THE POST-WAR SHORT STORY IN THE ATLANTIC MONTHLY, 1919 AND 1946

AN ANALYSIS OF SUBJECT, STYLE, AND PHILOSOPHY

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THE POST-WAR SHORT STORY IN THE ATLANTIC MONTHLY, 1919 and 1946

An analysis of Subject, Style, and Philosophy

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A THESIS

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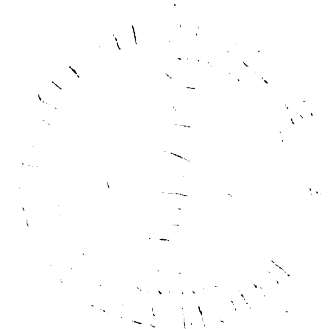

THESIS

Introduction

"There has been a kind of coming-of-age of the American short story."[1] It is this coming-of-age which I have found most pronounced in every phase, choice of subject, style of writing, and philosophic implications, in the short stories from the Atlantic Monthly of 1946 when compared with those from the Atlantic of 1919.

I have chosen to study these two specific years, 1919 and 1946, because each shows the immediate effects of the World Wars on short story writing. Although "it is a literary truism that there must be a period of distillation before the real impact of some tremendous event, either historical or personal, can emerge in writing,"[2] and therefore these stories may not represent the best of the war short stories, still they are important as first impressions and as such they may be compared. By confining my study to a single magazine, one which has been in continuous publication since 1857 and whose editorial policies have changed little, I believe that the comparisons may be valid. Each issue of the Atlantic since the first has contained two, usually three short stories. The Atlantic has encouraged new writers and has been among the first to publish unknowns who are now well established in the

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field. Since 1946, an Atlantic First, the first published short story of a new writer, has appeared in nearly every issue. Many of the stories from the Atlantic have been chosen as the best of the year by the Edward J. O'Brien collection and by the O'Henry Memorial Award. The Atlantic has shown over a long period of time skill and success in the selection of short stories of high quality. A study of its stories gives, I believe, a just appraisal of the tone of the better periodical writing of the time.

Because Americans are constantly in a hurry, the short story has become the most widely read type of fiction. It is also the most widely written, serving as the trial flight for new authors and as the field for experiments in new styles and unusual subject choices. The short story therefore reflects more immediately than any other form of fiction what people are thinking and feeling, a sort of literary barometer. Sometimes what is felt is put into a form excellent enough to survive after its timeliness is gone. More often the fate of the short story is that designated by critic Frank Norris when he wrote in 1902 that he believed the short story to be "a thing brillantly done, timely to the moment, with only a month for its life...If very good, it will create a demand for another short story by the same author, but that one particular contribution, the original one, is irretrievably and hopelessly dead."[3]

With two or three exceptions, Norris' verdict would serve accurately for the stories from the Atlantic of 1919. But his criticism is definitely dated when applied to the stories from the 1946 Atlantic. While remembering that these later stories cannot be looked at with the same perspective in time and that there are nearly twice as many stories in the later volume, I believe, nevertheless, that the quality of the 1946 stories is superior to that of the stories from 1919.

In choice of subject, the 1946 writers have been discerning and bold. They have written of the negro problem with sympathetic perception; they have accepted the child on his own terms and portrayed him accurately; they have probed the unhappy marriage, the out-patient hospital, the mind of the insane; and with the best of their skill they have written of the Second World War, of what it effected in the lives of the individuals who fought it, who were fought around, and who were fought for. These subjects shine when placed next to the majority of those from 1919, where children are treated as dolls or as small adults, where the real or the unpleasant is by-passed, and where the war is treated primarily as a glorious if awful adventure.

Only in the folk tales, the stories which find congenial humor in the wholesomeness of plain country people, do the two years blend in a homogeneity. V. L. Parrington

has said, "America is a city today, but day before yesterday it was still country, and in the backgrounds of our minds is a country setting and love of simple people...There is a reaction from too much pavement and the rubbing-down of individual differences from city contacts. 'Characters' are bred in isolated places."[4] It is of these 'characters' that people in 1919 and 1946 both loved to read, and both years found writers to present them with skill.

In style, the 1946 volume gains if possible even more over the earlier volume than in subject. Most of the 1946 writing is vital, fluid, original, and realistic. In 1919 the writing was predominately wordy, sentimental, heavy, and often dull. Much of the conversation in 1919 is oratory; in 1946 it has an every-day liveliness. The 1919 writer could not keep himself out of his pages; he indulged frequently in obvious moralizing. The subtlety of the 1946 work adds much to its charm.

In comparing the philosophies behind the writing of these two years, we find many of the reasons for the differences in subject and style. Pretentiousness and artificiality abounded in the thinking as well as in the writing of 1919. All of the Atlantic stories of that year, whether of war subjects or not, are laid against the background of the First World War, with its fervor of patriotism, heroism, and victory. The giddiness of success glossed over the essentials; all was so right

with the world that whatever was not right was ignored as though it did not exist.

The bitterness and sense of frustration following World War II led to more sane, sympathetic thinking, not so pleasant but in general more meaningful. When it is off balance, it is on the side of pessimism rather than of optimism.

Part I: The Non-War Stories

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There is a timelessness and a feeling of relaxation about the folk-type tale in the _Atlantic Monthly_, so that if one does not know which year created the stories, whether 1919 or 1946, it is difficult to guess. In both years the humor comes from the 'folksy' language and from the oddness of the country characters, who are, nevertheless, shrewd and able to outwit the city slickers. One's sympathy is invariably with the country people, echoing Parrington's observation that America's background is a country setting and love of simple people. We laugh with rather than at them.

The Photographer of Silver Mountain, 1919, a rambling mining town tale, compares easily with _Uncle Deck_, 1946, a story of backwoods Texans. Tabby, the mining town hero, a man of seemingly nine lives, saves a photographer and one of his own lives from a fire by burying them both in a mossy swamp until the fire passes. There is a tall-tale, Paul Bunyon quality to the story.

Similar barely credible events make up the plot of _Uncle Deck_. The backwoods Texans beat a depression money shortage by staging a pole-sitting event, attracting crowds, and serving dinners for a dollar a plate. The pole-sitting

is a hoax, accomplished by a pair of twins who take turns, but no one is the wiser. The rural colloquialisms are typical for this type of story: "they quit giving away the calves for three four dollars apiece;" "the money had wore out;" "store bought teeth."[1] Typical appealing type of 'character' is Aunt Dode, who "would have been an artist if she hadn't got off on the wrong foot and married a tenant farmer and liked it and stayed with it;"[2] who, when she came into a room, was such a mountain of flesh that you had to steady yourself because "you have an uncanny feeling that your part of the floor is going to buck up, because if it goes down so much in one place it's got to come up a bit somewhere else."[3]

Milky Way and The Vacation of Charlie French, 1919, paint similar lively portrayals of characters in a small Western town. The 'city' wife of Charlie is the villain who causes Charlie to take a vacation, with the sympathy of the entire village, and in keeping with the premise mentioned earlier that in these tales the city-dwellers come off badly.

Buttonholes and How Sandy Claus Come to the River, 1946, are of the same fabric. In fact, Buttonholes, with its wordy though whimsical images, would seem very much at home in the earlier volume. Miss Shila Smink, small town seamstress, made buttonholes which would outwear the garments: "this presents to fancy a vast array of garmentless buttonholes,

marching and countermarching, perhaps playing croquet or stooping to prayer."[4] Some of the images are somewhat strained: Miss Smink had eyes like "frightened skim milk."[5] Others are involved, yet original:

> From Miss Smink's waist, there dangled conveniently three strips of ribbon, clustered, and each bore a property of her calling. One ribbon tethered her buttonhole scissors, the second her emery pad, fashioned like a strawberry, with which to sharpen a tired needle, and the third a beeswax lump for the thread. Somehow...these dangling properties gave her dignity, as though she wore side arms.[6]

One significant difference puts this story in the later volume. It is a sketch, with no plot. I shall discuss this sketch-type story at greater length in considering the character stories. Whether the subject is chosen, as here, for its 'folksiness' and simplicity, or, as more frequently, for its complexity, this kind of story has grown in popularity in recent years along with an increased interest in and study of psychology. The various facets of a single character are considered sufficient material without the necessity for any overt action to or by the character within the limits of the story.

<u>How Sandy Claus Come to the River</u> has a small plot: a backwoodsman dresses up like Santa and surprises his wife. Its chief winsomeness is again in the language: "they kept right on a-setting considerable store by Christmas;" "like she's always hankered for;" "they was gone long before your time, wasn't they? A man kind of forgets."[7]

Closely allied to the folk type story is the human interest story, which has little plot and a humorous twist but does not depend upon 'folksy' people. This type also has become more popular recently, for 1946 has four stories which may be grouped in this catagory while 1919 has only one. The upsurge of new writers is partly responsible for this increase, for this is a medium in which a beginner can frequently do well. The story is usually taken from first hand experiences and often written in the first person. It depends for its success upon keen and original observations, with the same sort of skillful interpretation that is found in the serious war stories in 1946. Yet these lighter stories, while delightful reading once, are scarcely worthy of rereading. They belong to the mass of stories created to satisfy the appetite for short amusing reading matter, an appetite which has increased considerably since 1919.

The four stories from 1946 cover a variety of subjects. My Hotels is a first person narrative of an immigrant boy's experiences on the West Coast; he is snared by the manager of a "50¢ and Down Hotel,"[8] who, with his unscrupulous cronies, gets him a job as an elevator boy in a semi-elegant hotel and subsequently takes all his earnings from him. With material that could have been given an Oliver Twist sentimentalism, the author laughs at it all and treats his misfortunes with light irony, a procedure not found in the 1919 volume.

It may be noted here that there is more laughter as well as more bitterness in the 1946 volume, but fewer tears. Situations either called for humorous treatment or for serious consideration. 1919 instead felt impelled to call forth frequent tears, both of joy and of grief.

Saint Patrick's Day is Like Christmas Now is a humorous conversation-piece: a committee from a local union is planning a St. Patrick's Day dance. Ironically they find that they must pay the orchestra double-time for playing on a holiday. To get around this, they decide to have the dance on St. Patrick's Day Eve, making St. Patrick's Day "Like Christmas Now." The humor comes through the racial clashes, the committee being composed of those of Scotch and of Irish backgrounds, with St. Patrick's Day as the fencing material.

Obeah is an odd little sketch of a West Indian maid on a trip to Bermuda with a family from New York. She meets and secretly marries Danny, who drives the family's carriage and eventually becomes a chef on a steamer so that he may see his wife back in New York. The maid's accent is achieved by odd spelling, not very satisfactorily: "You just never ahsk about ting like that." "I never eat ahfter he." Danny was an "ungahdly" man.[9]

Last Rites at Dardanella, the fourth from this 1946 human interest group, is an account of a Syrian family funeral by a boy who has a summer job helping an undertaker

in a small town. The humor is in the assortment of characters and the strange, old-country proceedings.

Change of Venue is the only story from 1919 which compares in subject matter and style with these humorous, human-interest tales from 1946. It is a narrative by a New York lawyer about a case brought against a New England farmer who had procured clothes on credit for his entire family by offering as collateral animals which he had only borrowed. The young lawyer gets him off in what the author, H. T. Avery, describes in the Contributor's Column of that issue of the Atlantic as "one of the most ridiculous legal episodes."[10] The story has more plot than do the comparable ones from 1946, but it is similar in its account-like nature and its momentary interest.

The 1946 Atlantic published two Irish stories, Man From the Sea and Serpent Versus Donovan. They are also humorous and full of human interest, but their Irish background sets them apart; they are gems of their kind. They mix the inimitable Irish mysticism, witticism, and charm in proper proportions. Both have a surprise denouement which is really a surprise. They are fresh, intriguing, and at times emotional in the manner of Irish drama.

There is lyric beauty in this passage from Man From the Sea:

> And Brigid O'Faollan cried for the first time in ten years - cried a slow soft rain of tears, for all the things that were past and

> the long lonely nights by the fire, for the death of her man and the endless toll of the sea. She cried for the hunger of all lonely creatures who have died to hope and fear; she cried for the beauty of a man's ripe body that is cast on the sea like a broken bough from the tree of life. Brigid O'Faollan cried for the shadow of death that is laid over life as the night lies over the day.[11]

Quickly as the Irish temperament can leap to explosion, Brigid returns to the house and finds her sister snooping into her hidden savings. She snaps: "Hadn't ye better... get the Holy Father to wash the sin av the Seventh an' Tenth Commandments off yer narrow-gutted soul? Ye snivelin', whinin', kneecreepin' oul' snake thief that ye are!"[12]

The second story also catches the contrasting elements of the Irish temperament, its powerful emotions, its cleverness, its vivid color. Serpent Versus Donovan has a complex plot which even when unraveled is so subtle that the reader is brought up short and finds himself rereading the concluding paragraphs to be sure all the threads can be justifiably tied in such a surprising manner. Irish thugs, with their rough colloquial dialect, contrast oddly with their own superstitious use of the serpent pin and their fear of haunts.

The good writer of Irish stories must know his subject and must use care in not overdoing the Irish eccentricities. These stories display their many-sided charm and match it with their frequent lack of scruples in plots which show both to full advantage, and most entertainingly. They are

good examples of the greater appreciation for and understanding of other races which is a part of the coming-of-age found in the 1946 short stories.

Stories which may be classed as exotic or fanciful are more plentiful in the 1919 volume, in keeping with its generally less realistic tone. They are for me the worst reading in the volume. Good travel literature is so plentiful that The Last Dream of Bwona Khubla and A Mother seem like poor early attempts to catch some of the romance of Africa and India. The pleasant fantasies, Blue Roses and The True Story of the Loss of Paradise, seem rather inane. Dried Marjoram, by Amy Lowell, is the most memorable.

The Last Dream of Bwona Khubla is an imaginative sketch of men on an African safari. They come at last to a watering hole where, the natives tell them, a white man, called in that land Bwona Khubla, died three or four years before, raving of a far-off city where he had lived and of which the natives thought he was the king. The city presumably was London. Late that night the men see London all about them, "transfigured into a perfect city...magnificant."[13] The vision lasts for an hour, during which they are in the quiet, late-evening hustle of the city, then fades slowly away as "a bull rhinoceros coming down through the stillness snorted, and watered at the Carleton Club."[14] The language attempts a mysterious mood by phrases such as, "in that lonely desolation where the Equator comes up out of the forest and

climbs over jagged hills," "steaming lowlands down by the Equator, where monstrous orchids blow, where beetles big as mice sit on the tent-roofs, and fireflies glide about by night like little moving stars."[15]

Similar background and mood are found in A Mother, one of a series of "unusual stories drawn by the Elderly Spinster from her experience of many years as a volunteer worker in a hospital in Northern India, where she was thrown into relations of peculiar intimacy with Indian women of all castes and kinds."[16] The story is of strong primitive Indian emotion in the fanatical love of a mother for her young widowed daughter. A brother kills the girl and the man she now loves, believing that his sister should never love or marry again. The son is imprisoned, and the aging mother, crazy with grief, resolves to live until he is released so that she can kill her own son. "'I will not die' she continued calmly. 'I wait for him. When he comes home I will kill him with my own fingers, because he hurt my flower.' That was six years ago. She is still waiting."[17]

Dried Marjoram, in verse form, has a similar driving force, fanatical mother-love. A boy is hanged in an iron cage high in a tree because he stole a sheep for his mother. She gathers each piece of him as it drops through the bars and finally buries him at night in the churchyard and dies on his grave. The tragedy is patterned after the early ballads in subject as well as in form. Its grief is remote,

yet it has the folk-strength that gives character to the best of the true ballads.

Blue Roses is based on the most routine sort of fairy tale: a princess sends three princes on a search for blue roses for her, saying she will marry the one who finds them. The original twist with the third prince is that he tells the princess that he can get her lots of blue roses but that most ladies who wear them find them extremely unbecoming, "vulgar in candle-light." Of course then she does not want them. "If you but know how to talk to a woman, you do not need blue roses."[18] This sort of over-clarification dates the story, though it has some originality and playful understanding of human foibles.

A short fable, The True Story of the Loss of Paraidse, is called facetiously the Hittite version of the story of Adam and Eve's fall. Satan is unable to break down Eve by telling her of the wonderful world beyond the garden which will open to her if she eats the apple. But Ennui, Dame Boredom, succeeds quickly in getting both Adam and Eve to eat the fruit to escape "the intolerable ennui that had settled upon them."[19] Again, with annoying reemphasis, the last paragraph "assures us that there is much truth in this version, and that in the Paradise of Love, after an unbelievably short time, one still becomes, as in the days of Adam and Eve, a helpless prey to the same old and intolerable boredom."[20]

More realistic but with the same moralizing tone is The Invisible Garden from 1919. It is so 'sweet' and 'good' that today I am certain that it could find publication only in church sponsored literature. A girl on her way to work in New York sees in an art gallery window a picture of a house on a river. The stream was "foreign-looking, without the eagerness of an American stream,"[21] one of the best phrases in the story. A man, obviously German, standing beside her recognizes it as his old home. He tells her that he will buy the picture and go back to hang it in that home some day, but there is uncertainty in his voice. The girl looks encouragement at him. At lunchtime, the girl is drawn by a crowd of street evangelists where an old man prays for the crowd, saying that faith can move mountains, that if you believe, "it shall come to pass."[22] The girl sees the same man she had seen at the window in the morning, and this somehow renews the man's faith that he will see his homeland again, that faith will move mountains.

Delightful and far more satisfying to the intellect are the two fanciful stories from 1946, The Chinese Story and The Radiant Wood. Instead of moralizing, The Chinese Story pokes fun at stupid persistence and ignorant insistence in a charming mock-heroic manner. The tale is this: Sloan tells a story of a Chinese who dreamed he was a butterfly. The Chinaman awoke sadly from his dream and told his friends he was unhappy because, "I cannot tell whether I am a man

who dreamed he was a butterfly or a butterfly who dreams he is a man."[23] The first person narrator corrects Sloan on several small points and finally says he knows that he is right because he invented the story. Sloan becomes angry and so aggravated that he sets out to find proof that the narrator did not invent the story. He spends years at it, and finally loses his job, his wife, everything. At last he finds what he believes is irrefutable proof: a book published before the birth date of the narrator, containing the story. The narrator then tells Sloan that through transmigration of souls, he once was WuChow, the Chinese who had the dream. In that case, says Sloan, you did not invent the story; you lived it. No, says the narrator, I invented it. I awoke unhappy one day, and when my friends asked me why I was sad, I invented the story to amuse them.

The underlining in this story is done with playful mock-seriousness:

> So it is with people like Sloan. You go out of your way to help them and instead of loving you for it, they resent it.
> (Sloan) read thousands of books - scanned them, rather. None of them left a permanent record on his intellect...Yet the human mind being the marvelous instrument it is, he trained himself instantly to recognize a book he had searched before. He could not tell you its name, or what was in it, or who wrote it, or the color of its binding. But he could tell you that the Chinese story was not in it, and he would be right.[24]

Again, with tongue in cheek but with yet a hint of earnestness, the narrator is filled with compassion for Sloan, or would have been but for one thing:

> His suffering had not improved his character. He remained as stubborn, willful, and opinionated as before...He was unregenerate. Love was not in him.[25]

When the narrator tells Sloan that he was once WuChow, Sloan does not believe him:

> (It was) contrary to his experience of reality; it did not jibe with the facts he accepted as true. He never stopped to think that the trouble might be with him, that his receiving set might be faulty, or that there might be waves of truth beyond his perception.[26]

The Radiant Wood is a less meaningful yet charming fantasy of a child's dream. In the dream the child's father, who in reality is a non-entity whom the child doesn't know very well, becomes a hero on horseback in a radiant wood. The images are attractive and original:

> the world is full of wheel tracks in fields. No one remembers now the journeys that made them.[27]

> The wood could be full of all manner of things which only a child could imagine, but which a child dare not think of.[28]

We have felt in the folk and human interest tales a sameness of background mood through the two volumes, as though the simplicity of the material gave it a common, uncomplicated philosophy. In these fanciful and exotic stories, we sense a shadowing of the greater harshness behind the 1946 stories, a shadow that will deepen as we

consider the more serious problem stories and will show its darkest side in the war stories of 1946. In Blue Roses, The Last Dream of Bwona Khubla, The Invisible Garden, and The True Story of the Loss of Paradise, there is no bitterness. Even A Mother and Dried Marjoram, while totally tragic, seem removed from reality and cause a feeling of wonder rather than of sadness.

But in The Radiant Wood all of the glory is in the dream world; the world of reality is dull, confined, and frustrated. And for all the fun-making in The Chinese Story, its humor is pessimistic, laughing at negative qualities of narrow-mindedness and bigotry.

The general conclusions reached when studying all of the Atlantic stories from 1919 and 1946 are synopsized in a study of the stories of children from the two years. The 1946 stories show greater realism and understanding.

1919 has only one, showing a limited interest in children as adult story material. That one, a poor one called Explorers of the Dawn, treats three little boys as loveable rascals who have a big adventure sneaking upstairs to an attic window to watch the sunrise, which they have been told is a marvelous sight. While there, they disturb the contents of an old trunk, for which they are spanked. The youngest talks impossible baby-talk, and they are all three most remote from flesh and blood children, sentimentalized in the dear-little-darlings fashion.

The 1946 volume contains three stories of children, two of which are among the best of that year. The third, Unspoiled Reaction, goes to the opposite extreme from that of Explorers of the Dawn and is no more successful. It is a minute by minute account of the reactions of children at a puppet show, at which the people who are running the show display their dislike for children. This, of course, upsets the audience. Every shade of emotion shown by the children is scrutinized as a child psychologist might do, until the life goes out of the children through an excess of realism as surely as it was smothered by sentimentalism in the former story.

In The Nettle Patch and King of Daring, we have children as they are, not all good nor merely reacting molecules, but people, understandable, sometimes loveable, sometimes cowardly, sometimes astonishingly brave. The hero of The Nettle Patch is a boy of pioneer days who is bitten by a rattlesnake; he cuts off his own finger with a corn cutter to get rid of the poison. When he gets home, his mother, usually undemonstrative, shows great concern and love for him. Neighbors gather to tell stories of other snakebites and snake adventures. When it is evident that he will recover, the boy decides that the whole adventure was not so bad:

> he had his mammy back. A mam like he had didn't grow on every bush. He'd chop a whole finger off for her any time she wanted it.[29]

Old-time names, Sayward, Guerdon, Salomy, Huldah, and old-fashioned colloquialisms make convincing background: "overed" a snakebite, meaning recovered from, "Hell's needles" and "the devil's thumbprint," for the marks of the bite, a "catch," a ballad-like song.[30] The story combines the charm of a folk tale with good characterization of a child.

In King of Daring a negro boy is drowned in a daring dive into a deserted rock quarry. The conversation of the children, the negro and two Mexicans, as they work up to the climax is lifelike:

> 'Looks deep,' said Pepe.
> 'Man,' said Sam, 'nobody don' know how deep that water is. That's a well, that is. That's deeper'n any water I ever swum in.'
> 'Can you swim?' Miguel had never known anyone who could swim.
> 'Kin I swim! I wuz bohn swimmin'. My daddy thowed me in the river whin I wuzzin' no bigger'n 'at stone over yonder. He said, 'Boy, git to swimmin' or I gonna whale the whey outta you.' So I swum. Reckon they ain' prackly nobody kin swim good as me.'[31]

The terror in the Mexican children after Sam's dive is excellently portrayed:

> Miguel stopped holding his breath first. The sound of it broke in the thick silence like a roar in Pepe's ears. He stood up. His eyes played over the pool from one corner to another. The feather-light fingers of a strange fear were beginning to thrum somewhere in his chest. With an effort he thought the sensation away. He made himself say something, to make the thought more persuasive.
> 'Bet he's gonna pop up and try to scare us,' he said. His voice came out so weak and wavery that it startled him. There was a dryness, a

> contraction in his throat. Unconsciously he ran his hand over it as if to rub it away. He looked at Miguel, to find the smaller boy staring into his face, waiting for a cue on what attitude to take. He got it. The fear ran back and forth between them, growing stronger with each passage, becoming a current. Pepe felt himself becoming hysterical...He threw himself, face down, on the ground at the edge of the pool, and tried to force his eyes to see through the opaque skin of the water. "Sam!"[32]

These three 1946 stories study children as real human beings, not as primarily cute, adorable, and mischievous, but in Unspoiled Reaction as startled and disappointed, in The Nettle Patch as brave, and in King of Daring as daring to the point of tragedy and as very frightened. They offer understanding, respect, and intelligent interest. While the first goes to analytical extremes, the other two are of the caliber that come alive, that put into words real situations with effective interpretation.

The most important short stories of both years among those which do not have war as a prime mover are the problem stories, usually including a serious character study, and the character studies alone. Of these types, there are only four from 1919, while the eleven from 1946 show the extent to which the short story attempts today to present current problems and to probe character depths. These stories are the memorable ones, the best of them worthy of repeated readings. These are the ones which find their way into the annual short story collections. These are the stories which show the short story writer at his peak, using his social

conscience to call attention to matters needing correction or understanding, clarifying a type of character which has been overlooked or unappreciated. The subject matter demands the author's best in exposition and development.

Two of the problem stories of 1919 are concerned with financial matters; none from 1946 are. Money problems could be considered without treading on anyone's toes, for they were personal moral problems, not general conscience-pricking questions such as the bolder writers from 1946 considered: what attitude to take toward a negro convict, or an insane man, or a frustrated tenement mother. One story from 1919, *The Underfed Nursling*, approaches the problem of the monotonous life of the factory worker with a good deal of sympathy and concern, but with unobjective sentimentality that detracts for us today from its primary purpose.

The first money-problem story from 1919 is *Caught*, in which a young man of creative bent is caught in the money-making millstream and allows his talents to stifle. It is the same problem which frequently concerned Sinclair Lewis. In fact this story would probably have made a better novel of the Lewis type, for its lengthy, rambling nature, telescoping the entire life of Gordon Hamilton, detracts from its strength as a short story. Gordon, "half-baked author of still un-written masterpieces...decided to shake the stardust from his soul...for near-visioned, close-fisted Kansas..."[33] He is quickly financially successful, but when he realizes that he is no

longer "President-of-his-own-Soul", since he has not done the great writing that he hoped to do, he finds that he is too much caught in the mercenary world to have the strength of will to pull out. The story lacks subtlety, and the well-worn theme, while plausible and interesting, is treated with little originality.

Done with a finer touch is the second money story from 1919, Dreams and Compound Interest. It presents a more complex moral problem: whether to lend money with one's head or one's heart. The heroine, Janet Graham, a lady banker, refuses to lend to Mrs. Osborne, wife of a cattle breeder who is already behind in interest payments on an old loan, but goes at once about the risky business of lending $3000 to herself and her husband for a play he is attempting to launch. The story is successful in that it is not a condemnation of her action, but rather a careful study of the circumstances which brought the two women into clashing position. There is good arrangement of contrasting material: first, exposition of Janet and her husband, then exposition of the Osbornes, the request of Mrs. Osborne to Janet, with touches of their mutual femininity as they compare their baby-nursing problems, finally the refusal of the request, and the plans for granting the large loan to Mr. Graham. The co-authors have factual knowledge of both banking and the Holstein cattle business, with resultingly authoritative language.

Fighter and Bird Song, the two major problem stories from 1946, tackle the problem of the negro and the problem of the insane. In Fighter, written by a negro, Poke, an ex-convict, has been unable to find work because of his prison record. Jessie, his wife, and Country, his friend, try to keep him out of trouble. When they leave him alone for a few moments, a tussle starts in a bar and Poke gets into it. He escapes the cops, but knows they will find him soon and jail him again.

The author understands the negro's tremendous need for physical outlet:

> tangible energy was what he understood; and whenever he had hit a man and felt him deaden and drop, it gave him a strong sense of triumph and release. Violence offered a crazy kind of peace because he was familiar with it without understanding it. (Poke would) feel the need to strike out at something visible - something that could be solved or conquered in terms of his limited powers.[34]

After he has fought again and realizes he will be jailed again, Poke thinks back into his childhood hurts, the beatings from his father and the cuts of the white boys, and then of his recent jail term:

> each part indistinguishable, flavored with shame and fear and anger and the crushing endlessness of walking up and down in a prison cell...The power and the impotence were a distorting combination resolving themselves into an uncertain and aimless strength...
> as he huddled away from the chilly night air, he shrank deeply into himself, feeling small like a child, and hurt, and wanting somehow to find a way to let himself cry.[35]

Poke has our sympathy; we see his world through his eyes, with his intellect, needs, and capacities. The writer leads us to the emotional beginning point which must be reached before intelligent and meaningful work can be done to help the ex-convict of lower intellect, negro or white. The story reaches a height of understanding and purpose greater, to my mind, than any from 1919.

Bird Song won an O'Henry award for 1946. Its plot concerns George Beresford, a patient in an insane asylum, who is permitted to leave the hospital for the first time for a Sunday visit with his wife. He finds she is living in what is probably a brothel, can't face these realities, and hurries back gratefully to the sanctuary of the hospital. The author gets into George's mind in much the same way that Poke's mind is penetrated in Fighter. We feel George weaving, grasping, sometimes sure, mostly very insecure. It is the bird song which finally completely unbalances him. Just before George is to leave for his visit with his wife, the radio in the asylum day room carries an ad accompanied by the singing of canaries. In the apartment where he finds his wife, there are several cages of canaries. While he is eating a miserable dinner there, the same canary-singing ad comes over the radio. All the canaries in the apartment join in the song:

> The sound beat upon Beresford's face; he felt their wings drumming on his eyes and cheeks. He was submerged in their song...Never had the

> swing been so swift, never so crushing. This was the end...'I must go,' George forced himself to speak. 'I must get back.'[36]

Back at the hospital, a fellow patient consoles George with ironic humor:

> 'A guy sits here and forgets how screwy things were in the world.'[37]

James Gray, as literary editor of the Chicago Daily News, wrote a definitive criticism of this story:

> This story is particularly good because it is admirably created from the standpoint of structure and it...allows a handful of very real people to emerge out of the shadows of a tragic half-world of failure...a story of quiet despair;... there is a piercing sort of irony to the climax in which the central figure, having found that he simply cannot cope with the untidy realities of his world, settles down into the protection of madness. It isn't belabored; the irony isn't overdone or insisted upon sentimentally. The circumstances of inescapable tragedy are simply set before one with complete persuassiveness.[38]

An interesting but less important problem story from 1946 is The Good Neighbor, in which a man gets into trouble all round by trying to help a prostitute for the sake of her children. He is greatly relieved when she moves away with no warning, absolving him of further feelings of altruistic responsibility toward her family.

Closely linked in type and purpose to these stories which I have classed as problem stories are the character studies. Especially in the 1946 work, the stories in these two groups can hardly be held in one catagory or the other, for they are, Fighter and Bird Song in particular, as much

character studies as problem stories. Controversial social topics can best be handled by relating them to one individual, as has been shown. We shall consider as character stories those whose chief interest lies in the character rather than in the social problem.

Beautiful Golden-Haired Mamie, 1946, could be classed in either group. There is a shadowing of the background of the juvenile delinquent problem. But primarily the story is a character sketch of Mamie, a now overly-familiar type, a tenement woman who escapes reality through cheap love magazines, soap operas, and movies. In her mind she lives the exciting lives of her heroines. She closes her eyes and Ronald, her hero, knocks out her husband, who beats her frequently:

> Ronald picked her up in his arms and carried her to his huge black car and they escaped to the airport. She was beautiful in a new red dress and high, high little heels that twinkled on the sidewalk and didn't hurt because her feet were tiny-dainty, not gouty, to go with her small glamorous shape. Ronald crushed her to him and drank the nectar from her lips in one long, lingering kiss.[39]

She arouses more disgust than sympathy when pictured with the children who come in from school for a lunch that is not ready. The boy, Johnny, "was a fresh, mean kid,"[40] the type who might soon come to the attention of the juvenile court.

This story is a sketch in the modern manner with no plot. Its importance is in its subject matter, a bored,

worthless person presented objectively, and in its style, with the chain-of-consciousness device used to interprete the woman.

The Beach Boy uses a plot to draw a more complicated woman, one with somewhat the same problem as Mamie, boredom and frustration with a life of no purpose or satisfactions. Floss Bixby at twenty had married the owner of a summer resort and was overjoyed to escape from her home in the wild backwoods country. She was grateful to Bixby "because he had taken her from her home and all her mother's children and her thin raw-boned mother."[41] But at twenty-five she is bored, childless, and unhappy. When Skid Fenner, an Indian boy from her own northern lake country, comes to work for them at the resort as a beach boy, she feels a kinship with him. She manages to be with him as much as possible, dancing with him in the evenings and getting talked about by the resorters. Bixby finally decides that there must be something to all the talk and says the boy must leave. Floss reacts to this news:

> All around her, the room tightened, and she desired to reach out to the boy standing there (on the beach below her room) and touch his hand and feel the familiar, smooth, tanned skin these lake boys had.[42]

The boy, only sixteen, has thought of their relationship only as a friendship; he is dazed and hurt when told by Bixby to leave. All three characters are helpless in a set of circumstances where each misunderstands the other,

and there is no real love between them. The tragedy is that helpless type portrayed in Bird Song. It again epitomizes the feeling of frustration, loneliness, and lack of purpose found in many of these later stories.

The Linden Tree carries this same theme of lonely frustration in a character study of patients in a boarding house near a large hospital of the Mayo type where most of the sick are far from home. A sad, young girl of about twenty-five is the center of the story, and an older lady and man wonder about her brief, incomplete life as they sit in the small garden under the linden tree. The tree becomes a symbol to them of life as sometimes beautiful but completely uncompromising, a pale reminder of Chekov's Cherry Orchard. The girl would like to see the tree bloom, but she dies just before it flowers. The old lady is angry with the tree for not blooming a little early. "'She could have had that anyway.'"[43] The gruff sick old man authoritatively continues the theme of helplessness and bitterness:

> The tree blooms when it blooms because it is a link in a complicated chain of cause and effect... If you could alter one thing you could alter them all. You could take back the past and re-arrange the present. Unfortunately the laws of nature are logical, and according to them you can't change a thing.[44]

King of Daring, discussed earlier in connection with the stories of children (pp. 17, 18), must be cited here for its skillful, brief character study of Clem, the father of the negro boy, Sam, who drowned in the rock quarry. Clem,

in his numbed grief after Sam's death, "just sat there in a hand-chair and let time spill over him like rain over a smooth rock."45

The single character study from 1919, Christmas Roses, by Anne Douglas Sedgwick, contrasts well in subject and style with one of the two most important character studies from 1946, The Quality of Mercy, which was awarded distinction by the O'Brien Short Story Collection of 1946. Christmas Roses is distinctively 1919 in subject matter, style, and social philosophy. The character studied in Christmas Roses is Mrs. Delafield, a wealthy, competent English widow of the type considered worthy of serious study in 1919. Lant, the violent Canadian wheat farmer, would not have been thought worthy of keen interested analysis thirty years ago by Atlantic short story contributors, yet the hero of The Quality of Mercy emerges as by far the more important, the more complex, the more powerful.

Mrs. Delafield, in a long story serialized in two issues, is characterized by her actions in dealing with her niece, Rhoda, who has run away from her husband and baby with a young poet. Rhoda's father, Mrs. Delafield's brother, asks Mrs. Delafield to prevail upon Rhoda to return home. But she is so entranced with Rhoda's baby, which has been brought for her to take care of, that she entertains the idea of keeping the baby and raising it as her own, which of course she could not do if Rhoda went

back to her husband. After lengthy rationalizations, when Rhoda comes to see her, she does not prevail upon her to go home. But Rhoda decides on her own to do so. The young poet then comes to ask Mrs. Delafield to help him keep Rhoda. He sees into Mrs. Delafield's motives for wanting Rhoda to stay with him, and while Rhoda leaves him, he and Mrs. Delafield reach a satisfying intellectual companionship and she becomes his patron and friend.

Today the situation seems stilted and unrealistic; yet there is skill in the analysis of Mrs. Delafield's "beautiful and terrible" mind. The young poet who unerringly knows the truth or is earnestly seeking it is a frequent hero of this time: he was the aspiration of Gordon Hamilton in Caught; he is the subject of the best war short story from 1919, Autumn Crocuses. The second theme, lightly touched in this story, that of the incompatible marriage between a stolid, unimaginative husband and a wife with poetic tendencies, becomes one of the main themes of a war story also by Anne Douglas Sedgwick, Evening Primroses.

Mrs. Delafield is characterized in wordy passages such as this:

> Widowed and childless, with many mournings in her heart, griefs and devastations in her memory, she, too, was a force, silent and patient; and it was as that that people still came to her. For the appeal brought the answer. She had felt herself, so often, benumber into lethargy, and yielding to the mere mute instinct of self-preservation, had so often folded herself up and lapsed into the blank darkness of her grief... But it had always been to hear herself, as if in

> a dream, called to from the outside world, and to feel herself, in answer, coming up again, rising, if only to snows and tempests, in a renewal of life which brought with it, always, a renewal of joy in life.[46]

The language and phrasing is in keeping with the type of person being considered, elderly, slow, meditative.

Lant, in The Quality of Mercy, is given brief, dramatic characterization:

> Though I never saw him do it, I think Lant used to go out at night and stand puny under the wide prairie sky, among his decaying buildings and dilapidated equipment, and shake his fists up at heaven and defy God to come down and fight like a man. He thought more about God than any other man I ever knew.[47]

The power of The Quality of Mercy makes all the ramifications of Christmas Roses seem like idle parlor chatter. "In the populated areas," it begins, "it seems God leaves men to act as their own leaven, but in the lonely places, He either lets them stagnate or tries them powerfully."[48] God tried Lant, the wheat farmer, powerfully.

The English boy who went with the first person narrator to work for Lant during the harvest season is the commenter throughout. Of Lant's numerous misfortunes, he says, "Gawd's doing 'im a favor... 'e's got guts, Lant 'as. Gawd can see that for 'Imself."[49] God's favors to Lant consist of continuous breakdowns of machinery and the misbehavior of the weather in the struggle to harvest the wheat. Lant is a terror through it all, killing a horse in blind rage when it falls under too heavy a load, fighting with the men who work for him.

The climax comes when Lant has driven the boys to the station to go home. As the train comes in, a fire bursts out in the cab. Lant rushes to try to save the fireman who is being scalded by steam. His hands are badly burned. Instead of taking the train, the boys go back to the farm with Lant. "We'll stay and 'elp you out,"[50] they say.

Earlier in the summer the evening conversation had once turned to Shakespeare, and Lant had referred to the 'quality of mercy' passage as 'guff.' Now on the ride back to the farm:

> At last Lant said: "I have been thinking of a piece you started to quote once. 'The quality of mercy.'"
> "I thought you didn't like that piece," I said.
> Lant stirred on the seat, and the silhouette of his head dropped. "'It blesseth him that gives and him that takes,'" he said very quietly.
> "'Tis mightier than the mightiest,'" I said.
> We rode on together in the darkness.[51]

The 1919 Atlantic found its serious stories chiefly in the lives of the landed gentry, in formalized studies of the comfortable upper class. 1946 preferred lively interpretations of those whose struggle called for the use of all of their potential and whose environment shaped them into definitive, yet unpredictable molds.

Most memorable to me of the 1946 stories in this character study group is Such is Rachel. Its subject matter is modern and unusual, the story of a Jewish family in Egypt gathering to celebrate the Passover Feast in the orthodox manner at

the insistence of the old grandfather. The conflict comes through the lack of interest in and actual ridicule of the proceedings by the younger members of the family. The story carries strong emotion. The grandfather feels no joy at having his family about him:

> only the sadness of a dying hope...Time had come for Jacob to die, a bitter death with none there to take his place. With all hope dead. The house of Jacob, crumbling as a castle of sand, for were they not, his sons and children, sterile grains of sand to be blown away and scattered, useless, among other people?[52]

The character of the girl, Rachel, unfolds gracefully. She is seen first entering her grandfather's home, where alone among all present she feels no shame or embarrassment as she kneels before Jacob. Jacob feels pride in her, for "the girl Rachel carried well her name."[53] As she gazes at the long Passover table, she finds it so beautiful that she whispers to her brother Jack, "Don't you love it?" He sees only the crowdedness of the room and thinks it all unnecessary. Jacob sees that on her face alone is "his own emotion mirrored at Passover." "Seeking a man" to lead the family and take his place, "he had failed to see in Rachel the Lord's gift."[54] At length he does realize, watching her as she eats her own bitters and also her brother's:

> alone the child had taken to herself the bitterness of those who carry forth the Lord's ordained task...In her, by an irony of fate, two worlds were made one, the beauty of an old tradition wed to the vigor of a new age, as he (Jacob) had wanted them to be in his Chosen one.[55]

Jacob appoints Rachel to take his place as head of the family, saying, "Women there are who count as men, for they are wise when men are foolish, strong when men are weak, brave when men are cowards. Such is Rachel."[56]

There is beauty in this story of unusual subject matter, in which a thirteen-year-old girl is characterized as a near-Messiah. This difficult material is treated without sentimentality, with realistic settings, the crowded room and the inconveniences in serving the feast. Yet the reader is carried with Bibical-type meaningfulness into sympathy for the old Jacob and the young Rachel.

From this study of the subject matter, style, and philosophy of the Atlantic short stories not concerned with war in the years, 1919 and 1946, we conclude that the stature of the short story has shown considerable growth in this twenty-seven year period. In scope, it has broadened its choice of material from an emphasis on upper or middle class people of the more conventional type to negroes, Jews, the insane, the tenement dweller, anyone, any situation which contains human interest.

The style of the stories has become more vivid, word choice more accurate and picturesque, character portrayal more real. The pattern of the stories varies greatly, with variety in type of exposition and in conclusions. For the most part, the stories of 1946 are shorter than the earlier ones, yet seem to carry more in fewer words. With wordiness

gone, there is instead often a startling brevity and a satisfying subtlety that make the best stories worthy of rereadings.

In philosophy, 1919 finds few problems. Those that are present can be easily solved by a faith in God and in the goodness of man. 1946 finds great problems for which there are no easy solutions. There is growth in the sympathetic understanding of the situations in which the negro, the Jew, the insane, and the bored find themselves. There is a new, deep appreciation for the underdog, not glossed over sentimentally but analyzed to see what exactly is the problem of a certain individual and how society treats his situation. What are his temptations? Can we judge him by a pat set of standards, or can we by putting ourselves in his place discover new shades to 'right' and 'wrong' and gain new sympathy for his problems? The writers in 1946 find the problems, and they show insight into the personalities affected by difficult situations, but they offer no solutions. Whereas the earlier writers were able to clear up everything by an easy faith, the later writers find God harder to reach. There is more depth to their struggle and more genuineness to their grief; there is bitterness, disillusionment, and frustration for which there is no answer. If the 1919 writers found the world too good, the 1946 ones find it too bad. The pendulum has swung full.

Part II: The War Stories

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The war stories from the Atlantic Monthly of 1946 shake the reader with their intensity and their seriousness of purpose. Although peace had come, it was an uneasy peace, and there were many who felt that World War II had not been worth the fighting. These stories reflect this bitterness and disillusionment.

Following World War I, there was for the most part a buoyant sentimentality carried on a wave of feeling that the war had saved mankind. The war stories from 1919 are accordingly optimistic, but at the same time less potent than the later stories.

This difference in the climate of war feeling marks the types of authors who contributed to the Atlantic in those two years. The 1946 stories came mostly from the soldiers themselves, from those who had fought the war and knew its realities at first hand. The contributors in 1919 were not the soldiers, but were those who knew of the front lines only at second hand.

The Atlantic of 1919 published ten war stories by eight different authors. Three were women, two of whom, Margaret Prescott Montague and Anne Douglas Sedgwick, although Americans, wrote in England of English subjects. The five

male authors were all connected with the war, but only one was actually engaged in battle, and he wrote a less-than-serious story. Seven, therefore, of these eight 1919 writers had no direct gunfire connection with the war, and their work indicates this. Whether the work of a soldier in the front lines of World War I would have differed considerably from that of these who were in the backgrounds of the war we cannot tell, of course, from a study of the work of this particular year in this periodical where such work is not represented. It is significant, nevertheless, that there is no such work here.

Evidently the young soldier of 1919 was less anxious to publish his thoughts himself, more willing to allow himself to be interpreted by those who were scarcely close enough to his experience to do the job accurately. Probably the general reticence of the period to talk frankly of, much less to write of, distasteful subjects explains in part the sentimental, unrealistic interpretation given here to the First World War. Most influential was the feeling that there was a patriotic, heroic job being done, gloriously, with bands playing. This spirit carried into the writing and left little room for presentation of the horrors of war or for the worried questioning that surrounded 1946.

The mind of the thoughtful young men of 1946 burned with questions and problems for which he found no answers. He felt impelled to write, to try, by putting down the

problems for all to read, to call attention to the sores that needed the sympathy and attention of the many before they could be healed.

Of the twelve different authors of the seventeen war stories in the 1946 volume of the Atlantic, seven were young men under thirty who fought in World War II. All but one were publishing their first story. Two of the remaining five were established writers, Geoffrey Household and H. E. Bates, both of whom also had an active part in the war. Household was a major with the British Army Intelligence, serving in Central Europe and the Middle East; Bates was a volunteer for the RAF, who rose to the rank of squadron leader. The last two men, John Hershey and Vincent McHugh, were war correspondents who have done considerable writing and who saw the war at close range. The single woman author from 1946 was Monica Sterling, the Atlantic's Paris correspondent at the end of the war.

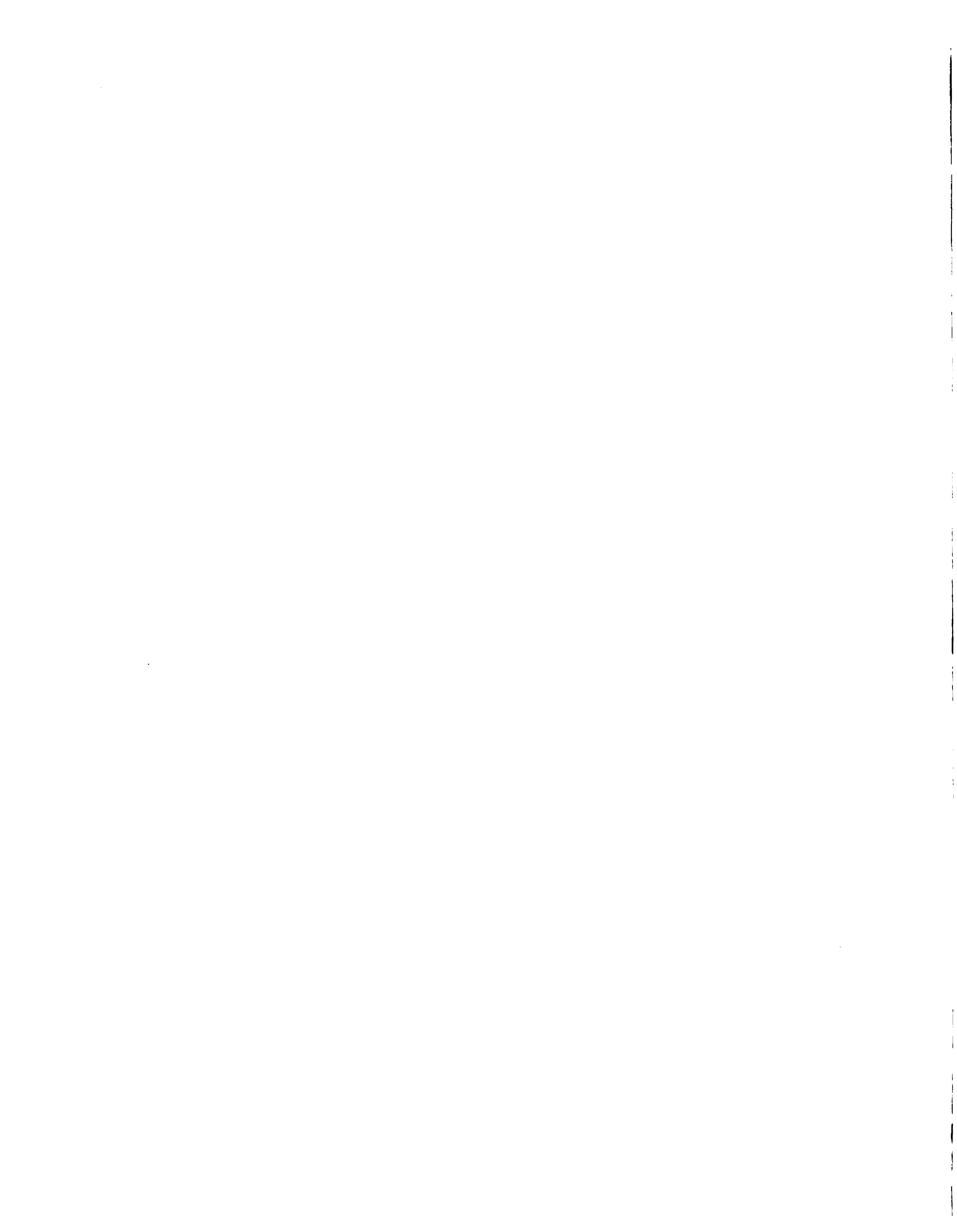
I believe that the most powerful and meaningful work of all of these war stories was that done by the seven young men who served actively in the war. It will be helpful to see just what sort of war experience these men had as we discover how these experiences became a part of their writing.

Alan Marcus served with the American Military Government in Bavaria and came home to write with a feeling of mission and purpose. His reasons for writing The Girl Without a Name are significant because they express the kind of

reasoning that compelled much of the best writing of 1946. It was "the monstrous irony: where broken, homeless, unwanted survivors live on in a martyrdom after the war which was supposed to have been fought, among other things, to accomplish their liberation."[1]

His second story, Ratachusky's Return, was written to point at the injustices and enormous difficulties faced by the American Military Government. In a note to this story, in the August, 1946, Atlantic, he wrote, "The incidents were widely scattered... It has seemed rather important to me since arriving home to synthesize certain random incidents into this form for a number of reasons... During my eight months of MG, I saw the exodus of a good many talented men, for reasons akin to those dramatized in the enclosed piece, and in its way I believe the point to be rather significant."[2] Alan Marcus wrote to explain both the difficulties met in the work of the military government with the people of the nations under its rule and the personnel problems within the government itself.

Robert Lewis was a translator in the American Government Section of the 7th Army during the invasion of Southern France and Germany. His story, Little Victor, is taken directly from his own experiences; he uses the first person and his own name, Sergeant Lewis. Francis Broderick handles his story, Return by Faith, in the same manner, the first person narrator, referred to in the story as Frank. Broderick



was a B-24 navigator with the 7th Air Force, and his story is of his difficulty in convincing a Catholic family of the death of their son in a plane crash which he, Frank, witnessed, when their faith assures them that their son will return.

Victor Ullman, a hospital corpsman with the Navy, told a powerful story of a crisis of decision in a field hospital in the Pacific, Sometimes You Break Even. Thomas Maner, who wrote of a soldier's bout with malaria, served for four years with the Air Force as a weather observer in Australia and New Guinea, where he contracted the disease himself. His factual handling of the nauseating aspects of malaria would never have been approached in 1919; by it, the reader understands the misery of the disease as he never could if it were given only polite mention.

Cord Meyer, whose Waves of Darkness is the most moving piece of writing from this 1946 volume, was severely wounded while leading a Marine platoon on Guam. His story comes from this first hand experience. He puts into graphic words what it is like to withstand a fierce night attack and to fall wounded next to your dead companion.

Best known of these young men of 1946 is Thomas Heggen. This Atlantic volume contains three of his stories, all taken from his book, Mister Roberts, which was published in the fall of 1946 and from which the successful stage play was taken. Heggen knew the Pacific as a Navy lieutenant serving on Guam, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa.

These eleven men who were active in the Second World War wrote of what they knew, of what they directly had seen and done. Their work is important for its social impact, for its comments and impressions from those who lived in the thick of war. It gives us an insight into the horror of war to an individual; it reveals war's specific devastation, to one refugee, to one soldier's family; it shows these horrors baring men to their best or their worst selves.

I believe that these stories are important, also, as literature, for the way in which they are written as well as for what they say. The conversation is lively and lifelike; the images are original; the situations are developed with skillful exposition, direct, yet subtle. In spite of the serious subject matter, humor abounds, showing the enormous resiliency of human beings and adding greatly to the readability of the volume.

The stories from 1919 have had time to be surveyed with the disinterested gaze of thirty-three years. Of the eight writers from 1919, only Anne Douglas Sedgwick and Margaret Prescott Montague are now considered worthy of an occasional rereading. Their stories were judged at the time they were written to be among the best of that year. Edward J. O'Brien's _Best Short Stories of 1919_ gives the two stories of Anne Douglas Sedgwick, _Autumn Crocuses_ and _Evening Primroses_, and Margaret Montague's _England to America_ each

three asterisks to "indicate the more or less permanent literary value of the story, and entitle it to a place on the annual 'Rolls of Honor'."[3] Margaret Montague's The Gift received two asterisks in the same index, to indicate only slightly less distinction.

The 1919 stories are filled with a sentimental idealism that begins with the choice of subject matter and carries through the style of the writing and the general philosophy behind what is written. In 1946, the trend is far in the opposite direction, as we saw in the stories not concerned with war. The bitter, searching-without-finding feeling is strong. I shall consider in detail one of the best stories from each year, bringing into the discussion other stories as they may pertain. Anne Douglas Sedgwick's Guy in Autumn Crocuses, August, 1919, is as concerned with the 'why' of war as is Cord Meyer's lieutenant in Waves of Darkness, January, 1946. The manner in which each of these young men faces his problem is typical of the writing of these two years.

The subject of Autumn Crocuses is the basic problem of a man's adjustment to war. Guy's best friend has been killed beside him in battle and he cannot get over it. He goes, at the suggestion of a cousin, to a cottage in the English countryside, the home of a Mrs. Baldwin, who has had as guests other boys suffering from battle shock. She succeeds in helping him to a complete recovery. He learns that she has suffered a great personal tragedy, the death of

her husband by a lingering cancer, and she is still able to find life basically good and to live it cheerfully and fully. Her example is a powerful inspiration for him.

Autumn Crocuses is a symbolic title. Mrs. Baldwin is the autumn crocus for Guy. These flowers are in profuse bloom at the time when he visits her in the country, and they become identified in his mind with her:

> She made him at once think of the crocuses, or they of her. Their gentleness was like her, their simplicity, and something, too, - for he felt this in her, - of unearthliness. More, perhaps than any other flower they seemed to belong to the air rather than to the ground, and with their faint pale stalks, their fragile petals unconfined by leaf or calyx, to be rising like emanations from the sod and ready to dissolve in mist into the sunlight.[4]

This heavy, sentimental over-writing is a just example of the style of this story. The beauty of the scene is inked in so heavily as to make it unreal and unbelievable. The figure "rising like emanations from the sod" is, like many from this 1919 writing, vague, exaggerated, and unsatisfactory, bringing no clear picture to mind.

The scene for Waves of Darkness is a foxhole somewhere in the Pacific war. A lieutenant and his companion wait at night for an attack which finally comes, kills the companion and wounds the lieutenant badly. The lieutenant believes that he is blind and hopes that he will also die soon, until he discovers that he still has sight in his right eye. Then his hope and will to live return.

Although the time limits of this story are brief, an hour or two, the time of waiting for the attack and the time just after show us the entire mind of the lieutenant, his fears, his hopes, his feelings about the war and his role in it. We are given a complete understanding of the war as it enveloped one thoughtful boy, physically and emotionally.

The writing in the action scenes is the best, vivid and so real that it becomes a part of our own experience. This excerpt is from the beginning of the battle scene:

> The barrage fell on them. It ripped and plowed the earth into smoking craters and lit the night with the hot flash of the explosions. The deep roar of the shellbursts mingled with the high, despairing wail of jagged splinters of steel flung at random against the night. Indiscriminately the shells dropped.
>
> A near miss erupted in a geyser of flame and sound close to their hole. His head rang with the concussion, and the fine earth sifted down over their bodies. The stinging smell of the high explosives lingered in his nostrils for a moment to remind him how tenuous was his hold on life...
>
> A bullet snapped overhead. He ducked instinctively. Near-by a man screamed in the universal language of pain and he could not tell if it was friend or enemy. All human thought and emotion withered and died. Animal-like, he crouched, panting. Like a cornered beast run to earth at last, he awaited the fierce hunters. He could hear them at their savage work, uttering short cries of triumph, and he imagined them plunging long bayonets through the twisting bodies of his companions. He could see nothing.[5]

We have been there. Our senses, sound, touch, smell, have all been called upon: "the smell of high explosives,"

"the fine earth sifted down," the "wail of...steel flung... against the night." Short, crisp sentences with action verbs catch the drama of the battle: a shell burst; a bullet snapped; he ducked; he crouched, panting. The feeling of the fight is caught by the rhythm of the sentences, direct, abrupt, active. Few modifying words are used.

When the lieutenant is hit a few moments later, Meyer handles that most difficult scene by strong, simple, unsentimental writing, done completely in terms of the physical impact on the man.

> A great club smashed him in the face. A light grew in his brain to agonizing brightness and then exploded in a roar of sound that was itself like a physical blow. He fell backward and an iron door clashed shut against his eyes... He pressed his hands to his temples, as if to hold his disintegrating being together by mere physical effort. His breath came chokingly. He allowed his head to fall to one side and felt the warm blood stream down his neck. There were fragments of teeth in his mouth and he let the blood wash them away.[6]

Throughout the story the writing combines a picturesque originality of expression with skillful observation of details to achieve a gripping reality:

> Each silent minute seemed a tiny weight added on a scale that slowly tipped toward destruction.[7]

> A cold, thin rain began to fall... the earth in the narrow hole turned slowly to a sticky mud, and his clothes clung to him.[8]

> Both the lieutenant and the corpsman knew in their hearts that there was no hope for the wounded man, but they tightened the bandages mechanically, as one might shut a house at evening to keep the night out.[9]

> Like a poor swimmer, he struggled through the successive waves of pain that crashed over him... The memory returned of how as a boy he had almost drowned. It seemed that again he struggled upward through the black water.[10]

By his style of writing, Meyer enlarges the subject of which he writes to include more of the war arena than did Anne Douglas Sedgwick or any of the earlier Atlantic writers. Because of his wider experience with his subject, for he was himself, as has been mentioned, wounded in the Pacific war, because of his lack of reticence in giving factual, yet literary reports of the horrible, because of his cautious use of sentiment and over-obvious feelings, presenting instead the numbed reality that war gives the emotions, his writing, like that of the other young men of 1946, does what it must do if it is to succeed in both a literary and moral sense. It shows us what war is and what it does.

When Autumn Crocuses pictures the war, it is ineffectual in comparison. Guy is telling Mrs. Baldwin what the war was like:

> Do you realize at all, I sometimes wonder, what it has all meant, this nightmare we are living in - we, that is, to whom it came? Can you imagine what it was to me to see boys, dead boys, buried stealthily at night, under fire? Boys so mangled, so disfigured that their mothers wouldn't have known them; featureless, dismembered boys, heaped one upon the other in the mud. Has your mind ever dwelt upon the community of corruption in which they lie, as their mother's minds must dwell?[11]

Guy comes the nearest of the 1919 characters to stating the

actualities of war. But the feminine author, by the repetition of the 'mother' theme and by the heavy, ineffective "community of corruption" image, detracts from what might have been a realistic account of a battle scene.

Both Guy and the lieutenant have had to struggle with their fears in times of quiet. The lieutenant rationalized his fear of death in order to live with it:

> What was he afraid of, he asked himself. Death, was the simple answer.. He could not deny this fact on which his fear nourished and grew...Most of his companions had a superstitious faith in their own luck... He preferred to think death inevitable. By absolving himself of all hope prior to each battle, he had found himself prepared for the most desperate eventualities... He stripped the night of its hideous pretensions to find only death, an old familiar companion. Though his fear remained, it became controllable, and this was all he asked.[12]

This writing is matter-of-fact, not overly emotional, very credible.

Guy suffered in somewhat the same way. At home, away from the battle, he had no cause to fear immediate death; his fear was psychological rather than actual:

> Bedtime had been, for many months, his most dreaded moment. The door shut him in and shut away the last chance of alleviation. There was nothing for it but to stretch himself on his couch and cling to every detail in the day's events, or in the morrow's prospects, that might preserve him from the past. To fight not to remember was a losing game, and filled one's brain with the white flames of insomnia. He had found that it was when, exhausted by the fruitless effort, he suffered the waiting vultures to settle upon him, abandoned himself to the beaks and talons, that, through the sheer passivity of anguish, oblivion most often came.[13]

This writing, too, is convincing and drops its sentimentality in conveying the universality of the mental tortures inflicted by war, a basic emotion unchanged by time or style.

Yet, all too frequent in Autumn Crocuses is the sentimental:

> The dear old Dutch coffee pot and jug on the mantel, and the bowl of mignonette that she, of course, had arranged. He sank his face into its fragrance, and peace seemed breathed upon him from the flowers.[14]

In the climactic moment of the story, when Mrs. Baldwin succeeds in lifting Guy out of his morbid mood, the mystical infiltrates the sentimental. Its effectiveness is a matter of taste, I believe. It shows a world far removed from the more practical one of 1946 which was not able or had little inclination to escape into the vague or theoretical:

> The crocuses beneath their feet, her sunlit shape beside him, her voice, as she spoke to him thus, with her very soul, blended together in a rising wave of light, or music, piercing, sweeping him, lifting him up to some new capacity, leaving the old inert and dangling, lifting and still lifting him, until at last, as if with a great, emerging breath, he came into a region bright and fair, whence, looking down on the dark and tattered past, he saw all life differently...[15]

In Charles Johnston's A Great Little Soldier from 1919, a young soldier writes from a rest camp in Europe to a friend in the States of how anxious he is to get back to killing the Boches. He carries with him everywhere a copy of the Bhagavad Gita. He writes: "I think this is like the war in the Bhagavad Gita, a war of spiritual forces...the

Germans having given themselves up to the powers of evil."[16] His feelings are very different from Guy's, but with Mrs. Baldwin he would be in complete sympathy.

As the soldiers go off to war, Johnston writes of a scene at a station, "where military trains are now a magnificent daily experience:"[17]

> It was really a heart-moving scene. One feels in the splendors of this war, so much that is akin to tears; much, too, that passes the depth of tears!... the awful eternalness of the issues made their way into every heart and raised it somewhat above personal feeling, the poignancy of parting was hushed by the very presence of the Eternal.[18]

Of a parting kiss of a girl and soldier, he wrote, "Purity could not have been purer."[19]

There is a naivety here that, looked at from this distance in time, is pathetic and tragic. War was a novelty in 1919, something grand and glorious. Guy's voice stands alone; there are many Mrs. Baldwin's.

What the 1919 writer does not succeed in doing - and what the 1946 writers do well - is to paint a picture that will call forth in the mind of the reader some feelings of his own. Instead the 1919 author inflicts his own emotions upon the reader and insists upon their acceptance. He says it is a "heart-moving scene." In the best of the 1946 work, the scenes are written so that our hearts are moved, but the writer does not tell us in so many words that that is what he is doing. If he succeeds, he does it and we know

that he has done it without his telling us so.

Two of these earlier stories do still have the power to move the reader, although even these are too obvious about what they are up to. Margaret Prescott Montague's England to America is frequently included in High School English anthologies, and it certainly can be fully grasped by the 10th grade mind. It has a surprise ending, the main part of the story being the odd but gallant manner in which an English family treats an American soldier who spends a leave in their home, at the invitation of their son, who has been his companion at the front. He learns at the end that they had received word of their son's death just before he arrived at their home. They did not wish to spoil his leave by telling him of it, but have been under great strain trying to give him a pleasant time while feeling deep personal grief. It is a noble story and has much in it that is convincing and charming. The English as a people come off well. Skip, the American boy, thinks this of them:

> These are they who have washed their garments - having come out of great tribulation.[20]

But this Biblical sort of wording is unconvincing for a young soldier's thoughts, as are the words of the English father to Skip in explanation of their fine action:

> 'It was a matter of the two countries...when America was in at last, and you fellows began to come, you seemed like our very own come back after many years, and,' he added with a throb in his voice, 'we were most awfully glad to see you - we wanted to show you how England felt.'[21]

The throb in the voice appears often in this 1919 writing, along with a sicky sweetness of expression. The idea of Americans being Britishers come home seems unconvincing when expressed in 1919; it might have been acceptable in 1319.

We find much the same sentimental atmosphere in Evening Primroses, by Anne Douglas Sedgwick. Here is the same personification of a flower that we found in this author's Autumn Crocuses : Pamela, a woman of thirty-three, is a "sweet, old-fashioned homely creature; like the evening primrose... an atmosphere of schoolroom tea and the nurture of rabbits still hanging about her."[22]

The overly sweet mood continues as we read that "Charlie's dear old parents clung to her."[23] In fact the entire pattern of the story is difficult for us to accept as credible. The plot is this: Rosamond, the widow of Charles, who died the year before in the war, feels guilty because she does not miss him. She returns to the garden of their old home to try to stir up some decent feelings of grief. She finds there Pamela, her former neighbor, and discovers that Pamela is grieving deeply for Charles, whom she had loved at a distance and has now idealized. This pleases Rosamond, for she feels that there is now someone to "love and remember Charlie."[24] She is able to explain this to Pamela and thus to comfort her. Rosamond "felt that she opened the gate, drew Pamela in, and put into her keeping all the keys that

had weighed so heavily in her unfitted hand."[25] It seems to be much ado about nothing to our minds, unaccustomed to this sort of sentiment to the point that we look at it with skepticism.

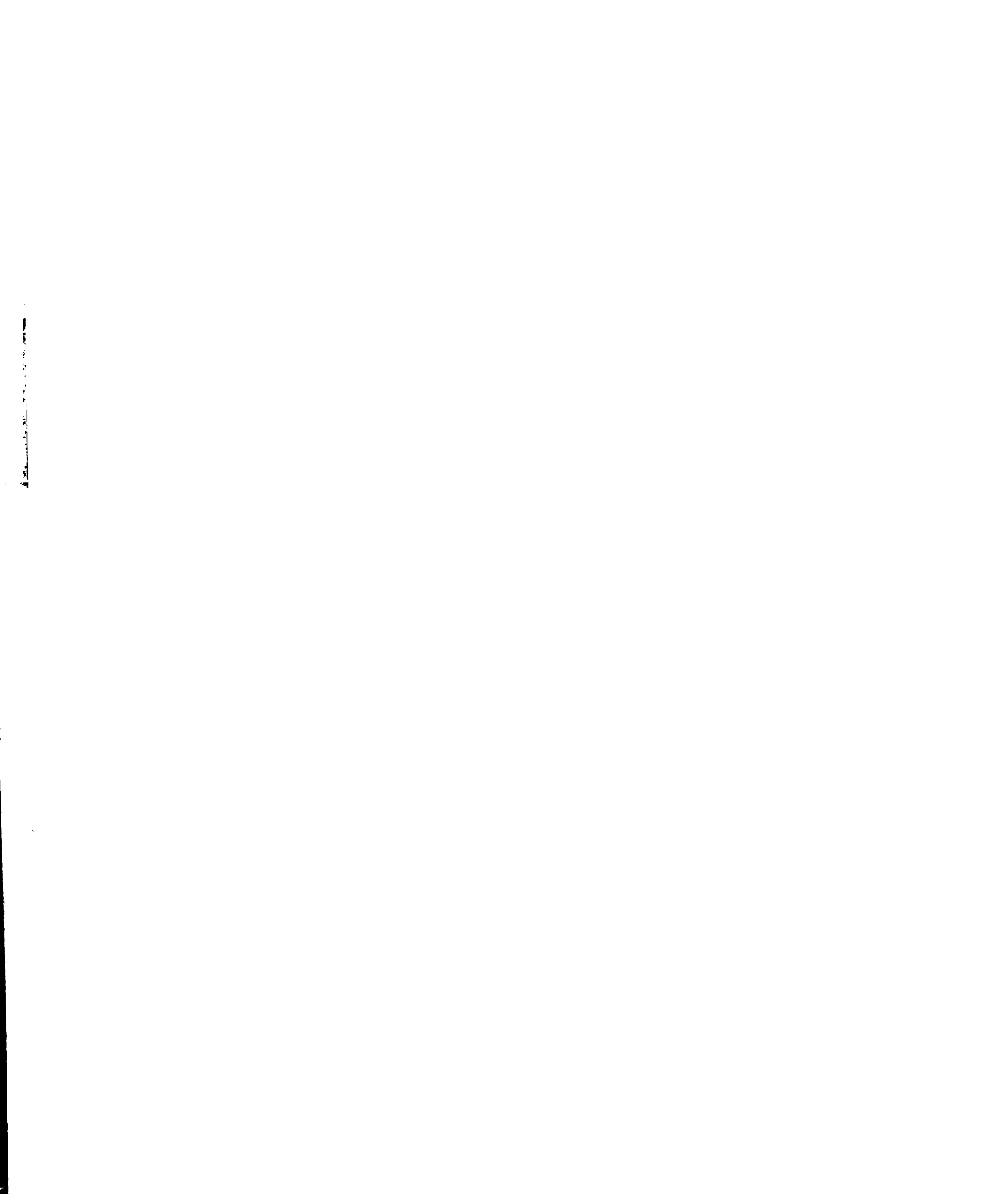
Much more refreshing, vivid, and meaningful are Thomas Heggen's stories from Mister Roberts. They say more of life and death, of good and evil, of joy and grief, than do the 1919 stories, but with beautiful subtlety. The result is that these stories actually do bring a tear to the eye now and then, whereas the former stories, striving hard to do just that, leave today's reader skeptical and unmoved. The 1946 stories allow for interpretation; they expect and demand more from the intellect of their readers. I believe that this is one of the strong points of growth in short story writing from 1919 to 1946: the ability to tell a story with more objectivity, with less thrusting of the writer's feelings upon the reader, leaving the reader free to conclude as he will, with graphic pictures before him rather than an over-abundance of emotional outpourings.

By the skillful use of a small device such as a repeated clause, Heggen catches Roberts' tedium more effectively than if he had tried to describe it lengthily:

> Roberts had the watch. For maybe the thousandth time in two and a half years Roberts had the watch.[26]

Yet he can use words for fine description:

> The ship slid through the water with an oily hiss,



> and the bow cut the fabric like a casual knife. At the stern, the wake was a wide, frothing rut, but further back it was healing and not so wide, and far, far back the fabric was whole and perfect again.[27]

And again in this recollection of Roberts' last leave in San Francisco, heavy with adjectives, the scene with its nostalgia can be envisaged most effectively:

> the air bright and murmurous with the laughter and the clink of glasses and the foolish, confidential talk and over it all, soft and unheard and really astonishingly sad, the deep slow rhythms of American dance music.[28]

The bitter boredom and its tragic effect upon the men who sat out the war on a ship in a comparatively safe part of the Pacific are caught by Heggen with as much skill as Cord Meyer used in <u>Waves of Darkness</u> to describe the action of the war. When Pulver, Roberts' friend, learns of Roberts' death, he goes down to the wardroom hoping to find someone to tell about it. But he realizes sadly that no one there would care enough. The sameness has killed these men, too:

> It was all just the same. It was just as every night, days without end. Nothing had happened; and now Pulver saw that in plain truth nothing ever could happen to these men. The higher centers where action was absorbed, where thought inspired and desires spoke, had been determinedly shut off and allowed to atrophy, and all that remained was an irritable surface with an insatiable hunger for triviality.[29]

Pulver finally reports Roberts' death in this sentence, "He was on a can and the can took a suicide plane off Kyusha."[30] That, I am sure, is the way it was. That is the way the boys of this war talked, and that is the way they

wrote of it when they got home. It is to be greatly regretted that there is so little work in the 1919 Atlantic by those who fought in World War I, for the comparison is even more weighed by the fact that the earlier work is taken from second-hand information and is preponderantly feminine.

In spite of the feeling of philosophic brooding that permeates these Mister Roberts stories, there is about them a continuous sense of humor. When Roberts has stood all that he can of the stupid captain, he throws overboard the potted palm tree that is the captain's pride. This strikes the reader, as it did Roberts' crew, as hilarious. The crew makes him a medal for his gallant action. The reader now hates the unbending, bigotted captain, and when Roberts picks this method of reprisal, he delights us. It surprises us, for Roberts is not the sort of person who throws things at any time. He is calm and reflective. The situation is successful because the reader has by now associated himself completely with Roberts. Roberts unexpectedly does just the sort of thing we want him to do but did not dare think he would. He has been almost too good; now he is human, yet discreetly so. He does not hit the captain in the nose; that would not have been nearly as funny.

But if this story had been written in 1919, chances are that he would have hit the captain in the nose. One strange little story in the Atlantic from that year,

Military Madness, attempts that sort of humor; it comes off badly at this distance. Albert, a soldier, is explaining how he got his nickname, the Duck:

> 'Oh,' says he, 'when the rain began to pour down, I just looked up and said, "Quack".'
> Now he is Albert the Duck.

Another soldier named Kaiser is called Resiak, or Resy, for short, Kaiser spelled backwards. Resy plays a joke on the Duck:

> Towards the end of a perfect day he met the Duck with a nicely calculated abruptness that left the Duck ruffled and outraged. For there had been, where the Duck landed, a pail of red paint.[32]

This is reminiscent of the pie-throwing early movies. The characters and situations are not developed, as they are in Mister Roberts, to a point where we care at all who does what to whom. There is no humor in this picture of one soldier shoving another into a pail of red paint. It is indeed strange that this little piece reached the pages of the Atlantic of 1919 or of any year. In any case, it offers a strong tribute to the growth of our sense of humor.

The Crusaders from 1919, by William McFee, carries another sort of humor, but one which is scarcely more satisfactory to us today than that from Military Madness. When the bombs fall on a ship in the Mediterranean, the sound is described as if "several thousand waiters, each with a trey of glasses, had fallen down some immense marble staircase in one grand débâcle."[33] In 1946 the sounds of battle

are rarely compared in a jesting mood. It is as if the horror of the war's results sobered the soldiers until falling bombs were not the subject for humor of any sort. Nor was being wounded, as it seemed to be to Mr. Ferguson in 1919:

> A plane flutters slowly over the water, one float smashed, wings slit, observer looking rather sick with a bullet in his thigh. Well, he will get a medal, never fear. According to Mr. Ferguson, every air man receives three medals a week just as he receives three meals a day.[34]

While there is something degrading about this casual smugness, as if these men had yet to realize what was happening, as a child might laugh at a funereal, still the sentimental is absent from these war scenes.

More detached, more ironic, and not as vehement as Guy of _Autumn Crocuses_, Mr. Ferguson of _The Crusaders_ stands along with Guy as a fellow realist, two discordant voices in the general chorus of 1919 Mrs. Baldwins.

Although this story by McFee belongs to 1919, we can see in it a forerunner of the bitter satire of 1946. It stands as a lukewarm ancestor to _Sometimes You Break Even_. The jesting about the three medals, done by an observer in _The Crusaders_, becomes in _Sometimes You Break Even_ jesting by the wounded themselves, without smugness and under far more sympathetic circumstances, in this scene from a field hospital:

> He started to laugh, but each indrawn gasp caught at the muscles of his stomach. The tears

> streamed down his face and mixed with sweat. He bit his lips.
> "You don't have to be a hero, Carl," Miss Norman said. "I know it hurts."
> His face relaxed and he winked at Hartnung.
> "She's a tough customer, Doc. I'm the sickest guy in this hospital and she talks like I have a cold. If I could move, I'd get out my Purple Heart, if I had it and if I live to get it."[35]

1946 had its light moments, nevertheless, as shown in two stories by Geoffrey Household. First Blood is a sketch of a civilian chosen at the beginning of the war to do war work in Egypt. He feels most patriotic and proud. He is quite a drinker, and unable to get liquor on the ship, goes through agony and finally dies just as the ship is landing. There is a tongue-in-cheek-ness about this type of heroism as the first blood shed in the war.

The second story is more forthright humor. In Railroad Harvest, the harvest is a bunch of grapes growing on a railroad tower. Everyone claims them, communists, resistence men, collaborators, with the result that the quarrel for the grapes gives opportunity for poking fun at all of these groups of people in France just after the war, each wary of the other, each trying to be authoritative. Charles Cortel, the engineer, "loved little else but Lulu (his locomotive) and all humanity, for he was a communist. But humanity is too large to love with enthusiasm. His true affection was for Lulu."[36] Mme. Delage, another chief contender, "had a black mustache, and her rotundities, though massive, were more square than round."[37]

More French feeling is caught in First Love, a moving story of the emotions of wartime France and of young love in its midst. The lovers, about to be separated by the war, go for their last evening together to hear a popular singer of the day, Edith Piaff, who epitomized for them the France they were living in:

> She sang from her guts...Her simplicity and violence were such that had she lived during a revolution she would probably have been chosen as the rebels' mascot; and her good humor and common sense would have made her a good mascot... In her person was an inventory of the qualities of the people of France - the poor and hurrying people who throng marketplaces and railway stations, brothels and doss houses, factories and department stores; the people who make revolutions and are the first to suffer from them.[29]

The words 'guts' and 'humanity' appear as frequently in the 1946 writing as does the 'throb in the throat' in 1919. The contrast serves as a commentary on the styles of writing as well as on the inherent emotion and philosophy.

The 1919 writing shows little concern or appreciation for the people or lands in which the war was fought, over which the armies tramped. One story only, The Wonder of It, approaches a real problem, and even that seems to find an answer which is too pat and too easy to be valid. The problem is that of the military government in Germany after the war. The military men have great difficulty in governing until they discover that the German people want to be bossed, want to be told just what they must do. The Germans are told to report all crimes to the military government, and all fines

collected will go to their own village government. There was a tremendous amount of crime until the order was changed saying that the fines would go directly to the military government; then crime miraculously vanished. The author says that this shows a weakness of character, a people who would cheat each other. In typical 1919 fashion, he stops in the middle of his story to comment on what has happened. He analyzes the German character, evidently feeling that he has not presented it well enough in the story for his readers to do this for themselves. This type of underlining and over-emphasizing is found in much of this 1919 writing:

> Can a people which is unable to move without an order, and which is disloyal to itself, be self-governing?..all its independent ideas have been crushed...(there is a) vague feeling that they should like to be free, but they did not know how to be free...
>
> A people which cannot hold together in adversity...cannot expect much success in a venture (democratic government) whose very service is self-sacrifice and a regard for common rather than special interests.[39]

This story does, nevertheless, show a serious concern for the problem of government for Germany. There are some good German character portrayals. This was the Burgermeister:

> a person who looked like a white rat that had been thoroughly soaked and shaved. And he had the faculty which all male Germans have of congealing his cords and muscles at a moment's notice, and could assume the rigor of an epilectic in the presence of superiors...slide into your office, uncover his teeth, espy you, and suddenly straighten himself up in obedience to an unspoken 'achtung'.[40]

A penetrating study of the same problem is tackled by Alan Marcus in 1946 in his two stories, _The Girl Without a Name_ and _Matachusky's Return_. His dedicated feeling in the writing of these stories of the military government in Germany after the war has been mentioned earlier (page 7). In _The Girl Without a Name_, Marcus' concern is with the refugees, those who were liberated after Germany's defeat, and who were living on in Germany, especially the Jews, unwanted and treated miserably. This story is about two Jewish girls who had been in a concentration camp all during the war. Marcus describes them graphically:

> As alike in appearance as the two of them were, with their bellies equally bloated, eyes equally cavernous, hair equally lusterless, ankles and wrists equally swollen, and with their left forearms similarly tattooed with a slaughter number, there was a profound mental difference between them.[41]

One girl, Anna, was still able to cope with life and to strive to get food for them both. The other had lost that ability and was completely dependent upon Anna.

> Her friend...seemed to have vomited years of association cleanly and bodily out, under the pressure of too much horror, bloodshed, and inhuman intimidation.[42]

Their problems are treated carelessly by most of the soldiers in the AMGOT office and cruelly by the Germans in the town, who hate them and all that they stand for.

Marcus presents the situation with blunt honesty, yet with original artistry. Anna has to obtain a governmental

form in order to buy some cloth. She stands before the German office girl in pathetic contrast, she, the liberated one, the German girl, the conquered one:

> The sound of the German girl efficiently gathering forms and data into place on her desk was like the quick explosive rattle of some rather complicated slot machine where you push a coin in and six or seven showy things commence to happen at once.[43]

When the girls are killed, by a combination of AMGOT carelessness and German cruelty, their few Jewish friends leave the cemetery where they have buried the girls:

> Cohesively, keeping close together, the eleven liberated allies moved down the street, threading their way through the populous ranks of the beaten, subjugated enemy.[44]

Irony, which abounds in this later writing, is non-existent in the earlier volume, with the exception of the story by McFee, The Crusaders.

Katachusky's Return, also by Marcus, is another story involving the same difficult problems of the place of the Jews in post-war Germany and of the enormous difficulties of the military government in meting out justice. It is significant, for it calls attention to a bad situation, with memorable sympathy for those involved. The AMGOT official strives honestly to justify the Jewish accusations and to punish the guilty Germans but succeeds only in angering a Jewish Army officer who is his superior. Army loyalties are supplanted by racial ones. A controversial problem is presented, one which would not have been tackled in 1919.

Other stories from 1946 show both the greater destruction from World War II and the greater understanding of this tragedy by the writers. Green River Train forms a contrast with A Great Little Soldier mentioned earlier for a picture of soldiers on a troop train. In A Great Little Soldier, military trains were "a magnificent daily experience." In Green River Train, a group of boys are on their way through from the European war to the Pacific, from "Normandy to Nagasaki." The sketch of the train is caught by a correspondent on a passing train as the two trains stop for a short time in a small Wyoming town. The soldiers call from the train windows to a little boy on the station platform, trying to guess his name, asking him what he wants to be when he grows up. They whistle at a girl with Air Force wings pinned on her sweater. They ask where he is; she answers, "He's missing."

The soldiers all "had the same tousled, sweaty look, and a curious, intimate furtiveness, as if they had gone moist and slack thinking about women when women were denied them."[45]

The atmosphere of the scene differs in every respect from the station scene in A Great Little Soldier. It is in keeping with the times that the story from World War I has as its setting a scene in which the boys were going away to war for the first time, filled with idealism for their venture. The story from World War II picked its subject

from near the end of the war, when the boys were tired and dirty, not thinking of war as glorious, but only as something which had caught them, something they'd be glad to be rid of. Their conversation is filled with slang, swearing, Army and foreign expressions. The boys are knowable, in contrast to the soldiers in A Great Little Soldier, who are unbelievably noble, thinking of the "awful eternalness of the issues."[46]

The subject matter chosen in 1946 was inevitably earthy, at times coarse, always frank. It dealt with the many different phases of the war and its effects not in a honey-coated or romanticized manner but as a reporter might see it, illuminated at its best by the understanding of a poet.

War means wounded and sick men and hospitals. There are two fine hospital stories in 1946, none in 1919, again significant as an example of that period's ability to ignore the unpleasant. Atabrine Tan is a tale of a sergeant in a hospital ward about to be released as cured of malaria, when he has another attack. Malaria becomes for the reader understandable in its dreadfulness. We know, to a point, what it is like to have malaria.

The writing is full of the type of images that make for reality. When the ward boy comes in the night, "Marty's fingers made a fragile cage of coral for his flashlight."[47]

Little dramas unfold about minor characters. This same Marty, only twenty-one, is working three shifts in a row in

order to get time off to go to see "his kids." These kids he considers his because their father, one night in the South Pacific, took Marty's orders for him because Marty "was about to get shacked up with a babe over there and he wanted to do me a favor."[48] In carrying out the orders, the father was killed.

Again, as in Mister Roberts, the tedium, the boredom, and the red-tape is dramatized, the little things that caused great annoyance:

> almost well, he was innured in one of those little hells of waiting to which the Army habitually consigns impatient men.[49]

> 'they' - Washington, the Army - had it all now, in black and white, that he had been born, and when and gone to school, and where, worked here, lived there...secure in fireproof files in Washington, likely to be around long after his fleshly namesake called it a day.[50]

And the war-weariness, in this glimpse of the girl waiting by her husband's wardroom:

> one of the sort you saw everywhere in the war years - in crowded busses, traveling alone in the transcontinental day coaches; worried, patient, faithful Penelope.[51]

In the other hospital story, Sometimes You Break Even, the writing is original and lively in a good story of adventure and decision. The scene is a field hospital in the Pacific. The author was a hospital corpsman during the war, and Hartnung, the leading character, is a hospital corpsman. Hartnung risks his life in a tornado in an effort to procure an extra tank of oxygen for two wounded boys. One dies before he gets back.

There is a 'been there' quality in the hospital atmosphere:

> Hartnung sliced the steak with a scalpel and fried it on an instrument tray.[52]
>
> Hartnung sweated his supplies along the runway.[53]
>
> The really sick men had begun their suppressed night groaning, muted half sighs that punctuated each stage of their efforts to sleep in spite of pain.[54]
>
> A kid who would grin down the mouth of an enemy gun always got the shakes the night before his operation. But it wasn't the operation itself. Even if they were going to have their guts laid open, they were frantic with fear of the blessed spinal anesthetic.[55]

The styles of writing in 1919 and 1946 differ greatly because different things are being said, and they are being said in different ways, motivated by different thoughts and feelings. We have found the style in 1919 to be for the most part wordy, sentimental, oozing with surface emotion, with spoken feelings of glory and honor. It lacks courage of expression, originality, honesty, the sympathetic grasp of single tragedy. It ignores the unpleasant and the difficult. It finds few words for the horrible. The subjects of race and sex were not considered in the stories of 1919. As the problems inherent in those realms were not mentioned, so they were not solved, but lay, unexplored and smoldering, waiting for another generation to take them out into the open, look at them, become concerned and use every available word to describe them to those who must understand them if they are to be solved. It is as if a frilly pinkness lies over the earlier writing, making the blood spilled not so

red, the guns not so loud. It is, I believe, false and incomplete; it failed in communicating to the reading public what war is and what it does. Yet it wrote what that public wanted to read. It was, of course, a product of its time, a time that enjoyed its own happy deception. It is at once fortunate and tragic that this present generation can read of 'guts' without turning purple, can consider the problem of a starved half-crazy Jewish refugee girl objectively and helpfully without getting merely a throb in the throat.

Two stories yet to be mentioned from the ten with war themes from 1919 have a goody-goody, do-your-bit theme. In the Milky Way a middle-aged milkman leaves his milk route to go off vaguely to do something for the war. In Shipbuilders, a hard-hearted judge is moved to leniency in a case of allowing a loan which would help speed the building of ships for the war by the lawyer's reading of a letter from a soldier in Europe. With the same idealistic theme as the letter written by the soldier in A Great Little Soldier, the boy writes, "I can't wait to get back again (to the front lines) - Honestly, I want to live as much as anyone, but I'd die a thousand times rather than have that wicked nightmare of German militarism impose its rule on the world."[56] There is a high-flown, save-the-world feeling, with no cynicism whatever. Mention is made of boys being killed, but, as in no story from the 1919 Atlantic, there is no real picture of battle. The letter device is much less

effective than an actual account.

In summarizing the stories from 1919, what emerges as their philosophy is that war, however horrible, is glorious. To die for one's country is still the most noble end. The answers came easily. The war was shorter; it ended with a more decisive, hopeful victory. Of those few who felt impelled to write about it in 1919, most did so with optimism, as of a necessary deed well done, or at least as of an event containing more good than evil.

The feeling as expressed by Guy's friend, Mrs. Baldwin, in Autumn Crocuses was that it was not good to dwell on ugly things or to write about them. Guy wrote some poems, referred to in the story only by their titles, Half a Corpse and Eating Bread and Butter, in which he invites "them to eat it with him in a trench with unburied comrades lying in No-Man's Land before them."[57] Mrs. Baldwin reads the poems, and when Guy asks her what she thinks of them, she answers:

> 'You ought not to write like that - with hatred in your heart. Can great poetry be written out of hatred? And it's not only yourself it hurts: it hurts other people...spreads a mood of darkness and fever just when they are so in need of light and calm...You imprison them, force them back into their helpless suffering; when what they pray for is strength to rise above it and to feel all the goodness and love that has been given for them; to feel what is beautiful, not what is horrible; so as to be worthy of their dead.[58]

Mrs. Baldwin echoes what the people in 1919 wanted to hear.

She has, it seems to me, an ostrich-like philosophy: if we don't talk or write of the horrors of war, they will cease to exist. She is the voice for the wave of emotion that believed that the war to end all wars had just been fought. And her philosophy is the one which predominated.

Guy, on the other hand, represents bitter, questioning frustration. In 1919 he is shouted down by Mrs. Baldwin. But his thoughts and feelings reappear and dominate the philosophy behind the 1946 writing.

Guy argues with Mrs. Baldwin that millions were "slaughtered, tortured, driven mad because of greasy, greedy wire-pullers in their leather chairs at home."[59] In answer, Mrs. Baldwin asks if he doesn't believe that the crime was Germany's. He laughs sneeringly. She continues:

> 'And weren't we all responsible...wasn't the fuse simply our conception of our national safety? of our national honor?...You are so wrong, so ungenerous, so vindictive...We all hate war...
>
> There are bad and selfish people everywhere, -among poets, I feel sure, just as much as among statesmen; but hasn't this war proved - since everybody has gone - that no one group is bad and selfish; that there are men in every group who have been glad to die for their country?'[60]

Guy has said the same thing that the lieutenant in <u>Waves of Darkness</u> says a decade later:

> An unreasoning indignation shook him against all who had placed Everett where he lay. For the frightened enemy that shot Everett and was probably already dead he had pity. 'But I wish,' he thought, 'that all those in power, country men and enemy alike, who decided for war, all those who profit by it, lay dead with their wealth and their honors and that Everett stood upright again with his life before him.'[61]

But this time no Mrs. Baldwin rises up to contradict him. This war there were no Pollyannas.

The writers of 1919 found a soothing faith. In Margaret Montague's The Gift, a minister whose son has been killed in France has lost his faith in God and humanity. On the day before Easter, he is depressed and overcome at the thought of having to preach of hope and resurrection to his people on the following day. A woman who is dying of a long and painful disease comes to him for help in her distress over the death of her son, who was killed also in the war. She says to the minister:

> What I really need to believe is that what my son did served some great magnificent purpose - not just the immediate one of beating back the Germans - but something beyond even that...that there is a God who cares for the unspeakably precious gift that my son offered...
> Sometimes...I seem to feel something bigger, and more tender, and infinitely more understanding than anything I could ever have thought of... Someone to whom you would want to give your whole self...[62]

As she talks through her problems, she restores the minister's faith as well as her own, until he is able to say:

> We are all making extraordinary gifts to one another in these great and terrible days. It is the flaming gift of humanity, that God inspires mankind to make to mankind.[63]

Horrible as the war was, it was conceded glorious to die in it, for it was a war to save mankind.

In 1946, the emphasis is very different. Listen to Mister Roberts:

'Just this once, just this one war anyhow, let us try to say true things about the dead. Begin by canceling the phrase "our honored dead," for that is not true: we forget them; we do not honor them except in rhetoric, and the phrase is the badge of those who want something of the dead. If the dead of this war must have a mutual encomium, then let it be "poor dead bastards." There is at least a little humanity in that.'[64]

Listen to Hartnung in Sometimes You Break Even:

'...they lied to us in the schools and churches when they told us a human life is sacred. It isn't. It's expendable.'[65]

Listen to Waves of Darkness:

the natives had fled to the hills and left their town to the foreigners who fought in a war the inhabitants could not understand and the outcome of which could leave them no different than before. He guessed that there were many who had fought bravely on both sides who understood it all no better than the natives and had as little stake in eventual victory...

To object or to struggle was like shouting into a big wind that tears the words from the corners of one's mouth before even oneself can hear them. He, his friend, his country men, the enemy, were all dying leaves cast on the black waters of some mysterious river. Even now the current ran faster and the leaves whirled toward the dark lip of destruction.[66]

Why, then, did these boys fight at all? Why did they go to war?

Lt. Roberts is "a young man of sensitivity, perceptiveness, and idealism...He wants to be in the war; like filings to a magnet, he is powerfully drawn to the war and to the general desolation of the time..."[67]

The lieutenant in Waves of Darkness had enlisted in a dangerous service:

> Not because he believed the war was fought for any cause worth dying for. Rather, he saw the war clearly as the finished product of universal ignorance, avarice, and brutality. A little out of adolescent vanity, but more because he had failed to become a conscientious objector, as he ought to have done, he chose to accept the consequences in an effort to redeem by personal valor a lost consistency of purpose.[68]

The boys went to war because they were caught in "the general desolation of the time." Their youth kept them from an attitude of complete defeatism and drew them toward a part in the Big Event. But they went with few of the illusions of glory and salvation that inspired the boys in 1917.

When the lieutenant in <u>Waves of Darkness</u> is wounded and about to die, his nihilistic thoughts were those which were much in the minds of other boys in this last war:

> Life seemed so poor a thing that he smiled to himself at having feared to lose it. There was no hatred in his heart against anyone, but rather pity. He considered the shortness of man's days, the pointlessness of his best hopes in comparison with the certainty and conclusiveness of death, and could see him only as a poor creature struggling for a moment above a forever escaping stream of time that seemed to run nowhere. It would have been better for man, he felt, if he had been given no trace of gentleness, no desire for goodness, no capacity for love...With them men hoped, struggled pitifully, and were totally defeated by an alien universe in which they wandered as unwanted strangers. Without them, an animal, man might happily eat, reproduce, and die, one with what is.[69]

But the story does not quite end there. 1946 is not completely black. The lieutenant discovers that he has sight in one eye, when he thought he was totally blind;

the will to live surges up again, and a spark of hope appears.

The strongest positive element in the 1946 scene is the fact that the soldiers themselves came home to write of the war. They wrote so that everyone might know what it was like, not in eulogistic terms, but rather in terms of how it felt to be one lone soldier in a foxhole with a dead companion, one hospital corpsman struggling to bring an oxygen tank through a Pacific tornado, one perceptive, bored, frustrated lieutenant on a ship out of the line of any sort of action, making the adjustment "with gallantry, courage, and fortitude...a kind of hero."[70] This sort of honest sensitive interpretation brought the soldier's war to the understanding of the people.

A second important positive quality in 1946 is the depth of concern for humanity in these stories. The lieutenant in Waves of Darkness feels no hatred, but only pity, for the pathetic enemy who killed his friend in contrast to the letter-writer of A Great Little Soldier, 1919, who is anxious to get back to the front lines to run his bayonet through another bloody Boche. There is far more thoughtful, intelligent concern for the problems of the military government, in terms of the effect on specific individuals, in the two 1946 stories, The Girl Without a Name and Ratachusky's Return, than in The Wonder of It from 1919, which sees the Germans as a people who want only to

be bossed. From Little Victor, a story of a French child who was called as a witness in a case involving his mother and an American soldier, the American sergeant serving as court interpretor makes this comment, "I gazed at his thin, undernourished body. I thought, this is war, this slow starvation of children. Seven years old, and he looks a scrawny five."[71] Soldiers of this war felt and observed with intelligent sympathy; they felt strongly enough to write of undernourished children and of mistreated refugees, of Negro soldiers who brought chocolate to French children, of all of the little bits of humanity that are affected by total war. These stories, as a group, approach the analytical perception of the great Russian and French novelists. There is that feeling for humanity in them which must exist if life is to be accurately interpreted.

* * *

Although we have considered them in two separate groups, all of the stories from 1919 and those from 1946 belong distinctly to their respective years. In the completed picture, the same understanding and considerate interest that created Fighter also wrote Waves of Darkness. And the stilted sentimentalism of Christmas Roses also bogged down Autumn Crocuses.

In the light-hearted folk tales we found great similarity in subject matter and style in the two years; but as we turned to the more serious stories, we found the courses of the

1919 and 1946 writers to veer farther and farther apart until in the war stories only the slightest connections are left, in the persons of Guy and Mr. Ferguson, who send out feelers in the 1946 direction. The majority of the writing of 1919 was marked by pretentious unrealism. In the 1946 writing a mastery of realistic interpretation is felt, an understanding and sympathy for humanity.

Footnotes

(Since all of the magazine references are to the *Atlantic Monthly*, I have given only volume and page numbers, avoiding constant repetition of the name. Since, also, the footnotes are almost entirely reference to four volumes of the *Atlantic Monthly*, I have avoided the awkward if not confusing apparatus of Roman capitals by using Arabic numerals. The volumes concerned are CXXIII and CXXIV for 1919, CLXXVII and CLXXVIII for 1946.)

Introduction

[1] Margaret Foley, *The Best Short Stories 1946*, p. vii.
[2] *Ibid.*
[3] F. L. Pattee, *The Development of the American Short Story*, p. [illegible].
[4] V. L. Parrington, *The Beginnings of Critical Realism in America*, p. 398.

Part I: The Non-War Stories

[1] 178 (Nov. 1946), 91.
[2] *Ibid.*
[3] *Ibid.*
[4] 178 (Aug. 1946), 101.
[5] *Ibid.*
[6] *Ibid.*, 102.
[7] 178 (Dec. 1946), 113.
[8] 177 (March 1946), 75.
[9] 178 (Oct. 1946), 112.
[10] 123 (Feb. 1919), 136.
[11] 177 (April 1946), 109.
[12] *Ibid.*, 110.
[13] 124 (Sept. 1919), 355.
[14] *Ibid.*
[15] *Ibid.*, 353-354.
[16] 123 (Feb. 1919), 138.
[17] *Ibid.*, 234.
[18] 124 (Nov. 1919), 615.
[19] 124 (Dec. 1919), 738.
[20] *Ibid.*
[21] 124 (Sept. 1919), 357.
[22] *Ibid.*, 359.
[23] 178 (July 1946), 89.
[24] *Ibid.*, 89-90.
[25] *Ibid.*, 91.
[26] *Ibid.*, 92.
[27] 178 (Sept. 1946), 84.
[28] *Ibid.*
[29] 177 (Jan. 1946), 100.
[30] *Ibid.*, 98.
[31] 177 (June 1946), 64.
[32] *Ibid.*, 65-66.
[33] 124 (Nov. 1919), 625.
[34] 177 (May 1946), 109.
[35] *Ibid.*, 110, 112.
[36] 177 (Feb. 1946), 84.
[37] *Ibid.*, 85.

[38]James Gray, *O'Henry Memorial Award Prize Stories of 1946*, p. x.
[39]178 (July 1946), 103.
[40]*Ibid.*, 104.
[41]178 (Nov. 1946), 80.
[42]*Ibid.*, 81.
[43]177 (Jan. 1946), 85.
[44]*Ibid.*
[45]177 (June 1946), 67.
[46]124 (Nov. 1919), 674.
[47]178 (Dec. 1946), 91.
[48]*Ibid.*
[49]*Ibid.*, 94.
[50]*Ibid.*, 96.
[51]*Ibid.*, 97.
[52]178 (Oct. 1946), 115-116.
[53]*Ibid.*, 113.
[54]*Ibid.*, 116.
[55]*Ibid.*, 117.
[56]*Ibid.*

Part II: *The War Stories*

[1]178 (Nov. 1946), 100.
[2]178 (Aug. 1946), 63.
[3]Edward J. O'Brien, *Best Short Stories of 1919*, p. 360-361.
[4]124 (Aug. 1919), 152.
[5]177 (Jan. 1946), 77-78.
[6]*Ibid.*, 78.
[7]*Ibid.*, 75.
[8]*Ibid.*
[9]*Ibid.*, 76.
[10]*Ibid.*, 78-79.
[11]178 (Aug. 1919), 159.
[12]123 (Jan. 1946), 74.
[13]178 (Aug. 1919), 150.
[14]*Ibid.*, 151.
[15]*Ibid.*, 161.
[16]123 (March 1919), 329.
[17]*Ibid.*, 332.
[18]*Ibid.*
[19]*Ibid.*, 333.
[20]124 (Sept. 1919), 322.
[21]*Ibid.*, 331.
[22]124 (July 1919), 12.
[23]*Ibid.*, 8.
[24]*Ibid.*, 17.
[25]*Ibid.*
[26]177 (April 1946), 51.
[27]*Ibid.*, 52.
[28]*Ibid.*, 54.
[29]177 (June 1946), 58.
[30]*Ibid.*
[31]124 (Dec. 1919), 817.
[32]*Ibid.*
[33]124 (Sept. 1919), 518.
[34]*Ibid.*, 519.
[35]177 (Feb. 1946), 98.
[36]177 (Jan. 1946), 49.
[37]*Ibid.*
[38]177 (May 1946), 63.
[39]124 (Sept. 1919), 376.
[40]*Ibid.*, 377.
[41]173 (Nov. 1946), 100.
[42]*Ibid.*
[43]*Ibid.*, 104.
[44]*Ibid.*, 106.
[45]177 (June 1946), 147.
[46]123 (March 1919), 332.
[47]178 (July 1946), 73.
[48]*Ibid.*
[49]*Ibid.*, 72.
[50]*Ibid.*, 75.
[51]*Ibid.*
[52]177 (Feb. 1946), 78.
[53]*Ibid.*
[54]*Ibid.*, 96.
[55]*Ibid.*
[56]123 (May 1919), 672.
[57]124 (Aug. 1919), 159.
[58]*Ibid.*, 161.
[59]*Ibid.*, 160.
[60]*Ibid.*
[61]177 (Jan. 1946), 76.
[62]123 (March 1919), 371.
[63]*Ibid.*, 372.
[64]177 (May 1946), 49.
[65]177 (Feb. 1946), 142.
[66]177 (Jan. 1946), 76-77.
[67]177 (April 1946), 49.
[68]177 (Jan. 1946), 80.
[69]*Ibid.*
[70]177 (April 1946), 49.
[71]178 (Oct. 1946), 66.

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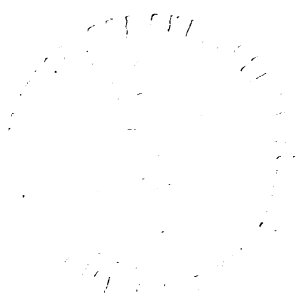

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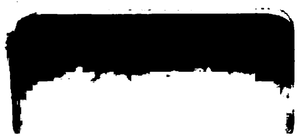

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