light on all night, but he was calm, patient and even kind. On the morning of Saturday August 26th, he asked Maria to pack him a suitcase as if he was going away for one of his weekend trips. He went to the Hotel Roma in town. On Sunday evening, a hotel employee was worried because the guest had not been seen all day. He forced the door open and found Cesare lying on the bed dead, dressed except for his shoes. On the nightstand were sixteen empty

packets of sleeping pills. His last words in his diary read, "All this is sickening. Not words. An act. I shall write no more." On the cover of one of his books by his bed in the hotel room, he had written, "I forgive everyone and ask forgiveness of everyone. O.K.? Not too much gossip, please."

An Absurd Vice

Lajolo called his biography of Cesare *An Absurd Vice*, which is how Cesare described his obsession with suicide. Cesare's life is easily summed up. An intellectual, enthusiastically concerned with issues in literature, but aware that such issues take second place to the common needs of all people - finding love and a place in the world.

Cesare's disposition and childhood experiences (the death of his father and his unaffectionate mother) prevented him from becoming mature. He never left home, moving from mother to sister, living all forty-two years with them. He never developed the social skills necessary for relating to women. He knew Fernanda for five years, proposed marriage, but never kissed her. She would have been foolish to marry such a man unless she was as immature as he was.

Cesare had friends, but listen to what he said, "As soon as I am aware that a friend is getting too close, I abandon him. I abandon women, those whom you call maternal, as soon I deceive myself into thinking they love me." Cesare could not stand closeness. It scared him. At another time he wrote, "(Cesare) wants to be alone - and he is alone - yet, at the same time, he yearns to be in the center of a group which is conscious of his solitude." He was alone, even when with friends. Indeed, his intellectual concerns about literature, which formed the topics for his conversations and his many essays, were ideal ways for having with contact with others while remaining distant.

His fears over his impotence were probably unfounded. With the little sexual contact he had, no wonder he ejaculated prematurely. If he had made love to Fernanda (or someone else) every day instead of reading poems to her, his sexual behavior may have developed normally. But the initial failures led to shame and to anxiety that he would always fail, and the shame and anxiety probably made him fail in the future. It became a self-fulfilling prophecy, a prophecy made more likely by falling in love with women who rejected him. It is hard to make love to a woman who hurts you and towards whom you feel anger.

Cesare suffered from depression all of his life. He frequently thought of suicide and eventually killed himself. It is a wonder that he lived so long and was as creative and productive as he was. Lajolo gives us no hints of a history of depression in Cesare's family. Though Cesare lost his father when he was six, his father had been ill all along, and so the death may not have been unexpected. His mother was cold, but she clearly cared for her family. Cesare's childhood was not ideal, but far from being as traumatic as some childhoods. It is amazing that such moderately disturbed settings lead to such misery.

Of all of the lives and deaths, perhaps Cesare's can serve as a warning. It would not be too hard for any of us to fall into Cesare's depressive lifestyle, and it is a style which, once begun, is hard to change.

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SARA TEASDALE

David Lester

Sara Teasdale was born on August 8, 1884 in St. Louis, Missouri. She was the fourth born, with a brother George aged twenty, a sister Mary (Mamie) seventeen, and a brother John fourteen. She was christened Sarah Trevor Teasdale, but later dropped the final "h". At home she was known as Sadie.[7]

Sara's father had intended to study law but went into business at the age of seventeen after his father died suddenly. He had been successful, ending up as a wholesaler in dried fruits, beans and nuts. He met his wife at the Third Baptist Church, where they were married in 1863, and they remained devoutly religious. At Sara's birth, her mother was forty and her father forty-five. Sara was almost like a grandchild in the family, only five years older than the first grandchild.

The dominant parent was her mother. Like her daughter, she too had a sickly childhood but became transformed upon marriage. Now she was an energetic and domineering mother. Sara's biographer speculates that to have had a daughter at the age of forty was unseemly in Victorian times. It advertised the fact that she and her husband still engaged in sexual intercourse. Her determination to bring her daughter up as the model of gentility was possibly an attempt to compensate for this shadow on her virtue.

Sara was watched over anxiously from birth and had an early tendency to frailness. She was never strong, got colds easily and was easily exhausted. When she caught a cold, she was treated as if she had pneumonia and put to bed. For much of her life, her family hired a nurse to be with her to ease the burden of daily tasks and see that Sara did not overtax her strength. Drake suggested that this concern for her led to Sara's life-long anxiety about her health. Her mother crippled Sara by her kindness and lavish concern. Sara's sickliness was not a *cause* of her lack of energy; rather it it was a *result* of Sara trying to suppress her energy.

Sara was not exceptionally beautiful, and she always regretted this. She was indulged, surrounded by luxuries, given whatever she needed, and excused from household responsibilities. Sara never cooked, mended, or cleaned house. Sara was a placid, sweet-tempered and obedient child who learned to inhibit her hostile impulses. Drake reprints a photograph of Sara at age five, looking cute for the photographer, but clenching her right fist by her side, perhaps to help her suppress her inner feelings.

Sara was taught at home until she was nine. Thereafter, she attended private schools. Her parents discouraged her from playing with other children because of her frailty, and she became rather shy. At school, Sara did not go to parties, engage in

[7] This essay is based on Drake (1979).

athletics or have typical teenage fun. She was asked to be on the commencement program, but she declined the honor.

Although her parents were not especially interested in literature, Sara soon developed a passion for it, and her older brothers and sisters encouraged her poetic gift. The schools she attended gave her an excellent education in literature and the arts so that, even without a college education, Sara was well-read and informed.

The Young Adult

At school, Sara made several close friends and, after graduation, this group formed the nucleus of a group of women interested in the arts. They called themselves the Potters, and they decided to produce an artistic monthly magazine containing their literary and artistic efforts. Each month they produced just a single copy of *The Potter's Wheel*, from November 1904 until October 1907, thirty-six issues in all. The group also wanted to improve their skills, and so criticism was encouraged. Sara's poems first appeared in print in this magazine, and her first published book of poems contained many of these poems. From the beginning, Sara was very conscientious about her writing and distressed by flaws in her poems. She worked hard to improve them and relied on her associates for constructive criticism.

In this phase of her life, Sara was involved with a group of women, and friendship with women continued to play a major role for the rest of her life. In the Potters, Williamina Parrish played a prominent role in Sara's life, helping her organize the poems for her first collection. The women in these years played a nurturing and guiding role, taking the place of her mother in supporting her, and Sara always seemed to need one of them to help her complete a book of poems. (After Williamina Parrish, there was Marion Stanley, Jessie Rittenhouse, Marguerite Wilkinson, and finally Margaret Conklin) Later, however, she became less dependent upon them, and her final friend (Margaret Conklin) was more like a servant/daughter to Sara. In Sara's early years her heroes were women - Sappho, Guenevere and the modern Eleonora Duse. Nonetheless, she also needed fantasy male figures for her love poems. Until she was twenty-eight, though, the lovers about whom she wrote poems were almost entirely imaginary.

In 1905, Sara and her mother took a trip abroad for three months. By the time the boat reached Greece, which for a long time had fascinated Sara, she was ill with a fever. But she managed a little sight-seeing and recovered enough to visit the Holy Lands, Egypt, Italy, Paris and London. Sara enjoyed the trip immensely and took many trips abroad during the rest of her life.

The fame of *The Potter's Wheel* spread through the literary circles of St Louis, eventually reaching the attention of William Reedy who ran the *St Louis Mirror*. He included a piece by Sara for the first time in May 1906, and her pieces in the *Mirror* soon began to establish her reputation as a lyric poet.

In 1907, *Poet Lore* accepted one of her sonnets and later that year produced a book of poems for her which her family had to subsidize. Reviews of the book, in *The Saturday Review* of London for example, were favorable. In 1908, she had a poem accepted in *Atlantic Monthly*, and Putnams brought out a book of her poems in 1911. Reviews in *The New York Times* and *Current Literature* praised it, and she became a member of the recently founded Poetry Society Of America. From the first, Sara had the tenacity to submit her work again and again to periodicals until it was accepted. She shrewdly sent copies of her books to supportive reviewers, and she cultivated friends in the literary field.

Sara continued to live at home, in a suite of rooms on the second floor, with a door isolating her from the rest of the house. Friends did not drop in on her casually. Rather, close friends had fixed, scheduled meetings, and their visits were kept brief so as not to overtax Sara's health. There were two main sides to Sara: this distraught, sickly person who withdrew into isolation, and a witty, intelligent and candid companion. However, this social side appeared only with those whom she knew well, and Sara preferred to develop new relationships through exchanges of letters.

There is no evidence that Sara was especially sickly. She had illnesses and fevers to be sure, but perhaps no more than the average person. Sara would get involved in social activities, and these seemed to arouse desires in her that she could not cope with. At this point, she would retreat into exhaustion and sickness and withdraw to a clinic or a hotel away from everyone to reorganize herself. Sara herself once wondered whether, had she been born into a poor family, she would have had better health! More likely, if she had not been so suppressed as a child and so repressed as an adult, she would have had no need for retreating into sickness.

In both 1908 and 1909, Sara's health continued to be poor[8], and so she spent some time in San Antonio and at a hospital in Connecticut hoping to recover. Thereafter, when life became too much for her to handle, she escaped to this hospital under the guise of being sick. In San Antonio, she made the acquaintance of another poet, Marion Stanley, with whom she developed a close friendship. Marion tried to get Sara to see herself honestly and to get out of the path of sickliness she had entered. However, even though every visit back home to her parents and St Louis brought on depression (and a desire for death) and a retreat into the patient role, Sara did not appear to have the strength to leave home and try to build a healthy life for herself. Sara was overwhelmed by the aggressive vitality of her mother, and the patient role was how she and her mother had learned to relate to each other in a semblance of a loving relationship.

In 1909, though, Sara decided that she did not want to live at home with her parents for ever, especially with her domineering and suffocating mother, but neither did she want to be independent and support herself. (If she ever had to do that, she said, she

[8] Sara's illnesses during her life consisted mainly of colds, sore throats, influenza, stomach pains, bladder inflammations, fever blisters, indigestion, flatulence, facial neuralgia, headaches, bronchitis, and back and neck pains.

would kill herself.) She decided that she needed a husband to support her. So she began to look around.

In 1908, Sara had begun a correspondence with a poet in New York City, John O'Hara, which developed into a life-long friendship. However, Sara developed an infatuation with O'Hara which was fueled by her fantasies about him made possible by the fact that she had never met him face-to-face. Indeed, she was scared by the prospect of real love and avoided meeting O'Hara on several occasions. She eventually met him in the January of 1911, and this meeting introduced reality into her relationship with him.

In 1911, Sara persuaded her parents to let her go to New York (at twenty-seven, she still needed their permission), and she began visiting New York for meetings of the Poetry Society, building up close relationships with writers there. When away from New York, she kept in touch with friends there by letter. Interestingly, when she was in New York, Sara showed little of the exhaustion and illness that plagued her in St Louis.

In the summer of 1912, Sara and Jessie Rittenhouse took a trip to Europe, and on the boat back Sara met Stafford Hatfield, an Englishman, with whom she became infatuated. It is not clear whether he wanted Sara to become his lover or return to England with him. But Sara could not cope with her anxiety, and she fled back to St Louis. From afar, Hatfield no longer was as interested in Sara as he had once seemed, and eventually he ended the relationship. This episode persuaded Sara that she had to plan more purposefully to get married or else she would remain a spinster. Since erotic emotions scared her, perhaps rationality could find her a husband?

The next romantic figure was John Wheelock, also a poet. But though Sara fell in love with him and gave him every opportunity to declare his love for her, he never did. In 1913, Sara began a correspondence Vachel Lindsay, also a poet, and they finally met in 1914 in St. Louis. After this meeting, they wrote to each other more often, and eventually Vachel fell in love with her. However, in 1914 Sara was introduced to Ernst Filsinger, who was running a shoe business in St Louis. He too was attracted to Sara, and soon Sara had to choose which one to marry. John Wheeler was still the man she loved, she thought, but he did not want her. So she had to choose from two men, neither of whom she loved, but who seemed to love her.

In 1914, Sara's father had suffered a stoke and her mother's health was also poor. These events happened at a critical point for Sara. The poor health of her parents made the question of what would happen to her once they died more urgent. Vachel was poor, too full of energy and too egocentric to be a caring husband for Sara. Ernst appeared to fit the role much better. Their interests and natures seemed harmonious, and he appeared to worship her. He would make a good husband and father for her children. Despite Sara's misgivings, which she did not tell anyone till many years later, they married in December 1914 in St Louis.

The marriage was a disaster from the beginning. Sara could not abide sleeping with a man, and so they always had separate bedrooms, at home, in hotels, and even on board boats. Sex too, apparently, was a disaster. Sara developed a bladder problem that caused excruciating pain soon after the wedding which lasted for two years. That probably limited their sexual relationship. (Sara would probably have had difficulty having a sexual relationship even with a man she loved passionately given the way she was raised.) More importantly, Sara never could feel passionately in love with Ernst.

Life must have been difficult for Sara at this point. She had chosen the conventional life of marriage partly to get away from her parents, partly for security, and partly because it she was a conventional person who expected to live conventionally. But since love was missing, and passion too, she had failed. She was faced with a difficult interpersonal relationship, an absence of love, but probable future unhappiness.[9] Sara had one solution open to her. She retreated into illness again.

They made their home first in St Louis and then in New York City, and they chose to live in hotel apartments to spare Sara the strain of running a house and staff. Ernst was proud of Sara's poetic talent and encouraged her in every way he could. Her third book of poems appeared in 1915 from Macmillan, again receiving excellent reviews. And her next book of poems in 1918 received a prize that was the forerunner of the Pulitzer Prize.

Married life soon developed a clear pattern. Sara continued to write poems and edit collections. Ernst became involved in international trade and was called upon to travel the world widely, but at a pace that would strain Sara too much. So she stayed in New York and took trips to secluded spots around America. Sara continued to be frail, so that even socializing was restricted. She would send Ernst in her place occasionally to read her poems and to important meetings, and even to social events with her friends for company. Ernst screened her mail when she was away and occasionally handled her business affairs. Sara even turned down honors because they would involve evening dinners or travel.

Very soon a conflict developed in their relationship. Ernst's new job, after his shoe business went bankrupt, was in international trade. He became an expert on the topic. He gave talks all over America and traveled all over the world. Sara encouraged him in this, since she wanted him to be successful and she also wanted financial security. But she also resented the fact that he threw himself so energetically into his work. She was continually telling him to take it easy. (Ernst probably threw himself into his work because of the frustrations arising out of his marriage!)

Then again, she missed him a lot at first when he began to travel though, after he came back, she seemed unable to cope with him in their apartment. She would become depressed, fall ill and take herself off to her hospital in Connecticut or to a favorite

[9] Sara did respect Ernst and was grateful to him for the love he felt for her and for the care and respect with which he always treated her.

vacation spot. In fact she seemed most content off by herself in hospital or resort hotel as long as Ernst stayed in New York City.

However, much as she found life with Ernst difficult, at least his presence kept her depression at bay and took her mind off self-destructive thoughts. Ernst's absences brought Sara closest to feelings of love for him.

Surprisingly, in 1917 Sara became pregnant. Although she had thought she wanted to be a mother, the reality of it now threatened to interfere with her career. More importantly, it threatened her role as patient. How could Sara cope with taking care of someone else? So she had an abortion. Of course, she could justify an abortion on the grounds of her frail health, but she must also have felt a great deal of guilt over her decision.

For much of their life, their financial position was not secure. Though they could afford a comfortable life style, especially supplemented by Sara's earnings from her writings, in early years they had to borrow from Ernst's family to get by. Sara considered ways of increasing her contribution to their income, but she never did much about it.

The absences caused by Ernst's traveling grew. In 1920 and 1921, they were together just six weeks in a period of a year and a half. Sarcasm grew more common between them, they brought up old annoyances, and they readily got hurt over new trifles. Ernst grew more defensive, moody and irritable, and his explosive temper showed itself more.

The Divorce And Final Years

Sara's decision to divorce Ernst in 1929 came as a surprise to her friends. Sara feared abandonment, and this fear had been made worse by his absences. (In a letter Sara wrote to Ernst just before he sailed on the trip during which she would divorce him, she listed his previous trips in 1919, 1919-1920, 1923, 1925, 1928, and now the present one.) Eventually she began to fear that he would be attracted to another woman. (This was likely, of course, since she would not be his lover and since he was away a lot. However, there is no evidence that Ernst ever behaved in any way as to reinforce these fears.)

She had discussed divorce with Ernst before, but he had protested. So she planned the divorce in Nevada while he was away. She divorced him for mental cruelty and begged him not to contest it. Although she expressed euphoria at being free when she was back in New York, she soon sank into a depression. After the divorce, Sara lived in hotel apartments by herself, just as her marriage had consisted of living in hotel apartments mainly by herself while Ernst was away. Her life changed little, except that Ernst no longer made occasional visits!

Sara met a young student, Margaret Conklin, who became her close friend in her final years. Margaret would visit daily, and they went to Europe together. However,

interestingly, Sara showed little concern for Margaret. She ate meals sent up to her from the hotel in front of Margaret without ever worrying whether Margaret had eaten. Sara had been in the patient role all of her life, with others taking care of her, so that she had never learned that sometimes one has to take care of others. If Margaret upset Sara in some trivial way, she would even be banished for days at a time.

Sara grew more inflexible. She still gave friends specific appointment times for their visits, and now she kept them waiting if they arrived a few minutes early. These latter years illustrated quite clearly her egocentricity, her lack of caring for others, and her selfishness.

In the final years of her marriage, Sara had experienced periods during which she could not write. She went from the summer of 1920 till November without writing one poem. These long barren spells became quite common. Five months in 1925. More during the period leading up to her divorce. But even after the divorce, writing was not easy.

Sara had experienced depressions throughout her life. In later years she lost weight. She suffered from insomnia, though in her creative periods she would work on her poems during the night, and she also had trouble getting up in the mornings, typical symptoms of depression. She took Veronal as a sleeping tablet. Her moods varied with the seasons. Her depressions were worse in winter, and she hated the cold weather since it brought on her respiratory illnesses. As she grew older, external events led to an intensification of her depression (such as the marital problems of her friends, the Untermeyers, and the suicide of their son).

Sara's father died in 1921 at the age of eighty-two, and this was a severe loss for Sara. Her mother died in 1924, as did her older brother George. In 1928, a friend, Marguerite Wilkinson, drowned after recovering from a nervous breakdown. Later that year, Sara was injured in taxicab accident. In September of the year, Ernst's father died.

Sara's concerns over her finances grew. After her parents' death, the inheritance was not as great as had been expected. The stock market crash in 1929 also increased her anxiety. After the divorce, though she had asked for no alimony, Sara tried to get Ernst to set up a trust fund for her. She worried whether she could afford to renew the lease in her hotel and decided to move a cheaper apartment. Her concerns became almost a nightmarish obsession. However, she left almost eighty-four thousand dollars, and so it appears that her financial concerns were irrational.

After her divorce in 1929, many of Sara's friends moved away from New York City, and she was often lonely. Despite craving company, she often rejected offers from friends to visit her, pleading illness. In 1931 Vachel Lindsay killed himself by drinking Lysol, and Sara was distraught over this. For many months after Lindsay's suicide, Sara feared that she was about to have a complete physical breakdown or die in an accident.

Sara was no longer able to write productively, but John Wheelock suggested she write a biography of Christina Rossetti. Macmillan gave her advance on the project, and she had written about a hundred pages at the time of her death.

In August 1932, Sara went to England to gather material for the biography but got pneumonia. She came back to America in September, 1932, still sick, and recovery was slow. She was very weak and deeply depressed. She had failed to build a fruitful life after the divorce, and now only ill health seem to lay ahead for her. She worried that her heart had weakened and that her blood pressure was fluctuating too much. Her friends were very concerned over her despondency. She was taking sleeping pills regularly and seemed severely depressed.

During the Fall, the deaths of some friends deepened her despondency, and in December she began to accumulate a supply of sleeping pills. She began to fear having a stoke, like her father and her brother John (who had lived for twenty years after a paralytic stroke, dying in 1917 at the age of forty-seven).

In December, she went to Florida to stay with Jessie Rittenhouse but lay in bed all day with the drapes closed. Jessie discussed the situation with Sara's doctor and nurse and they all felt she should return to New York and seek psychiatric help. She developed an obsessive but unfounded fear that her blood vessels were beginning to rupture, increasing her fear of a stroke. On January 27, 1933, a blood vessel did break in her hand, making her frantic with the idea that her long-awaited stroke was imminent.

On the evening of January 29, 1933, Margaret Conklin visited her. They read and listened to Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony*. Sara was found the next morning at 9 am by her nurse, dead in her bath after taking an overdose of sedatives. The water was still warm, and perhaps the nurse could have saved her had she checked earlier.

Discussion

Drake (1979) points out that four major women poets of the Nineteenth Century (Emily Bronte, Christina Rossetti, Emily Dickinson and Elizabeth Barrett Browning until she was forty) were all recluses like Sara. All four belonged to very close family units which fulfilled their desires for affection and intellectual stimulation. Sara ventured out more than some of her predecessors but continually retreated into seclusion because of her "illnesses", becoming almost a total recluse by the end of her life.

The Victorian era encouraged women in the creative arts but undermined their self-confidence. They were allowed to dabble, but they were not supposed to achieve. When they did write poetry, they wrote mostly about love, protective love and the desire to submit to the ideal lover. However, it was not always easy to find this in their own lives. They often ended up renouncing love for men and substituting an attraction to death. They frequently had mysterious physical weaknesses and chronic ill health, a

neurotic way of resolving the conflict between their personal desires and the conventions imposed upon them by the society.

Sara was a chronically depressed woman whose depression worsened as she grew older. In her middle age, concerns that were mild as a young adult grew to be irrational obsessions. She feared poverty and an imminent death, though neither was very likely. It is unfortunate that Sara would contract a real illness (pneumonia) at this time and that a blood vessel did break in her hand. Her irrational concerns no longer seemed so irrational to her.

She had struggled to lead a conventional life but failed. Sara never learned to form and maintain healthy interpersonal relationships. The patient role she learned as a child was of no use to her in marriage. Simply put, she failed to mature. She remained a child, as evidenced by her failed marriage and the self-centeredness she displayed in her friendships.

Her childhood experiences led her to repress her basic emotions. Anger, curiosity of the world, sexuality were all suppressed by her aged parents, and in particular by her mother. She married at thirty with no realistic idea of the responsibilities of a person involved in adult relationships.

The prospect of having a child frightened her so much that she had an abortion. In looking for an event that could have turned her life around, this might have been it. The easiest change for a person to make in life is to switch to a role that is complementary to one that she has already had. Perhaps Sara could have become the nurse (mother) taking care of the patient (her baby) after her years of experience as the patient? But maybe not. Anyway, Sara panicked and avoided the experience.

By the end of her life, she was finding it hard to write creatively, she was lonely and isolated, and her irrational fears and depressions were getting worse. Sara had often contemplated death, and now she planned it. She had long used sleeping pills and knew the peace they brought her. And so she sought the ultimate peace, not in bed, but in a warm bath, as if seeking the womb from which she may have wished that she had never emerged.

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SYLVIA PLATH

David Lester

Sylvia Plath was an American poet who died at the age of thirty in 1963 in England by putting her head in the gas oven. Today, she might not have died in this way because during the 1960s the British detoxified domestic gas, removing the carbon monoxide from it, and eventually switching to natural gas which contains no carbon monoxide (Clarke and Lester, 1989). But Sylvia Plath had already died and, even if she could not have used gas, she might have switched to another method, such as the medications she used in an earlier attempt when she was twenty one.

What brought Sylvia to this crisis? For the details of her life, I have relied on the biography by Butscher (1976).

Her Parents

Sylvia's father, Otto Plath, was born in 1885 in the German town of Grabow. He emigrated to the United States when he was fifteen to join his father in North Dakota. After college, he pursued his interest in entomology, going to Harvard in his 30s to study for his doctorate, leaving his first wife behind in Oregon. Otto got his doctorate in 1928, at the age of forty three, specializing in the study of bees. He began teaching at Boston University where he met a student called Aurelia Schober, twenty one years his junior.

Aurelia was born in Boston to Roman Catholic parents who were from Austria. Early in 1932, Otto and Aurelia travelled to Nevada so that Otto could divorce his first wife and marry Aurelia. They set up house in Jamaica Plain, near the university and near the Arboretum where Otto conducted his research.

Sylvia was born on October 27, 1932. She was somewhat frail because of a sinus condition that plagued her for the rest of her life. Two and a half years later, her brother Warren was born.

Early Years

The family bought a house in Winthrop in 1937, near the sea and Aurelia's parents. The early years were uneventful. Sylvia apparently was quite bright and used her intelligence to please her father, as many first-borns do. She learnt the Latin names for insects, and Otto would show off her skill to visitors. From the beginning, she earned straight A's in school, impressing teachers with her intelligence and dedication.

Otto was diabetic and neglected his condition. His leg became gangrenous and was amputated, and the complications of broncho-pneumonia killed him on November 5, 1940, eight days after Sylvia's birthday. Aurelia left both children at home during the funeral, which Sylvia eventually listed as one of her grievances against her mother.

The family was now in financial difficulty. Aurelia took a teaching position at Boston University's school for secretarial studies and had her parents and brother move in with her to share expenses. Eventually, she decided to move to Wellesley where she could raise her children in an educated and middle class community and help Sylvia's sinus condition and Warren's asthma. Thereafter, Aurelia strove to give her children high achievement experiences. In addition to school, she provided extracurricular activities in scouting, sailing, piano and viola lessons, dancing, painting and summer camps.

Sylvia's first poem appeared in the *Boston Sunday Herald* when she was eight and a half, and she won a prize with a drawing in another contest. As she progressed through school, her work continued to be outstanding, receiving many awards. She quickly developed an interest in literature and in writing. At junior high school she received straight A's and a perfect record of punctuality. Her poems and drawings continued to win prizes. Her IQ was about 160. Socially she was a bit of a loner, though she had many good friends, she did not date much, and she spent long hours studying, reading and writing.

High school continued in the same vein. She took the advanced literature courses and edited the school magazine in her senior year. Her stories and poems appeared in magazines such as *Seventeen* and the *Christian Science Monitor*. She was also active in the local Unitarian church and the community. She was admitted to Smith College and awarded a scholarship.

Her menstruation began with cramps and an irregular and copious flow. She did not date much until her senior year. But this was 1950 when sexual behavior was quite inhibited and heavy petting as far as people went.

Her biographer does not mention much at all about psychological problems at this time in Sylvia's life. Knowing that she eventually killed herself, Butscher sees all kinds of portents of this later fate, but the only symptoms he mentions are severe depressions whenever her sinuses or menstrual cramps bothered her. The frequency and severity of the depressions is unclear.

Smith College And The First Suicide Attempt

Sylvia's career at Smith was outstanding. From the first, she obtained A's, and her literary achievements steadily grew. She made many friends there, some staying close to her for the rest of her life. It was considered crucial at Smith to date and to date the right kind of men. Since Sylvia had no relationships with appropriate men from her school days, she went on many blind dates, until a friend from high school days, the Buddy Willard of her novel *The Bell Jar*, took her to the Yale senior prom. Thereafter, Sylvia managed always to have a 'boy friend' available. Her relationship with Buddy had some friction, and eventually other boy-friends would come along. But her biographer, Butscher, feels that Sylvia saw marriage as an inevitable and desirable goal and needed

always to have a man in her life who could be viewed as a potential husband. Periods of unattachment were hard for her. Buddy was admitted to Harvard Medical School but had to drop out with tuberculosis. Sylvia wrote to him and maintained the illusion that he was her boyfriend, but she gradually began to get involved with others.

Sylvia's stay at Smith was, of course, the first separation from her mother. Aurelia used to write to Sylvia every day, which suggests that the separation was harder on Aurelia than on Sylvia. In addition, the status of being a scholarship student did carry an inferior status in those days. But there were few other traumas for Sylvia.

Her scholarship patron was a popular novelist, Mrs. Olive Prouty (Higgins), and Sylvia was encouraged by the college to keep in contact with her. This relationship proved to be useful to Sylvia later during her breakdown. When Sylvia decided that a successful college career involved extracurricula activities, she participated in all kinds, successfully building up a record of involvement.

In summers at Wellesley Sylvia had worked, and she also found work at Smith. Her first summer was spent working as a mother's helper for a family in Swampscott, an exclusive resort on the coast, and her second summer as a waitress and mother's helper.

In her junior year she broke-up with Buddy, but he had already been replaced by Myron Lotz. She broke her leg while skiing during the Christmas recess, but this did not impede her college work. The year ended with Sylvia winning a position as guest editor for *Mademoiselle* for June.

This is the summer of 1953 which is the focus of Sylvia's later novel *The Bell Jar*, written mostly during 1961 and 1962. For this month, Sylvia worked for Cyrilly Abels, reading and judging manuscripts, and participating in all of the social activities planned for the group of guest editors. Abels noticed Sylvia's distancing manner and tried to break through and relate to the real Sylvia, but she failed to penetrate Sylvia's social mask.

Back in Wellesley, Sylvia was rejected for a course on creative writing at Harvard summer school which left her with two months to fill. She fell into an increasingly severe depression. Aurelia eventually became concerned enough to take her to a local psychiatrist, the 'Dr. Gordon' of the novel, who after a few sessions of psychotherapy recommended electroconvulsive therapy at his clinic. (We must also remember that in the 1950s, effective anti-depressant medications had not yet been developed.)

The idea of suicide grew. She contemplated using a razor blade and drowning. But eventually, on a Monday morning in August, she took forty-eight sleeping pills from where her mother had locked them up, went into the basement of the house after leaving a note saying that she was going for a hike and would be back the next day, and crawled behind some wood that was stacked there. Her mother called the police that evening, and search parties were organized. But Sylvia was not found until Wednesday afternoon when her grandmother went into the basement to do the laundry and heard Sylvia moaning.

After a week in the hospital, Sylvia was transferred to the locked psychiatric ward at Massachusetts General Hospital. Sylvia's patron at Smith College, Mrs. Prouty, paid for her to be transferred to McLean's Hospital. There Sylvia received insulin shock therapy at first and then electroshock therapy again, but this was supplemented by psychotherapy from a female psychiatrist, the Dr. Jones of *The Bell Jar*. She was released just before Christmas 1953.

Sylvia spent another year and a half at Smith, graduating in June 1955. This period saw a more extraverted Sylvia, one who now also took pains to be beautiful and fashionably dressed, still the campus literary star and with a romantic aura from being an attempted suicide. Her virginity was lost (and she developed the reputation of being rather loose.[10]) There were minor upsets, such as the rejection by Myron Lotz, whom Sylvia had seen as a potential husband. She continued to see Dr. Jones occasionally.

In the summer of 1954, Sylvia was accepted at summer school at Harvard University to study German. It was there she met Edwin, a married man with a wife in St Louis where he was a professor, who may or may not have raped her. However, her night with him precipitated severe hemorrhaging.

Sylvia quietened down a little in her senior year and worked hard at her studies. She was awarded a Fulbright scholarship upon graduation in 1955 and decided to go to Cambridge University in England to study.

Cambridge University And Ted Hughes

Sylvia spent two years at Cambridge University, at Newnham College, where she eventually obtained her second BA. Her stay there was filled with course work, writing, and dating. At Christmas, she visited France and a former lover who was now there. But in February 1956, she met Ted Hughes whom she would soon marry.

Ted, an aspiring poet and writer like Sylvia, had graduated from Cambridge in 1954 and had worked in various odd jobs. He was now living in London. Sylvia planned to visit Germany in the Spring where her current 'potential husband' was living, but they argued and broke off their relationship. Sylvia also saw her ex-lover in France for the last time. On her return to England in April 1956, Sylvia and Ted got engaged.[11] They married in June, with Sylvia's mother in attendance, and went to Spain for their honeymoon.

Their first year of marriage was made difficult by the fact that undergraduates could not marry without permission at Cambridge University. Eventually, Sylvia was

[10] On a boat trip to England in 1955, the joke was that Sylvia never got a decent meal because she was always sleeping with someone! Butscher notes that Sylvia remained faithful to her husband, Ted Hughes, and so her quest for lovers ended with her marriage.

[11] Sylvia's grandmother died from cancer that April after a painful illness.

pardoned and moved out from Newnham College into an apartment with Ted. Sylvia's Fulbright award was renewed, and Ted got a teaching job at a boy's secondary school.

Sylvia began to work with dedication on their literary careers, typing up and sending off submissions of both her work and Ted's. Their publications grew more and more numerous, and Ted had his first collection of poems accepted for publication in 1957.

They decided to move to the United States in 1957, and Sylvia got a teaching job at Smith College. Ted remained unemployed till 1958 when he got a teaching job at the University of Massachusetts. Sylvia found that an instructor's position teaching freshman English left little time for writing, and so she decided to quit teaching at the end of the year in 1958.

The marriage seemed quite happy. In these initial phases, Ted was the more successful poet. He soon had a second book of poems completed and a book of children's stories. His poems appeared in *The New Yorker*. They decided to return to England, especially as Ted was not happy in the United States. But first they spent a year in Boston, supported by Sylvia working at odd jobs for a while and then by a Guggenheim fellowship won by Ted. They were trying to have children (though Sylvia was more motivated to have a family than was Ted) and sought medical advice when conception did not occur soon enough. They spent three months touring the United States during the summer of 1959, and during this trip Sylvia became pregnant.

After a stay at Yaddoo, the artists' colony near Saratoga Springs in New York, Sylvia and Ted left for England in December 1959. Sylvia was twenty-seven, pregnant, and headed for permanent residence in a foreign country.

England And The End

They first rented an apartment in London. Sylvia gave birth to Frieda in April 1960 and, after a miscarriage in February 1961 to a son Nicholas in January 1962.[12] Their literary careers continued to progress, and Sylvia had her first book of poems published in 1960. They won prize after prize and by 1961 were sucsessful enough as writers that their finances were thereafter in good shape. In 1961, Sylvia was awarded a Saxton Foundation grant to work on *The Bell Jar*.

In 1961, they bought a house in Croton, Devon, with the help of loans from both of their families. Life was full and busy with writing and the children and a new house to fix up, yet Butscher describes Sylvia in early 1962 as tense and tired and subject to fits of depression. Visitors, however, saw no marital trouble and viewed the life there as 'idyllic'.

[12] The miscarriage was followed three weeks later by acute appendicitis.

Butscher says little about Ted. Perhaps Ted was not enthusiastic about having children? Perhaps after being the more successful writer in the family at first, he was threatened by Sylvia's growing skill and success? But he had had his way in the decision to move back to England and to live in Devon. However, by the summer of 1962 another woman had entered his life.

Butscher calls her Olga, married to a Canadian poet (after a failed first marriage). Olga seems to have pursued Ted, flirting with him even in his own home in Croton. But he too fell in love with her. The affair was in earnest by the summer of 1962. (Olga appears to have quite unstable herself, later identifying with Sylvia and believing herself to be almost Sylvia's reincarnation. She later committed suicide with gas, killing her young daughter too, possibly Ted's child though Butscher is not explicit about this.)

In August, Olga telephoned Ted, trying to disguise her voice. Sylvia ripped the telephone off the wall and fled to friends.[13] She returned the next day and asked Ted to leave as soon as her mother had departed for the United States. Sylvia kept hoping that Ted would come back to her. She came down with a severe bout of influenza, and Ted did come back to help out. In September, Sylvia thought she and Ted were to have a holiday together in Ireland, but Ted left her after one day for Olga in London.

Her thirtieth birthday came in October 1962, with Sylvia alone in Devon with two children, deserted by her husband, writing poems furiously every morning. Sylvia decided to find an apartment in London and rent the house in Devon to others. She moved in the middle of December.

Sylvia was safe financially, though, of course, she worried a lot about money. However, in London she found that many of 'their' friends were now 'his' friends. Both she and Ted also worked for the BBC which was sometimes awkward. Sylvia was alone with the children that Christmas. Ted visited the children regularly, but these meetings were hard on Sylvia.

The last few weeks of her life were difficult. She had corrected the galley proofs for *The Bell Jar* and was awaiting publication and comment. She was working feverishly, smoking heavily, hardly sleeping and eating little. She had lost twenty pounds since the summer. She had influenza, after which the children came down with it. The winter was one of the worst ever, with frozen plumbing, strikes by the electrical workers, and snow and ice everywhere. Sylvia endured a bathtub that would not empty and dripping pipes in the ceiling. The weather did not break until the end of January.

The reviews of her book appeared at the end of January, and they were luke warm. (She had published it under a pseudonym which meant that reviewers would be less likely to give the work close attention and praise the Sylvia Plath whom they knew.) Her recent poems were being rejected.

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[13] Sylvia's mother was staying with them at this time.

Sylvia had plans for the future though. The Devon house was to be rented to an Australian couple, and she was to return there in the summer. Nicholas needed treatment for his eye, and Frieda was enrolled in a nursery school.

In the last week of her life, from February 4th 1963 to February 11th, Sylvia had a fever and wild fluctuations in her moods. She had lost her *au pair* girl and the weather was still bad. Her physician recognized her depression and had arranged for Sylvia to see a therapist (whose letter to her was delivered to the wrong address). By Friday the 8th he had tried to get three clinics to admit her, but all refused. He arranged for a nurse to come on Monday morning. Sylvia went away for the weekend to visit friends, returning on Sunday evening.

At 6am on Monday February 11th, Sylvia took milk and bread up the children's rooms and went to the kitchen where she sealed the door. She put her head in the gas oven and was found there later in the morning when the nurse finally broke in with the aid of some workmen.

Discussion

The loss of her father when she was eight looms large as a factor in Sylvia's life, especially because of the way she wrote about him. However, after reading of her anger toward him in her novel and poems, it is a shock to find that he was a mild mannered academic, the age of a grandfather more than a father, who died of natural causes. His greatest fault seems to be that he spent too much time with his bees and his research.

Nonetheless, Sylvia was full of anger for his rejection of her, both while he was alive and in his death. Her poem written in the months prior to her suicide casts him as a devil, a concentration camp guard with her as a victim. She sees Ted as a father substitute. And yet she loves her father too and casts her suicide attempt years earlier as an attempt to be reunited with him. (Interestingly, Sylvia eventually kept bees, as did her father, and she studied German the language of her father. Her identification with him was strong.)

Though her depressions are not documented well at all, it is likely that she had an affective disorder (a psychotic depression). She had her first breakdown as an undergraduate, and she lived in fear that it would occur again. Might her suicide have been motivated in part also by a fear of becoming psychotic again?

On top of this, there is the loss of her husband, whom she loved, and who provided her with the environment to flourish as a mother and author. He rejected her for another. (Interestingly, Sylvia was upset in her marriage by the very close relationship between Ted and his sister Olwyn, which she saw as incestuous. In a memorable row when Sylvia was eight months pregnant with Nicholas, Olwyn told Sylvia how much she resented Sylvia. Ted did not take Sylvia's side at all in this, which hurt her deeply.)

In her novel about her psychiatric breakdown in 1953, Sylvia shows a distrust of her ability. She had worked hard to get good grades and to publish, but she feared that the success was temporary. Curiously enough though, Sylvia was quite resilient in her writing career, sending off poems and stories despite rejections.

Butscher makes much of the facade Sylvia put on. Sylvia seems, more than the average person, to have suppressed the real Sylvia, assuming a mask that would gain approval from others. Good grades (reinforced by her father's admiration for her academic skills), desirable boy friends (and eventually lovers), and awards and honors all served to bolster her self-esteem. But eventually you have to come to like yourself for what you are, regardless of the reactions of others, and this perhaps comes in middle age, too late for Sylvia.

There are few other symptoms to be noted about Sylvia. A possessiveness about her belongings, especially her books. Her chronic sinus condition. Nothing more.

Thus, her suicide makes sense only in the light of a chronic depressive condition, a condition that colored her world view and made the loss of her father so much harder to adjust to. Then, at the peak of her creative life but hopeless, she chose to leave the living, her children, and return to the dead, her father.

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VACHEL LINDSAY[14]

David Lester

Vachel Lindsay was a poet known mainly for reciting his poems. He embarked on numerous tours of the USA, so many that he grew tired of reciting the same poems time and time again. Eventually, at the age of fifty-two, he killed himself by drinking a bottle of lysol.

His Early Life

Vachel's family came originally from Scotland, but Vachel's father was born in Kentucky. He earned enough money to pay for his own medical training, became a doctor, and established his practice in Illinois. In 1871, when he was twenty-seven, he returned to Kentucky to marry his long-time sweetheart, but found her dying from tuberculosis. He married her nonetheless, but she died within months after the wedding. He returned to his practice in Illinois. In 1875, he went with his sister and a friend of hers on a trip to Europe. He fell in love with the friend (Kate Frazee) and married her in 1876. Kate was from Scottish and English stock, and her father had worked as a farmer in Indiana.

When Kate was twelve, she was overcome by the sun while picking blackberries. Her sight was injured, and she seems to have developed some unspecified psychological problems after her recovery. She went to college, graduated with perfect grades, and taught mathematics in college for a while.

The Lindsays moved to Springfield and had six children. Olive, Vachel, Isabel, Esther, Eudora and Joy. Vachel (christened Nicholas Vachel) was born on November 10, 1879. When Olive was twelve and Vachel ten, Isabel, Esther and Eudora died within three weeks of one another of scarlet fever. The loss of the children was felt strongly, and the family visited their graves every Saturday.

Vachel came down with milk poisoning when he was four months old and remained ill for over a year. His mother kept him with her all the time, and this set up an especially close bond between them. His father was an intimidating figure. He warned Vachel strongly about the evils of venereal disease, drink and tobacco, and these prohibitions remained powerful edicts in Vachel's mind.

Vachel grew up to be an affectionate and excitable boy. His mother was the dominating parent in the household, but her husband was secure enough not to mind her authority. For punishment, Vachel's mother would whip him with a light pony whip, but on one occasion, after he and some friends had accidentally burnt down some farm buildings, his father flogged him severely.

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[14] This essay is based on Ruggles (1959).

Vachel's mother was seen by townspeople as eccentric and a social climber. She took lessons in elocution, played the piano and painted. After the death of her three young children, she threw herself into social and religious activities. She taught Bible classes, became president of the Woman's Missionary Society of her church, and much more.

The Lindsays' house was plain and simple, but filled with books. Vachel joined the Disciples Church when he was ten and wrote his first poem on a religious subject soon thereafter. His grandfather had spoken of poets as clever but crazy and told Vachel that writing poems was something you did for fun as a hobby. His mother wanted Vachel to paint, and so she tried to convince him that his talent lay in art. Throughout high school he painted and wrote poems. Vachel always had a girl-friend, though she was needed for artistic inspiration rather than erotic purposes. Indeed Vachel remained a virgin until his marriage at the age of forty-five.

However, it was soon clear that both parents wanted him to become a doctor eventually. His father once gave him a skeleton in pieces and told him to learn how to assemble it. Vachel never succeeded, but he did enjoy sketching the bones.

He won prizes for his essays, enabling him to skip seventh grade. At the end of high school his mother sided with his father over his choice of career. He went off to college to become a doctor, though he wanted to become an artist. Vachel's mother had held Olive back a year so that she and Vachel could start Hiram College together in 1897. Vachel was not quite eighteen, Olive just under twenty.

The Young Adult

During his first year of college, Vachel wrote for the college paper and the college annual and continued writing poetry. His mother, though, continued to stress that writing poetry was at best a recreation. He tried out for basketball, baseball and football and failed at all of them. He failed also at the oratorical contests at the college. In these, his anxiety interfered with his performance, as it did in class and in social situations. However, he became a leader in college pranks.

He did not like his course of study. In his junior year, he skipped almost all his classes. He read literature and pursued his artistic inclinations. He decided that he wanted to become a professional illustrator or designer, with writing as a hobby until he could make his writing pay enough to live on. He dropped out of college after his junior year with the hope of enrolling at the Art Institute in Chicago.

Vachel stayed with his parents for a few months and arrived in Chicago in January 1901 when he was twenty-one. His father had fallen chronically ill with diabetes and had a ulcerous eye. The family remained in financial difficulties for the rest of his life but continued to support Vachel. Vachel attended classes at the Art Institute and

earned some money by teaching classes at the local Disciples Church. When funds ran low, he would make do with a ten-cent lunch for the whole day. He wrote poetry every night but all of it was rejected by the editors to whom he submitted it.

Vachel's teachers were not very impressed by his skill, and he made few friends. He searched for a job with a newspaper and then with advertising agencies, but he was turned down by all of them. Finally, he took a job in a toy store as a stock boy but, after two months of working from eight-thirty in the morning till midnight, he quit. In June 1903, Vachel decided to go to New York to study art. His parents reluctantly agreed to support him in this.

While at Hiram College, he had grown attached to another student, Ruth Wheeler, and on the way to New York Vachel stopped in Akron and became unofficially engaged to her. In New York, he enrolled in the New York School of Art and continued to write poetry. He spent a lot of time at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and attended the Disciples Church regularly. Finally, he had two poems accepted in the *Critic*.

Back home in 1904 for Olive's wedding, he began to have visions which he saw as projections of his visual imagination. One night, he saw the prophets of the Old Testament pass though his bedroom. He spent six months in Springfield in a fever of imagination, constructing a cosmic system which he called his "universe", drawing an elaborate map of this imaginary realm and then writing about it in poems. He put all his work together in a book, *Where Is Aladdin's Lamp*, which was never published, but he made one copy to show others. Back in New York, in 1905, he abandoned his art education to concentrate on writing.

It is difficult to know exactly what Vachel experienced during this period. Nowhere does his biographer mention the possibility of schizophrenia, but this period seems to mark the beginning of more serious psychiatric problems than Vachel had ever shown before.

Vachel's Adult Life

Vachel decided to have two of his poems printed at his own expense. He wandered around New York, reciting the poems to shop owners and people he encountered, trying to sell them for two cents, and then trying to give them away. He found few takers.

He broke off his engagement with Ruth. He said that if he had an income he would marry her, an argument he used later when he was in love with Sara Teasdale, but he did nothing to earn any money. Now, and for many years more, he was content to live off the small amounts his parents could give him and the little he earned.

By October 1905, he finally had to take a job, and he began work in a factory. However, soon thereafter the YMCA paid him to teach classes in art, and he quit the

factory. In 1906 he decided to go on a walking trip, and in the next six years he went on three such trips. He would have some of his poems printed and perhaps organize one copy of a book with poems and drawings. Then he would set off on a cross-country walk, staying with farmers and whomever would put him up, entertaining them in the evenings with recitation of his poems and those of others or showing them his book.

On his first trip in March 1906, he began in Florida with a friend, Edward Broderick. But Broderick soon deserted him, and Vachel continued his hike by himself, arriving at his Aunt's house in Kentucky two months later.

In the Fall, Vachel was again in New York, teaching for the YMCA and at settlement houses. In the Spring of 1908, he set out for his second hike, from New York to Springfield. After this hike, he decided to stay in Springfield.

In Springfield, he began to develop the idea that Springfield could become a model city for America and, indeed, the world. He lectured for free at the YMCA and began to formulate plans for a utopian city where culture and godliness would take priority over industry and commerce. He wanted to clean up town politics, build town pride, develop the talents of the gifted children, and build a city that would be an architectural wonder. He got involved in social issues too, speaking in favor of prohibition and socialist ideals. His delivery was crude, but he was acquiring the skills that would make him a fine public orator in later years. He continued to have romantic attachments, but one of his partners commented that Vachel never got beyond stroking her hand.

During this period, he continued to write, and beginning in 1909 he had several small leaflets printed at his own expense. These contained his utopian ideas, stories and poems. Vachel mailed copies of these to everyone he knew of in the literary field. Some of those who received them wrote suggesting other potential recipients.

Eventually, Vachel was noticed. One of his leaflets was reviewed in the *Chicago Evening Post* in 1909. One of his poems appeared in the *Illinois State Register* and was reprinted in papers throughout the Midwest. His work was accepted in *Collier's* and reviewed in *Current Literature*, and Vachel was invited to Chicago to meet the Cliff Dwellers, an association of regional artists and writers.

But for every acceptance, Vachel received many rejections, and he earned very little. His father's practice was not bringing much money, and so his parents rented out rooms in their house. Vachel even took a job as a laborer briefly.

In May 1912, Vachel set out for California on his third hike, but this time he had to take temporary jobs as a farm laborer to get by. The heat and the work were hard on him, and he often collapsed. But did make it to the family's camp on Mount Clinton in Colorado. After staying with them, he continued his walk west, but soon gave it up and wired his father to send him money for the train to Los Angeles.

In California, beginning to head back for home by train, Vachel was depressed, homesick, feeling persecuted by his family for being a poet, and ashamed that he had failed in his life. These feelings were always worse when he lost his inspiration and could not write. He came home to Springfield in October 1912, on the eve of his thirty-third birthday.

Fame

In 1912, Harriet Monroe, editor of *Poetry* in Chicago, noticed Vachel's poems. Soon, *Poetry* was publishing Vachel's work, and his writing was appearing in all the major publications. In 1913, *Poetry* awarded Vachel a prize of $100. Macmillan began to publish his books.

Vachel's poems were emotionally stirring with a strong rhythm, and Vachel's recitations of them were well-received. At a Cliff Dwellers' dinner in March 1914 in honor of William Butler Yeats, Vachel recited his poem *The Congo* to a rousing reception. Thus began Vachel's series of recitations of his works that lasted until his death. Vachel recited to all kinds of groups, at most of the major universities, and even to President Wilson and his cabinet. Eventually, Vachel experimented with accompanying the readings of his poems with dance and pantomine.

Vachel loved the response of an enthusiastic audience. Yet he also grew tired of being called upon to recite the same poems time and time again and of the lonely travel from town to town to the engagements his agent had arranged for him. Still, these tours provided his major source of income, and his poor financial position, especially after his marriage and the birth of his children, compelled him to go on more tours.

He continued to write poems and to editorialize on political and social issues (he was a pacifist for the first part of the First World War), and he produced some innovative critical works. For example, his book in 1915, *The Art Of The Moving Picture,* suggested for first time that films might be considered an art form.

Romantic affairs continued to cause problems for Vachel. He had fallen in love with Octavia Roberts in Illinois, but she rejected his proposals of marriage several times. He then began to correspond with Sara Teasdale, eventually met her and fell in love with her. But she too rejected him. Next, in 1917, at the age of thirty-seven, Vachel fell in love with Isadora Bennett who was 17. When she rejected him to marry a soldier, Vachel was very upset.

Decline

After 1920, Vachel's fortunes began to decline. His work which had hitherto been well received seemed to be poorer in quality. A strange book which he had thought would be his masterpiece, *The Golden Book Of Springfield,* was ignored by critics. New

poets were coming along, like T. S. Eliot, and they received critical attention. Increasingly, Vachel found it hard to write. The long and exhausting recitation tours that he undertook, partly to satisfy his desire for approval and partly for the money, left him little time to write. But also, his creativity seemed to be drying up. In later years he would sit for hours trying to create a new poem or write an article for a magazine that might earn him money, but he produced little.

His father died in 1918 and his mother in 1922. Vachel had lived his life dependent upon them. He had depended upon their financial support, and he had returned to live with them after his few years in New York. Their deaths were a great loss to him. (He had felt very ambivalent toward them. He both loved and felt hostility for his mother, yet wanted her recognition for his accomplishments.)

For most of his life Vachel was lonely. He had few friends back in Springfield. Men thought him strange, and women seemed to tolerate him only a little. However, he continually fell in love with them in his eccentric way, only to be rejected by them. His views too often left him without friends. His pacificism during the First World War eventually became an unpopular position. His travels left him alone in hotel rooms in strange cities.

As he grew older, more and more symptoms appeared. After a trip to England with his mother in 1920, he lost his vitality, cried easily and acted silly and excited over nothing. Sometimes his handwriting was sprawling and uncontrolled. Later, his letters became rambling, with misspelled words and aborted sentences. He had spells of depression, vertigo and what his biographer calls 'dazed dullness'. He was often angry. Politically, he turned against the immigrants whose entry into America he had once welcomed. Now he wanted them sent back. He behaved badly toward those hosting him, often shouting abuse at them for which he would have to apologize afterwards. He began to talk about his 'enemies' in America who were glad that he seemed to have written himself out.

In January 1923, after a recital near Gulf Park Junior College for Girls, he broke his tour to rest and recover, staying with the President of the College whom Vachel had known at Hiram College. He began to teach at the college and stayed for eighteen months.

He fell in love with an eighteen year-old student there who, as usual, rejected him. He found the students boring and uninterested in intellectual topics. He began to talk of enemies among the faculty who disapproved of him and spied on him. His brother-in-law came down to see what was wrong with Vachel and found him hallucinating and distraught. Vachel talked continually about his persecutors and argued that America owed him a living. In June, 1924, his brother-in-law took him to the Mayo Clinic where Vachel was diagnosed as having epilepsy. Vachel eventually admitted that, as a child, he had awoken at night on the floor to find his tongue bitten half through. But having the affliction labeled as epilepsy was a shock to Vachel, and he never accepted

the label or forgave his brother-in-law for taking him to the Mayo Clinic. Vachel was prescribed luminal sodium by a neurologist.

Vachel's biographer was content with this diagnosis. However, even if we assume that Vachel may have truly had epilepsy, few epileptics develop paranoid delusions or hallucinate. Today, such symptoms would be viewed as signs of schizophrenia, and once we see these signs as schizophrenic in nature, much of Vachel's strange life makes sense. His inability to finish college or to find and hold a job, his bizarre relationships with women, his obsession with religious-political causes and his unrealistic goals for his home town of Springfield suggest a pre-psychotic personality disorder.

But Vachel was also depressed. After the deaths of his parents, he suffered from insomnia, felt very lonely and wrote to friends that he could find no reason for continuing to live. Friends described him as weary, worn, inexpressibly sad and antagonistic toward his audiences.

Vachel decided to move to Spokane in Washington, where he moved into a hotel, subsidized by an admirer who wanted to improve the cultural life of Spokane but who never let on to Vachel that he was paying part of his hotel bill. In Spokane, his biographer describes him thus:

> His swinging, ungainly gait was more marked than ever. He carried a cane, wore his cowboy hat and often dancing pumps.....and he lifted his face as though to taste the universe, then lowered it to note with shrewed eye some sign of the times. (Ruggles, 1959, p. 333)

In February 1925, Vachel met Elizabeth Conner, a twenty-three year old school teacher in Spokane. He still wrote to his girl friend from Gulf Park Junior College and even sent her an engagement ring. When she firmly said no, Vachel proposed to Elizabeth.

Vachel's eccentricity is illustrated by this decision. Elizabeth was teaching on a Tuesday morning in May, when the minister arrived to tell her that Vachel proposed to get married that very day. Elizabeth, who had known nothing of this, acquiesced, and they were married at nine in the evening after Elizabeth returned from an AAUW meeting!

Vachel's biographer reports that the marriage was happy and gives no hint of any sexual difficulties. Elizabeth did not know of Vachel's seizures when she married him. He had a seizure in August while they on a hiking tour, and Elizabeth, who was now pregnant, felt very anxious about what was in store for her.

Vachel decided that he would like to move back to his parents' house in Springfield. His paranoia had spread to include people in Spokane. During a speech to the Spokane AAUW, he began to talk of the businessmen in Spokane who were trying to

drive him out of town and crucify him. Vachel managed to move his family back to Springfield and into his family home in April, 1929.

Money was scarce, and Elizabeth could not meet expenses. Vachel continued his recitation tours to bring in money. Despite his tours, from which he sent back less and less money to Elizabeth as time progressed, money remained scarce, and the family ran up bills with local merchants. A daughter was born in May, 1926, and a son in September, 1927.

His new books received bad reviews, and Vachel was upset by this. Since Vachel had already developed paranoid tendencies, these attacks fed into his delusions of persecution. He complained about his critics and the publishers who were now rejecting his work. He sat at home in Springfield trying to write, but writing little. He began to drink, he who had spoken in favor of prohibition, and he smoked heavily. He was jealous of any man who visited Elizabeth, and accused her of infidelities. He continued to tour, but spent more money during the tours and sent less home to Elizabeth. (In 1929, his income was $11,628 of which $1,022 was from royalties and rents from the Lindsay estate. The rest was from recital fees. $2,387 went to his agent, but after deductions for expenses, only $3,293 remained.)

Although Vachel still received honors (a prize from *Poetry* and an honorary doctorate from Hiram College), these were based on his past accomplishments, not on present endeavors.

In February, 1931, he was diagnosed as having a mild case of diabetes mellitus, and the additional stress caused Elizabeth to tell Vachel how she felt about him and their life and to declare that she would not sleep with him any more. (Vachel's biographer says she did not keep her vow.) On his tours now, his self-control was gone. He refused to recite the poems his audiences wanted, and he screamed at his hosts. He wrote rude letters to his sisters, and Elizabeth felt that some of his letters indicated madness.

Vachel began to threaten Elizabeth with physical violence, even that he would kill her. Eventually, he did assault her mildly. He accused his father-in-law of trying to murder him. Vachel's brother-in-law considered institutionalizing Vachel and consulted with psychiatrists, but Vachel refused to visit any psychiatrist or neurologist.

In November, 1931, Vachel's debts totaled $4,000, and he was on the road again. He was fifty-two. In November, he was giving a recital in Washington, DC, when the amplifiers broke down and many in the audience left. Vachel, however, was not aware of the technical difficulties, and the exodus of the audience troubled him greatly. When he arrived home on November 29th, his speech was thickened, he seemed dazed and his hands were shaking. After his first night at home, he asked Elizabeth who she had met in the house during the night. (There had been no visitors.)

On December 4th, Vachel was depressed and crying. Later that day, he attacked Elizabeth, accusing her of taking away his pride. He talked about his life, recalling every hurt and working himself into a tearful fury. After they went to bed, Vachel got up and swallowed a bottle of Lysol. Elizabeth sent for a doctor, but Vachel died soon after the doctor's arrival, at one in the morning.

Discussion

There is no evidence of psychiatric disturbance in Vachel's family, except for the psychological problems his mother experienced after her sunstroke. His childhood seems uneventful except for the death of his sisters when he was ten.

Yet during his college days the first signs of his adult life style began to be evident, a life style that can be characterized by an inability to develop any kind of career, to support himself, or to develop mature interpersonal relationships. It is interesting that his parents supported his aimless life-style despite their own financial difficulties.

As he got older, Vachel began to show more of the symptoms of severe mental disturbance, in particular hallucinations and delusions of persecution. Aside from any possible epilepsy, Vachel seems to have developed schizophrenic symptoms, complicated by depression.

Interestingly, like Ernest Hemingway, Vachel distorted the circumstances of his life. As a child he had wished that he had Indian blood in him, but as an adult he insisted that he did. He denied that he accepted money from his father when in fact he had. After his father's death, he claimed he supported himself and bought his mother everything she wanted, whereas the truth was that he borrowed heavily from her. He implied that he had been fired or forced into resigning from Gulf Park Junior College, whereas he had refused to return.

Toward the end of his life, his psychological state became much worse. His creative life seemed over, critical rejection of his work grew, and the stress of the recitation tours increased. He was unable to relate rationally to anyone, including his wife. He was severely depressed. If he had not killed himself, Vachel would probably have had to be institutionalized.

Since he left no suicide note, we can only speculate about his personal motives for his suicide. But his biographer says that Vachel told Elizabeth after swallowing the lysol: "I got them before they could get me - they can just try to explain this, if they can!" (Ruggles, 1959, p. 432). It appears that Vachel killed himself under the influence of the delusions that people were trying to kill him, and he thwarted them by killing himself first.

Reference

Ruggles, E. (1959). *The west-going heart*. New York: Norton.

JOHN BERRYMAN[15]

David Lester

John Berryman was an American poet, winner of the Pulitzer Prize and other literary awards, who jumped to his death in 1972, at the age of 57. I have relied on the biography written by Haffenden (1982) for this essay.

Early Life

John was born on October 25, 1914, in McAlester, Oklahoma. His mother Martha was from a Southern family. Her father deserted the family when she was five, and she never felt that her mother loved her. Martha was working as a school teacher in Sasakwa, Oklahoma, when she met John Allyn Smith, a bank manager in McAlester. (John Allyn was born in Minnesota.) They married in July, 1912, when Martha was eighteen and John was twenty-five.

It is not clear whether Martha loved John Allyn, but they kept up appearances. The first child, later known as John Berryman, was born by caesarian operation, and Martha felt that her sins had prevented her from the agony experienced in a normal birth! She felt incomplete without suffering pain. When she was pregnant again, both her husband and her mother wanted her to have an abortion. They feared for her life, and her husband was not sure he could afford two children. Robert was born, however, in 1919.

John's childhood began uneventfully. John was raised as a Catholic, and the family was devout. He felt some sibling rivalry when his brother was born. John later remembered an incident when he pushed Robert off a wall and bloodied him.

In 1924, John's father had trouble at his bank. Perhaps there was rivalry with a colleague; perhaps he neglected his duties? At any rate, the family moved to Florida. Martha and John Allyn had also been having marital problems, perhaps because of Martha's intense attachment to her children. John Allyn also had at least one affair of which Martha was aware.

At first, just Martha, John Allyn and Martha's mother moved to Florida, leaving the two boys in a boarding school. However, the boys were bullied and unhappy there and soon joined their parents. Their father bought a restaurant and also worked as a real estate salesman. This was the time of the Florida land boom, which soon ended, leaving people with land worth much less than they paid for it. In 1926, John Allyn sold the restaurant for a third of what he had paid, and the family moved into an apartment building owned by John Angus Berryman.

[15] This essay is based on Haffenden (1982).

It was soon obvious that Martha and John Angus were attracted to each other. John Allyn was distressed over his career crisis and had an affair with a Cuban woman. He asked Martha for a divorce so that he could marry his lover, and she agreed. Because of his distress, Martha had encouraged John Allyn to consult with psychiatrists, but these visits did not seem to help. It is possible that John Allyn considered drowning himself with his son Robert, but regardless of the truth of this report it is clear that John Allyn was very disturbed by his life situation.

In the period leading up to John Allyn's suicide, he was having arguments with Martha and John Angus, he remained unemployed, and his Cuban mistress went back to Cuba leaving him without any money. His divorce was to be finalized on June 26th, and on June 25th Martha suggested continuing their marriage. John Allyn refused and shot himself with a .32 automatic pistol early in the morning of June 26th. (Incidentally, John Allyn's elder sister had also killed herself.)

In later years, John Berryman called his father's suicide the turning point in his life, a turning point toward psychological instability. His biographer saw the father's suicide as a convenient rationalization for John. John felt guilt over his father's death and also anger. His father's death also threw him even more to his mother and her overpossessive love.

Within a few months of John Allyn's death Martha married John Angus (in September 1926), and her sons took his name. John Angus was forty-eight, and Martha was now thirty-two. The family moved to New York City where John Angus was a bond salesman. The family switched also to the Episcopalian faith. Again, it is not clear whether Martha loved John Angus.

In New York City, John, now twelve years old, went to public school, but two years later he went to South Kent School, a private school in Connecticut. John was bullied there and very unhappy but made good academic progress. The school affected a disdain for academic pursuits and stressed athletic prowess of which John had little. John was withdrawn, unaggressive, physically inept and wore glasses with thick lenses which earned him the nickname of 'Blears'. His mother, who earlier had encouraged John's interest in literature, pushed him to succeed in both academics and athletics, adding to his conflict.

John was sick a lot during these school years. He worried about his complexion and dandruff, and his concern over his hair loss and itching scalp continued into adulthood. In March 1931, John encountered three schoolmates by the railroad track who began to torment him. John threw himself in front of an oncoming train but was dragged away by the other boys. Despite this early suicide attempt, John did not attempt suicide again before his death, although he often wrote about suicide in his diary.

John became the foremost scholar at his school, with an average in the nineties, twenty one points above the school average. His mother continued to encourage his

interest in literature, actively engaging in discussions with him about books. He wrote for the school newspaper and became the first boy at the school to bypass the sixth form and enter college from the fifth form.

Interestingly, the love and attention from his mother made his vacations in New York City very different from his bleak existence at school. In New York City, he was fashionably dressed, a flirt with girls, a good dancer, and a theater and film enthusiast. But it is questionable how self-confident John really felt in New York City since his later life shows much evidence of his lack of self-confidence and his inability to cope with the stresses of day-to-day life.

John Angus's health eventually began to fail, and Martha began to work more (in the world of fashion and advertising), eventually becoming the major provider for the family. There were hard times, however. John's brother was withdrawn from South Kent School, and John needed a scholarship to attend Columbia University.

During his freshman year at Columbia, John was academically unmotivated and over-involved with social activities. He pursued dancing, music, chess, theater, bridge, and tennis. He usually had a girl friend and would get upset whenever one of these relationships ended. On some occasions he would talk of suicide while distraught over these break-ups.

Because John had flunked an English course, he lost his scholarship and was obliged to drop out for a semester. As he moved through Columbia, his amorous adventures and traumas continued, though he remained a virgin, but his interest in literature gradually grew. He began to draft poems which were published in *Columbia Review* and came under the influence of a professor there, Mark Van Doren. He graduated in 1936 *Phi Beta Kappa*, after a crisis over a C in one course which would have prevented his graduation. (John had taken a dislike to the instructor.) He won a fellowship to study at Cambridge University. However, his excessive study, staying up all night at times, led to exhaustion which was complicated by a bad ear infection. Doctors advised Martha to withdraw John from college, but John continued to work and passed.

As we leave this early phase of John's life, two themes emerge from the college years. First is John's need for women in his life and his distress when the relationships fail. Eventually we shall see how John's relationships with women became critical in his life. Second, once John decided to apply himself to his studies, he overdid it. Working throughout the night to the point of exhaustion became a general pattern in his life and he seems driven. Women, work and breakdown characterize most of John's later life.

His Career

John's career involved many moves and he was often unemployed or appointed only for temporary positions (weeks or months at a time). Thus, he faced job insecurity for much of his life. He studied for two years in England and returned to the USA in 1938

where he remained unemployed for a year. He spent one year as an instructor at Wayne State University, three years at Harvard University, and eight years in various capacities at Princeton University where he taught occasionally and was supported by fellowships. In 1954, John was appointed to teach at the University of Iowa, but he was dismissed after a drunken altercation. In 1955, he began teaching at the University of Minnesota, and he remained there for the rest of his life, eventually becoming a Regent's Professor of Humanities in 1969. Interspersed throughout this career were several sabbatical leaves.

Much of this career involved uncertainty. Though John was awarded many prizes and fellowships which helped support him and his family, he was turned down for others and lived with the uncertainty each time he applied for a fellowship as to whether it would be awarded him. He was in financial straits for much of his life, except toward the end, and never owned a house until after his third marriage. (He finally bought a house in Minneapolis in 1964.)

John's work never was easy. His first teaching position was at Wayne State University, where he sank into a cycle of alienation, bouts of work, followed by starvation and social withdrawal. Although college teaching is a relative easy job, many college teachers work themselves into exhaustion and mental breakdowns, and John was one of those teachers who broke down. For example, at Wayne State University John assigned lots of papers to his students and then decided that he had to read each paper carefully and write voluminous comments. When the pile of unread papers grew too great, John would spend hours at a time without a break for food or relaxation in order to read them. At this time too, his fiancé was in England, and they were growing apart.

His Poetry And Essays

John's writing was the dominant activity in his life. He wrote as if compelled to work through on paper the conflicts in his mind. His poems were intensely personal. For example, his sonnets, published in 1967, were written in 1947 to his mistress with whom he was in love (a married woman, Lise).

Throughout his life, John was productive, getting his poems and critical essays published quite successfully. However, writing inevitably involves many rejections too. No one escapes them. The rejections upset John terribly, probably because of his doubts about his own merits as a writer. As his career progressed, the honors came faster: Rockefeller Fellowships, Guggenheim Fellowships, a Pulitzer Prize, and so on. However, as his career progressed, his aspirations increased. Once it was enough to have his poems accepted for publication. Then the books of poems had to be praised, and finally he needed to be the greatest living American poet. What would have once thrilled him soon ranked as a bitter disappointment because of what he did not achieve. Toward the end of his life, John doubted more and more the quality of his work, and he sought the praise of his friends for his latest poems after each draft.

His Marriages

John married three times, but there were numerous other loves and sexual conquests. He had a number of 'loves' while at Columbia, and but his first serious involvement was with a 'Beatrice' in England (about whom the biographer tells us little), two years John's junior. They were engaged to marry, although they had doubts about their relationship. John's return to the USA in 1938 introduced strains into the relationship, particularly since John had by no means freed himself from his mother's possessive love. Beatrice visited John in October 1938, staying until April 1939. She felt that John was not serious about finding a job (they could not live on the proceeds from his writing), and she disapproved of the pattern of his life. (After she returned to England, John had an affair that he told her about, forcing her to 'forgive' him.) She promised to wait until 1941 for John to get his life in order, but the Second World War intervened. (Beatrice decided to stay in England for the duration of the war.) However, it is unlikely that they would have married even had there been no war. During his first teaching position, at Wayne State University, John began sleeping with his students, and this became typical for him throughout his career.

After moving to Harvard University, John met Eileen Mulligan who had been a friend of one of John's girl friends at Columbia University and who had read his letters back then. They met in 1941 and became engaged in July 1942, just after Beatrice wrote to break off her engagement to John. They married in October.

The marriage seems to have been tolerable given that few people could have been happy with a person like John. However, in 1947, John fell in love with a twenty-seven year old married friend, Lise, and spent the summer writing sonnets about her and trying to persuade her to make love "just one more time." The affair was over by the end of the year, leaving John with a memory of ecstasy and a lot of guilt. Lise refused to leave her husband, which is perhaps as well for John, for it is by no means clear that he could have left Eileen. John turned to thoughts of suicide again but began seeing a psychiatrist in order to understand himself better.

Although John and Eileen stayed married, John threw himself into alcohol and affairs. His targets were mainly young married women, and his sexual desires so strong that he often masturbated after being with a lover. By 1949, his day was also filled with drug use including vitamins, an anti-spasmodic, dexedrine, martinis, nembutal and sherry. All this while smoking heavily!

Eileen had serious back problems following a fall, which brought out John's lack of concern for her. She also pursued a career, earning a Masters degree and working as a clinical psychologist. By 1953, Eileen had suffered enough from John's neglect, infidelities, drug abuse, reluctance to have children, and employment instability. After a trip together to Europe (in which he resented having to visit her in the hospital after she re-injured her back), she separated from him when they returned to the USA.

Eileen was an orphan and probably impressed by the young poet she met back in 1941. Although her life with John revealed his flaws clearly and must have entailed much suffering for her, she was able to build up a career for herself and develop the self-confidence to leave him to his own self-destructive path.

He then met Ann Levine, a young woman in her early twenties, soon after he arrived at Minnesota, and married her in 1956. They had a son Paul in 1957, toward whom John felt much affection and much resentment. By 1958, Ann had become disenchanted with John, and she left him in 1959.

In 1961, he met and married Kate Donahue, also in her early twenties, whose mother had died when she was young and whose father had been an alcoholic, the ideal wife for an aging alcoholic. They remained married until John's suicide. A daughter was born in 1962 and another in 1971. Kate eventually began to study to be a teacher, pursuing a career like Eileen before her.

His Social Presence

The frequent moves in his career led to John being lonely a lot. For example, when he first arrived in England in 1936 he knew no one and craved for company. This led him to behave inappropriately when he was in company. He would become over-excited to the point of dominating the conversation and insulting people. An acquaintance in England described his moods as hysterical joy, deep depression and obvious boredom. His social style was affected by his nervousness and self-doubts, to which John reacted by being noisy, boastful and bullying. His drinking exacerbated this public persona.

At his first teaching position at Wayne State University, he drank black coffee and chain-smoked. He was thin and had a bushy mustache. He bathed infrequently and wore such dirty clothes that he stank. John's biographer sums up John's style at Princeton between 1943 and 1953 as a braggart, womanizer, drinker and formidable intellectual. John was also consumed by insecurity over his worth as a poet and self-recriminations over his adulteries. He felt hateful, unworthy, pitiable, and could be paranoid about his critics. John admitted that sex and alcohol became the props for his existence.

His Psychiatric State

John experienced depression quite frequently. It could be brought on by loneliness, doubts about his adequacy as a writer, breakups with his women, and by his physical exhaustion. His first 'breakdown' seems to have occurred while in New York after his return from England when he was having great difficulty finding a job, his writings were being rejected, and his fiancé Beatrice was in England.

During his first semester at Wayne State University, the stress he created for himself by his work habits, loneliness, social ineptitude, and separation from Beatrice, all

eventually led to a breakdown. He was exhausted at times, sullen and angry at others, and eventually began talking of demons and passing out. Soon after the beginning of the second semester, John collapsed and was examined by psychiatrists. One diagnosed post-epileptic confusion; another psychoneurotic maladjustment and possible schizophrenia. With the help of his friends, John hung on and finished the semester. John eventually came to believe that he suffered from *petit mal* epilepsy and took medication for it for much of his life.

Thereafter his state gradually grew worse. During a period of unemployment in 1943, while married to Eileen, John was exhausted, undernourished, sleeping badly, suffering from indigestion, and his scalp was burning and itching. He feared another attack of *petit mal*. He thought of suicide and wrote that only his relationship with Eileen prevented him. His biographer labels these symptoms as psychosomatic and hysterical.

In 1947, after John's love affair with Lise ended, John saw a psychiatrist for a few years (until 1953). His diaries list many of the symptoms he presented to his psychiatrist over the years and which he analyzed in detail - little habits such as his aversion to opening mail or answering the door or the telephone, his emotional numbness, his eczema and fear of baldness, his pleasure in pimples and blackheads, his hatred of women, and the problems with his father and mother. (At one point, he worried whether his sexual excesses were rooted in homosexual tendencies.) John was an intellectual, and he wrote poems about his suffering. He seems to have become obsessed by his symptoms, and his self-absorption made them far worse. He analyzed his dreams in his diaries and tried to make sense of his mind. John worried about things that do not merit worry, and then he worried about his worrying.

This is perhaps a problem with all psychologically-oriented intellectuals, and those who keep diaries permit us to monitor their self-absorption. Many grow out of this, eventually reaching a measure of peace in old age. However, John's preoccupation with himself-as-a-problem grew during his life.

In 1954, John was hired by the University of Iowa. He fell soon after his arrival, breaking his wrist and damaging his ankles. He suffered from colitis, was lonely, sexually deprived, and not eating well. He slept very little, drank a lot and had hallucinations. He got into a fight with his landlord one night and was put in jail. The University dismissed him.

John arrived in Minnesota in 1954. There his health deteriorated and his drinking increased steadily. After his second divorce, he was frequently hospitalized for brief periods. Eventually he was diagnosed as an alcoholic and after his third marriage was treated on several occasions for alcoholism. He entered treatment for alcoholism in 1966 and 1967, but not seriously until late 1969. He was diagnosed as an alcohol and drug abuser. A list of drugs used revealed: sleeping pills since 1949, nerve pills since 1955, phenobarbital since 1959, Haldol, Vivactic and Tuinol since May 1969, Serax since

November 1969, Thorazine since May 1969, Nembutal in 1961, and Librium occasionally. He also smoked five packs of cigarettes a day.

He had great trouble staying off alcohol and had to be re-admitted several times. He joined Alcoholics Anonymous and worked hard at fighting the craving. In 1970, one doctor diagnosed him as having a cyclothymic personality (with swings from depression to elation). Another felt that John was not psychotic when sober, but that he had a fear of insanity and of committing suicide.

John's Suicide

In 1971, John was still married to Kate, but Kate was now a school teacher. The marriage had severe problems. They had tried marriage therapy (back in 1969). Their sexual relationship was poor. They had one daughter and Kate was pregnant with another child. (Sarah was born in June, 1971). In June, John moved his mother from New York to an apartment opposite his house in Minneapolis. John, who needed his wife's full attention, was facing the coming of another baby in the house, and his mother drove him crazy with her demands. Kate was tired of the constant demands he made on her and was tired of his alcoholism. It would not have been surprising if John had feared that Kate would leave him soon.

John's income was higher now than ever before. In 1971, his total income reached thirty-one thousand dollars. After years of financial insecurity, he was better off. But he might have been afraid of the effects of his alcoholism on his future income, especially if his writing suffered. (He had defaulted on his child support payments in 1962 and 1966, and Ann had to take him to court.)

John's confidence in his ability to write well had gone. He was beginning to recognize that he no longer had the perseverance to finish any major work. He also began to lose confidence in his teaching ability. Although many of his students remember his teaching as outstanding, one commentator noted that John preferred to teach undergraduates (who would be more likely to worship him) which suggests an underlying self-doubt about his ability as a teacher. He had reverted to Catholicism, and his biographer believes that John retained his faith in God.

John began to drink again, although there was no alcohol in his blood after his death. On Wednesday January 5th, 1972, he left the house intending to kill himself. His note read "I am a nuisance." He came home. On Friday January 7th he left again, telling Kate "You won't have to worry about me any more." He took the bus to the University and walked to the Washington Avenue Bridge. At about nine in the morning, he climbed over the railings and jumped without looking back. He fell one hundred feet, landing near the pier of the municipal coal docks, rolling fifteen feet or so down the embankment.

Discussion

In some ways, this is the simple story of the slow disintegration of an alcoholic. John, beginning life with some psychological problems, gradually turns more and more to alcohol as a solution, and eventually killed himself as do many alcoholics.

However, the fact that John's father, who was portrayed to him by his mother as a spiritless, sexless, effete wastrel, committed suicide clearly must have been a critical event in John's development. It is noteworthy that early on, at South Kent School, John used an attempt at suicide as a solution to the problem of being bullied. Despite the negative view John developed of his father, he probably identified with his father as a child, and the suicide of his role model would lead him to see suicide as an attractive alternative in crisis situations.

The death of his school mate and later, when he was at Harvard University, of his good friend Bhain Campbell from cancer would have been more traumatic because of the earlier death of his father. The experience of one loss often sensitizes a person to subsequent losses.

His father's suicide served to make John more dependent on his overpossessive mother, who was not very affectionate despite her love for her children. His relationship with his mother must have hindered his relationships with other women. Sometimes he put his mother's concerns before those of his lovers and wives. He also must have feared that women would try to possess him in the way that his mother had tried to.

It is also noteworthy that his personal style was so unpleasant that it must have alienated others from him, increasing his fears that he was not worthy. No wonder that he strove for sexual conquests, for they would prop up his insecure sense of self-worth. He preferred to teach undergraduates who would be more likely to like him as a teacher. He married young women, often lacking self-confidence in themselves, two of whom eventually found the confidence to free themselves from bondage to him.

John suffered from tremendous insecurity about his self-worth. The weak and sickly kid at school developed into an abrasive self-absorbed adult. Was he any good as a teacher, as a poet, as a son, husband or father, or as a lover? Despite the successes of his life (teaching jobs at good universities, acclaim for his poems, and three marriages), he continued to be plagued by doubts, and to alienate those who wanted to be close to him. At the age of fifty-seven, rather than reaping the rewards from his earlier successes, he seemed to be facing failure. His poetry was perhaps no longer good. His craving for alcohol was as hard to fight as ever, and his marriage was disintegrating. Sexual liaisons would probably become rare.

He could have continued the struggle and sought to improve himself. But his past attempts had not proved successful. Perhaps he had lost hope that future efforts would succeed? Rather than face a continuing decline, John chose the solution that his father had chosen forty-five years earlier.

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HART CRANE[16]

David Lester

Hart Crane was born on July 21, 1899, in Garrettsville, Ohio, as Harold Hart Crane. (He adopted his mother's surname as his first name when he was eighteen and sided with his mother during his parents' divorce.) His father's family could trace their ancestors back to English ancestors who arrived in 1646. His grandfather ran the biggest store in Garrettsville, was a director of the local bank, and ran a maple-syrup cannery. His mother's family, the Harts, traced their line back to New England settlers and were also in business.

His mother, Grace Hart, had visited Garrettsville and met his father, Clarence (C.A.) Crane in 1898. After a brief romance, they married, on June 1, 1898. The marriage was a failure from the beginning. Grace was terrified by sex. As a result, Clarence found her cold, and she found him lustful. Hart was torn by their conflict and this, more than any other factor, accounts for his life style and his eventual suicide. Hart initially took his mother's side, but toward the end of his brief life he took his father's side. To an outside observer, however, Grace is clearly at fault. Her terror of sex alienated her husband and caused her to turn to her son as her fantasied lover. She became obsessed with Hart, devoting herself after his suicide to building up his reputation and trying (unsuccessfully) to obliterate the record of her pathological behavior. She even tried to communicate with Hart through mediums. Hart's homosexuality was partly the result of Grace's pathology. Hart killed himself at the age of thirty-three, jumping from a boat bringing him from Mexico to New York City.

Hart's Childhood

Hart was not sickly but was considered delicate. His relatives waited for the first signs of the allergies that ran in the Crane family, but Hart had none at first. They would develop later. Hart was precocious, walking, talking and reading at an early age.

By age three he showed feminine interests. He liked to play with his aunt's dress-making materials and to decorate hats. His aunt and mother were concerned by this and forbad such play. When Hart was five, the family moved to Warren, Ohio, where Hart led a more typical kid's life.

The business ventures of his father and the marital conflict between his parents consumed his parents' energy. Hart learned that he could get their attention and approval by being witty and clever and by being sick. If he was criticized by his parents, Hart would fall ill with what we would now call psychosomatic complaints. He had fits in which he would vomit and cry hysterically. Both Hart and his mother came to believe that his illnesses were a direct result of her unkindness or insensitivity.

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[16] This essay is based on Unterecker (1969).

In 1908, the marital conflict became so severe that Grace entered a private sanitarium and C.A. moved to Chicago. Hart, age nine, was sent to live with his grandparents in Cleveland. There he had an indulgent grandmother, servants and much freedom. In 1909, both of his parents moved in with Hart's grandparents.

By age eleven, Hart was interested in the theater, painted, took piano lessons, and loved to write. He read rather than play outdoors. It was then that he told his grandmother that he wanted to be a poet. His teenage years seem relatively uneventful. He tried smoking, both cigars and a pipe. He was caught playing with a neighbor's daughter. And he had his first homosexual experience with a young man who worked for the family.

His biographer is reticent about Hart's homosexuality. He minimizes it, fails to describe Hart's lovers and the path of his affairs, and generally treats it as if it were not important. The fact is that Hart, as already noted, had the kind of mother who moves a son (particularly an only child) toward homosexuality. He had an early seduction about which we are told nothing. And he spent his adult life cruising waterfront bars picking up sailors for quick sex. Hart spoke of love, but none of his sailors stayed for long, a few months at the most. He never managed to establish a long-term homosexual relationship. In the early 1900s, homosexual encounters were probably uncommon, especially in the midwest. Hart, even with an inclination (conscious or unconscious) to develop into a homosexual, might never have encountered the opportunity, ending up a latent homosexual. In this context, an early homosexual encounter looms as critical.

At this time too, though he occasionally dated, Hart was telling his mother that she was more beautiful than girls his own age and was his real sweetheart. He felt that she was in need of his protection more than "common girls." It is likely that Grace encouraged this unhealthy attachment.

In January 1913, his grandfather died. Hart had not been as close to his grandfather as to his grandmother, but it was an upsetting experience to watch his grandfather fall sick and die. His grandfather left Hart a legacy of $5,000 to be given to him once his grandmother died.

Hart entered a good high school in January, 1914, and he attended intermittently for the next three years. He was not active in school. He joined no clubs, played no sports, and did not write for the school newspaper or magazine. He was in the college-oriented program, but he was frequently absent. For example, he took one semester off to go with his mother and grandmother to visit their house in an island off Cuba.

Hart had built up a good library in his room at his grandmother's. When he wrote poetry, he would smoke cigars or smell his mother's perfume (or other odors such as the maid's sweaty shoes) in order to get himself into a poetic mood. His first poem appeared in print in the Greenwich Village *Bruno's Weekly* in September, 1916.

Hart also showed moodiness, moving from high elation to deep depression. At his grandmother's Caribbean island house in late 1914, his parents had a very bad argument, and C.A. left for the USA. Grace turned to Hart as a confidante, not noticing how depressed he was becoming. In early 1915, Hart made two suicide attempts, one by slashing his wrists and another by swallowing his mother's Veronal powders. It is clear that his parents' violent quarrels and their "violent sexual reconciliations" (as he described them to friends) left him very upset, to the point of physical illness. On the other hand, when his parents were away, he was lonely.

In 1916, Hart was a "published" poet but unhappy at school, so he decided to quit school. In November, after a particularly bad row, C.A. moved out, and Hart's parents filed for divorce. Hart had a second poem published (in *The Pagan*), and so it was agreed that he could quit school, ostensibly to find a job to help support his mother. In this confused time, Hart's parents decided that he could go and live in New York City, thinking that he would study for the entrance exams for Columbia University. Hart made only token efforts in this direction, but started instead on the life path that would lead to his decline and suicide.

Hart's life makes sense in the light of his psychological disturbance, and so it makes sense to briefly review his problems.

Depression

Hart suffered continually from depression. This could be brought on by letters from his mother or his father when they tried to involve him in their affairs, his poverty, his loneliness or the rejection of his poems. His biographer mentions periods of elation, and so this raises the possibility of a bipolar affective disorder. However, there is not sufficient information in the biography to make such a diagnosis, and Unterecker gives no information about the presence of psychiatric disorder in Hart's relatives. His maternal grandparents seemed to have been free from any disorder.

Hart suffered from insomnia for most of his life and, in addition, he suffered at times from nightmares so that he preferred insomnia to sleep.

Alcoholism

Initially, Hart drank to overcome his shyness in company and for poetic inspiration. He would begin a composition when drunk and polish it later. However, his drinking quickly grew out of control until he was drinking up to nine scotches at a time (by his own admission in 1927) or a half a gallon of bootleg wine in 1928. By his late-twenties, Hart was clearly an alcoholic, suffering from delirium tremens. In 1927, Yvor Winters desribed Hart:

> .....he regarded Crane as a man of "more or less manic-depressive make-up" and.....was shocked to find that "his hair was graying, his skin had the dull red

> color with reticulated grayish traceries which so often go with advanced alcoholism, and his ears and knuckles were beginning to look like those of a pugilist. (Unterecker, 1969, p. 526)

Hart was only 28 at the time! (His hair was white by the next year.)

Hart would go on drinking sprees for days at a time, often being picked up dead drunk by friends, sometimes getting into fights and being arrested by the police (in New York City in 1927, Paris in 1929 and Mexico in 1931).

Paranoia

Hart seems to have had paranoid tendencies toward the end of his life. He felt betrayed by his friends and parents and, when he was drunk, he would list his grievances against them. He often got into fights with taxi drivers whom he felt had overcharged him.

Hart typically blamed others for his misfortunes, never apparently realizing what an unpleasant person he was. He borrowed money from friends, moved in with them, interrupted them whenever he needed company, destroyed their property, and insulted them. He behaved like a pampered brat, immature, with the self-centeredness of a child. Friends eventually asked him to leave, though he would often storm out before he pushed them to the brink.

By 1928, Hart was becoming increasingly violent when drunk, and his landladies and friends frequently hid from him in fear during what were described as his "incoherent attacks." His behavior deteriorated still further during his final year in Mexico.

His paranoia was, therefore, based in part on real events, but they were events he brought on himself.

Physical Illnesses

Hart suffered a lot from psychosomatic illnesses - hay fever and hives in particular. He also from time to time had boils, back ache, and occasional tonsilitis, urethritis (which he thought at first was venereal disease) and conjunctivitis. His eyesight was also poor. However, Unterecker suggests that Hart enjoyed his illnesses, and they certainly elicited sympathy from his friends.

Suicide Attempts

His first documented suicide attempts were in 1915 when on vacation with his mother after his father had stormed back to Cleveland. He slashed his wrists and took an overdose. Unterecker does not mention suicidal behavior again until Hart's final year of life spent in Mexico.

Interestingly, his friend Harry Crosby shot himself in December, 1929, in New York, and Hart was with Harry's wife and mother that evening and helped them cope with the shocking event.

Homosexuality

Initially, in Akron in 1919, in Cleveland in 1921 to 1923 and in New York City in 1924, Hart fell in love with and had, albeit brief, affairs with men. But Hart's homosexuality soon developed into a pattern in which he would cruise parks in Cleveland or waterfront bars in New York City and elsewhere looking for casual sex. Occasionally, these casual episodes developed into relationships that lasted weeks or months, but this was not typical. In many of these episodes, Hart was drunk, and it was not uncommon for Hart to be beaten up and robbed during his visits to the waterfront. In 1922 he was blackmailed after a casual encounter. When he was in Washington, DC, in 1920 working for his father, and in California for six months with his mother in 1927 and 1928, he became involved with groups of homosexual friends, and he went to orgiastic parties. But Hart failed to find a stable lover.

It must remembered that homosexuality was not so accepted or open in the 1920s as now and that Hart was from the conservative midwest. He never really felt comfortable about his homosexuality. He may have assuaged his guilt by making sex a brutal experience and by getting beaten up by truckers or sailors who objected to his advances. He was typically drunk during his sexual searches, probably to overcome his guilt. When he finally fell in love with a woman for the first time, Peggy Cowley in Mexico in 1931, he seemed overjoyed to be normal for the first time, though very quickly he had to supplement intercourse with Peggy by casual homosexual encounters with Mexican boys.

Hart And His Parents

His emotional life was dominated by his parents. At first, there were daily letters back and forth and an intimate involvement with the details of one another's lives, especially between Grace and Hart. After his parents' divorce, he sided with his mother and became alienated from his father. In time, he became more and more aware of the suffocating possessiveness of his mother. In 1928 he fled from her home in California and spent the rest of his life hiding his whereabouts from her. Upon breaking with his mother, he became close to his father.

Hart's mother had continual breakdowns, and her letters to Hart would plunge him into anxiety or depression and interfere with his writing. When he stayed with his mother he fought with her, and yet he was lonely without her. Eventually her jealousy over his relationship with his father, his friends and his homosexual lovers (after he had confessed to her) drove him away. Hart's mother was the neurotic mother often found in

background of disturbed sons. Hart eventually fled from her, but far too late in his life to achieve independence and maturity.

Hart's father seems to have been a normal, pleasant, conservative businessman. Despite the odd life style of his son, he was willing to support his efforts to be a good poet, and he sent him money regularly once Hart reconciled with him.

Hart And His Friends

Hart made many friends and had hundreds of acquaintances. His friends lent him money to live on, let him stay with them, critiqued his work, and went to plays, restaurants and bars with him. He carried on a voluminous correspondence with them and they with him.

Yet a frequent cry of Hart's was that he was so lonely. Of course, he alienated his friends by his drunken and abusive behavior but, amazingly, many remained tolerant of him. His loneliness suggests a couple of possibilities. First, that these "friendships" were not close, close enough to form the social bonds that people need. Or second, that they could not replace the need we all have for a primary tie, usually with a lover or spouse. Hart kept his overly close ties to his parents long after others have moved on, maintained a large circle of "friends", and looked for orgasms in toilets and dark alleyways. None of these can replace deep and meaningful relationships.

Hart's Efforts To Support Himself

Hart's adult life consisted of a series of moves from one city to another and long periods of half-hearted job-hunting interspersed with brief periods of work. He lived in rented rooms, other people's apartments and houses, or with his mother or father. The list of his travels is long: New York, Cleveland, New York, Cleveland, Akron, Washington DC, Cleveland, New York, Woodstock, New York, Pawling NY, New York, Isle of Pines, New York, Patterson NY, Los Angeles, Patterson, New York, France, New York, and thence to Mexico. His moves were made on the basis of lovers he had, friends offering to support him, searches for jobs, and retreats back to his parents.

His attempts to get work fit a classic pattern: an individual who develops a perception of himself as a writer and resents the effort needed to develop a secure career. Hart worked - as a temporary salesman in bookstores, as a low level copy-writer in advertising agencies, and for his father in his father's stores. But he spent most of his time "searching" for jobs. He lived off loans from friends (which he did repay) and toward the end of his life on monthly checks from his father. In 1925 Otto Kahn gave him $2000 (and an additional $500 in 1927) to write poetry. In 1929, his grandmother died, and he received his inheritance of $5000 which he spent in eight months on a trip to France followed by a stay in New York City. In 1931, he received a Guggenheim fellowship for $2000 and went to Mexico for a year.

When he received these large sums of money, he spent them quickly and foolishly. He gave no serious thought to establishing a stable base, though he had fantasies of stable work in an advertising agency and of owning a house in the country. His income from writing was miniscule, and his attempts to write stories, plays, movie scripts and magazine articles came to nothing, more through his lack of persistence than from rejections from editors and publishers.

His adult life, therefore, was dominated by his poverty. Like a pampered child, he blamed others for his failures. He seemed not to acknowledge the role of his alcoholism, his laziness, his failure to go to college, or his general lack of motivation and persistence. He seemed to think that his parents had a duty to support him throughout his life and that he could remain a dependent child.

Yet, at the same time, he also realized his failure, especially in contrast to his father, a successful businessman. When it came down to a final reckoning, Hart knew that he had failed in his career, in his friendships, in his love life, and probably as a writer. By age thirty-three his life was over, and he could look forward only to the life of a derelict.

Hart's Poetry

Hart had some success as a poet. After publishing occasional poems in small magazines, he sold his first poem (for ten dollars) in 1919. His first collection (*White Buildings*) was published in 1926, after two years of sending the manuscript around to publishing houses, and it received an enthusiastic reception, along with some criticisms. Hart was pleased with its reception. He worked for years on a long poem, eventually published as *The Bridge* in 1930 to more negative and critical reviews, though Hart was awarded the Levinson Prize by *Poetry* that year.

However, by 1928 Hart was finding it hard to write. As his reputation grew, magazines began to solicit work from him, but he had nothing to send. After *The Bridge*, Hart wrote very little. He tried writing articles for *Fortune* and book reviews, but finished only a couple of pieces. His alcoholism and deteriorating social relationships did not make writing easier. In 1930, Howard Lovecraft wrote of Hart:

> Poor devil - he has "arrived" at last as a standard American poet seriously regarded by all reviewers & critics; yet at the very crest of his fame he is on the verge of psychological, physical, & financial disintegration, & with no certainty of ever having the inspiration to write a major work of literature again. (Unterecker, 1969, p. 626)

The Final Year

Hart's final year of life was spent in Mexico as a Guggenheim fellow. It was a failure. Rather than writing, Hart continued to deteriorate. He stayed almost permanently

drunk, sought homosexual pick-ups, and abused and insulted friends and acquaintances there.

He wrote a couple of poems, one book review and an article. But his plans for a play, an epic poem, a series of book reviews and a series of articles were abandoned. His fear that he was finished as a writer grew.

> .....he seemed full of doubts about what he had written and full of doubts about whether he could ever write anything more. He seemed very depressed and in a sort of hopeless state of mind..... (Unterecker, 1969, p. 683)

Then, soon after his arrival there, his father died, and Hart went back to Cleveland for the funeral. (His grandmother had died in September 1928.) This must have been a severe loss for him since he had grown close to his father in recent years now that he was completely alienated from his mother. One result of his father's death was an expectation of being able to live on his inheritance, but soon problems arose with how much this would be and how regular the checks would come.

In December, 1931, he fell in love with Peggy Cowley who had come to Mexico to divorce Malcolm Cowley. He was overjoyed at having fallen in love with a woman at last, but he was soon soliciting Mexican boys. Peggy moved in with him, and they began to quarrel continually. His intake of alcohol increased, and he worried about his inheritance and his literary reputation. He was particularly worried about how his latest poem would be reviewed.

> Moroseness and anger against the world possessed him.....He became an ugly, sick man in mind and body. Constant tirades against the servants, Mexico, his friends in the States.....Mexico was destroying him. His friends despised his work. The world despised his work. He was a failure as a poet, the laughing stock of his friends. (Unterecker, 1969, pp. 737, 751)

One day in April, he decided to kill himself. With Peggy and a friend helping him, he tried to draft a will. Then he took some iodine and later some mercurochrome, after which his stomach was pumped. Peggy persuaded him that he had to go back to America, though he was afraid to return there. They left by boat on April 23rd, 1932.

During a stop in Havana, Hart went off for a homosexual encounter but became angry at Peggy. What had she done in Havana? Why hadn't she returned to the boat? (She had been waiting for him in a restaurant!) He became drunk and violent. A night watchman on the boat prevented him jumping overboard, but Hart jumped successfully to his death around noon the next day, on April 27th.

Discussion

Hart Crane was many things. He was an alcoholic and a violent and abusive person, with little regard for others. He was a pampered child, spoilt by his parents and grandparents, and he decided that living off them was an acceptable life style. Though his alienation from his relatives and their deaths pained him a great deal, there was always their inheritances for him to squander as he continued his downward path.

But he was also a poet and might have been a productive poet if his life circumstances had been otherwise. He had little to support his self-esteem. After all, he failed to develop a career or to form a stable life (with home and lover). All he had was his poetry.

Literary matters consumed him, both the esthetics and the politics. This made him vulnerable, for he became involved in the politics of the literary world and its squabbles. The reception of his poetry was critical to his feelings of self-worth. Some of his work was praised, but much was not. Even successful writers must face rejection after rejection at times. And Hart's experience was no different. His first collection of poems was passed from publisher to publisher for almost two years before getting accepted. Then, when he was receiving recognition, his creative powers declined. Perhaps they would have declined anyway, but his increasing alcohol abuse and unstable life may have been sufficient cause in themselves.

It is always interesting to ask what would have happened had the person not killed himself. What would Hart Crane have become? A drunken bum in New York City? Perhaps robbed, beaten up and killed by the sailors one day at the waterfront? An isolate for sure, for he was rapidly becoming so abusive that his friends and acquaintances would soon have abandoned him. And yet what might have happened if his father had not died and if Hart had gone to live with him? His times there seemed to have been the happiest and quietest periods of his life and as close to normal as Hart ever came. But, probably, Hart's lack of self-control would have driven him from Ohio, back to New York and to the path of chronic self-destruction that he had chosen for himself.

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WELDON KEES

David Lester

Weldon Kees was born in Beatrice, Nebraska, on February 14, 1914.[17] His family was among the wealthy in Beatrice. His grandfather (originally from Germany) and father developed the F. D. Kees Manufacturing company, which produced hardware, tools and machines for rural communities (including skates). Weldon's father, John, graduated from the University of Nebraska before taking over the company. John married Sarah Green, born in Illinois, who was a school teacher in Beatrice. Sarah had social aspirations and managed to trace her ancestry to the pilgrims on the *Mayflower* and, beyond that, to the British royal family, the Plantagenets, thereby giving the family Anglo-Saxon respectability. Sarah was 34 when Weldon was born, and she was advised to have no more children.

As an only child and the child of a teacher, Weldon received a lot of attention. He was an early reader and learned the piano. His peers considered him a bookworm and a "Momma's boy," but he was not a loner. He had friends with whom he played, drew and wrote (friends remembered that he told the best stories), and he participated in plays that the community put on. He was bought a puppet theater for which he wrote and directed performances, and he loved the cinema.

Despite the Great Depression and a bad investment by his father in a gold mine, the Kees family survived the era well. In his high school years, Weldon's father often took Weldon on business trips and, after seeing his first talking movie in Minneapolis, the local newspaper published Weldon's account of the experience. Although Weldon was expected to take over the family business (which he never did), his parents were proud of his literary and artistic skills and encouraged him in those pursuits. In high school, Weldon wrote essays and stories that were often published locally, he acted in plays, and he played the piano and other instruments. He graduated from high school in 1931 at the age of 17 and went to Doane College in Crete, Nebraska, where he majored in English and psychology. He discovered poetry and the Jazz Age novelists, and he started smoking. He played in a tea-dance trio and wrote tunes for his group to play. A teacher there encouraged him to write and present one-act plays which were performed at the college and in the local cinema between features. But Weldon did not like Doane and transferred to the University of Missouri in 1933.

His mentor at the University of Missouri, Mary Keeley, a journalism teacher, also encouraged his writing, but Weldon struck her as lonely and detached from his fellow students, and he attracted homosexual advances from fellow students, perhaps a result of his impeccable dress, poise, slight build, and carefully combed hair.

[17] He was christened Harry Weldon Kees, but his parents and friends always called him Weldon.

After one year there, Weldon transferred to the University of Nebraska where there was a large community of writers. Weldon had a story published while he was there in *Prairie Schooner*, to the envy of his fellow students. He remained aloof from his fellow students, but he met a student there, Ann Swan, born in Wyoming, niversity, and his father enjoyed Weldon's success vicariously. Ann graduated and went to California, while Weldon stayed to finish his degree in summer school and then went to Colorado (to his parents' cabin there) to finish a novel he had started. In the fall of 1935, Weldon enrolled for a Masters in English at the University of Chicago but quickly realized that he did not have the stamina to be a success there. After two weeks, he went back to the University of Nebraska where he took some courses and worked as a salesclerk. In January, he left for Los Angeles, where Ann was, and he looked for a job and worked on his second novel. He found some work as a musician in studio orchestras, which forced him to join a union.[18]

Although his first novel was rejected by publishing houses, his short stories were successes, even making anthologies. His friends there noted his fascination with those who committed suicide or died in car wrecks. After a fire destroyed the house in which he had a room, along with several manuscripts he had finished, he moved back to Lincoln, Nebraska, where he got a job working on the state guide. There he began writing poetry and also book reviews. For the rest of his life, Weldon earned a little money by writing book reviews and essays on a variety of topics, published in a wide variety of magazines.

In 1937, Weldon enrolled in the library program at the University of Denver and got a job at the public library in town. Ann moved there and got a job as a secretary for a law firm, and they were married on October 3, 1937. A small literary social group developed around the couple, and many literary friends visited them there. Weldon continued to focus on becoming an established novelist, and poetry was a sideshow, even though he was becoming a successful poet, with a *New Directions* collection of his poems published. Yet Weldon also had setbacks. None of his novels were published, and he was rejected for fellowships and a Guggenheim Foundation, but he was invited for the summer to Yaddo, an artists; colony in Saratoga, New York, which he enjoyed.

While he was there, Ann, back home in Denver, began drinking heavily and had a psychiatric crisis. She felt insecure and lonely and developed delusions. Weldon persuaded Ann to agree to a separation. In 1943 Ann went back to her parents in Wyoming, and Weldon went to New York City.

New York City (1943-1948)

Life in New York City developed into a routine of writing and finding employment, frequent moves (often subletting from friends who on vacation) and socializing with literary and artistic friends. He continued to write poetry and review

[18] By this time, he had left-wing political views and was an atheist.

essays, and he continued to have disappointments over his novels which were rejected by many publishers. Ann joined him in July 1943, a surprising to his friends there who did not know that he had a wife. Eventually, they began spending the summers in Provincetown on Cape Cod with many of their friends and acquaintances. Ann did not always join enthusiastically into the cultural scene, especially in Provincetown, and she began to drink heavily again.

Initially, Weldon had a job for *Time* for a while writing for the back pages, and moving on to be the music and then cinema critic. Weldon had developed a liking for jazz, but not modern jazz – only the classic New Orleans-style jazz. After being fired from *Time*, Weldon got a job working on newsreels and documentaries for the Paramount News Service, while Ann got a job as an assistant editor at *Antiques*. He avoided the draft, getting classified 4F. His first book of poetry (*The Last Man*) was published (by Colt Press), and he won a small prize for his poetry (*Poetry*'s Oscar Blumenthal Prize).

However, in New York, Weldon's interests began to change. He took up painting, reasonably successfully. Although he sold few, if any, paintings, he did have a couple of galley shows. He was also commissioned to produce record album covers, combining his interest in painting and music. At Provincetown, he began to organize shows and panel discussions, moving into an organization and management role. These changes affected his life in 1950 when he and Ann moved to San Francisco.

San Francisco (1950-1955) And The End

The five years in San Francisco saw several major changes in Weldon's life. First, Ann's drinking got worse and worse, and she eventually had another psychotic breakdown, after which Weldon insisted on a divorce (in 1954). Second, Weldon abandoned the one area in which he had been successful (as a poet)[19] and began to scatter his talents into a variety of other projects, including making films, writing and performing music (especially jazz and ragtime music), suggesting ideas for cartoons, putting on reviews and writing plays. All of these projects came to naught as his work was rejected or as he ran into difficulties (such as planning a review in a building which was condemned and for which he could not raise any money to restore). Like most other writers, as well as getting his work published, he also had many rejections, and this was especially the case for his new projects. For much of his time in San Francisco, Weldon had a part-time job with Gregory Bateson and the Langley Port Clinic making films on play and nonverbal communication, projects supported by NIMH and private foundation grants.[20]

He began to sleep less and less, and his behavior resembles that of someone in mild or full mania. He was earning little and dependent on funds from his parents who had now moved to Santa Barbara. In addition, Weldon was still dependent on their approval for his "career path," approval which was not forthcoming from them. Indeed,

[19] He also abandoned his art much to the disappointment of several of his New York City friends.
[20] Weldon had some scholarly publications with Bateson as a result of this work.

they were disappointed. Weldon was reasonably healthy except for bouts of sinus headaches and colitis. He began taking amphetamines to help him cope with all of his projects.

His ideas became grandiose – a Broadway show using his music, a movie company, a film school, writing scripts for movies and television. After the break-up with Ann, Weldon dated a couple of women, the second of whom Virginia Patterson, was a clinical psychologist. She lived in Sausalito and, while driving her home across the Golden Gate Bridge, Weldon used to talk about suicide and told her that he was working on a book about suicides. She began to find Weldon overwhelming, especially his depression.

In July 1955, Weldon continued interest in suicide, stimulated by reading Dostoyevsky's *The Devils*. He met his friends for dinner and visited his parents (leaving with money from them). In the light of his disappearance, it seems, in retrospect, as if he was saying goodbye. He met his friend Michael Grieg for dinner on several occasions and talked about his plan to either jump off the Golden Gate Bridge or go to Mexico. He admitted that he had tried to jump off the bridge a week earlier, but he lost his nerve. He could not get his foot over the rail. They had their last dinner together on Sunday July 17, 1955.

Probably, on Monday evening, he drove across the bridge for the last time. His car was found the next morning at the north end, in Marin County. The keys were in the ignition. His lab coat from the Langley Porter Clinic was neatly folded in the back seat. There was no note. No one witnessed his jump, and his body was never found.

Comment

Weldon might have gone to Mexico and not committed suicide. But his apartment was untouched, as if he was still living there. Books were opened, socks were soaking in the sink, and there was congealed milk in a dish for his cat. A move to Mexico might have resulted in some signs of packing and cleaning.

Weldon had long been interested in suicide, and this interest grew in the weeks before his disappearance. Indeed, his talking about suicide to Virginia, a psychologist, may have been an indirect communication. But she was "overwhelmed" with Weldon, which is reminiscent of Avarez's (1972) concern with his own depression so that he could not respond to Sylvia Plath's indirect suicidal communications to him.

Weldon's career was falling apart. Rather than focusing on what he was good at, writing poetry, he was diffusing his efforts into all kinds of projects for which he had neither the talent nor the funds to pursue effectively. The use of amphetamines, which helped him maintain his manic life style, did not help in this.

He has passed the age of 40, and in his parents eyes, he had failed. Perhaps their opinion mattered to him because it was consistent with his own view of himself. So many of his projects had failed and so much of his work (especially his novels) had been rejected, that perhaps he saw no future for himself in the artistic circles to which he so wanted to belong.

Acquaintances throughout his life had wondered whether Weldon was gay, and he certainly attracted gay men. It would be interesting to know more about the quality of his relationship with his wife Ann and whether his possibly latent homosexuality played any role in the decisions that he made. There is certainly no evidence that he ever engaged in homosexual activity.

His parents were old, they were ill and they might need his help. He could not continue to rely on them to help him. His wife of some fifteen years had become an alcoholic, and he had not found any replacement.

Weldon's wallet, sleeping bag and bank-book were never found. He had made the final payment on his car. The California Highway Patrol did not believe that he was a suicide. Suicides do not take these things with them, they claimed. Weldon was depressed and discouraged, but his friends and father thought that his mood was no worse than usual. And wouldn't he have left a note?

Did he jump? Or go to Mexico? We do not know for sure, but his final weeks fit the profile of a man who committed suicide off the Golden Gate Bridge rather than fake such a death. And he was never heard from again.

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IRIS WILKINSON (ROBIN HYDE)

By David Lester

Iris's father, George Wilkinson (born in 1881) grew up in India and went to fight in the Boer War in South Africa in 1899 where he was inured in the leg and head. He spent several months in a hospital there recovering from his wounds. While there he met Adelaide Butler (Nelly, born in 1872) who was raised in Australia and was on a visit to England when her ship stopped in South Africa and she took a job as a nurse. They married (in 1903), and George worked for the Post and Telegraph Department. They had four daughters, with Iris, the second born, born on January 19, 1906. When Iris was one, they decided to move to Wellington, New Zealand, where George continued to work for the post office. George had a steady job, but they were relatively poor.

Iris's childhood and adolescence was without trauma. George was prone to migraine headaches and had an explosive temper. Her parents had different political views, with George a socialist and Nelly more conservative, and there were frequent bitter arguments in the house, leaving Iris divided in her loyalties toward her parents, which caused her distress.

Iris was described as high-strung and sensitive, often tearful, with a vivid imagination. (She firmly believed in the existence of fairies!) She was seen as vulnerable to playground bullies and not physically robust. Iris showed an interest in and ability with poetry from an early age. By the age of eight, she was writing prayers for church and poems. Iris did well at school (except for mathematics) and was awarded a Junior National Scholarship, the first student from her school to win one.

George enlisted in the armed forces when World War One broke out, leaving New Zealand in May 1916. He served for two-and-a-half years, but safely in England in the postal services. He returned in December 1918, after which the family's circumstances improved as a result of the extra benefits George received from his military service, and they moved to a better neighborhood.

At the next level of schooling, Iris continued to perform well except for mathematics and biology. Iris was emotional, hypersensitive and unpopular, but she made a good friend, Gwen Hawthorn, who remained her friend for life. Both were lovers of literature, and both wrote poetry. Iris's poems and stories appeared in the school newspaper and were awarded prizes. Her poetry was even reviewed favorably by a national New Zealand newspaper. She was awarded a National Senior Scholarship for the University of New Zealand, but she never attended college. Her graduation was delayed because she failed mathematics, but she graduated from school in 1922.

Home life continued to be stressful because of the disputes between her parents[21], but Iris also made life difficult. Her sisters described her as rebellious, impulsive, and demanding. As the "star," she made demands on others, such as requiring silence at home while she wrote.

In April 1922, Iris's father brought home a young man he worked with, Harry Sweetman, who liked literature, and he and Iris immediately formed a strong bond. They never became lovers,[22] but they were very close, and Harry may have been the one true love of Iris's life – "a phantom lover" (p. 38). "He haunted her imagination and her poetry relentlessly for the rest of her life" (p. 38). Iris's father quickly became concerned about his 16 year-old daughter's infatuation and banished Harry from the house. But their relationship continued, with voluminous letters after Harry became an itinerate worker and occasional meetings.

Iris left school and began work at the *Dominion*, a daily newspaper which also published other newspapers and magazines. Iris started by writing a children's page for the *Farmer's Advocate* and moved on to a woman's page and reporting from the New Zealand parliament.

The Crises

In the Spring of 1924, Iris injured her knee. The circumstances of the injury are not clear, but she was in a hospital for eight months and on crutches when she returned home. This injury never healed, and her knee bothered her for the rest of her life. But she did return to work at the newspaper. Her work there was good, and her new salary enabled her to find an apartment in town. For the first time, she was free from her parents' interference.

In October 1925, Harry announced that he was going to England – alone. Her dreams were shattered, and it was a bitter blow. He never wrote to Iris again. He arrived in England in December 1925, got tonsillitis and died from the complications in May 1926.

Iris received a small inheritance from an Australian uncle and, with it, she took a holiday in Rotorua. There she met Frederick de Mulford Hyde, and he was her first lover. Unfortunately, Iris got pregnant. Frederick already had a permanent lover and had had no intention of a serious relationship with Iris. Iris informed her mother, and her mother sent Iris off to Australia to have the baby without telling her husband or her other daughters who never learned the truth.[23] After a difficult time in Australia (Iris had little money and met prejudice as an unmarried pregnant woman), the baby died soon after birth. Iris saw him (but was not allowed to hold him) and decided to name him Christopher Robin

[21] Gwen Hawthorn described Iris's father as "a disappointed, railing, whining man, shambling and repulsive." (p. 34)
[22] There were fierce kisses and passionate declarations.
[23] The pretense was that Iris was going to have her knee examined there.

Hyde. Her mother came to Australia to take care of Iris after the birth. Iris made the decision to memorialize him by adopting the pen name of Robin Hyde for her writing, but this was a continual reminder for the rest of her life of this traumatic loss.

When Iris returned to New Zealand, she found out that Frederick had married his long-time lover. She had a nervous breakdown. She began to take medicines such as veronal and luminal[24] and eventually was hospitalized. She refused to eat and was forced fed, and she was kept sedated with morphine. Back in Wellington, a doctor stopped the sedation and had a nurse move into the Wilkinson home to take care of Iris, which helped but which made her sisters angry at this special treatment.[25] Iris still failed to recover, and so she was placed in the Queen Mary Hospital in May 1927. Her doctors described her as mildly confused, with insomnia, and diagnosed her with hysteria. The five-month stay there seemed to heal Iris, and she was able to write poetry during this period, and she got a job writing for the New Zealand Publicity Bureau.

In December of 1926, Iris heard from Harry's brother that Harry had died earlier that year, and his brother told her (truthfully or not) that Harry professed his love for Iris and spoke of her on his deathbed. Iris's biographers doubt this, for Harry was very attached to another woman in New Zealand to whom he did write while he was traveling to England and who, herself, spoke of the close bond she had with Harry. Iris, however, was spared knowledge of this.

She continued to submit her poems and other works, and received a great deal of support and encouragement from John Schroder, the literary editor of the Christchurch *Sun*. She moved home and continued to freelance. By 1928, the effects of the Great Depression began to be felt, and jobs were scarce. Her relationship with Schroder grew closer. Eventually she moved to Christchurch, partly to look for a job on a newspaper there (the *Sun*), successfully, and partly to meet Schroder. She began an affair with the *Sun*'s news editor, Mac Vincent and, had this not happened, Schroder would have proposed marriage to Iris, but they remained friends, and Iris moved to work as lady editor for the Wanganui *Chronicle*.

The work on that newspaper was demanding, involving long hours. While there, she met Henry Lawson Smith, a married man on the staff of a nearby newspaper, and began an affair with him which scandalized the community. Iris had no intention of marrying him, but she did intend to get pregnant. Although she wrote less poetry during this period, Schroder worked with Iris to get a book of her poems published, partly at her own expense which would be paid back from the profits from the book. The book (*The Desolate Star*) appeared in November 1929.

To avoid scandal, Iris decided to hide during the pregnancy and birth, and she went to an isolated community, D'Urville Island. Lawson refused to support the child but agreed to cover basic medical and nursing expenses. Finding a boarding place proved

[24] Brand names of the barbiturate phenobarbitone.
[25] It added to the lifelong resentment her sisters felt toward Iris.

difficult. When the landladies found out that Iris was not married, they asked her to leave. Eventually she found a landlady who did not mind, but bad news came when her freelancing opportunities dried up.

The baby was born October 29, 1930, and named Derek Challis. Iris returned to Wellington. The next few years were difficult. She found places to board the baby, seeing him only occasionally. She eventually told her mother about Derek. Nelly was angry at the news and kept knowledge of the baby's existence from Iris's father and her sisters. Iris found a job in Auckland at the *Observer* and found a woman to take care of the three-month old baby nearby. Although this woman took good care of Derek, she was poor and illiterate. When Derek was fourteen months old, in the early months of 1932, Iris took him away from this woman and found another family to board him with in Auckland.

Iris became very friendly with a middle-aged pharmacist who was staying in the same boarding home (but they were probably not lovers) who supplied her with drugs. In 1932, she moved to her own one-room flat, but Lawson still refused to make any provision for the care of Derek.

The Psychiatric Breakdown

Iris continued to work diligently at her newspaper, but she grew weary and despondent, and her knee continued to cause her pain. Friends and colleagues observed grow more irritable and eccentric. She was disillusioned with her job and using drugs more heavily (especially morphine). The effects of the Great Depression were hard on New Zealanders, and this created social and political unrest. In May, the weather turned unusually cold and wet, and Iris came down with the flu. On June 1st, 1933, Iris was asked to resign from the *Observer*, so that now she was out of work. On June 2nd, depressed and ill, Iris threw herself into the harbor water, but she was rescued.[26]

Iris was placed in a hospital holding cell, charged on June 5th in the magistrate's court (attempting suicide was a crime) and returned to her cell. After two weeks, Iris was transferred to the Auckland Mental Hospital where, with one brief interlude, she stayed for the next three years.[27] It took her quite a while to accept living there, but she eventually came to trust her psychiatrist, Dr. Tothill. Tothill noted her insomnia, weeping, anxiety and suicidal ideation for the past year. She feared her thoughts being "read" and claimed to hear Harry Sweetman's voice. She was diagnosed with hysteria and schizophrenia.

Acting on Tothill's suggestion, she began a journal (which became an autobiography) and, during her stay in the hospital, Iris wrote a great deal, much of which

[26] The reason she gave was so that Derek, her son, would be taken care of with the life insurance money.

[27] She was released on September 28th, and stayed with her mother with the family caring for Derek for two weeks, returned to Auckland where she tried to find freelance work for the government Tourist and Publicity Section. However, on December 5th, she began to scream in the middle of the street and was returned to Tothill's care at the mental hospital.

was published – poems, stories, articles and several books. She wrote most mornings and gardened in the afternoons. She began a friendship with the Rawlinson family whose 15 year-old daughter, Gloria, was already a poet and who later co-authored the biography of Iris with Derek, Iris's son. Iris was soon allowed to go into town at will, with the proviso that she back at the hospital by 8 pm.

In 1934, Iris began a book on her journalism experiences which was published that year as *Journalese*.[28] In addition to this book and her autobiography, by the end of 1934, Iris had written seventy poems and many articles, all during this period of "deep emotional instability, depression, anorexia, and insomnia persistent enough to totally preclude sleep without the nightly use of hypnotic drugs"(p. 250). One wonders whether today, Iris might be diagnosed with a bipolar affective disorder.

The publication of *Journalese* restored her self-confidence, and she began work on a second book of poems (*The Conquerors*, 1935) and a biography of Baron Charles de Thierry, an early colonizer of New Zealand (*Check to your King*, 1936). By the end of 1934, Iris's mental state had improved, but her symptoms persisted. In 1935, her literary productivity increased "prodigiously" (p. 258), and one of her stories won a prize. She met James Stark, an adventurer, and wrote a book on his experiences (*Passport to Hell*). Despite this, Tothill found Iris still quite disturbed in June 1935 – emotionally unstable, often depressed, and prone to auditory and visual hallucinations which, however, Iris knew to be imaginary. In December 1935, he felt for sure that she was schizophrenic.

Iris continued to live at the hospital and write,[29] even though she complained about the noise that the other patients made,[30] and she also had a busy social life with her friends and with other writers and newspaper people in Auckland or who visited. However, her behavior was very odd at times. She often fell into long silences; she was preoccupied with death; she sometimes talked for hours about other writers (maliciously) and about her own writing; if thwarted in an argument, she would squat on the ground; she waved her walking stick about in a threatening manner and talked of breaking shop windows; and she recited her own poems in a harsh voice with tears streaming down her face.

She was apolitical on the whole,[31] but she did write a protest poem when Italy invaded Abyssinia, and she did protest the government's plan to demolish a Maori village. In 1936, New Zealand had its first "Authors Week" and, initially, Iris was not asked to speak. Eventually, she was given an invitation, and she was nervous that her emotional problems might interfere with her talk. Her opening was "uncomfortable," but she recovered and presented her theme. Some found the talk "overblown," while critics

[28] Iris earned only a five pounds advance for the book and no royalties.
[29] She wrote twenty substantial articles from April 1935 to September 1937 for magazines and newspapers, as well as poems, short stories and book.
[30] They complained about the noise of her typing at all hours.
[31] When Labour formed the its first government in 1935, she said, "I don't know whether to cheer for Dad, or weep for mother!" (p. 306).

saw it as embarrassing and ridiculous. Separately, Iris was also criticized for publishing poetry in newspapers, "cheapening" the art form!

She had a ten-day leave in December 1935 at which time she went home to her parents, and she was given other leaves from time to time. She encountered some problems with her book based on James Stark's experiences in the First World War when some of the people in it objected to what he said about them. Eventually these disputes were resolved by published apologies from Iris, without any court proceedings.

In 1936, she took an extended leave to go to Dunedin to work with Downie Stewart at the Hocken Library at the university there. Iris thought she was going to help Stewart on a biography of Sir Francis Bell (New Zealand's first native-born prime minister), but this was a misunderstanding, and Iris worked on her own writing instead. The head of the psychiatric hospital where she had been living wrote a formal application for Iris to have a probationary release, this after more than three years living at the hospital.

Iris found the stay in Dunedin difficult. Her professional relationship with Stewart was tenuous and ill-defined, and the university was possessive about its collection. Her lodgings were noisy and poor for both writing and relaxing. However, she managed to travel around the region and write articles for *New Zealand Railway Magazine*. She returned to Auckland and the mental hospital after the three-month absence, but it was clear now that she could survive away from the hospital.[32] She left and found a series of shacks and vacation cottages to rent and stay in.

In 1937, Iris was on her own and had no regular job and little income. A legal struggle ensued with Derek's father about the child support which was not resolved until the middle of the year. There were also continual squabbles with fellow writers in New Zealand. Iris decided to visit England in order to advance her literary career, and so she began to write more articles for pay and to save for the journey. A visitor reported that Iris confessed to earning only about one pound a week and using candles for light at night. Her dependence on paraldehyde and other sleeping medications led to some minor overdoses which could have been accidental (especially when combined with alcohol) or as parasuicidal acts, and these were often accompanied by visual hallucinations. A close friend described Iris in late 1937 as erratic in behavior, neglecting her appearance and indifferent to her friends. Another friend tried to get Iris a government pension, but failed.

Iris decided to travel to England via China and the trans-Siberian Railway, a very difficult route especially since Japan had invaded China and a war was ongoing there. Nevertheless, she persisted in her plans and left New Zealand by boat for Australia on January 18, 1938.

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[32] The doctors who had supported her during her long stay there had moved on, and the new psychiatrists were less supportive of her.

China

The boat docked in Australia, and then Iris transferred to a new boat for the Philippines and then Hong Kong. Iris met many interesting people and wrote articles about them, and she particularly enjoyed the Chinese food on the boat to Hong Kong and her Chinese fellow-travelers. In Hong Kong, Iris was, at first, shocked by the poverty and primitive living conditions, which were made worse than usual by those fleeing the war. Iris was quite depressed there until she went to the local newspaper office and met people who took her around, including an inspector of factories. As her interest in Hong Kong grew, Iris decided to change her itinerary. Rather than taking a boat to Japan and from there to Russia to catch the train, she decided to go to Shanghai and travel through China to meet the train in China. Shanghai was in Japanese hands, and British nationals were free to use the port there. She left Hong Kong by boat for Shanghai on February 17, 1938

Iris's stay in China is quite surprising. She sailed for England from Hong Kong on August 11, 1938, having decided that she was not strong enough to take the trans-Siberian railway. In that time, Iris traveled to Han Kou, visited the war front along with other journalists, stayed in Xuzhou as the Japanese invading army bombed and then occupied the city (soon after slaughtering the residents of Nanking in the now well-documented genocide there), tried to leave by walking along the railway tracks for days at time, eventually being put on a train to Qindao on the second occasion, from where the British consul managed to evacuate her to Shanghai and thence to Hong Kong.

She witnessed the plight of refugees, helped an American doctor in Xuzhou (Dr. Nettie Grier) take care of the victims of bombing and, later, victims of rape and abuse at the hands of the Japanese, frequently observing these war crimes in progress as she walked through the town. Dead bodies were everywhere, left to rot in the streets and by the railway tracks. Her diet was minimal, and she was abused on one occasion, primarily by being hit in the face many times. She also fell off the railway tracks once and had one eye pierced by a thorn.

In Hong Kong, a physician removed the thorn and saved her eyesight, but was found to have developed *sprue*, a disease in which the small intestine loses its ability to digest and absorb fats, minerals and vitamins. The effects include loss of appetite, vomiting, dehydration and behavioral changes such as irritability and timidity and withdrawal. Without treatment, it leads to death. She stayed in a hospital nursing home for three weeks where she recovered a little.

During this period, she managed to keep writing, finished some poems, and had articles published in newspapers and magazines. News of her travels and tribulations occasionally got back to New Zealand where they received great publicity for, after all, she was one of the only New Zealanders in this war zone.

What is surprising is that Iris had lived for three years in a mental hospital, diagnosed with schizophrenia. She is described as a very odd person with whom others found difficult to interact. She had a personal and behavioral style that alienated other people. Yet, she had the mental strength to witness and endure the harsh conditions of a war zone (am incredibly brutal war zone), enlist people of all nationalities (European, Chinese and Japanese) to assist her (with food, clothing, travel, and places to stay and sleep), and turn her experiences into creative output.

It is difficult to reconcile the picture of Iris in New Zealand with the Iris of China. One thing that does stand out is that the diagnosis of schizophrenia was probably erroneous. It is extremely doubtful that a chronic schizophrenic could have been such a creative writer during her New Zealand years, and even less likely that such a person could have acted as she did (and survived) in China. Her psychiatrist (and biographers) mentioned hallucinations and depressive symptoms, but her ability to write copiously (long letters, articles and poems) suggest a bipolar disorder rather than schizophrenia. This disorder can be accompanied by periods of depression, creative and productive episodes and, in many patients, hallucinations and delusions. Indeed, the content of the hallucinations that Iris seems to have had are not typical of schizophrenic (harsh and abusive voices).[33]

England

Iris arrived in Hong Kong, arriving on July 11th. A couple of days later, she collapsed in the hotel and stayed in a nursing home for three weeks before sailing for England.[34] She sailed for England on August 11th on a Dutch cargo-passenger ship which stopped at Manila (in the Philippines) before sailing on to Singapore where it arrived on August 18th. She had difficulty sleeping, was quite ill and got into fights with the other passengers, and so she was removed from the ship in Singapore and admitted to a hospital until a larger ship with an on-board doctor was available. She sailed for England on August 26th on a passenger liner. She arrived in England on September 18th 1938

Iris committed suicide in England on August 23rd, 1939. That year in England was a difficult year. Iris had little money, as usual, and so could afford to rent only miserable places. She stayed at first in a caravan (which today in the America is called a recreational vehicle or RV) in a field in the country which was very primitive, with no water or toilet available, and very little heating possible.[35] The psychiatrist who ran the mental hospital in New Zealand where Iris lived for three years visited her and persuaded a charity to give Iris some warm winter clothes. When eventually she found a place in London, after staying for brief periods with friends and acquaintances, it was a depressing attic in a boarding house.

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[33] She heard voices, but at one point the voice was that of Harry Sweetman, the lost lover. She also had vivid dreams and visual hallucinations.

[34] She was obviously too sick and weak to take the trans-Siberian railway.

[35] Even today, in 2010, England can be a cold and damp place. In the 1938, the conditions when living in England were much worse.

Her books were not selling well, and so her income was quite small. She continued to write and publish articles and poems in newspapers and magazines, which brought in a little income, but she was unable to find work as journalist in England. She began a project with Heron Carvic to adapt one of her novels into a play, but disagreements over the contract were still being fought over, quite nastily, at the time of her death, even over how to split the advance of one hundred pounds and despite the fact that Iris was working on the play during much of the year. Her English publishers, however, did give her a contract promising to publish her next three books, and her book on China did appear late in 1939.

Here health continued to be quite poor, with frequent bouts of dysentery,[36] and problems with pain in her knee. A surgeon in England suggested fusing the bones to make the knee completely stiff, but Iris did not pursue this. She neither liked the idea, nor could she afford the operation. On December 27th, 1938, she was admitted to the Middlesex Hospital, but she left prematurely, only to be admitted a few weeks later to the Hospital for Tropical Diseases in late March or early April. She was discharged on April 14th, somewhat better, but not cured. Her anemia was much better, and opium and chalk had alleviated the dysentery somewhat.

Derek's foster parents in New Zealand had fallen on hard times too, and Derek's biological father continued to fail to pay the child support on time. Iris intended to live with Derek when she returned to New Zealand but, when Derek was asked with whom he wanted to live, he chose his foster parents. This was distressing news for Iris.

Iris longed to visit China on her way back to New Zealand, but her lack of money and poor health made this impossible, another aspect of her life that depressed her. If she had received some money from the proposed play, she would probably have tried to reach China, but the contract negotiations were still in progress at the time of her death.

By May 16th, Iris was living in a small flat in London, and she made a sexual advance to a friend who was concerned about her state and who was helping her. He rejected the advance,[37] and Iris took a sleeping draught and cut her wrists. Her biographers feel that the suicidal act was a gesture, but Iris's friend described a "huge gash."

The visit to England had been a failure. Iris had not increased her stature as a poet or writer, she had earned only enough to survive, and she had now contracted a serious illness. Her desire to visit China again was seen by her biographers as wanting to be where she had found human companionship despite witnessing human suffering. Those in the closed literary circles of New Zealand seemed to resent her, and many Europeans found her to be eccentric and difficult to deal with. Even in China, other Europeans

[36] When living in her caravan, Iris had to go to the toilet in the fields, avoiding the thistles and brambles. Eventually a farm-hand constructed a plank of wood over a bucket for her.
[37] He said that, "physically she repelled me" (p. 714).

found her to be a nuisance at best. But the Chinese seemed to accept her despite the difficulties with, and sometimes lack of, verbal communication. They saw Iris as a foreign friend who wanted to help them. There, "she had been treated not as a literary freak or a hospital case, but as a human being" (p. 749).

There were other stressors. The possibility of a European war was also omnipresent. (Many New Zealanders in England set sail for home at this time.) Back in New Zealand, her mother was ageing and could afford a cataract operation on only one eye, but her mother had Iris's bedroom repainted in anticipation of Iris's return. All who visited Iris during these last months noted her deteriorating health and her bouts of depression, and the one friend who had tried to help (the man to whom she had made advances) left for the United States on June 30th. Her friends also noted that she was using amphetamines which, at the time, was considered a miracle drug to "clear the head" and reduce anxiety.

Still, her new book (*Dragon Rampart*) about her travels in China received good reviews, and Iris continued to be involved in a China Campaign Committee in London, as a result of which Sylvia Pankhurst befriended Iris and tried to help her, traveling with Iris, inviting her to stay with her and referring Iris to a good doctor. But these interventions did not help. Iris withdrew still further in the days before her death.

On Tuesday, August 22nd, Iris learned that the PEN conference in Sweden, to which she was planning to go, had been cancelled. She also learned that, rather than a one hundred pound advance for her play, she would receive only two-thirds of that less her agent's fee. The opening of the play was delayed until December 1940, and so she would receive no more money until after that date. On that night, Iris told Carvic that she was going to commit suicide, but he might have dismissed that threat as simply anger over the negotiations.[38] On Wednesday, August 24th, Iris did not answer her door and, when the door was forced open, she was found dead.

The coroner ruled the death as suicide while of unsound mind. There was a smell of gas in the room, but Iris had also taken a large quantity of Benzedrine, leading to acute pulmonary edema.

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[38] Her biographers doubt that this happened.

ROBERT LA FOLLETT

David Lester

Robert La Follette, known as *Young Bob*, was born in Wisconsin to Robert Marion La Follette, a lawyer and United States congressman, and his wife Belle on February 6th, 1895, the second of four children, but the first son. La Follette Senior became in 1884 the youngest member of the House, later becoming Governor of the Wisconsin and then a Republican Senator in Washington, DC. Both parents were lawyers and held great expectations for their children.

La Follette Junior had a mostly uneventful first 18 years, despite moves to Madison and then Washington, DC. At age eight, he had the first of many illnesses that plagued him throughout his life, an illness which was never diagnosed but which may have been rheumatic fever. He was confined to bed for several months. La Follette was only an average student, but his parents expected him to attend university, and he started at the University of Wisconsin in 1913. He ran for and became president of the freshman class, but he found classes boring. At the end of his freshman year, he was placed on probation for his poor grades. His parents actively involved themselves with La Follette and his instructors for they saw education as critical for La Follette's political career that they intended for him. However, in his third year, after improving his grades, La Follette fell ill with a viral infection and had to withdraw (in January 1916). La Follette never finished college.

Life Until his Father's Death

After his health recovered, La Follette went to Washington to work in his father's Senate office. Immediately, his father's opposition to America's involvement in the First World War led to political crises, and then La Follette fell ill with streptococcal pneumonia in 1918 and was confined to bed again. He was declared unfit for military service, while his younger brother, Phil, went off to war. In these early years, helping his father, La Follette was clearly more sensitive to criticism and more concerned about the political consequences of actions than was his father, and La Follette developed a sense of failure and inadequacy. As he recovered from his illness, he wondered whether life was worth living.

In 1919, La Follette took the job as his father's chief assistant, a job he intended to hold only until he decided upon a career. However, this determined his career. La Follette enjoyed the job, especially the networking and the political campaigning for his father. Six years later, his father died after an unsuccessful run for the Presidency[39], and in 1925, La Follette ran for his father's office and became the youngest United States senator, a position he had never wanted. Phil wanted a political career[40], but the parents had set their goals on the older son following in his father's footsteps. La Follette lacked

[39] Coolidge won the 1924 election.
[40] He did become the Governor of Wisconsin.

the independence of mind and self-confidence to break away from his father, and the father exploited this.

His Years in the Senate

La Follette's years in the Senate, from 1926 to 1946 were eventful politically, but not very eventful psychodynamically. What characterizes these years is that La Follette avoided joining the major parties and became a member of the Progressive Party, of which there were only a handful of Senators.[41] He championed many causes that today would be seen as liberal, fighting for legislation that would benefit the workers in the country (in particular, the rights of labor unions), both urban and rural, but he was very rarely successful. He worked extremely hard as a senator, and he came to enjoy the work despite his failures to get his legislation passed. He worked diligently during the Depression to get government action, and always wanted more than was actually accomplished. On the other hand, while his father had been very unpopular with his colleagues, La Follette became very popular and widely respected in the Senate. Toward the end of his years there, even President Roosevelt consulted with him on many occasions and tried to win his support for his legislative plans.

He suffered from many ailments during his Senate years, including phlebitis and streptococcal infections. He had many treatments and exploratory operations and biopsies, and his poor health led him to postpone marriage. Eventually he did marry his secretary, Rachel Young, in 1930 whom he had dated since 1917. Rachel realized how close the family was when Phil and his wife accompanied them on their honeymoon. Rachel disliked politics, unlike the other members of the family, and never managed to penetrate the family circle. The marriage seems to have been stable, although there were rumors of serious problems in 1944. Rachel hated going back to Wisconsin and campaigning there, while political leaders in Wisconsin kept urging La Follette to go back there more often.

His mother, who had lived with her son in Washington, died in 1931, and she more than his father had understood young Bob and been his main source of counsel and encouragement. Three months later, Rachel gave birth to a girl who died after five hours. They later had two sons, Joseph and Bronson.

The years during the Second World War were difficult for La Follette. At the age of 51, he was tired, physically and emotionally. He opposed America's involvement in the war until Pearl Harbor, after which he voted for war. His brother Phil enlisted and left La Follette to lead the Progressive Party in Wisconsin, a task which La Follette hated. Their relationship deteriorated, and this contributed to La Follette's depressed state. La Follette's reluctance to leave Washington and visit Wisconsin contributed to his defeat in 1946. He did visit the state in 1943, whereupon he came down with bronchopneumonia

[41] Officially, he was accepted by the Republican caucus.

and was hospitalized for six weeks. More health problem followed, and family members could see that La Follette was in deep depression.[42]

In 1945, La Follette considered retiring, but he decided to run again (as a Republican) and was defeated in the primary by a relative unknown, Joseph McCarthy. He was disappointed, feeling that he had let his father down, but he also felt relief.

1947-1953

Private life turned out to be worse than public life, and La Follette killed himself on February 24th, 1953 at the age of 58.

In 1947, he began working as a business consultant, opening an office in Washington. He worked hard, but it was not clear that he enjoyed the work, and friends could see that he missed the Senate.[43] By 1952, he and Rachel had a net worth of $160,000, and so they were able to live comfortably. Surprisingly, he became concerned, almost to the point of obsession, about the Communist menace and wrote an article for *Collier's* on the problem.

His health problems continued, with hospitalized treatment for a heart problem, diverticulitis, bursitis, mild diabetes, and chronic neck and shoulder pains. He also began to have anxiety attacks and seemed more depressed than usual. His birthday was on February 6th. On February 24th, he left the office at 11 am and called Rachel at noon, asking her to come home. When Rachel arrived at 12.30, she found him dead in the bathroom from a bullet from a pistol lodged in his brain.

Comment

The biography of La Follette focuses mainly on his political career. However, we can easily discern that his was under the control of his father and did not choose a political career. Rather he failed to choose an alternative career. Furthermore, in his career, although he had some successes, he failed in most of his aspirations. His belonging to a "third" party did not help him achieve his political goals.

His manner of suicide is interesting. He shot himself and arranged for his wife to discover him. This suggests anger toward his wife and that he chose to die in this manner to punish her. The biography mentions tension in the La Follette household, but a more thorough investigation of this would have been useful.

Finally, what was the source of his anxiety in the last few months. Although La Follette had been anti-Communist, his was not supportive of the tactics used by Senator Joe McCarthy, and perhaps he was anxious about being called to testify before

[42] They also felt that many of the health problems were psychosomatic in response to work and personal stress.
[43] He turned down offers of positions from President Truman.

McCarthy's committee about what he knew of Communist infiltration into the Senate staff. Was La Follette becoming convinced of his poor health and imminent death from natural causes? Or was he anxious at the decision that he had made to kill himself? We can only speculate.

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JACK LONDON

David Lester

The survivors (and the biographers too) of many suicides often claim that the deceased did not kill himself or herself. Ernest Hemingway's wife claimed that his death was accidental, and many people have speculated that Marilyn Monroe was murdered.
In the case of Jack London the evidence for suicide is much less clear. He died after an overdose of morphine, but whether the self-administered overdose was an intentional act of suicide is disputed. The biographer from whose work the information in this chapter was obtained (Sinclair, 1977) does not believe that Jack's death was suicide.

His Early Life

Jack's mother was Flora Wellman, a small woman, partially bald and short-sighted as a result of having had typhoid. When she was sixteen, she ran away from her family in Ohio to California where she survived on the charity of friends and by giving music lessons. When she was thirty, she met William Chaney, in his fifties, a vagabond and astrologer originally from Maine, who had at various times worked as a sailor, editor, politician and attorney. They lived together in a boarding house in San Francisco and gave lectures on astrology and spiritualism

When Flora became pregnant, she refused to have an abortion despite Chaney's insistence. She made two suicide attempts (using an overdose of opium and a revolver), both of which were reported in the local newspapers. Chaney wanted neither Flora not the responsibility of fatherhood, so he fled to Oregon. Flora continued to give music lessons, séances and lectures on spiritualism and gave birth to John Chaney (Jack) on January 12, 1876.

Eight months after his birth, Flora married John London, a widower in poor health with five children, two of whom, Eliza and Ida, were still living with him. After Jack and Eliza nearly died from diphtheria in San Francisco, John moved the family to West Oakland where he ran a grocery store and a small farm.

As a mother, Flora was usually too busy to bother much with her son. She continued to give lessons and lectures and to try new schemes to get rich. Jack was often left alone, and he received little physical affection or warmth from his mother. Over the years, Flora became more bitter and worn down by the family's lack of success. She began to complain of fictitious heart trouble, especially when she was thwarted, and her moods of anger and depression pervaded the household.

Eliza was six years older than Jack and took care of him (and her younger sister) in his early years. She grew to adore him and later in life left her husband to take care of Jack. Jack also had a black wet-nurse, Virginia Prentiss, who moved with the family to be near to Jack. So Jack, though neglected by his mother, was not unloved.

However, Jack's biographer (Sinclair) sees Jack as profoundly affected by the lack of affection from his mother. Sinclair argued that Jack confused his hunger for his mother's love with hunger for food. In particular he became hungry for meat, even once stealing a schoolmate's lunch. Later in life, Jack would crave and consume underdone and even uncooked meat and fish, a practice which exacerbated his physical illnesses and caused additional infections.

Since Flora resented the family's poverty, she valued education as a way to succeed, and so she taught Jack to read. Jack found school difficult, partly because the other kids teased him about his spooky mother. The family's financial problems also caused Jack to switch schools a good deal. The grocery store failed, and the family moved to a farm in Alameda, then to a larger one on the coast of San Mateo County, and finally to a ranch in the Livermore Valley. As Jack had few friends in these new communities, he withdrew more and more into the world of fiction – dime store novels and romantic history.

On two occasions, when he was five and seven, Jack drank alcohol and each time suffered from nightmares. Jack continued to suffer from nightmares throughout his life, especially toward the end, and Sinclair dates the earliest appearance of them from these intoxications.

When she was sixteen, Eliza married an elderly widower with children of his own, and the ranch soon failed without her to manage it. Defeated, the family returned to Oakland where Flora ran a boarding house and John worked as a night watchman and special constable on the docks.

At school Jack was sometimes aggressive and rebellious, but he worked hard (at his newspaper route, on an ice wagon and at a bowling alley), and he took out two books a week from the library. The family was poor, and Jack could not attend graduation because he had no suit to wear. At thirteen, the financial failure of his parents' boarding house forced him to leave school to go to work at a cannery for fourteen hours a day. The family moved to a ramshackle house by the estuary.

His other step-sister, Ida, soon left to get married, but left her child with Flora to care for. Flora loved and cared for this grandchild as she never had for Jack. Resenting this, Jack abandoned the job and bought a little boat form his saving and spent nearly all his time sailing on the San Francisco Bay. At age fifteen, he joined the gangs in the area, learning to fight and to survive by theft. After he was almost killed by the alcohol and the fighting, Jack joined the Fish Patrol to catch the Oyster bed pirates with whom he had earlier been working.

Interestingly, like many of the other writers I have written about, Jack in later years distorted the truth about his early years. His childhood was painted as more traumatic than it was and his delinquent adventures as more successful.

Soon he was back again as a vagrant and thief, mugging victims and riding the rails. But he realized that he had to escape from this life, and when he was seventeen he signed on as a seaman on a sealing ship. At this time in his life, Jack was physically fit and attractive, and he had a sense that there had to be a better way for him, one which would bring success.[44]

The Move To Adulthood

He enjoyed his life on ship and, when he returned to San Francisco, he sent in a piece based on his experiences for a competition in the San Francisco *Morning Call* which won him $25. Flora now saw her son as the means to her rise in the social scale. If he were a successful writer, maybe her days of poverty would end?

In 1893 Jack went back to work in a jute mill for $1 a day. This depressed him, and so he went traveling across the country in 1894 with a group of militant men who were out-of-work. He abandoned the trek before it reached Washington, DC, and was arrested for vagrancy in Buffalo. The experience in jail had a profound effect on Jack. Jack was no innocent. He had been a delinquent, a tramp and a sailor, but the squalor and brutality of life in jail shocked him. As soon as he was released, Jack returned to Oakland.

This experience had several effects on Jack. First, it helped foster his socialist beliefs that he later lectured on and which shaped some of his fiction. Second, it made him determined to end his aimless drifting. He went back at the age of nineteen to high school, studying nineteen hours a day to try to graduate in two years.

Jail may also have introduced him to homosexuality. Jack's biographer is reticent on this point. He notes that Jack certainly witnessed homosexual acts but asserts that Jack never slept voluntarily with men, leading to the implication that he had involuntary homosexual relations. Earlier biographers often speculated that Jack was a latent homosexual, but what is noteworthy is Jack's excessive masculine life style. Like Ernest Hemingway later, it is as if Jack had to demonstrate his "masculinity" through his life style. Furthermore, he distorted the accounts of his life, especially in his autobiographical novels, to exaggerate his exploits.

At high school, he was with students three years younger than he was, and he was shy and awkward amongst them. He fled from their company to study. However, he made a couple of friends and wrote stories for the school newspaper. He fell in love with the sister of one of these friends and joined the Socialist Labor Party (in 1896) which provided him with a circle of friends.

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[44] Jack suffered a severe attack of shingles on the ship. In addition, by age seventeen his teeth were rotten (he chewed tobacco to ease the pain), and his step-sister Eliza bought him a toothbrush and paid for dental work.

Jack believed in socialist ideas, but eventually formed his own political philosophy which deviated considerably from the official one. However, for the rest of his life, he continued to support the Socialists, and they in turn used him in their cause no matter how much his ideas and life-style deviated from their ideals. Sinclair notes that Jack was most fervently a socialist when he was depressed and suffering from his physical illnesses.

Jack left high school after a year and crammed for the university entrance examination. After three months of exhausting study, he took the exams in August 1896, at the age of twenty, and was accepted at Berkeley as a special student. But college life disappointed him, and he dropped out after his second semester. Four years at college was too long for a working-class boy who felt that his time was limited. In addition, his family could not support him financially.

At that time he finally found out that he was illegitimate. Jack wrote to his father, but Chaney denied that he was Jack's father. For Jack there remained only three people who had loved him and to whom he would remain loyal: his step-father John London, his step-sister Eliza, and his wet-nurse.

Jack decided to become a writer. (He would have preferred to be a composer, but he had no talent in that area.) He began to write, fifteen hours a day, writing any and all kinds of things – essays, poems, and stories. He found few publishers. In the Spring of 1897, he gave up and took a job in a laundry for $30 a month plus board. But in July Eliza staked him and her husband to travel up to the newly-discovered Klondike gold strike in Canada. Jack staked some claims, but never struck gold. He soon realized that this was no better a way of making money than working in a laundry. So he stopped digging for gold and stayed in the bars listening to the tales that were told. He came back home in August 1898 with $4.50 worth of gold dust, broken in health and penniless.[45]

His step-father had died while he was away, and his mother had taken in her grandchild permanently. Jack began to write again. Between august 1898 and May 1900, he had 15 pieces accepted and 88 pieces rejected a total of over 400 times. But he persevered. He even wrote jokes for the newspapers for 50 cents and a campaign song for the local Republicans for $10. Then *Overland Monthly* bought eight Alaskan stories, *Black Cat* paid him $40 for a science fiction story, and *Atlantic Monthly* paid him $120 for one story. He had enough money to get his bicycle out of the pawn-shop and enough confidence to turn down a job as a mailman.

In 1900 Houghton Mifflin offered to publish his Alaskan stories as a book, *The Son of the Wolf*. With his fame, he now got all of his rejected work accepted. Hearst newspapers offered to pay him for articles, and he accepted. This began the split in his values. Though he continued to support socialist ideas and to give speeches on them, his desire for wealth and fame led him to accept assignments from groups whose values were

[45] In the Klondike, Jack suffered from scurvy which caused swollen joints and softened gums. The wild game he ate also made him sick.

opposed to those of the socialists, and he adopted a life style antithetical to socialism, ending up as a wealthy rancher with racist beliefs.

At this point, Jack began to formalize the distortions about his background. For his publisher he wrote that John London was his father and that his descendants were in America before the revolution. Yet he also built up the myth of himself as a self-made man who had lived through the struggles that he wrote about, which of course he had, though not necessarily with the same actions as his heroic characters or with the same outcomes.

At one of the socialist meetings, Jack met Anna Strunsky with whom he remained in love all his life. She was seventeen, from an intellectual Russian-Jewish family. Jack seemed to make a distinction between the whores of the waterfront and "good girls" whom you dated and married. Jack felt he could not marry Anna because he did not have enough income to support her. An affair was also out of the question in those times. She went off to Stanford, and Jack quickly married the girl friend of a high school friend who had died, Bess Maddern. It was a companionate marriage, yet they came to feel affection for each other during the first few years of the marriage. Jack called Bess "mother-girl", and she called him "daddy-boy", and soon Bess was relegated to the role of the mother of his two children (Joan and Becky) and housekeeper. Indeed, just before the marriage, Jack met the woman who fitted him better and who became his second wife, Charmian Kittredge.

Now earning good money, Jack rented a villa for his mother and her grandchild, and Jack and Bess moved in with them. Jack's first book was well received, and he was compared with Rudyard Kipling and Bret Harte. *McClure*'s put on him a retainer of $125 a month.

As his success grew, Jack moved away from his mother and rented more expensive houses. His socialist friends were replaced by smart bohemians from San Francisco, called The Crowd, among whom was George Sterling. Sterling can be counted as the third great love of Jack's life (along with Anna and Charmian), and the attraction between the Wolf (Jack) and the Greek (George), as they called each other, was probably based upon unconscious homosexual desires. Sterling introduced Jack into the world of style and taste, while Jack introduced George to the adventures of the waterfront and its low life.

Success

As Jack's successes multiplied, he began to disassociate himself from the Crowd. Jack now began to be influenced by social Darwinism, thinking that the fittest race (the Caucasians) had to win the fight for domination and that imperialism had to run its course before all men could have equal opportunities. Despite his heresies, the Social Democratic Party chose him to run for mayor of Oakland several times, though he always lost easily, and he still wrote and lectured for the socialists.

Jack was generous and a spendthrift after his years of poverty. He paid for two households (his own and his mother's), and he was permanently in debt. His editor at Macmillan urged him to stop his daily writing of all sorts of pieces and to concentrate on writing less but better. But Jack needed the money from his writing to stay financially afloat. In 1902, he needed cash so urgently that he relinquished royalties and sold *The Call of the Wild* to Macmillan for $2000 outright. Had he not done so, that one book would have eased his financial worries for the rest of his life. Yet this decision characterized Jack's poor judgment throughout his life where business was concerned. He made bad business decisions one after the other, so that he was never out of debt.

Now that he had fame, Jack was not satisfied. In his late twenties he behaved like a man who has reached his mid-life crisis. In his love life, he first pursued Anna Strunsky, suggesting that they work on a book together (they did) and eventually declaring his love for her in 1902. An offer to report on the Boer War in South Africa enabled Jack to escape from the dilemma and, while he was in England (where he remained rather than going on to South Africa), Anna ended the affair.

Later he flirted with Charmian Kittredge, five years older than Jack (who was twenty seven) but much more his type of playmate. This time Jack separated from Bess (and had his mother move into an apartment with him to take care of him). Bess believed that Anna was the other woman. The scandal helped the sales of Jack's book written with Anna, but the newspapers began to criticize Jack for the first time. Jack felt guilty and, when his daughter Joan was ill with typhoid, he stayed with her and almost reconciled with Bess. He escaped from this situation by going to Korea to report on the Russian-Japanese war. After being expelled from Korea by the Japanese, he returned and persuaded Bess to divorce him for desertion, building her a house in Piedmont. He continued to feel lost and depressed, and he said that he would have killed himself had it not been for his dependents and his socialist ideals.

Although his hunger for Charmian was waning, his physical health was worsening. He was quite lame from leg injuries, and he developed a tumor on his rectum. He feared physical and mental collapse. He had an affair with a woman from the Crowd, but after he had an operation for the tumor, which turned out to be piles, Charmian stayed with him all the time, reassuring his fears of cancer and venereal disease. His love for her revived.

He married Chamiam in November 1905, and she encouraged him in his new plans to buy land and farm successfully as his mother and step-father had tried. Of course, Jack continued to make bad business decisions, buying too much land (incurring too much debt) and trying to improve the land too quickly. The farms became the dominant concern of his life, and he withdrew from political activity.

Although he continued to write (he had to in order to pay his debts), his work was increasingly criticized. He was accused of plagiarism, though he defended himself

successfully. He was attacked for being a nature-faker (getting his biological facts wrong) and of incorrectly endowing animals with the ability to reason. Sales of his books fell, and some libraries banned his works. He continued to cultivate the public image of himself. The earthquake and fire in San Francisco in April 1906 destroyed the records of his true background, enabling him to develop this new persona.

Jack next embarked upon building a boat with which to sail around the world. The boat cost much more than a ready-made boat (the final cost was $30,000 instead of the estimated $7,000) and was much less sea-worthy. The trip was intended to reinforce the myth of his physical prowess and eternal youth. Instead it almost destroyed him. It was planned to take seven years (though how could he be a good farmer and yet be away for seven years is not clear), but he abandoned the trip after two years. When he reached Tahiti, he returned to California to settle debts, convince people that he had not died at sea, and prevent Bess from remarrying. (Jack feared Bess's attempts to break free of his influence.)

After he resumed his cruise, he had problems with his teeth, a return of piles, an ulcer in his rectum and, once they reached the Solomon Islands, he and Charmian fell ill with malaria and yellow fever. He next developed what seemed to be leprosy of the hands but which may have been pellagra or psoriasis exacerbated by his heavy drinking. Jack became emotionally unstable, and his temper at times grew uncontrollable.

The trip was abandoned, and Jack stayed in Australia to recover. He was hospitalized, after which he remained as an outpatient for five months. He had an operation on his rectum and took quinine for the malaria, and the psoriasis disappeared during the voyage back to California.

While in Australia, the doctors used arsenic to ameliorate Jack's yaws. Jack already had undergone a mercury-cure for gonorrhea (which Bess cited in his first divorce petition), and he now regularly underwent treatments with arsenic. These two chemicals, although accepted treatments at the time, caused tremendous internal damage, and Jack soon suffered from rectal, kidney and nervous disorders as a result of the treatments. He drank heavily and took morphine to kill the pain from his illnesses and treatments. Increasingly too, Jack began to read medical journals and to treat his illnesses himself. (Nonetheless, he continued to abuse his diet, both with drugs and by eating raw meat and fish.)

Decline And Death

Back on the ranch in July 1909, Jack pensioned off the friend who had been mismanaging it, engaged a competent literary agent, and settled down to write more competently in order to get out of debt. He tried to make a success of the ranch, but suffered from his diseases which were compounded by additional injuries, incurred while breaking in horses for example.

Jack became a hypochondriac about his health, though of course his body was truly riddled with disease. His skin, teeth, kidneys and bladder were diseased, but he managed to worry in addition about whether he had tuberculosis and a tumor on the brain. Since he resumed his arsenic treatments, he soon also developed gout and rheumatism. Eye-strain led him to wear a green eye shade. In the next few years, he also suffered from severe colds, sties on his eyes, pyorrhea and an inflamed appendix.

He also began to show symptoms of manic-depressive disease, alternating between elation and melancholy, and he feared that he would go mad and die from syphilis as had Maupassant and Nietsche.

Jack relied on Charmian to take care of him. When she was sick (she had frequent bouts of malaria), he became depressed. When Charmian became pregnant, Jack invited Eliza, his step-sister, to manage the ranch, and she left her elderly husband to do so. Charmian, however, gave birth to a daughter who died within a few days. Jack responded by going out oat and getting drunk and then fleeing to Reno to report on a boxing fight there. Jack feared that his diseases had led to the death of the child, and he desperately wanted a son and heir. He continued to drink heavily in 1911 and 1912, and his insomnia and nightmares worsened. Yet he tried to hide how sick he was from Charmian and slept apart from her.

In 1913, his doctors warned Jack that he should stop drinking, give up raw fish and meat, and start exercising. Jack refused. But he began to switch more and more from alcohol to morphine and heroin as analgesics. He also had most of his upper teeth removed to halt the pyorrhea.

He was still fighting with Bess. Bess refused to let the two children visit him at the ranch because Charmian was a bad influence on them. In retaliation Jack cut Bess and his daughter out of his will. His mother took Bess's side, and so she too was excluded.

In 1912 Charmian had a miscarriage, and it looked as if they would have no children. He withdrew from Charmian and began efforts to persuade his twelve year-old daughter, Joan, to leave her mother and come and live with him. She eventually refused, leading Jack to tell her in 1913 that he would never had anything to do with her again.

Jack then made another disastrous business decision. He bought 500 neighboring acres for $30,000 and decided to build a $70,000 house for his family. This made writing for money a necessity, and Jack pursued his task with a rigorous routine. He wrote a thousand words every morning, answered his correspondence, and then had lunch. The afternoon was spent with guests and boxing or swimming and the evenings with games. At night he read magazines and made notes, sleeping for no more than five hours.

Despite the need for money, Jack continued to make disastrous decisions. He switched publishers for a while from Macmillan to Century, and then begged Macmillan

to take him back. He got a contract from the *Sunday Magazine* for twelve stories at $1,000 each and then sent them old rejected stories. But in 1912, *Cosmopolitan* offered Jack $2,000 a month for the rights to serialize his stories, and this eased the pressure on him.

In 1913, the house he had built burned down, probably a result of arson, perhaps by a disgruntled workman who had been fired, by Eliza's deserted husband or by an angry socialist. Jack now owed $100,000.

On the ranch he pursued his goal to breed livestock, experimenting with pigs, cattle and horses, eventually preferring to work on the land than write. But he lost $10,000 on a land deal in Mexico, and more money on a grape-juice company whose stockholders eventually sued him. Trying to make money from the new film industry, he ran into copyright problems.

He went to Mexico to cover the Revolution and the American expedition to Vera Cruz, but he caught amoebic dysentery and pleurisy. His articles on the events in Mexico revealed his growing racism which led former friends and supporters to criticize his work. He advocated a proletarian revolution against the landowners, yet he remained one himself. He said he would give up capitalism when socialism took over, but until then, he was a landowner. As a result, people on both sides of the political spectrum distrusted him and saw him as a hypocrite.

After his withdrawal from socialist politics, he distorted the circumstances so as to portray himself as one who was rejected and pushed out by the others. Rather, he had chosen to live as a wealthy man and had cut off his contacts with the working classes.

By 1915, Jack was tiring of writing, and the magazines no longer were interested in his material now that the Great War in progress. As before, when he set sail around the world, Jack fled. He spent twelve of the next eighteen months in Hawaii with Charmian and, as he enjoyed himself, his fortunes improved. His book sales were good, and he sold motion picture rights to his work, enabling him to reduce his debt. He lifted the mortgages on six properties he owned and paid up his life insurance. Eliza ran the ranch efficiently.

Jack's drug use worsened, however. He was now taking injections of atropine and belladonna mixed with opium and morphine, the fatal "uppers and downers" of modern drug abuse. His behavior was also more erratic. He would lash out at friends who offended him and occasionally showed paranoia. However, he began to read Freud and Jung and gained some insight into his problems. He became aware of his need for a mother figure to replace the real mother who had failed him, and he made peace with his daughter Joan.

Nakata, his close servant for over seven years, now left him to set up as a dentist. As his health continued to deteriorate, Jack became more dependent upon Charmian. Since he was impotent, he began to be jealous of her for the first time.

He developed nephritis, which threatened him with uremia, and the pyorrhea was still uncured and poisoning his body. Yet he continued to eat raw fish and meat and to refuse vegetables. Charmian wrote after his death that his behavior seemed to indicate an unconscious desire to die. Back home in California, he was planning to expand the ranch and was fighting neighbors in court over his use of the water supply of the valley. But he was rapidly deteriorating physically and mentally. His anger, irritation and paranoia grew. When the wild duck season opened, he lived on two blood-red ducks a day. On November 8th he had another kidney attack. On the 10th he had food poisoning which led to dysentery.

Suicide Or Accident?

On November 21st he woke up vomiting, but before supper he discussed plans for the ranch with Eliza. After a supper of underdone wild duck and one cocktail he became angry and depressed. He went off to work in his room looking to Charmian for sympathy, but she reminded him that he imposed the schedule on himself. His last words to her were “Thank God, you’re not afraid of anything.”

Shortly before dawn, Jack injected himself with an overdose, no more than thirteen grains of morphine sulfate mixed with atropine sulfate. He fell into a deep coma and was discovered at seven in the morning. A local doctor said that he found two empty phials of drugs on the floor and a note containing calculation for a lethal dose of morphine.

The doctors tried to pump Jack’s stomach and revive him. Charmian felt that he resisted these efforts. He seemed to have no desire to live, and he died in the evening. The doctors signed a death certificate saying that the cause of death was uremic poisoning.

Sinclair argued that the death was natural/accidental. He claims that the calculations could have been about royalties. Only one doctor noticed the empty phials, and he did not voice his suspicions until twenty-one years had passed. Jack had just written to his daughter Joan to arrange a meeting, was planning trips for the following year, discussing the future direction of the ranch, and plotting stories. Jack might have been light-headed from lack of sleep or crazed from too much pain. He left no will, made no attempt to wind up his affairs, and ignored the Colt 44 beside his bed.

On the other hand, Jack supported the right to suicide. He felt that once the body betrayed its owner, it should be scattered as dust. And Sinclair notes as an aside that Jack had once tried to drown himself when he was young and drunk.

Discussion

The significant events in Jack's early life were the lack of affection from his mother (which appeared to have led to a search for maternal substitutes throughout his life) and the family's poverty and mobility. However, these events do not appear to be very traumatic and have significance only in the light of Jack's later life.

Jack adopted his mother's desire for success in life. Jack wanted to succeed, and it is this that seems to have motivated him to escape from a potential life as a criminal. His love of reading adventure fiction led him to try his hand as an author. He lacked the patience to acquire the necessary skills though education, but he capitalized on his rich experiences to provide exciting material for his fiction.

Jack's behavior seems driven in several respects. In his writing, quantity and monetary reward seems to have guided him rather than quality. In a similar manner, his attempts to farm were shaped by a desire to acquire more and more land rapidly and to develop it too quickly. Jack was an alcohol abuser (and later a drug abuser) and would typically go on drinking sprees for days at a time. He ate raw meat and fish ravenously.

It is easy to characterize these behaviors as immature but, truly, Jack seems not to have developed the patience or persistence that would have enabled him to plan and implement rational strategies. Jack was impulsive in many ways. His decisions to begin one activity and then to abandon it (such as the trek across America) and his precipitous marriage illustrate this. Yet in his writing, he was able to discipline himself.

The illnesses that Jack suffered from in his life are legion. From diphtheria s a child to the malaria in his thirties, Jack suffered from all kinds of diseases brought on by accident (such as the malaria and yellow fever), by his life style (such as poisoning from eating raw meat or the scurvy in the Klondike from his poor diet), and by the medical treatments of the time (mercury and arsenic poisoning). His hypochondria and imagined diseases make sense given the poor state of his body, but they added to his anxieties.

Jack seems to have shown his, possibly unconscious, self-destructive tendencies by the choice of his life style, risking death in many of his adventures, and by his preferred diet of raw meat despite his doctors' advice against it. Jack was also a serious drug abuser, first of alcohol and then of morphine, and this too can be seen as a manifestation of his self-destructive tendencies.

His biographer mentions that Jack attempted suicide at least once as a young man but gives no details of the event, nor whether it was an isolated incident. It is noteworthy that Jack's mother made two suicide attempts while she was pregnant, for this suggests that suicide as a solution to life's problems may have been part of the script of this family.

Jack seems to have suffered from depression for much of his life as evidenced by his insomnia and his frequent bouts of melancholy. Later in life, the affective disorder began to resemble manic-depressive disorder more, with periods of elation and depression. Toward the end of his life, Jack also showed irritability, an explosive temper, and suspiciousness bordering on paranoia. However, as far as we can tell from the biography, there were few symptoms of psychiatric disturbance in Jack's childhood save for frequent nightmares.

Despite his biographer's opinion that Jack's death was accidental, it does look suicidal. Jack was probably suffering from a bipolar affective disorder, was heavily addicted to drugs, and was facing imminent death. The image of himself that he had created was of an athletic and handsome man, attractive to women, and an adventurer. By the age of forty, Jack was far from this ideal. In his fortieth year he resembled Ernest Hemingway in his early sixties. Like Hemingway, Jack had little to live for except increasing pain and suffering and further deviation from the image he desired for himself. His suicide merely hastened his death by a few days or weeks but at least gave him control over his fate.

Reference

Sinclair, A. (1977). *Jack*. New York: Harper & Row.