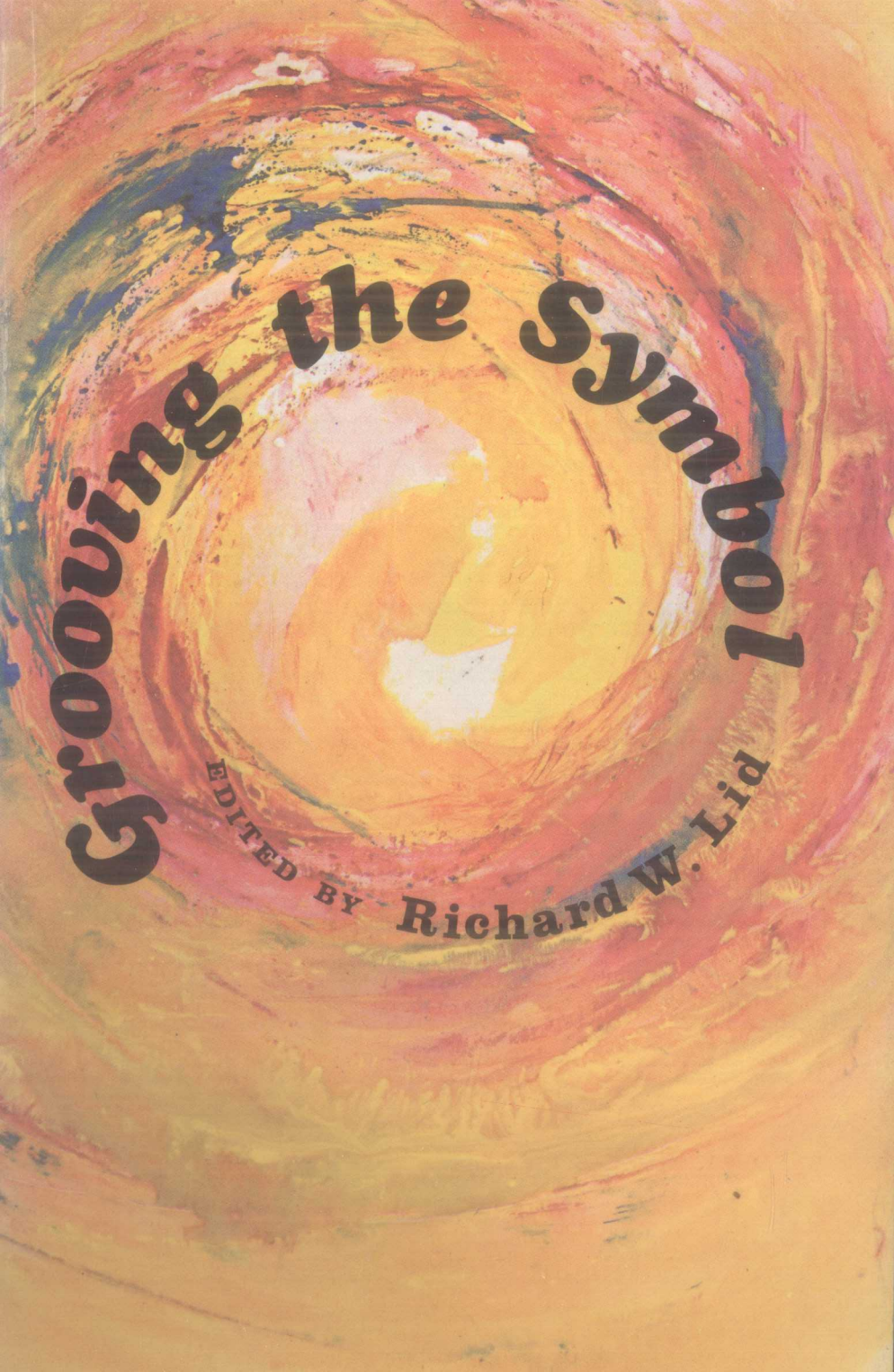
Grooving the Symbol
EDITED BY Richard W. Lid

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Preface

Grooving the Symbol is a book of contemporary American readings for college students. It assumes an audience that grew up in a decade of awareness. *Grooving the Symbol* provides a broad spectrum of new statements in essay, fiction, and poetry about this growing and changing awareness.

We cannot understand what is without some sense of what has been. For this reason, the opening section of Part One of *Grooving the Symbol* deals with "Some Ancestors: Old and New." Here the present and the readers of the present are confronted with a variety of experiences from the near American past. To speak of ancestors as both "old" and "new" correctly suggests that the names have been chosen in terms of present relevance. The next section, "Some Descendants: Recent and Contemporary," includes five essays dealing with a more immediate America. The last section of Part One—"Some Futurists"—offers some imaginative glimpses of the world that could be, suggesting the ways in which our vision of the future is really dominated by our concern with the present.

Part Two of *Grooving the Symbol* organizes and explores related issues involving five broad areas: Identity, Society, Education, the Media and the Arts, and Making It. The intent is to describe and define fully the contemporary sensibility through fiction, poetry, and essay. All the readings can be seen as an expression of our contemporary cultural and moral codes. These five themes are themselves not new; their formulation here and the problems they raise are.

Other ways of organizing the material no doubt will occur to the instructor, and he should move among the selections as best suits his purposes. *Symbol and Myth* supplies four brief statements about symbolic language and myth and their social uses. This material can be read inde-

pendently or as frames of reference for discussing the fiction, poetry, and essays in the volume.

The editor of *Grooving the Symbol* is, like everyone, the representative of a generation, locked in time by background, education, profession. He believes, like many other concerned instructors, that he must break out of the past and move into the present—now, today, not alone but with his students, so that he too can "groove" the symbols of the America of the Seventies and come responsibly to terms with it.

R. W. L.

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PART ONE

Part One

1

Some Ancestors: Old and New

By popular definition an ancestor is a dead relative we have forgotten about—or one we wish we could forget about. Both kinds of ancestors are represented in the selections which follow.

For most of us there is a mild shock of recognition in discovering the Nick Adams of Ernest Hemingway's "Indian Camp" to be the prototype of generations of sensitive American youth. To explore Nick's experience in the form given to us is to begin to sound the meaning of our own experiences.

For most of the same group of us it is less pleasant to come across James Agee's account of himself running after a black couple on a road in the rural South to ask them a question, initially unaware of the fear and terror he is causing them. Agee's coming to awareness is also part of the American experience, as are the feelings of that young man and woman on that road.

The "old and new" ancestors which we meet in this section represent the diverse elements that form our cultural background. In the voices they are given to speak to us with and in their stories we can recognize social and historical determinants, as well as familiar literary and linguistic patterns. The experiences of the young Richard Wright as he describes them in "The Ethics of Living Jim Crow"; the story of Flitcraft's attempt to escape middle class American life, as told by Dashiell Hammett's Sam Spade in *The Maltese Falcon;* Lawrence Ferlinghetti's hopes during the Eisenhower years, as he ironically recounts them in verse: these

and the other retelling of experiences by ancestors in this section reflect the pluralism of American culture. They also represent attempts to cope with, match wits with, come to terms with society. At least part of their American-ness surely lies in their attempts to define and give meaning to the seemingly indeterminate fate of American lives.

ERNEST HEMINGWAY

Indian Camp

At the lake shore there was another rowboat drawn up. The two Indians stood waiting.

Nick and his father got in the stern of the boat and the Indians shoved it off and one of them got in to row. Uncle George sat in the stern of the camp rowboat. The young Indian shoved the camp boat off and got in to row Uncle George.

The two boats started off in the dark. Nick heard the oarlocks of the other boat quite a way ahead of them in the mist. The Indians rowed with quick choppy strokes. Nick lay back with his father's arm around him. It was cold on the water. The Indian who was rowing them was working very hard, but the other boat moved further ahead in the mist all the time.

"Where are we going, Dad?" Nick asked.

"Over to the Indian camp. There is an Indian lady very sick."

"Oh," said Nick.

Across the bay they found the other boat beached. Uncle George was smoking a cigar in the dark. The young Indian pulled the boat way up the beach. Uncle George gave both the Indians cigars.

They walked up from the beach through a meadow that was soaking wet with dew, following the young Indian who carried a lantern. Then they went into the woods and followed a trail that led to the logging road that ran back into the hills. It was much lighter on the logging road as the timber was cut away on both sides. The young Indian stopped and blew out his lantern and they all walked on along the road.

They came around a bend and a dog came out barking. Ahead were the lights of the shanties where the Indian bark-peelers lived. More dogs rushed out at them. The two Indians sent them back to the shanties. In the shanty nearest the road

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there was a light in the window. An old woman stood in the doorway holding a lamp.

Inside on a wooden bunk lay a young Indian woman. She had been trying to have her baby for two days. All the old women in the camp had been helping her. The men had moved off up the road to sit in the dark and smoke out of range of the noise she made. She screamed just as Nick and the two Indians followed his father and Uncle George into the shanty. She lay in the lower bunk, very big under a quilt. Her head was turned to one side. In the upper bunk was her husband. He had cut his foot very badly with an ax three days before. He was smoking a pipe. The room smelled very bad.

Nick's father ordered some water to be put on the stove, and while it was heating he spoke to Nick.

"This lady is going to have a baby, Nick," he said.

"I know," said Nick.

"You don't know," said his father. "Listen to me. What she is going through is called being in labor. The baby wants to be born and she wants it to be born. All her muscles are trying to get the baby born. This is what is happening when she screams."

"I see," Nick said.

Just then the woman cried out.

"Oh, Daddy, can't you give her something to make her stop screaming?" asked Nick.

"No. I haven't any anaesthetic," his father said. "But her screams are not important. I don't hear them because they are not important."

The husband in the upper bunk rolled over against the wall.

The woman in the kitchen motioned to the doctor that the water was hot. Nick's father went into the kitchen and poured about half of the water out of the big kettle into a basin. Into the water left in the kettle he put several things he unwrapped from a handkerchief.

"Those must boil," he said, and begun to scrub his hands in the basin of hot water with a cake of soap he had brought from the camp. Nick watched his father's hands scrubbing each other with the soap. While his father washed his hands very carefully and thoroughly, he talked.

"You see, Nick, babies are supposed to be born head first but sometimes they're not. When they're not they make a lot of trouble for everybody. Maybe I'll have to operate on this lady. We'll know in a little while."

When he was satisfied with his hands he went in and went to work.

"Pull back that quilt, will you, George?" he said. "I'd rather not touch it."

Later when he started to operate Uncle George and three Indian men held the woman still. She bit Uncle George on the arm and Uncle George said, "Damn squaw bitch!" and the young Indian who had rowed Uncle George over laughed at him. Nick held the basin for his father. It took a long time.

His father picked the baby up and slapped it to make it breathe and handed it to the old woman.

"See, it's a boy, Nick," he said. "How do you like being an interne?"

Nick said, "All right." He was looking away so as not to see what his father was doing.

"There. That gets it," said his father and put something into the basin.

Nick didn't look at it.

"Now," his father said, "there's some stitches to put in. You can watch this or not, Nick, just as you like. I'm going to sew up the incision I made."

Nick did not watch. His curiosity had been gone for a long time.

His father finished and stood up. Uncle George and the three Indian men stood up. Nick put the basin out in the kitchen.

Uncle George looked at his arm. The young Indian smiled reminiscently.

"I'll put some peroxide on that, George," the doctor said.

He bent over the Indian woman. She was quiet now and her eyes were closed. She looked very pale. She did not know what had become of the baby or anything.

"I'll be back in the morning," the doctor said, standing up. "The nurse should be here from St. Ignace by noon and she'll bring everything we need."

He was feeling exalted and talkative as football players are in the dressing room after a game.

"That's one for the medical journal, George," he said. "Doing a Caesarian with a jack-knife and sewing it up with nine-foot, tapered gut leaders."

Uncle George was standing against the wall, looking at his arm.

"Oh, you're a great man, all right," he said.

"Ought to have a look at the proud father. They're usually the worst sufferers in these little affairs," the doctor said. "I must say he took it all pretty quietly."

He pulled back the blanket from the Indian's head. His hand came away wet. He mounted on the edge of the lower bunk with the lamp in one hand and looked in. The Indian lay with his face toward the wall. His throat had been cut from ear to ear. The blood had flowed down into a pool where his body sagged the bunk. His head rested on his left arm. The open razor lay, edge up, in the blankets.

"Take Nick out of the shanty, George," the doctor said.

There was no need of that. Nick, standing in the door of the kitchen, had a good view of the upper bunk when his father, the lamp in one hand, tipped the Indian's head back.

It was just beginning to be daylight when they walked along the logging road back toward the lake.

"I'm terribly sorry I brought you along, Nickie," said his father, all his post-operative exhilaration gone. "It was an awful mess to put you through."

"Do ladies always have such a hard time having babies?" Nick asked.

"No, that was very, very exceptional."

"Why did he kill himself, Daddy?"

"I don't know, Nick. He couldn't stand things, I guess."

"Do many men kill themselves, Daddy?"

"Not very many, Nick."

"Do many women?"

"Hardly ever."

"Don't they ever?"

"Oh, yes. They do sometimes."