

Twentieth-Century
Literary Criticism

TCLC

117

Volume 117

Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

**Criticism of the
Works of Novelists, Poets, Playwrights,
Short Story Writers, and Other Creative Writers
Who Lived between 1900 and 1999,
from the First Published Critical
Appraisals to Current Evaluations**



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Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

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Preface

Since its inception more than fifteen years ago, *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism* (TCLC) has been purchased and used by nearly 10,000 school, public, and college or university libraries. TCLC has covered more than 500 authors, representing 58 nationalities and over 25,000 titles. No other reference source has surveyed the critical response to twentieth-century authors and literature as thoroughly as TCLC. In the words of one reviewer, "there is nothing comparable available." TCLC "is a gold mine of information—dates, pseudonyms, biographical information, and criticism from books and periodicals—which many librarians would have difficulty assembling on their own."

Scope of the Series

TCLC is designed to serve as an introduction to authors who died between 1900 and 1999 and to the most significant interpretations of these author's works. Volumes published from 1978 through 1999 included authors who died between 1900 and 1960. The great poets, novelists, short story writers, playwrights, and philosophers of the period are frequently studied in high school and college literature courses. In organizing and reprinting the vast amount of critical material written on these authors, TCLC helps students develop valuable insight into literary history, promotes a better understanding of the texts, and sparks ideas for papers and assignments. Each entry in TCLC presents a comprehensive survey on an author's career or an individual work of literature and provides the user with a multiplicity of interpretations and assessments. Such variety allows students to pursue their own interests; furthermore, it fosters an awareness that literature is dynamic and responsive to many different opinions.

Every fourth volume of TCLC is devoted to literary topics. These topics widen the focus of the series from the individual authors to such broader subjects as literary movements, prominent themes in twentieth-century literature, literary reaction to political and historical events, significant eras in literary history, prominent literary anniversaries, and the literatures of cultures that are often overlooked by English-speaking readers.

TCLC is designed as a companion series to Gale's *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, (CLC) which reprints commentary on authors who died after 1999. Because of the different time periods under consideration, there is no duplication of material between CLC and TCLC.

Organization of the Book

A TCLC entry consists of the following elements:

- The **Author Heading** cites the name under which the author most commonly wrote, followed by birth and death dates. Also located here are any name variations under which an author wrote, including transliterated forms for authors whose native languages use nonroman alphabets. If the author wrote consistently under a pseudonym, the pseudonym will be listed in the author heading and the author's actual name given in parenthesis on the first line of the biographical and critical information. Uncertain birth or death dates are indicated by question marks. Single-work entries are preceded by a heading that consists of the most common form of the title in English translation (if applicable) and the original date of composition.
- A **Portrait of the Author** is included when available.
- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author, work, or topic that is the subject of the entry.
- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The genre and publication date of each work is given. In the case of foreign authors whose

works have been translated into English, the English-language version of the title follows in brackets. Unless otherwise indicated, dramas are dated by first performance, not first publication.

- Reprinted **Criticism** is arranged chronologically in each entry to provide a useful perspective on changes in critical evaluation over time. The critic's name and the date of composition or publication of the critical work are given at the beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the source in which it appeared. All titles by the author featured in the text are printed in boldface type. Footnotes are reprinted at the end of each essay or excerpt. In the case of excerpted criticism, only those footnotes that pertain to the excerpted texts are included.
- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism.
- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** explicating each piece.
- An annotated bibliography of **Further Reading** appears at the end of each entry and suggests resources for additional study. In some cases, significant essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights are included here. Boxed material following the further reading list provides references to other biographical and critical sources on the author in series published by Gale.

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A **Cumulative Author Index** lists all of the authors that appear in a wide variety of reference sources published by the Gale Group, including *TCLC*. A complete list of these sources is found facing the first page of the Author Index. The index also includes birth and death dates and cross references between pseudonyms and actual names.

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A **Cumulative Topic Index** lists the literary themes and topics treated in the series as well as in *Classical and Medieval Literature Criticism*, *Literature Criticism from 1400 to 1800*, *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism*, and the *Contemporary Literary Criticism Yearbook*, which was discontinued in 1998.

An alphabetical **Title Index** accompanies each volume of *TCLC*. Listings of titles by authors covered in the given volume are followed by the author's name and the corresponding page numbers where the titles are discussed. English translations of foreign titles and variations of titles are cross-referenced to the title under which a work was originally published. Titles of novels, dramas, nonfiction books, and poetry, short story, or essay collections are printed in italics, while individual poems, short stories, and essays are printed in roman type within quotation marks.

In response to numerous suggestions from librarians, Gale also produces an annual paperbound edition of the *TCLC* cumulative title index. This annual cumulation, which alphabetically lists all titles reviewed in the series, is available to all customers. Additional copies of this index are available upon request. Librarians and patrons will welcome this separate index; it saves shelf space, is easy to use, and is recyclable upon receipt of the next edition.

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William H. Slavick, "Going to School to DuBose Heyward," *The Harlem Renaissance Re-examined*, ed. Victor A. Kramer (AMS, 1987), 65- 91; reprinted in *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*, vol. 59, ed. Jennifer Garipey (Detroit: The Gale Group, 1995), 94-105.

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Erskine Caldwell

1903-1987

(Born Erskine Preston Caldwell) American novelist, short story writer, nonfiction writer, journalist, autobiographer, and scriptwriter.

INTRODUCTION

One of the most popular and at the same time controversial American authors of the early to mid-twentieth century, Caldwell is best known for his works of fiction that graphically depict the plight of impoverished Southerners. He was a fervent opponent of social exploitation, and his writings frequently portray grotesque rustics who have been reduced to an animalistic state of ignorance, bigotry, and violence by the economic and political realities of the world in which they live.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

The son of an itinerant preacher, Caldwell was born in 1903. His first two novels, *The Bastard* (1929), the story of a man whose deprived childhood figures in his later criminality, and *Poor Fool* (1930), which examines corruption in boxing, garnered little critical or popular attention. However, his next two novels, *Tobacco Road* (1932) and *God's Little Acre* (1933), achieved widespread notoriety upon being named in a highly publicized obscenity trial. Business, agricultural, and political groups in the South charged Caldwell with exaggerating the degraded living conditions in their region; in several instances the author was accused of being a propagandist for communism. Nevertheless, *Tobacco Road* and *God's Little Acre* eventually became the cornerstone of Caldwell's literary reputation and won international acclaim for their powerful depictions of social and economic conditions that dehumanize the poor and undermine such American values as hard work and individualism. Caldwell died in 1987.

MAJOR WORKS

Tobacco Road centers on the Lesters, a family of Georgia sharecroppers who are so debased by poverty that they disregard the needs of others to fulfill their own immediate physical wants and sexual desires. As a result of their blind pursuit of personal gratification, the Lesters are ultimately destroyed as a family. *God's Little Acre* chronicles the declining fortunes of the Waldons, another sharecropping family. At the bidding of their obstinate patriarch Ty



Ty, the Waldons obsessively dig for gold they believe is on their property, thereby rendering the land useless for growing crops. As in *Tobacco Road*, the characters in *God's Little Acre* come to ruin due to their ignorance, greed, and unrestrained sexuality. These two novels were the beginning of a ten-novel series that Caldwell later termed his "cyclorama of Southern life." Although none of these novels is linked by common characters or events into a consistent historical framework, Caldwell's "cyclorama" provides a comprehensive portrait of the milieu of the American South of his times. Such novels as *Journeyman* (1935), the story of a self-proclaimed preacher whose passionate revival meetings release the repressed sexuality of his congregation, and *Trouble in July* (1940), which focuses on a complacent sheriff's involvement in a lynching, earned praise for their incisive treatment of social ills. Later works in the cyclorama include *Tragic Ground* (1944), *A House in the Uplands* (1946), *The Sure Hand of God* (1947), *This Very Earth* (1948), *Place Called Estherville* (1949), and *Episode in Palmetto* (1950). While most of Caldwell's novels failed to attain the renown of *To-*

bacco Road and *God's Little Acre*, several are recognized for their effective rendering of his characteristic themes and concerns, including *The Sacrilege of Alan Kent* (1936), *Georgia Boy* (1943), and *The Weather Shelter* (1969).

In addition to his novels, Caldwell also published several collections of short stories and nonfiction works that similarly dealt with the deprived conditions throughout the Southern United States. Prominent among these titles are the story collections *We Are the Living* (1933), *Kneel to the Rising Sun* (1933), and *Southways* (1938); *You Have Seen Their Faces* (1937), a collaborative effort with his second wife, the renowned photographer Margaret Bourke-White; and the autobiographical works *Call It Experience* (1951), an informal recollection of the author's writing career, *Deep South* (1968), a memoir of his father, and *In Search of Bisco* (1965), about Caldwell's attempt to find the black playmate whose childhood friendship influenced his racial attitudes.

CRITICAL RECEPTION

While a number of critics condemned Caldwell's often lurid narratives of Southern life, especially for his fusion of humor with social commentary, others agreed with Sylvia Jenkins Cook that Caldwell skillfully "increases the burden of comic horror the reader has to bear until the episodes finally become intolerable and a recognition of their tragic implications is inevitable." Several of Caldwell's works, particularly *Tobacco Road* and *God's Little Acre*, have been recurrently banned and censored due to explicit sexual content, yet have earned extensive praise for their vivid evocation of Southern dialects and folkways. Despite the fact that critics generally consider his later works to be repetitive of his earlier fiction, Caldwell is cited with such authors as John Steinbeck and Ernest Hemingway as a significant contributor to the development of social themes in twentieth-century American literature.

PRINCIPAL WORKS

The Bastard (novel) 1929
American Earth (short stories) 1930
Poor Fool (novel) 1930
Tobacco Road (novel) 1932
God's Little Acre (novel) 1933
Kneel to the Rising Sun (short stories) 1933
We Are the Living (short stories) 1933
Journeyman (novel) 1935
Some American People (novel) 1935
The Sacrilege of Alan Kent (novel) 1936
You Have Seen Their Faces [with Margaret Bourke-White] (nonfiction and photographs) 1937
Southways (short stories) 1938
Trouble in July (novel) 1940

Say, Is This the U.S.A. (nonfiction) 1941
All Night Long (novel) 1942
Palmetto Country [editor] (novel) 1942
Georgia Boy (novel) 1943
Tragic Ground (novel) 1944
A House in the Uplands (novel) 1946
The Sure Hand of God (novel) 1947
This Very Earth (novel) 1948
Place Called Estherville (novel) 1949
Episode in Palmetto (novel) 1950
Call It Experience (autobiography) 1951
A Lamp for Nightfall (novel) 1952
The Complete Stories of Erskine Caldwell (short stories) 1953
Love and Money (novel) 1954
Gretta (novel) 1955
Claudelle Inglish (novel) 1958
Jenny by Nature (novel) 1961
Close to Home (novel) 1962
The Last Night of Summer (novel) 1963
Around About America (novel) 1964
In Search of Bisco (autobiography) 1965
Miss Mama Aimee (novel) 1967
Deep South (nonfiction) 1968
Summertime Island (novel) 1968
The Weather Shelter (novel) 1969
The Earnshaw Neighborhood (novel) 1971
Annette (novel) 1973
Afternoons in Mid-America (novel) 1976
With All My Might (autobiography) 1987

CRITICISM

Erskine Caldwell with Richard Kelly and Marcia Pankake (interview date 1984)

SOURCE: "Fifty Years since *Tobacco Road*: An Interview with Erskine Caldwell," in *Conversations with Erskine Caldwell*, edited by Edwin T. Arnold, University Press of Mississippi, 1988, pp. 218-32.

[In the following interview, originally published in 1984, Caldwell discusses his life in the South, his early literary influences, and his opinions about censorship and racism.]

On the evening of July 15, 1982, Erskine Caldwell and his wife, Virginia, paid a visit to Wilson Library at the University of Minnesota for the opening of an exhibit celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of *Tobacco Road*. Austin McLean, curator of the Special Collections and Rare Book Library, organized the exhibit and arranged for the Caldwells to come from their home in Scottsdale, Arizona for the occasion. The program, attended by more than one hundred Friends of Special Collections, included reminiscences by Edward P. Schwartz, a

book collector, founder of the Henry Miller Literary Society, and friend of the Caldwells; a presentation by the author of a facsimile of his 1929 broadside, "**In Defense of Myself**" (Palemon Press), which was added to the Library's collection; and a reading by Professor Göran Stockenström, Chairman of the University's Department of Scandinavian Studies, of the author's early story, "**Country Full of Swedes**."

The centerpiece of the evening was an hour-long interview with the seventy-nine year old Mr. Caldwell, which he had agreed to in lieu of giving a formal talk. "I am not a public speaker," he had modestly written to Austin McLean, "and could probably not get a passing grade as a conversationalist." In preparing for the interview we chose questions we hoped would allow Mr. Caldwell both to entertain and enlighten those present—book collectors, students and faculty, members of the general public—and to talk about some aspects of his life and work not discussed in print before. We assumed that many in the audience—familiar with our guest for his enormously popular *Tobacco Road* and *God's Little Acre*—would not be aware that he has written fifty other books, one hundred and fifty stories, and that his work is increasingly the subject of scholarship in the United States and Europe.

With the three of us seated at a small table before the group and a tape recorder running, Mr. Caldwell answered our questions extemporaneously and vigorously, commenting on such topics as his early life in the South, learning to write, his method of working, humor, screenwriting, favorite authors, little magazines, advice for young writers, Max Perkins, censorship, and the situation of blacks in the U.S. today. We are grateful to him for his generous responses to our questions and for allowing his answers (unedited by him) to be published. We would also like to thank Austin McLean for organizing the program and for inviting our participation.

[Interviewer:] *You've written eloquently about your father in **Call It Experience** and in **Deep South** and you seem to have absorbed some of your social consciousness from him. Could you tell us a little bit about your mother and what qualities you might have gotten from her?*

[Caldwell:] Well, the reason I've never written much about my mother is because she once asked me not to—and so I haven't. But I suppose it would be all right if I said a few things about her here. She was a school teacher and I think it was probably that—her interest in education—that influenced me most. Then, as far as a career went, I didn't want to be a doctor, I didn't want to be a lawyer. I didn't want to be this or that, so the only thing left was to be a writer. That's what I ended up being, more or less, and I attribute that, fortunately, to my mother's influence because she had the idea that it was worthwhile to get an education. So I did the best I could to get an education, I suppose, to please her in a way. And I more or less became a tramp scholar, I went from one college to another, time after time. The reason I did that was I thought I could

play football and so I more or less tried to improve my standing as a football player by going from a larger college to another larger college. And I ended up in my football career playing semi-pro football in the Anthracite League in Pennsylvania. So that's my whole background in education.

What do you remember reading as a child?

I don't remember reading anything actually. The only book I ever remembered having or reading or looking at, I acquired when I was going to a lower grade school. I don't know what grade it was now, 5th or 7th or something, in Tennessee where we were living at that time, and the teacher had a test for her class. The test, I think it was based on Geography, was to point out what we had learned by studying Geography. Anyway, this was a kind of test all her students were eligible for in this lower grade school, and I happened to win the contest. I remember very well what the book was. It was called Gibbon's *Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire*. And that was so far above my ability to understand that I never finished reading the book!

I wonder if you could say something about your early attempts at writing fiction and getting published. You mentioned somewhere, I think, a seven-year accumulation of rejection slips, which should be a great encouragement to anyone out there in the audience trying to write.

I think I had a normal career in those days of being an unpublished writer. I suppose I was no different than, let's say, another 10,000 or 100,000 would-be writers. Everybody has to have a rejection program in life in order to succeed. You can't succeed without being rejected to begin with because it's the only way you can learn. You've got to learn by failure. My career really began when I was working on a newspaper, as a newspaper reporter, and I was attempting to write short stories or write fiction at that time. I did not succeed after several years, so I left that field and went into raising potatoes as another avocation in the state of Maine, and it was there I continued my education, I suppose you'd call it. I was self-taught in that sense. And that was over a period of years—I think a period of 10 years altogether, probably, from the beginning to the end of my failure, and at the end of that time I did have a short story accepted and published in a little magazine. A little magazine, of course, is not a wide-circulation large magazine like *Cosmopolitan* used to be. But this was a little magazine, probably was mimeographed and only had 3 or 400 copies circulation, but it was *printed*. Anyway, that was my first publication, and I had this great big box full of rejection slips that I was keeping very assiduously, as inspiration, and so when I finished gloating over the fact that I had been published I took all these rejection slips I'd accumulated over the years and made a very fine bonfire with them.

*The first story you had accepted I think was "**Midsummer Passion**," and I remember reading somewhere that almost immediately after that you had about five more stories ac-*

cepted. I wonder if you can identify any particular qualities that you were able to get into those stories that, say, were lacking in the earlier ones.

I think the only answer to that would be the fact that over a period of time you have to achieve some sort of ableness in constructing a story, because a story can be formless, completely formless, and have no sense of form at all, but I think you do learn, if you have any inclination to be able to learn, that sooner or later you're going to have to make this thing, this story, fit into a certain form. It has to have a beginning; it has to have a middle; it has to have an end; you have to have certain characters—the good boys, the bad boys, and so forth—those things constitute a story basically. I think any writer who is attempting to be a writer instinctively finds out that this is something he has to accomplish before he can get, he can achieve, publication. So to me, the whole idea of being a writer is completely in the hands of the writer himself. You can learn by example, you can learn by instruction, but in the end you have to do it yourself.

One other question in that area—you said that in the early stage of your writing you made no attempt to break into the mass circulation periodicals—that you, rather, felt there was more to be learned from the little magazines, and I wondered what you learned from them, if there's anything you could tell us about what you might have gained in going that route and whether that would be a good route for writers today, as well?

The only answer I can see to that is this. A young writer has to have something to give or something to present; he cannot just be an imitator of an older writer. That's fatal; you end up being nothing. And to me, to be able to experiment with writing was the most important feeling I had of these so-called "little magazines," because there you could experiment. You had nobody hanging over you saying "Do it this way" or "Do it that way." You had no editorship to try to make you change something to fit someone else's conception. You were left entirely on your own. That was a great feature, in my opinion, of little magazines in that era. And by being able to experiment, I think, a writer, right now, today, a young writer, if he can find the means and the ways to experiment, I think he will achieve something much better than he will by trying to imitate what someone else has already done, because that imitation is fatal for a young writer. I don't know about the older writers, I'm not concerned about the old ones, but the young writers are the ones who should not fail. They should have this opportunity to experiment, and wherever they can find it, they should be encouraged. But of course these days you've great difficulty finding where you can do this in print. Because it has to be in print. If you don't write something and get it in print, it doesn't exist. It's still a manuscript.

Your literary experiments served you very well. One aspect of your works that readers have enjoyed has been the colorful language—the earthy eloquence of southern whites

and the vivid speech of the blacks or the talk of the Maine farmers. How did you convey such different speech, such different rhythms and dialects in your work?

I would have to answer that by saying that I was disinterested. I had no interest whatsoever in imitating dialect. You know, if you had read some of the early dialect stories written about Negro life, it was almost unintelligible to look at much less to pronounce or to get any sense out of because it was a phonetic kind of thing. It made no sense at all. To me, the secret (it isn't a secret but the essence of transmitting the ethnic life, we'll say, of the black people) is in the rhythm of their speech, not in their dialect, not in their southern accent, or in the western accent, or any accent. Accent means nothing. But the rhythm of their speech, I think, tells a whole story that you want to have on this character or these people you're writing about. And that rhythm, of course, goes with your place in life, with what you're doing. Are you doing manual work, are you digging ditches, are you driving a truck, or are you a lawyer pleading a case? All these things have different variations in rhythm, I think. At least to me they do. I can see that feeling of a person's occupation, his life work, whatever it is, in his way of speech, and to me, I think I always tried to transmit that rhythm, not the dialect of speaking.

I understand that you are a great reader of dictionaries and that you once went through a Webster's Collegiate and crossed out all the words of more than four syllables. I wonder if you could say something about why you did that and about your practice of reading dictionaries.

To try to be facetious about the thing, I think, probably my main motive in crossing out the words of many syllables and of great length was because I couldn't spell them. I didn't want to be burdened with having to look up a word in the dictionary every time I wanted to use it because I'm not a very good speller. So I think that has something to do with it. But more than that it was my conviction that a simple word is much more effective than a long, compound word. You can compound a word to great length like the Germans do, which I would not adhere to for my point. To me, to use a simple word that derived from the origin—when you use a certain kind of dictionary, the older *Webster's Dictionary*, not the current ones, not the 3rd edition but way back in the 2nd edition, *Webster's Collegiate* or whatnot—you'll find the origin of the word, usually right in the beginning of the definition, where the pronunciation is, the accent marks, and so forth. They're always in there, whether it's Old French, Old English, Latin, Greek or whatnot—that gives you a key, an entrée into that word that you're trying to use, and if you hit right, just right, you'll get the correct word every time, and it's going to be a very short word and it's not going to have any great compound length at all.

You've tended, I think, to use shorter, simpler words in your fiction, and to allow yourself longer words in your nonfiction. Is that because you think there is really a fundamental difference—that the two forms require different vocabularies?

Yes, I think so. I know that's very true that I do that. I don't know whether I'm trying to impress people with my knowledge or what when I use a long word in nonfiction. I think that's a result of doing journalism because I've done much journalism in my life off and on. I did newspaper and magazine journalism, television, radio. In those kinds of things I think simply that you have to exert a little bit of, oh, boastful knowledge about something, so you impress them by the big long word. That could be true, I don't know. But I don't know any other explanation other than the fact that it comes out of journalism, whereas fiction I think is much different writing.

*Let's talk a little bit about the books of yours that people know best. Both in **Tobacco Road** and in **God's Little Acre**, important characters make fun of the church and of institutionalized religion. For example, Sister Bessie tells Jeeter that she's instructed Dude to preach his first sermon in the church against men wearing black shirts, and when Jeeter asks why, she says, "Preachers always have to be against things." Was your father shocked by this picture of religion that you put in these books, and did you have some other feelings about what religion was in the South and in people's lives?*

Well, as far as my father was concerned, I don't think he was shocked by anything that I wrote because he knew more about life than I did. He was more of a sociologist than he was anything else, and he was very familiar with the bottom lines of existence, so that I could have learned from him, and I did learn from him, very much. Now the fact that he was a religious man in this sense, being a minister, I don't think had anything to do with the fact because he was also a teacher, a newspaper writer, in addition to being a minister. But his great interest in life was people—whatever people were doing, were saying, were living—that was his great interest. I think that, more or less, influenced me a great deal because I could see the origin of stories and fiction and anything else that is written. It has to come out of people's lives to start with. You can be a reporter as far as journalistic ideas are concerned, but you also have to be a creator, or inventor of stories, of life, because otherwise if you don't do that you're not creating fiction. You'll have non-fiction instead of fiction, and what we're trying to do as fiction writers, is to write something that does not exist, but may exist in the past or in the future. It may exist. But we can't go and put our finger on it and say there it is right there, and there he is, and so forth—that's non-fiction. So what I have always done is, more or less, to use the idea that you have to invent everything and to make it more lifelike than life is itself.

*I have to ask you a couple of questions about "**Country Full of Swedes**." One is that the narrator refers several times to the "back kingdom," and says he should never have left there, etc. I wonder if you could give us any clues as to what the "back kingdom" is?*

That's just a figure of speech, in a sense. I lived in the middle of Maine, central Maine. North of that would be

the forestland and all the occupation evolving around that—lumber mills and so forth. East of that is farming—potato country, where everything is flat and no trees. People who leave those two environments and come down to central Maine or coastal Maine leave something behind. They leave an old homestead or leave an old environment of some kind, and I have heard the expression "back kingdom." It also always applied to back home. Back home could either be in the North in the woods, or in the East in the potato fields. In this particular story I don't know where he came from or anything of the sort. It doesn't interest me and it doesn't matter, I don't think. But the "back kingdom" idea was that he was a newcomer, down in the more or less civilized part of Maine, so to speak, greater population and so forth, and the "back kingdom" was his reference to his former life.

One other question on the story. I'm always interested in where ideas for stories originate and I'm wondering if you can remember where you got the idea for this particular story.

Well, I got it from a bunch of Swedes. I happened to be living in a rural community, in a township called Mount Vernon, in central Maine, and I was living there on a farm. The farms there were not very large, they were maybe forty acres, eighty acres, and so there were quite a few farms in the whole expanse of this road where I was living. I remember very clearly that down the foot of the hill from where I was living there was a house of Swedish people from Waterville who had been working in a paper mill for many years, came over and bought and renovated and added to and put a new roof on and built a woodshed and things like that and painted it yellow. That more or less originated the idea in my mind that these people were the prototypes of what I wanted to write about. So they were more or less based on actual existence. But I couldn't point out any one person who was in this story, for example. They had to be invented.

Do you see, in retrospect, your works fitting into a tradition of Southern or frontier humor?

Frontier humor? I don't know—what is that?

Oh, maybe a tradition of literature dealing with backwoodsmen, of dealing with violence in American life, of rather exaggerated characters?

Well, I thought what I was doing was being influenced by the environment in which I lived in the South, and maybe I lived in some of these regions that created or originated frontier humor. Of course there was violence, yes. But I lived in so many southern states, all the southern states I lived in at one time or another, and so I accumulated a lot of this feeling, I suppose, but it all happened to congeal into one local feeling. So I could not isolate my memories and say "This took place over here and this took place over there"—it's all just one complete picture to me. Now what the humor is I don't know. I think any agricul-