

# A GREAT GIFT: READING JOHN WILLIAM CORRINGTON

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*It is rare in life you get to say what you think where it will count. It becomes important to say the right things. So I will try.*

– John William Corrington, letter to  
Charles Bukowski, January 9, 1962<sup>1</sup>

## TAKEN BY SURPRISE

It was a day embedded in one of those summer weeks when idleness and industry have settled into a quiet truce. I am, or so I tell myself, writing a book on lawyers and stories, one of those elusive books that never seem to get written. On this particular morning, I'm waiting, with a patience easily confused for idleness, for that strong writing wind by

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\* Editor, Legal Studies Forum. When I set out to learn more about John William Corrington from those who knew him, taught him, practiced law with him, lived with him, and loved him, no one could have been more responsive and helpful than Joyce H. Corrington, Bill Corrington's wife and collaborator. Joyce Corrington quietly encouraged my endeavors, responded to my persistent questions about her husband and his work, reviewed her husband's unpublished papers, and most importantly, graciously authorized my unfettered access to her husband's papers. My thanks, again, to Joyce Corrington for her help and her friendship.

John William Corrington's papers are archived at Centenary College, Shreveport, Louisiana. My work with the Corrington Papers was made all the more enjoyable by the able assistance of Margery Wright, who catalogued Corrington's papers at Centenary College, and by Roger Becker, Director of the Magale Library at Centenary College, who were the most collegial of hosts during my stay at Centenary College.

<sup>1</sup> Corrington letter to Charles Bukowski, sent from Baton Rouge. Corrington Papers, Centenary College. [All Corrington letters cited hereinafter are located in the Corrington Papers, Centenary College, Shreveport, Louisiana]. Corrington writes Bukowski about a introduction to his poetry that he plans to write for Jon Webb's collection of Bukowski poetry that will be published by Webb's Loujon Press. Corrington corresponded with Charles Bukowski throughout the 1960s. The relationship ended on a sour note, instigated by Bukowski (a man never known for loyalty to his friends), and the two men went their different ways.

Jon Webb and his wife, "Gypsy Lou," published the *Outsider*, a New Orleans magazine of poetry, and founded the Loujon Press, which they eventually moved to Tucson, Arizona. Both Corrington and Bukowski contributed poetry to the *Outsider*, and both men held Jon Webb in high esteem. Loujon Press published a now highly collectable book of Bukowski's poetry under the title *It Catches My Heart in Its Hands* (New Orleans, 1963) (777 copies printed, all signed by Bukowski). Corrington wrote the introduction to the book and, in doing so, made the case for Bukowski as a major poet. See generally Lloyd Halliburton, *Corrington, Bukowski, and the Loujon Press*, 13 (1) Louisiana Literature 103 (1996).

which I will set sail with the book. I did indeed catch that strong wind; and no, the book on lawyers and stories didn't get written.

A fine summer day it was, watching with detached bemusement as my writing flounders, when the postman arrives with another morning's diversions. I edit a journal—the *Legal Studies Forum*<sup>2</sup>—and it provides a steady source of diversions, diversions all the more attractive when one's own writing is stalled. On this particular morning, the diversion turns out to be an essay about a writer named John William Corrington, and his novella, "Decoration Day." I've never heard of Corrington, but apparently "Decoration Day" is a story about a retired judge, and the author of the essay assures me the novella will be of substantial interest to a legal audience.

I read the essay with an editor's hope soured with a history of disappointment.<sup>3</sup> The opening paragraphs are not encouraging. The author wants to explore the novella to show how "Decoration Day" reflects Plato's sense of order in the soul; my eyes glaze over at the thought of it.<sup>4</sup> An editor, like a teacher, learns to battle cynicism, and the bad judgments that follow in its wake by seeking the best in what we read, and to do that it helps to remain curious. And so I find, tucked

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<sup>2</sup> Some of you know the journal; and to those who do not, I will say only this—it's a big little journal with a proud history. As editor, I'm the man on the tail-end of that history, a fate Corrington would understand better than most. A history carries with it duties, so it falls to me to live this history and to pursue, as relentlessly as energy and time and resources permit, the varied intellectual diversions which will ultimately find a place in the journal.

<sup>3</sup> An editor reads a manuscript expectantly, with hope it will be a startling discovery, a pleasure to all those who read it, an honor to publish. But this hope is tempered with the knowledge that most essays do not live up to such expectations.

<sup>4</sup> Those who teach know the situation: You read the first page of a student's paper and the only thing to prompt you to read what follows is a strong sense of duty, and the understanding that this student (as indeed, most writers) is struggling, still learning. At the worst of times, it may help for a teacher to remind himself that reading shoddy, ill-formed ideas (and writing that seems never good enough) is work we get paid to do. It may also help to realize that we ourselves, we teachers, are capable of shoddy writing. But an editor, like a teacher, has a duty to this author/stranger, a duty to read well and find value, if possible, in what was written.

I try, not always successfully, to forestall negative judgment and look for something of value in the essays I review for publication. I must read a manuscript well if I am to provide a considered judgment about its features and qualities, and then describe to the author my decision not to publish the work. My best efforts at diplomacy in this critical decision sometimes fail. I have found no guaranteed way to assure authors that their work has been read carefully. Editors make enemies. If it be so, as it is, let my failed efforts at diplomacy be testimony that I have undertaken with care my duties to a journal which has claimed so much of me.

away in a footnote, a brief biographical sketch of John William Corrington.<sup>5</sup> Here is the footnote:

John William Corrington received a Ph.D. from the University of Sussex in 1964 and taught English at Louisiana State and Loyola until 1973. He received his J.D. from Tulane in 1976. While practicing law in New Orleans, he remained active as a writer, working on film and television scripts, and continued to publish novels, poetry, and short stories. Among his most significant works are the novels *The Bombardier* (1970) and *Shad Sentell* (1984), the poetry volume, *Lines to the South and Other Poems* (1965), and a volume of short stories, *The Actes and Monuments* (1978).<sup>6</sup>

If Corrington's Platonic sense of justice was inducement for summer indolence, the biographical footnote on Corrington's career roused me. First, I'm puzzled that I've never heard of Corrington. While there is now more scholarly writing in the field of law and literature, law and popular culture, narrative jurisprudence, and legal storytelling than most of us can possibly manage to read,<sup>7</sup> I can't recall ever having seen a single reference to Corrington.<sup>8</sup> With the swarm of lawyer novelists and their growing prominence in popular culture, learning of still another would not start much of a fire.<sup>9</sup> But there is something in the short biographical

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<sup>5</sup> Different readers react differently to footnotes. They seem far more acceptable in legal scholarly circles than beyond. I once tried to write without them; I have now given up that effort.

<sup>6</sup> Douglas Mitchell, *John William Corrington's Decoration Day*, 25 *Legal Stud. F.* 687, 686, n.1 (2000). Corrington attended Tulane Law School from 1972 until 1975, and received his degree in 1975, rather than 1976. Corrington's degree from the University of Sussex was a D. Phil., not a Ph.D.

<sup>7</sup> A bibliography on narrative jurisprudence and legal storytelling now in-progress lists over 400 articles and books; more appear every week.

<sup>8</sup> I did find, as my work on Corrington proceeded, one scholar, William Domnarski, who had written about Corrington for the legal community. See William Domnarski, *A Novelist's Knowing Look at the Law: Short Stories by John William Corrington*, 69 *ABAJ* 1706 (November, 1983) [26 *Legal Stud. F.* 839 (2002)]. Domnarski, a decade later, would write still another essay on Corrington. See William Domnarski, "Corrington's Lawyer as Moralizer," in *JOHN WILLIAM CORRINGTON: SOUTHERN MAN OF LETTERS* 144-155 (Conway, Arkansas: UCA Press, 1994) [26 *Legal Stud. F.* 847 (2002)] [hereinafter *Southern Man of Letters*]. The only other mention of Corrington in the legal literature that I have been able to locate is Judith L. Maute's review of two Corrington collections of stories. See Judith L. Maute, *Book Review*, 37 *Okla. L. Rev.* 636 (1984) (reviewing the lawyer stories in *The Actes and Monuments* and *The Southern Reporter*).

<sup>9</sup> While there has been a great outpouring of legal fiction in the last twenty years (most of it eminently forgettable), I still find the idea of the lawyer novelist interesting. And since I teach a course on lawyers and fiction, I'm in constant search of stories (and new authors). Of course, most of the fiction I read (in which lawyers play a significant

sketch about Corrington that suggests, a man cut from a different cloth: an English professor with a D. Phil., a published poet, a novelist, and Hollywood screenwriter. Then he becomes a lawyer. What I found in the footnote left me curious about Corrington, his work and his life, and his fiction.

#### READING CORRINGTON

Editing an essay on Corrington's novella, "Decoration Day," the novella seemed an obvious place to begin my reading.<sup>10</sup> "Decoration Day," was published with a second novella, "The Risi's Wife," under the title *All My Trials*,<sup>11</sup> and as I soon learned, the book is out-of-print. No copy to be found in my university library, I turn to the Web, where, wondrously, a curious man (with dollars in his pocket) can peruse the holdings of some 9,000 independent book dealers located around the country. A few

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part) is not something I ever want to read again, and therefore, cannot imagine wanting to teach it. But the course and my thinking about it does influence my reading.

While the lawyer turned novelist is now a common phenomenon, there is, I think, a reason to be curious about lawyers who write novels. We live in the age of the billable hour (and increments of an hour), an era in which, for the lawyer, time equals money. Law is a demanding profession, and as students learn early-on, a great thief of time. Law students claim to have no time to read anything but law cases, indeed, one of the reasons I get a few lost souls in my lawyers and literature course is the desire to make time to read something other than law books (even if it happens to be books "about" lawyers). So the idea that a practicing lawyer might find time to not just read a novel but to write one is rather intriguing. How do they find the time? When do they write? What long suppressed dream, what stories heard, what smoldering sense of the self as a writer, makes its way into a lawyer's fiction?

Lawyer novelists interest us because we have questions we want to ask them. Law students seek, ever so ardently, to find a place in the "real world." Does the lawyer turned novelist move in the opposite direction, seeking in fiction to escape the iron grasp of Law and its Necessities? It's possible of course, that even in these days of well-paid lawyers, one might turn to novel writing simply to make big money. John Grisham has made a pile of it. But I have serious doubts that it is money that prompts a lawyer to become a novelist. And if it is not money, what?

<sup>10</sup> Since Corrington was a published poet, novelist, literary critic, and screenwriter before he began writing legal fiction, one might follow a different strategy in reading his work. For example, one might read Corrington, beginning with his poetry in the early and mid-1960s; his early novels and first collection of short stories, and then his academic writings, the early 1970s novel, and then his lawyer fiction and detective mystery fiction. Since I've never tried to read an author in this systematic, chronological way, I saw no reason to start doing so with Corrington.

<sup>11</sup> John William Corrington, *ALL MY TRIALS* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1987).

minutes on abebooks.com<sup>12</sup> and their marvelous used-book search-engine and it's possible to locate even the most obscure book and a bookseller who will see it to your door.<sup>13</sup>

July 1, 2000. I locate a paperback copy of *All My Trials* at Pinchpenny Books in Ashland, Kentucky (and how remarkable it is that *All My Trials* could have ended up in such a place; a story there I suspect, albeit one never to be told). \$4.00 and \$1.58 shipping. *All My Trials* is on its way.<sup>14</sup> A few days later, I've read "Decoration Day" and decided that Corrington is the real thing. "Decoration Day" is a story of perfect pitch, luminous prose, and vividly complex characters. Corrington writes as if he has God looking over his shoulder and the Devil knocking at the door;<sup>15</sup> this John William Corrington may be the man to know. It seemed so on that July summer day when I finished reading "Decoration Day," and it seems so now.

Something in the gravity and reach of "Decoration Day" prompted the acquisition of another copy of *All My Trials*. Chuck Flotkoetter, a bookseller at Lombard, Illinois had one and he wanted a personal check for \$21; no credit cards. A week later a pristine hard-back copy of *All My*

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<sup>12</sup> "Advanced Book Exchange," <<http://abebooks.com>> (visited so frequently that I now own books that I will not live long enough to read)(reader beware—abebooks.com is addictive).

<sup>13</sup> Originally, I used Bibliofind.com to acquire used and out-of-print books. This great resource, acquired by Amazon.com, has now been eclipsed in usefulness by the Advanced Book Exchange/abebooks.com. Alibris ([www.alibris.com](http://www.alibris.com)) advertises itself as representing some 19 million books available from booksellers in 21 countries. Even so, in my experience, abebooks.com is the best source of used and out-of-print books.

<sup>14</sup> *All My Trials* is not a rare book, but it is by no means in plentiful supply. A search on abebooks.com on January 1, 2002 lists only two copies of the book available for sale, one of them a hard cover edition offered for sale by Turgid Tomes, a book store in Nashville, Tennessee at \$38 (plus shipping). A search of Amazon.com's Bibliofind reveals another copy of the paper back edition of *All My Trials* for sale. It is now early April, all three copies of *All My Trials* are still available.

<sup>15</sup> Corrington, in his early days as a writer, a quarter century before he would write "Decoration Day," would have this to say about the Devil and his writing:

The devil rides inside, and I fight the sonofabitch and lean on him and tell him to report to the principal, but he fingers the rotten air and makes these poems which have no place in the mouth or eyes of a sharecropper's great-grandson, and he robes me of hate and love and lets me have the empty bottles out of which he has poured all the fluids that count and make men susceptible and free. Dr. Frankenstein, making the Great Beast out of his own intestines. Somebody stop me before I write more.

Corrington letter to Charles Bukowski, dated November 7, 1961. Corrington followed the comment with a slap of the face, complaining that he had gotten "the creeping philosophies," and that with a return to his "regular typewriter" he wouldn't be writing anymore of this kind of stuff.

*Trials* arrives and I read “The Risi’s Wife,” the second of Corrington’s two legal novellas. If “Decoration Day” is told with the steady-hand of a seasoned Southern master, “The Risi’s Wife” is a metaphysical love story written under the influence of Corrington’s reading of Indian philosophy.<sup>16</sup> A reader walks away from this story staggering a bit (as do the two lawyers who share the story), reminded perhaps of Dorothy’s aside to Toto in the *Wizard of Oz*: “We’re not in Kansas anymore.”

“Decoration Day” and “The Risi’s Wife” are both stunning works of fiction and my response in reading them, I begin to see, is a bit odd. I impulsively call the University of Arkansas Press to see if I can find someone who knows anything about Corrington<sup>17</sup> and how the Press came

<sup>16</sup> My colleague and friend, Louise Harmon, lured into reading Corrington by no more than the promise that he was a writer unlike any other, explores “The Risi’s Wife,” one of Corrington’s most complex and demanding stories, in her essay, *The Canyon of Doubt: John William Corrington’s The Risi’s Wife*, 26 *Legal Stud. F.* 859 (2002). Corrington, describing “The Risi’s Wife” in a 1985 interview, says:

“Risi” is the Indian word for a seer with extraordinary powers from the time of Rig Veda. And the form is patterned after Conrad: if you know Conrad, you know this form. It’s two lawyers discussing a case that one of them once had. It started as a divorce case and ended as a manifestation of Shiva, but it’s done with cold, calculating determination to get the same kind of effects that Conrad was able to get out of Marlow’s monologues in such works as “Heart of Darkness.”

William Parrill, “After the Confederate War: A Conversation with John William Corrington (1932-1988),” in *Southern Man of Letters*, *supra* note 8, 181-201, at 185 [26 *Legal Stud. F.* 671, 675-676 (2002)] [hereinafter Parrill Interview]. Corrington, later in the interview, described the story this way:

A good old boy from Shreveport, from Rapides Parish, actually, gets drafted, and as one of the lawyers tells the other one, by some misbegotten fate, they send him to the China-Burma-India theatre where he flew the hump. And everybody who flew the hump smoked the hemp, because when you got up in one of those damned C 47s, you are flying from Assam in Northern India across the Himalayas down into Northern China. Here’s the problem: your ceiling is twenty-thousand feet and the mountains range up to twenty-nine and thirty-thousand feet. If you misread your compass and your map, you can fly down a four-hundred mile corridor into a sheer face of rock—and there’s no turning back and there’s no going up—you’re dead. This makes for a very nervous bunch of guys. In a certain way, it was more terrifying than having to combat German fighters. The description of the Himalayas I’m very proud of, just the sheer awe of something that reduces mankind to the size of a gnat. We’re going to have to go into deep space to encounter anything more humbling than that. Anyhow, he comes back and he has yoga powers he didn’t even intend to get. Imagine yoga powers in Shreveport in 1947.

*Id.* at 187-188 [27 *Legal Stud. F.* 671, at 678].

<sup>17</sup> A university library has biographical reference materials on well-published authors and the most obvious thing to do would have been to seek out these sources. I did not do that and I suspect if I had, this essay might never have been written.

For biographical sketches of Corrington in these standard reference sources, see Joseph M. Flora & Robert Bain (eds.), *CONTEMPORARY FICTION WRITERS OF THE SOUTH*:

to publish *All My Trials*.<sup>18</sup> Nothing comes of the call and I don't learn anything new about Corrington or the book.

Exactly what might have been driving this inordinate curiosity about Corrington, I'm not sure I would have been able to explain. I'm usually more than content to satisfy my curiosity about an author with what I find in a dust-jacket bio. Reading Richard Selzer, I know only that he is a surgeon turned literary man.<sup>19</sup> And beyond the dust-jacket facts—professor of surgery at Yale, retired to write full-time, now a prolific writer—I know Selzer only by way of what I intuit from his writings. And this dust-jacket knowledge of Selzer seems quite enough. I've been reading Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* with law students for years now with nothing remotely resembling a temptation to make the trip to Monroeville, Alabama, to visit the town and the courtroom so vividly, famously, fictionally portrayed in Lee's novel.<sup>20</sup> I've read, admired and

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A BIO-BIBLIOGRAPHICAL SOURCEBOOK 83-90 (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1993); Ann Evory & Linda Metzger (eds.), CONTEMPORARY AUTHORS 113-117 (Detroit: Gale Research Co., 1983)(Vol. 8: New Revision Series)(includes an interview with Corrington); John A. Garraty & Mark C. Carnes (eds.), AMERICAN NATIONAL BIOGRAPHY 535-537 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Robert Bain, Joseph M. Flora & Louis D. Rubin, Jr. (eds.), SOUTHERN WRITERS: A BIOGRAPHICAL DICTIONARY 99-100 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979).

<sup>18</sup> July 7, 2000. I double-check the University of Arkansas Press website and learn that *All My Trials* is indeed out-of-print as Amazon.com reports. In my call to the University of Arkansas Press, I manage, by one means or another, to talk with Lawrence Malley, the new editor of the press. Malley gives me some loose rope, we talk, he expresses an interest in the *Legal Studies Forum*. I suggest to Malley that if the University of Arkansas Press has no plans to put *All My Trials* back into print, I'd like to reprint the novellas in the *Forum*. Malley doesn't know who controls the copyright to the novellas. It's late on a Friday afternoon, and Malley has other things to do. He takes my telephone number and promises to get back to me. To date, I've heard nothing from him.

<sup>19</sup> See Richard Selzer, RITUALS OF SURGERY (New York: Simon and Schuster/Touchstone Book, 1974); MORTAL LESSONS: NOTES ON THE ART OF SURGERY (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1976); CONFESSIONS OF A KNIFE (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979); LETTERS TO A YOUNG DOCTOR (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982); TAKING THE WORLD IN FOR REPAIRS (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1986); IMAGINE A WOMAN & OTHER TALES (New York: Random House, 1990); DOWN FROM TROY: A DOCTOR COMES OF AGE (Boston: Little, Brown and Company/Back Bay Books, 1992); RAISING THE DEAD: A DOCTOR'S ENCOUNTER WITH HIS OWN MORTALITY (New York: Viking Penguin, 1994)(1993).

<sup>20</sup> Others, of course, do made the "pilgrimage." See e.g., Timothy Hoff, *Influences on Harper Lee: An Introduction the Symposium*, 45 Ala. L. Rev. 389 (1994). Hoff does not explain his reasons for visiting Monroeville, other than to note, in passing, that he has been teaching "Law in Literature" for many years, the implication being that *To Kill a Mockingbird* had long been on his course reading list. *Id.* at 399. Interested in what Tim Hoff might have to say about his quest to learn more about Harper Lee, I send Hoff an

taught Walker Percy's *The Second Coming*<sup>21</sup> without digging beyond the surface facts I know about Percy—trained as a physician, tuberculosis during the last years of his medical training, took up the reading of existential philosophers, did not practice medicine, slowly got around to making himself a novelist. I have dutifully acquired the Percy biographies,<sup>22</sup> a collection of letters exchanged between Percy and Shelby Foote,<sup>23</sup> and a collection of occasional writings published after Percy's death,<sup>24</sup> but haven't pursued these biographical sources in any kind of systematic way.<sup>25</sup> With Corrington it has turned out to be a different story.

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email to inquire about his pilgrimage to Lee's Monroeville. My note to Hoff went something like this:

In your introduction to the *To Kill a Mockingbird* symposium, you connected Harper Lee's portrayal of Atticus Finch in the novel to Lee's life, and during the course of that endeavor you made the trip to Monroeville. But, you do not tell us anything about your reading of and involvement with *To Kill a Mockingbird* that would have made this trip to Monroeville a "pilgrimage." Why the trip to Monroeville? Was it really a "pilgrimage"? What kind of relationship, as a reader and teacher, do you have with *To Kill a Mockingbird*?

Maybe, I tell myself, if I can get Tim Hoff to talk a bit about what he was after on that trip to Monroeville, I might get my bearings on my Corrington obsession. Indeed, I wonder if Tim Hoff, a long-time teacher of law and literature, might not know Corrington's work. If anyone in legal education circles knows Corrington's work, good chance it would be Hoff. But my inquiry to Hoff goes unanswered and I'm left to my own devices.

<sup>21</sup> Walker Percy, *THE SECOND COMING* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1980).

<sup>22</sup> Patrick Samway, *WALKER PERCY: A LIFE* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1997); Jay Tolson, *PILGRIM IN THE RUINS: A LIFE OF WALKER PERCY* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992). For an exploration of Percy's fiction, see John Edward Hardy, *THE FICTION OF WALKER PERCY* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987).

<sup>23</sup> Jay Tolson (ed.), *THE CORRESPONDENCE OF SHELBY FOOTE & WALKER PERCY* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1997).

<sup>24</sup> Patrick Samway (ed.), *WALKER PERCY: SIGN-POSTS IN A STRANGE LAND* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1991).

<sup>25</sup> My first introduction to the work of Robert Coles, a psychiatrist with literary interests, was his intellectual biography of Walker Percy. See Robert Coles, *WALKER PERCY: AN AMERICAN SEARCH* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1978). I began reading Percy because Coles wrote so convincingly that Percy was not a run-of-the-mill novelist. Now, reading Corrington, I find my interest in Walker Percy rekindled. Percy and Corrington were, of course, both Southern literary men and were not only professional acquaintances, but at one time, neighbors in Covington, Louisiana. Neither showed real affection or enthusiasm for the other's fiction. It was, according to Joyce Corrington, a matter of temperament more than it was about the nature of their writing. Joyce Corrington, email message to the author, April 3, 2002.

When the President of Centenary College approached Corrington about talking to Percy to see if he might be persuaded to give a lecture or perhaps a commencement speech at Centenary, Corrington notes in his journal: "I have no idea why he's so generally admired. Maybe I should have had folks in my novels who are confused, strung



## READING "DECORATION DAY"

"Decoration Day" is not in any sense difficult to describe (it's not experimental, post-modern, or genre-defying), but a description of the story by way of a condensed re-telling renders a pale imitation of the story itself. Corrington once noted, "I have yet to see a reading of an important modern novel which is not clearly partial; which does not play blind man to the novel's elephant."<sup>26</sup> Like any literary work of lasting merit, efforts to describe it falter when placed against the work itself. Corrington, early in his career as an English professor, writing about the work of writers he admired, recognized the problem. "I have found out a peculiar thing about great art. The greater it is, the less I can find to say about it."<sup>27</sup>

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out, and ready to say the rosary to solve their problems. What the hell, Walker is a decent man." Journal entry dated September 13, 1980 in *John William Corrington's Journals: 1980-1988*, 26 *Legal Stud. F.* 541 (2002) [hereinafter *Journal*]. Percy, in notes to Corrington, acknowledges receipt of Corrington's books but his two or three sentence replies, while complimentary, are slim pickings for a man looking for praise. See *Corrington Correspondence*, Corrington Papers, Centenary College.

<sup>26</sup> "The Twentieth Century Novel," typescript course notes. Corrington Papers, Centenary College. Corrington goes on to note:

[T]he modern novel contains at its core something of the irreducible mystery which pervades the human spirit. This is not to say that the novel is itself a mystery. That would be absurd. Rather the novel in its intricacy and in the symbolic array of its meanings and implications can parallel in form the operations of the human spirit . . . .

Corrington, in notes on Hemingway (for a course in "The Twentieth Century Novel") confronts the problem I now face in writing about Corrington: "It is difficult to know what to say about Hemingway. As with Joyce and Faulkner, it may be I know too much to be able to sort it out. And it is not head-knowledge, but that other kind that lives deeper and which is of one piece." "Ernest Hemingway" notes, in "The Twentieth Century Novel," *id.*

<sup>27</sup> "Ernest Hemingway" notes, *id.* "It is always easier to write about failures than about successes. If a man writes badly, it is because he is a fool or a liar or a phoney. If he writes well, it is because the gods have touched his lips with the burning coal . . . and there is very little to say except acknowledge the touch and let it go." Corrington letter to Charles Bukowski, undated (probably mid-1962).

Corrington, writing about his work on Norman Mailer, observed that what he had ended up with was "many loose ends and dangling propositions" and a concern that what he had managed to write wasn't scholarly at all:

What we are doing here is not scholarship, it is evocation. . . . It is madness to define a living, growing vision, especially when it belongs to a genius. One only touches it, knowing that however gently one touches, Heisenberg's principle of uncertainty may hold true. Still the attempt must be made . . . .

"Norman Mailer" notes, in *id.* See John William Corrington, *An American Dreamer*, 18 (1) *Chicago Rev.* 58, 66 (1965) (book review of Norman Mailer's *The American Dream*). And so it is, that from a distance, we readers/teachers attempt to touch (in our commentary) the work of the author.

Corrington was, of course, an academic and a student of literature and he knew he must, as teacher and critic, find a way to talk about the literature he found exemplary. And so, whatever my limits as a critic,<sup>28</sup> I must now say *something* about “Decoration Day,”<sup>29</sup> a story that left me, at the end, knowing I’d been places only *this* story could have taken me. But isn’t it just such a reading experience, having seen what could not be seen without the story, an experience difficult to recreate (or even explain), that makes one a reader, a real reader? And it is, I think, an experience that takes us, again and again, back to a particular author, an author who *made* that story and *made* that experience possible.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Working with the stories of another fine lawyer storyteller, Lowell B. Komie, I experience this same problem. See James R. Elkins, *Lowell B. Komie of Chicago—Writer and Lawyer*, 25 Legal Stud. F. 1 (2001). What can any we say, from a distance, about the work an author spends a life-time to create? Yes, I know literary critics attempt such descriptions, and I know they are ridiculed by authors for their efforts. But authors do want us to read their work, and to take it seriously. Protest though they may, they may still take pleasure in our “failed” efforts.

<sup>29</sup> I was once in an art galley with a woman (who happened to be my wife, a status that give her opinions instant validity), and she was insistent upon hearing my views about the paintings in the exhibit. I was content to report on what I found attractive, and the paintings that had little appeal to me, but she made it clear that my thumbs-up/thumbs-down approach to the paintings wasn’t satisfactory. She argued that I needed some way to talk about the choices I made. A judgment without an explanation simply meant that I didn’t fully understand what I was seeing. She argued that the paintings and whatever meaning they might have for me could not be fully understood and evaluated until I gained access to that sub-strata of knowledge beyond and beneath my first impressions of approval and disapproval. I find myself, often enough, trying to impart something of this notion (whether one calls it “critical reading” or something else) to the law students who find themselves reading fiction with me. Looking back on this incident now I see that my wife (now ex-wife) was simply asking me to do what we expect judges to do—render opinions but support them with an explanation of reasons.

Finally, we might note that not having a language to say what we mean has implications beyond the failed critical efforts of the student. Corrington, in his legal fiction, deals with truths not so readily amenable to language, truths which can be told only by way of story. James Boyd White, in his latest book, *The Edge of Meaning*, explores the personal, cultural, and literary features of this search for a language not readily available, and for truths that lie beyond immediate reach. See James Boyd White, *THE EDGE OF MEANING* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

<sup>30</sup> I remember picking up my first Don DeLillio book—*Names*. I was staying at a bed and breakfast in San Francisco, attending a Joseph Campbell workshop. I read that first DeLillio book over the course of a long sleepless evening and the next afternoon I was back for another DeLillio book. And so it went for a week, workshop by day, reading Don DeLillio at night—a rather delightful week.

As the story begins, we find Judge Albert Sidney Johnston Finch,<sup>31</sup> recently retired from the bench—a Louisiana state court judgeship—having taken up the gentlemen’s life, reading ancient Roman historians, listening to classical music,<sup>32</sup> musing about the possibility of writing a philosophical

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<sup>31</sup> Albert Sidney Johnston, the Confederate General, was one of Corrington’s heroes and we find him honoring the General in “Decoration Day” by naming his protagonist, Albert Sidney Johnston Finch. Some twenty years before he would write “Decoration Day,” Corrington, then an English professor at LSU, in one of many letters he would write to the poet and novelist, Charles Bukowski, relates to Bukowski a conversation with a former student who has set out to be “a Southern historian.” The young man knows his history, so Corrington talks with him about the battle at Shiloh and the General:

Albert Sidney Johnston who saw the sun of Austerlitz above that field and laughed and laughed as the peach blossoms and the beautiful young men fell all around, and laughed when he received a minor leg wound and went on laughing till he bled to death at the very verge, the lip of victory so near to Pittsburgh Landing where a taciturn and shabby clown named Grant had been surprised and outsmarted.

Letter to Charles Bukowski, dated November 13, 1961.

Albert Sidney Johnston fought at Shiloh and died from minor wounds received in battle there. *See generally* Charles P. Roland, ALBERT SIDNEY JOHNSTON: SOLDIER OF THREE REPUBLICS (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1964). Johnston has connections to both Corrington’s Louisiana and my Kentucky. General Johnston was born in Washington, Kentucky and attended Transylvania, just across town from the University of Kentucky which I attended as an undergraduate and where I received my law degree. Johnston attended West Point by appointment from Louisiana. At least some of General Johnston’s Civil War duty was in Kentucky. After the untimely death Corrington describes, Johnston was temporarily interred at New Orleans before being removed for burial in Texas.

One is reminded of another famous Finch lawyer, Atticus Finch, the now famous lawyer hero of Harper Lee’s 1964 novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Corrington doesn’t mention the novel in his writings, correspondence, or journals, but one must assume, as a teacher of literature, and a devotee of Southern literature in particular, he would have read a novel by an Alabama writer, and especially one so well-received as was *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

Corrington is likely to have adopted the name Finch from his own Shreveport. The Corringtons lived next door to the Finches for some fifty years. Otis Finch, the older son, was Bill’s age and his mentor. Bill was very ill from asthma as a child and it was Otis Finch who “taught him how to be a man.” Joyce Corrington, notation on a manuscript version of this essay, April 19, 2002.

<sup>32</sup> Corrington told William Parrill in a 1985 interview that his first and last love would always be music:

I wanted to be a professional musician. Unfortunately, I was born approximately fifteen or twenty years too late, and with a very small talent. My great ambition in life (and it still would be if there were a time machine) was to play lead trumpet in the Glenn Miller orchestra. That was the way I grew up. The pillars then were Tommy Dorsey, and Goodman, and Shaw, and Miller.

Parrill Interview, *supra* note 16, at 182 [26 Legal Stud. F. 671, 672 (2002)].

legal treatise.<sup>33</sup> He's a fisherman<sup>34</sup> and he's something of a loner. He's most definitely a Southerner.

Corrington had a Southerner's sensibility when it came to stories and how they work, and as a writer, once he had a story underway he knew how to keep it moving.<sup>35</sup> We've no more than been introduced to Judge Albert and his efforts at retirement when Albert Sidney's peace and

<sup>33</sup> The tentative title for Judge Albert's proposed legal treatise, *From Logos to Lex to Law*, shows up as the title for one of Corrington's few presentations to a legal audience. See "Logos, Lex, and Law," unpublished paper, presentation at the University of Oklahoma School of Law, January 31, 1985. Corrington Papers, Centenary College [26 Legal Stud. F. 709 (2002)]. Corrington comments on the relation of law to *logos* in "A Day in Thy Court" where a lawyer, set about some fishing—literal and metaphysical—observes:

It occurred to him that these green-golden fishes had meant as much to his life as the course of the law. But even as he thought it, he laughed aloud. Because bass were as much a part of the law as he was, as were the courts in which he passed his life, the attorneys with whom he lived it out. The law is *lex*. The bass is *logos*. She was. He remembered a passage from one of the old Greeks, something about how deep lies the *logos*, so deep that no dive could reach it. You could not, deep-diving, find the depth of the soul, though you traveled the whole way down, so profound is its *logos*. That was it.

"A Day in Thy Court," in John William Corrington, *THE COLLECTED STORIES OF JOHN WILLIAM CORRINGTON* 412-433, at 417 (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1990) [26 Legal Stud. F. 335, 340 (2002)] [hereinafter *Collected Stories*].

Limited as law might be when viewed in the context of his relation to *logos*, Corrington knew well the law's own mystery. Walter Journe, the lawyer in one of Corrington's stories, "Every Act Whatever of Man," loves the Civil Law because:

there came to it no problem that men had not struggled with before. And not simply Englishmen whose Common Law was as rough and recent as their ways, but Spaniards, Frenchmen, Germans—even Russians and Arabs. All had their civil codes. To be a civilian lawyer was like standing for a moment at the end of the law's long intricate web. This strand, two millennia old, still grew, was vital, and no man who served within it was left alone with his problem. If the code of Louisiana had no answer, then the Code of Napoleon. If not that, then Justinian or Gaius, the *Corpus Juris Civilis*. What work could man undertake that had not been done before, by those of every tongue and hue who had preceded, those brothers in the law?

"Every Act Whatever of Man," in *Collected Stories*, *id.* at 301-341, at 315 [26 Legal Stud. F. 245, 259 (2002)].

<sup>34</sup> Corrington, in a 1968 letter to his colleague and friend, Barbara Steinberg, wrote: "I have given myself over fully and without reservation to fishing for bass. Called green trout around here. In times of lunacy, the sane withdraw until the nuts kill off enough of each other so that during the lull, sanity can be heard again." Corrington letter to Barbara S. [Barbara Steinberg], dated November 18, 1968.

<sup>35</sup> Corrington, as philosophically sophisticated as any writer of legal fiction we've ever had, doesn't let his philosophical concerns gum-up his stories. Walker Percy, another "philosophical" writer, gave us a notable work of legal fiction in *The Second Coming*, but Percy was never as adept as Corrington in the pure art of story-telling.

contentment are threatened by a visit from Loreen Wendell and the unwelcome news that she's going to seek a divorce from Albert Sidney's godson, Billy Wendell. Albert Sidney may be new in his retirement but he takes it seriously—too seriously one might think—and he doesn't welcome the intrusion occasioned by Loreen Wendell's problems.

I was surely and adamantly retired. No more car thieves and pigeon-droppers, chicken-geeks and soft-tissue injuries. I was done with them and they with me. Not another eviction or foreclosure. Never a motion *in limine* or one more garnishment. If what I had was not the peace that passeth understanding, it would have to do till I was subpoenaed by a Higher Jurisdiction.<sup>36</sup>

Albert Sidney claims to have put his work as a man of the law behind him and while Loreen isn't asking Judge Albert to represent her, only to recommend a good lawyer, even this simple request seems to threaten his new-found peace, a new life he's taken up beyond the business and busyness of the law.

We are later to learn, that it has been the death of his wife, Victoria, more than anything else, that has brought about Judge Albert's effort to settle down into the quiet contentment of retirement, and his withdrawal not just from the law, but from friends and neighbors as well. Judge Albert seeks solace now in his books,<sup>37</sup> music,<sup>38</sup> fishing, and a quarrelsome relationship with Rowena, a black woman who has worked for his family so long that neither she nor Albert quite know how to do anything but keep doing what they've always done. Rowena is an awfully powerful woman, recognized to be so by Albert Sidney, and she has in ways small

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<sup>36</sup> "Decoration Day," *supra* note 11, at 7 [26 Legal Stud. F. 1, 5 (2002)]. The "peace that passeth understanding" phrase is taken from the Bible, Philippians 7:4. (The phrase appears again in the "Introduction" that Corrington wrote with Miller Williams to *Southern Writing in the Sixties: Fiction ix-xxiv* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1966)(John William Corrington & Miller Williams eds.) [26 Legal Stud. F. 721 (2002)].

Corrington's reference to a "Higher Jurisdiction" may be simply taken as a reference to Heaven, but underlying all Corrington's work is the idea of an "order" beyond immediate reality, an "order" that takes us back to first things. It is the intrusion of this "order" into our everyday lives that one finds as a leitmotif in Corrington fiction.

<sup>37</sup> The championship of books will figure in yet another Corrington lawyer story, "The Actes and Monuments." See John William Corrington, "The Actes and Monuments," in *Collected Stories*, *supra* note 33, at 215-245 [26 Legal Stud. F. 181 (2002)].

<sup>38</sup> As a young man, Corrington wanted to be a musician. He was a trumpet player, and according to those who knew him, a talented one. Corrington would always claim music as his first love, and he listened to classical music throughout his life. It was an interest which often found a place in his fiction. See e.g., John William Corrington, *THE BOMBARDIER* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1970).

but numerous become a central part of his life. "And so, you see, Rowena and I are stuck with one another, both fearing what our people would say were either of us to betray that unspoken compact of half a century's standing."<sup>39</sup> With Rowena looking after him, doing some cooking, keeping things straight at the house, Albert Sidney isn't much interested in the world or anyone's affairs, even of those he would call family.

After Loreen Wendell's visit and the unpleasant news of the troubles in her marriage to Billy Wendell, Albert Sidney confirms that his retirement and withdrawal are intentional, and he expects to remain so retired until the end of his days:

That evening I was on the porch with my whiskey, a decent sunset, and looming out ahead, a fine empty evening to fill. It was my hope and intention in those days to go forward with the retirement thing until, one bright morning, Rowena would show up grumbling and cursing her aching bones, shut off my stereo, search the premises for me, and find me at last right there in my chair, on my porch, Homer or Ariosto in hand, smiling, and dead as a mackerel.<sup>40</sup>

But we must surely know what Albert Sidney does not—this contentment cannot last. We know this because it's so terribly hard to imagine a story that begins with a man's contentment and simply follows its progress. Or perhaps we know from our own lives (well before we crawl or stumble into retirement) that contentment is elusive. Contentment arrives like a fickle, visiting relative, on the move again before we've gotten use to her peculiar ways. And fiction, with its dependence upon conflict and drama, is an unlikely source of anything resembling contentment. While I've never sought contentment, I have been blessed on occasion by its unexpected appearance, and as a man looking retirement in the face sooner rather than later, I'm curious about how Judge Albert's strong-willed efforts to retire and stay retired might work out.

"Decoration Day" is, as you might suspect, not really a retirement story at all. Albert Sidney has a good deal more life in him than he wants to realize, too much to content himself rereading Greek and Italian classics, while he listens to fine music, and watches the swirl and snarl of the world beyond.<sup>41</sup> Devoted now to retirement, Judge Albert is a man

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<sup>39</sup> "Decoration Day," *supra* note 11, at 8 [26 Legal Stud. F. 1, 6 (2002)].

<sup>40</sup> *Id.* at 9 [26 Legal Stud. F. 1, 6 (2002)]. Ariosto (1474-1533) was an Italian poet, remembered primarily for "Orlando Furioso," a narrative poem identified with the era of the Italian high Renaissance. The poem became the basis for various artists' paintings and musical works.

<sup>41</sup> Corrington, in his private writings, would often muse about a return to Shreveport, teaching at Centenary College (where he attended college), and ultimately, the kind of retirement he imagines for Judge Finch.

shaped by years of disciplined work and, being neither whimsical nor precipitous in action, it's not clear what might get him off his front porch and into a more active life.

With still another visit, this one from Billy Wendell, who has come not to talk with Judge Albert about the troublesome situation with his wife, Loreen, but to seek the Judge's help in dealing with a matter involving the government, we suspect we'll have a chance to see Judge Albert in action. Billy Wendell tells Albert Sidney that the government has decided it wants to give a medal, and not just any medal, but the Medal of Honor, to Gaspard Penniwell—known to Albert Sidney as Uncle Gee. Gee, for reasons known best to himself, wants no part of the government or the medal.<sup>42</sup> Gee works some of Billy Wendell's land, as well as his own farm (deeded to him by Billy's father), and Billy is trying to lend him a hand and fend off the government as a favor to Gee. And there are two additional facts of some importance: Gee is black and he's a man that Albert Sidney knows from the time he was a young boy and Gee just a young man.

"Decoration Day" takes off, then, from these two pivotal points: Judge Albert's retirement and his efforts to remain so and his legal efforts on behalf of Gee to force the federal government to leave him alone. It would be possible, if not a bit foolish, to continue in this vein and walk the reader through "Decoration Day." No second-hand description can do justice to Corrington's masterful, poignant story and I will, as they say in Kentucky, "stop while the gettin's good." I'll say only this: There is more to be learned about Judge Albert as the story progresses, about his relationship with Gee when they were both young men, and why Gee doesn't feel inclined to let the government bestow medals on him. In all of this, Judge Albert, in his legal efforts on Gee's behalf, ends up learning something about himself. We readers learn, slowly and subtly, just how much Victoria, his wife (and the law), has meant to him, the role Gee played in his upbringing, how the work on behalf of Gee requires a kind of self-scrutiny that lies beyond Albert Sidney's experience (but not his character). Judge Albert must now question and reexamine the assumptions he's held about who he is and how he wants to live the rest of his life.

"Decoration Day" has the compelling vibrancy and poetic prose which one finds in all of Corrington's fiction. And there is a literary quality and depth of seriousness in "Decoration Day" (and Corrington's other legal

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<sup>42</sup> Gee's desire to be left alone by the government is something akin to Judge Albert's protestations that he wants his retirement to be something more than not showing up for work; Gee wants the world to leave him alone.

fiction) absent in the lawyer fiction the public now consumes like over-priced breakfast cereal<sup>43</sup> and rarely matched in the best contemporary legal fiction.<sup>44</sup>

For those who teach and study legal fiction, to stumble upon Corrington's "Decoration Day" is like finding gold.<sup>45</sup> It is a story charged with passion, plotted through the lives of characters we learn to care

<sup>43</sup> An exception to this sweeping claim, might be Scott Turow's latest novel, *Personal Injuries*. See Scott Turow, *PERSONAL INJURIES* (New York: Farrar Straus & Giroux, 1999).

<sup>44</sup> By legal fiction I do not mean the legal thriller genre, for which John Grisham is so widely-known and read. But now, even Grisham, who has made fortune upon fortune as the master of the genre, has turned to non-legal themes. See John Grisham, *A PAINTED HOUSE* (New York: Doubleday, 2001)(first serialized in the *Oxford American*, a Southern literary magazine). *A Painted House* is set in rural Arkansas in 1952 and told from the perspective of a 7 year old boy, reminiscent of Harper Lee's young narrator, Scout Finch, in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. For Grisham's efforts to write beyond the genre with which he has become so closely associated, see also, John Grisham, *SKIPPING CHRISTMAS* (New York: Doubleday, 2001).

The best contemporary legal fiction is often the work of writers who have no association with the legal profession, writers like Walker Percy (a physician by training) who forego courtroom dramatics and fast-plotting, and focus on characters, the communities in which they live, and the social worlds they inhabit. See e.g., Walker Percy, *THE SECOND COMING*, *supra* note 21. In the best legal fiction, law and lawyers must take their place alongside the other forces which shape our existence (history, culture, religion) and the current-swift fates which sweep us off our feet. See e.g., Katherine Anne Porter's novella, "Noon Wine," in Katherine Anne Porter, *PALE HORSE, PALE RIDER* 93-176 (New York: Modern Library, 1939); Albert Camus, *THE FALL* (New York: Vintage Books 1956); Pete Dexter, *PARIS TROUT* (New York: Penguin Books, 1989)(1988); Russell Banks, *THE SWEET HEREAFTER* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991); Cynthia Ozick, *THE PUTTERMESSER PAPERS* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997).

For late 20<sup>th</sup> century legal fiction of some literary merit see, Chris Bohjalian, *THE LAW OF SIMILARS* (New York: Harmony Books, 1999) and *MIDWIVES* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998)(1997); Jean Hanff Korelitz, *THE SABBATHDAY RIVER* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1999); Paula Sharp, *CROWS OVER A WHEATFIELD* (New York: Hyperion, 1996); Robert Cohen, *THE ORGAN BUILDER* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988).

<sup>45</sup> Corrington, some 500 pages into his first novel, *And Wait for the Night* (published in 1964), admits to his friend Tom Bell that the book contains some uneven writing, but finds some of it poetic and he's hopeful that someday he'll produce a work of fiction in which he gets it exactly right: "[O]ne day I'll pull that old Flaubert bit and give you a brief novel that is perfect from cover to cover. That will sing in chapters, in pages, in paragraphs, and even in lines. Anyhow, that's the dream." Corrington letter to Tom Bell, dated March 1, 1962. In my view, Corrington exactly that, in his novella, "Decoration Day."

Corrington met Tom Bell, then an undergraduate, when he was a graduate student at Rice University. Bell worked as a reporter for a Houston paper after his graduation, and with Corrington's help, secured a teaching position in the Department of Journalism at Loyola-New Orleans. Bell later became Chair of the department. Corrington and Bell remained lifelong friends.



about (as we learn how they care for each other). There is, in finding something like "Decoration Day," a sense of pleasure, and the hope that more of the same can be found with a return to Corrington's other fiction. Reading "Decoration Day," I knew one thing clearly—I had found a writer to read and a man to know, a writer who wrote with assurance that there is still something to be learned about the world, indeed, that this ordinary world in which we make our lives is part of some larger Tale.

### FISHING DEEP WATERS

The driving force in Corrington's life was an adamant sense of himself as writer. Simply put, Corrington knew he could write, that he had stories to tell and that he knew how to tell them. Corrington was both disciplined and talented. He had trained himself carefully in the use of words, primarily as a poet;<sup>46</sup> he knew he was good with words and felt it

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<sup>46</sup> Corrington's published collections of poetry include: *WHERE WE ARE* (Washington, D.C.: Charioteer Press, 1962); *THE ANATOMY OF LOVE AND OTHER POEMS* (Ft. Lauderdale: Roman Books, 1964); *MR CLEAN AND OTHER POEMS* (San Francisco: Amber House Press, 1964); *LINES TO THE SOUTH AND OTHER POEMS* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1965).

Corrington observed that he had learned from poetry to "handle a single line of prose," and "make it whip like a hurt snake or curl as smooth as old brandy." But there was also a price to pay. His concern with "the individual line" and "the *sound* and rhythm of that single line," at times would make his writing more difficult.

Bad clumsy unrhythmical sentences bug hell out of me (and I find plenty in everybody except maybe Wolfe and Agee), and thus the work goes slowly and may not really be worth the extra time: does it matter i[f] the back of a statue is sanded when it's set in a niche and nobody sees the back?

If his poet's feel for prose made writing more difficult, it was surely a difficulty to be appreciated. Corrington says he learned to make "every single word carry its weight" and to let "a sentence fan out into a whole complexus of meanings." It was as a poet he learned "about ambiguity and how to harness it—about how to set a whole passage on fire with a phrase or a word. This is what the poem can teach, and if you can carry it over, you've *got* to be a better novelist for the learning of it." Corrington's comments on what he learned from poetry are found in a letter to Tom Bell, dated October 15, 1961, sent from LSU, Baton Rouge.

In a second letter written several months later, again to Tom Bell, Corrington claimed that "the net gain from writing poetry has been a big one."

The prose is tighter, and there are fewer cliches in it, I reckon. I still pause too long between sentences, and I weight the sound of each prose paragraph as long as old Flaubert must have, but I can live with this. What kills is to write a long section and later see it was chiefly horseshit. Bad prose is horseshit in a different way than bad poetry is: you are always conscious of making poetry, and when you fall off, you know it and can patch and paint or rip it up and start over. But since you talk and write prose always, since it is your basic manner of signaling, you sometimes forget while using it for other things like a novel, and write whole reams of crap without any red lights flashing or bells going off.

a duty to write and write well. He would, along the way, expend an enormous amount of time and energy engaged in writing that had little meaning to him, other than as a means to support his family, but it was always his stories and novels (and his philosophical writings) that he saw as his life's purpose. And that purpose was to capture in fiction, by way of his talent, some "larger conception of things."<sup>47</sup> This quest—to write big fiction—would never falter whatever other work he might undertake. And he would give up, along the way, the idea of being: a musician (but never cease listening to music), a poet (his fictional prose is often poetic),<sup>48</sup> a professor (even as he uses his fiction to "teach"), a literary scholar (continue as he did to write about philosophy and the "humanities"<sup>49</sup>), an intellectual historian (although he did maintain his interest in the work of Eric Voegelin and, with colleagues, edit a book of Voegelin papers<sup>50</sup> and

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Letter to Tom Bell, dated December 31, 1961. Corrington never underestimated the importance of poetry in his writing as he writes Charles Bukowski: "Wherever I am, I got here with poems."

Although he would publish four collections of poetry, and numerous articles of poetry criticism (including one article on the lawyer-poet, Wallace Stevens), Corrington never considered himself a poet. Here is how he puts it in a letter to his friend Tom Bell: "With almost 100 poems published, I still think of myself as a writer, not a poet. I want to write big novels, and I will. But I was a lucky sonofabitch to land on poetry first. If it has loused me up, I have brains enough to find my way out of the hole." Corrington letter to Tom Bell, dated October 15, 1961.

Corrington, during his years as a poet, was also writing extensively about poetry. See Joyce Corrington, *John William Corrington: A Bibliography*, 26 Legal Stud. F. 899 (2002).

<sup>47</sup> "The Academic Revolution: Work in Progress," unpublished paper, for a presentation at Centenary College, in 1968. Corrington Papers, Centenary College [hereinafter "Academic Revolution"].

<sup>48</sup> Corrington said that "somewhere along the way things stopped happening in my head in poem-shots. I guess there was a secret trade in there, and now I can write the prose I always wanted to." Corrington letter to Miller Williams, undated dot-matrix copy, September (?), 1985. Corrington may have given up poetry, but his writing was, according to Lloyd Halliburton, "the epitome of pure prose wearing poetic shoes." Lloyd Halliburton, "Corrington, John William," in John A. Garraty & Mark C. Carnes (eds.), 14 AMERICAN NATIONAL BIOGRAPHY 535–537, at 536 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999). I don't know about Corrington's "poetic shoes" but Halliburton is right—Corrington writes pure prose with the rhythm and feel of the poet's touch. A Corrington story does not lie flat on the page, but dances to the beat of an exuberant prose, the prose of a practiced poet and a passionate intellect.

<sup>49</sup> See John William Corrington, *The Recovery of the Humanities*, 26 Legal Stud. F. 781 (2002); *The Recovery of the Humanities-II*, 26 Legal Stud. F. 805 (2002).

<sup>50</sup> Corrington's writings on Voegelin include: *Philosophies of History: An Interview with Eric Voegelin*, 3 (2) New Orleans Rev. 135 (1973)(interview conducted by Corrington & Peter Cangelosi); *A Symposium on Eric Voegelin*, 10 (3) Denver Quart. 93 (1975) (Corrington edited and contributed to the Symposium); "Order and Consciousness / Consciousness and History: The New Program of Voegelin," in Stephen A. McKnight (ed.),

study Eastern philosophy). What Corrington did not give up was his sense of himself as a writer of serious fiction.<sup>51</sup>

It was, he says, in his days as a high school student that the decision to be a writer was put in place: "They had a short story contest at Jesuit High here in town [Shreveport, Louisiana], and I won it till they stopped having it!"<sup>52</sup> As an undergraduate at Centenary College, the die was cast: "By my senior year, I'd reckoned on what I wanted to do with my life. I wanted to write. I was in the process of moving my spiritual and intellectual baggage from Artie Shaw and Glenn Miller to William Faulkner and Thomas Wolfe."<sup>53</sup>

And with the baggage moved, Corrington made writing an intellectual, philosophical, and spiritual quest that would continue for the rest of his life. He set about in his fiction, to fish the deepest waters. What he wants to do, he says, is "to test and assay and learn the meaning of the depths that exist beneath the flux of surface change upon which we skate like water-bugs until we are pulled down, back into that engendering depth from which we rose to the light."<sup>54</sup> Corrington's fiction, like a

ERIC VOEGELIN'S SEARCH FOR ORDER IN HISTORY 155-207 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978); *A Rebirth of Philosophical Thought*, 20 Southern Rev. 738 (1984)(reviewing *The Voegelinian Revolution: A Biographical Introduction and Eric Voegelin's Thought: A Critical Appraisal*); Robert Anthony Pascal, James Lee Babin, & John William Corrington (eds.), *THE NATURE OF THE LAW AND RELATED LEGAL WRITINGS* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1991) (Vol. 27, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*).

<sup>51</sup> Corrington, in high school and as a college student, his early years as a teacher, poet and novelist, was always talking about writing and nowhere more so than in the extensive correspondence with the poet Charles Bukowski during the 1960s. This focus on writing as the central commitment of his life is also found in Corrington's journals which he maintained from 1980 to 1988, the last eight years of his life.

<sup>52</sup> "The Mystery of Writing," unpublished typescript, presentation at the Northeast Louisiana Writer's Conference, Shreveport, Louisiana, June, 1985. Corrington Papers, Centenary College [26 Legal Stud. F. 503 (2002)].

<sup>53</sup> *Id.* [26 Legal Stud. F. 503, 505 (2002)]. Steve Plotkin, a Louisiana judge, who hired Bill Corrington to work in his New Orleans law firm after his graduation from Tulane Law School, noted that Corrington was a sufficiently good trumpeter to have been offered a first chair with the Ray Anthony band. Telephone Interview, Steve Plotkin, April 4, 2001.

<sup>54</sup> "New Orleans-Mon Bete Noir-II," unpublished lecture (Humanities Lecture, Southeastern Louisiana University, Hammond, Louisiana, November 16, 1984). Corrington Papers, Centenary College [26 Legal Stud. F. 519, 536 (2002)]. Corrington, in a letter to Charles Bukowski, written months shy of his 30<sup>th</sup> birthday, says:

I really believe I have material enough to write for the rest of my life. It's not what you've seen or been, but how much feeling and thought and desperation and strength you can milk out of all you have come across. The water is deep, and it's never certain how long or how well we can swim.

compass bearing, always has its alignment with that “engendering depth”; and then, coming up against that depth, glimpsing it, finding ourselves enmeshed in it, we are changed in some inexorable way.

Corrington did little trolling in the deep waters of his own inner life and had an aversion to the idea of fiction as a substituted form of politics.<sup>55</sup> Unlike writers he might admire, Corrington sought no place for himself in his fiction.<sup>56</sup> “I have always tried to avoid making fiction which in fact constituted nothing but fictionalized essays on my own opinions and moods.”<sup>57</sup>

While Corrington was insistent that neither he nor his politics belonged in the fiction, an author’s life must inevitably bleed into a fictional work, and this was as true for Corrington as it is any writer.<sup>58</sup> But the Corrington we see in the fiction, significant and intriguing as it may be, never gets in the way of his penultimate desire—to tell a story, and to let the characters do the telling.<sup>59</sup> What Corrington sought as an ideal, and largely achieved, was to simply honor the story he was trying to tell. Joyce Corrington suggest that her husband’s “literary ideal” was an “art free of biographical incident—even free of the ego of the artist.” She points to the following passage in Bill’s journals where he addresses this aspect of his writing:

[I]sn’t art the purest and the best when it reflects a vanished artist, and a luminous object whose sheen, the glory surrounding, is the living projection of the subject artist immolated as an ego, existing only in the patina of love which lifts the object out of nature and into that small transcendence of artistic creation? (12 July 1981)<sup>60</sup>

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Corrington letter to Charles Bukowski, dated January 8, 1962.

<sup>55</sup> What we find in Corrington’s fiction is a devotion to the story, to an honoring of it, a desire to be a storyteller rather than a literary psychologist exploring his own psyche.

<sup>56</sup> *Se e.g.*, John William Corrington, *An American Dreamer*, 18 (1) Chicago Rev. 58 (1965)(reviewing Norman Mailer’s *The American Dream*).

<sup>57</sup> Journal entry dated June 17, 1984.

<sup>58</sup> *See generally* Lloyd Halliburton, “Autobiography in the Fiction of John William Corrington,” in *Southern Man of Letters*, *supra* note 8, at 170-180.

<sup>59</sup> Corrington in a letter to Charles Bukowski observes that: “What I *do* know is that every experience has a form proper to itself. . . . I know that real form is when you or I struggle long enough to find out how to say this whatever-it-is *as it would say itself* if it had tongue.” Corrington letter to Charles Bukowski, dated February 25, 1961.

<sup>60</sup> Joyce Corrington, “The Evolution of Bill Corrington’s Metaphysics,” in *Southern Man of Letters*, *supra* note 8, 106-116, at 107 [26 Legal Stud. F. 659, 660 (2002)]. Corrington, in this observation, sounds a good deal like the T.S. Eliot, quoted by Hugh Kenner, who says, “What happens is a continual surrender of himself [the poet] as he is at the moment to something which is more valuable [the tradition]. The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality.” Hugh Kenner, *THE INVISIBLE POET: T.S. ELIOT* 118-119 (New York: Harcourt, 1959).

Corrington knew where he stood as an author, and he knew what he wanted his fiction to be. He had taught fiction, lectured on “the twentieth century novel,” and developed a comprehensive “theory of literature.”<sup>61</sup> Corrington knew the literature of his time and he knew he didn’t want his writing to become an extension of his personality<sup>62</sup> or his politics.<sup>63</sup> And while he might have had strong “political feelings,” he had no desire to have his fiction serve as political tracts.

Strong as my political feelings might be, I’ve never consciously tried or wanted to convert them into stories or poems. There has to be a form of human expression which ignores the short-term passions and gets on with the real questions: the ones that have always existed, and which always will.<sup>64</sup>

Corrington believed, with some justification, that his fiction was sufficient proof that he was “not given to autobiographical ravings . . .”<sup>65</sup> A lawyer in one of Corrington’s stories tells his colleague: “Folks here can abide a lot of peculiarity, but you ought not to flaunt it. You want to keep your appetites kind of to yourself.”<sup>66</sup> Corrington took that admonition to heart and tried to abide by it in his fiction.

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<sup>61</sup> John William Corrington, “The Twentieth Century Novel” course lecture typescript (prepared for his spring, 1968 visit to teach at the University of California, Berkeley) and “Prolegomena to a Theory of Literature,” unpublished typescript, 75 pages, dated 26 November 1965, Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Corrington Papers, Centenary College.

<sup>62</sup> “I feel real bad for people whose writing (or editing) becomes an extension of their personalities.” Letter to Charles Bukowski, dated December 6, 1961. In still another letter to Bukowski, Corrington writes:

I decided to drop the personal pronouns insofar as I could from all my work. It gets in the way: you keep telling how you feel, and I usually feel like a nap or a walk or like nothing at all. So you slip behind a character and tell how he feels, and he’s all fucked up and hence interesting. It would be interesting to see whether I could make it through massive humiliation and loss and still write. Would I be better? Hem[ingway] used to say a little flesh wound is maybe helpful, but any wound that does extensive damage to bone or nerve is bad indeed and should be avoided. Most of our contemporaries either haven’t even got scratched or are faking themselves as basket-cases.

Letter to Charles Bukowski, dated January 8, 1962.

<sup>63</sup> Another lawyer, poet, novelist, Edgar Lee Masters, seemed constitutionally incapable of writing either fiction or poetry that did more than thinly disguise his personal problems and politics. See Herbert K. Russell, *EDGAR LEE MASTERS: A BIOGRAPHY* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001).

<sup>64</sup> Journal entry, November 26, 1980. .

<sup>65</sup> “The Mystery of Writing,” *supra* note 52 [26 Legal Stud. F. 503 (2002)].

<sup>66</sup> “The Actes and Monuments,” *supra* note 37, at 227 [26 Legal Stud. F.181, 193 (2002)].

Corrington reached beyond himself for his stories and he wanted them to honor the long past, not as a glorification of history, but an acknowledgment of that past and order which has “always existed.”<sup>67</sup> As Corrington puts it: “To be happy, one has to have the sense of having accomplished something beyond oneself, beyond what the ego wants and craves—something that is somehow a tribute to God, and to the powers he grants us if we prepare and listen.”<sup>68</sup> To write fiction as Corrington sought to write it, meant he had to fish the deep waters and to do that he needed to be well out-fitted. “The more I read in history, philosophy, and religion,” he said, “the more determined I am to use everything I can, because what you want is the broadest possible human basis for your work . . . .”<sup>69</sup>

Corrington’s fiction became an expression of his quest to make use of everything he could, and to let his characters do some of the heavy-lifting. In “The Actes and Monuments,” we find a man at the end of his tether, but he’s still trying to figure out how to live, to learn what he needs to know to survive:

After the coronary, I quit. I could have slowed down, let things go easier, taken some of the jobs where little more than appearance was required. But I didn’t do that. I like to believe that I cared too much for the law. No, I *do* believe that. Because if I had cared nothing for the law, I would have played at being an attorney—or else simply stopped being involved with law at all. But I did neither.

Rather, I let go my partnership and began looking for some way to use all I knew, all I was coming to know.<sup>70</sup>

Corrington in “The Actes and Monuments,” is after “something big,” something of sufficient magnitude that it requires all he knows.<sup>71</sup> And

<sup>67</sup> Corrington would, we think, have agreed with the poet, James Wright, and his assertion that “whatever we have in our lives that matters has to do with our discovering our true relation to the past.” James Wright, “From the Pure Clear Word,” in Martin Lammon (ed.), *WRITTEN IN WATER, WRITTEN IN STONE: TWENTY YEARS OF POETS ON POETRY* 71-80, 74 (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999).

<sup>68</sup> Journal entry dated March 14, 1981.

<sup>69</sup> Parrill Interview, *supra* note 16, at 189 [26 Legal Stud. F. 671, 679 (2002)].

<sup>70</sup> “The Actes and Monuments,” *supra* note 37, at 215 [26 Legal Stud. F. 181 (2002)].

<sup>71</sup> I am reminded here of Walker Percy’s Will Barrett, the lawyer in *The Second Coming*, who early in the novel has what he calls a “revelation” while watching a cat lying in a spot of sunlight:

As for Will Barrett, as for people nowadays—they were never a hundred percent themselves. They occupied a place uneasily and more or less successfully. More likely they were forty-seven percent themselves or rarely. . . . All too often these days they were two percent themselves, specters who hardly occupied a place at all. Percy, *The Second Coming*, *supra* note 21, at 16. Corrington may have found places and

what he is after, the magnitude of it, and the knowledge of it, did not so much arise and grow over the years, as it did possess him from the beginning. While writing his first novel, *And Wait for the Night*, Corrington writes his friend and fellow poet, Charles Bukowski, and tries to explain what he hopes to do with the novel:

When you've done a lot of little things like scaling small hills and even big hills, you feel like you have got to take on something big or else what the hell did you buy the safety-rope and the alpine spikes for? So my novel. It is not about graduate school or about men who sell insurance and can't get an erection because I never cared about grad school (drank whiskey then and slept during classes), and there is no insurance for suddenly finding you are dead (which is the only risk and only surety). . . . So it [the book] is about a strange monumental yesterday peopled with all the beloved ghosts of men who were only men until musket balls or cannon shells stripped them of flesh as swords did Hector and an arrow did Achilles. Now they are myths, and it is good to say of them, like in Ecclesiastics: LET US NOW PRAISE FAMOUS MEN.<sup>72</sup> And the infamous too. Because all sent their greatness and their sins down to us, and we triumph and suffer for them again.<sup>73</sup>

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work he occupied "uneasily" (or hardly at all), but in his fiction he managed as well as any writer can, to be fully himself.

<sup>72</sup> "Let us now praise famous men, and our fathers in their generations." Ecclesiasticus (Book of Sirach) 44:1, BIBLE (OLD TESTAMENT APOCRYPHA).

<sup>73</sup> Letter to Charles Bukowski, undated, probably March or April, 1962. In April, 1962, Corrington wrote to Tom Bell, sending along his new address, 1447 Pickett, a "smaller house, with smaller rent," and commenting on his first novel, *And Wait for the Night*, then in progress:

My reactions to being in the middle of a novel are not any different than being in the middle of anything else. It has become a habit and it fits like a glove with fingers still to be sewed on. I do not work enough. But what I write is hardly ever total horseshit. Some is dogshit, perhaps, but all in all, it feels like a novel. Weak in a dozen ways, but shored up, by two things: conviction and energy. It is not good to have to ride on conviction because there will be later novels for which I will have few tears. But at the start of novelty I expect you have to have a demon and it saves you from seeing how inferior the product is in comparison to the dream.

Corrington letter to Tom Bell, dated April 2, 1962. The publisher's flyleaf blurb describing the novel reads:

In *And Wait For the Night* . . . Corrington depicts with matchless dramatic impact what happened to the South when the Civil War was lost, when the battered remnants of the Confederacy trailed home from defeat to towns like Shreveport, Louisiana, followed by their Yankee conquerors, the troopers in blue, and their plundering companions without uniform, the carpet-baggers.

[N]o man, woman or child is immune to the conquerors, and it is the story of these defeated Southerners that *And Wait for the Night* so eloquently tells.

John William Corrington, *AND WAIT FOR THE NIGHT* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1964)(1963).

This notion that he had been left a great legacy would preoccupy Corrington throughout his life. But unlike Harold Bloom's writer who suffers an "anxiety of influence" in coming to grips with the great writers who precede him,<sup>74</sup> Corrington welcomed the embrace of this legacy and the sense of duty that accompanied it. In "The Actes and Monuments," Harry Cohen, one of Corrington's fictional lawyers, having fled New York, besieged with heart attacks, has gotten himself to Vicksburg, Mississippi where he must now try to keep himself alive. But in Vicksburg, Harry Cohen takes on a new burden—to understand the South. Cohen says:

I walked amid the grassy parkland of the old battlefields. I touched stone markers and tried to reach through the granite and marble to touch the flesh of that pain, to find what those thousands of deaths had said and meant. . . . [T]he Southerners, those aliens, outsiders, dying for slavery, owning no slaves; dying for the rights of states that had no great care for their rights. In the name of Death, which had engulfed them all, why?<sup>75</sup>

Cohen's effort to understand where he is, is part and parcel of knowing who he is, and only by knowing who and where he is will he know how to live. This idea—that one belongs to a place and that *place* and belonging to it becomes part of you—is integral to Corrington's understanding of the South and his sense of himself as a writer. But more of this business about Corrington and the South in a moment. Corrington is not, in his fiction, attempting to represent or portray a faithful

On "ghosts" in the lives of Southern writers, see Corrington & Williams, *supra* note 36.

<sup>74</sup> Harold Bloom, *THE ANXIETY OF INFLUENCE: A THEORY OF POETRY* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1997)(1973). Just how little "anxiety of influence" Corrington suffered can be garnered from a comment to Charles Bukowski about having just received his first copies of his first published collection of poetry, *Where We Are*:

I got me a few of them, and baby is it ever pretty printing and too had a lot of the poems are nice old noise instead of gutwringers. But they are . . . progress forward to new stuff, and . . . as you go through, I think you see where the kid learned, how quickly he learned, and how, having learned, he raised a leg at the teachers and went off to knit his own woolen tomb. No disrespect to the old teachers: it's just that you get to seeing how they do it, and once the formula is discovered, it's as flat as a clumsy magic-show or a self-conscious whore. I try never to do the same thing twice, and sometimes not even the same thing once.

Corrington letter to Charles Bukowski, dated April 10, 1962.

<sup>75</sup> "The Actes and Monuments," *supra* note 37, at 240-241 [26 Legal Stud. F. 181, 206 (2002)]. Corrington would, from time to time, attempt to answer Harry Cohen's question. See John William Corrington, *Are Southerners Different?*, 4 (1) Southern Partisan 16 (1984) [26 Legal Stud. F. 733 (2002)]; "Introduction," to John William Corrington & Miller Williams (eds.), *SOUTHERN WRITING IN THE SIXTIES: FICTION ix-xxiv* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1966) [26 Legal Stud. F. 721 (2002)].



rendering of the South and its people so much as he is working out an “ontology” or “view of Being”<sup>76</sup> that underlies, shapes, and fuels his writing and his view of literature.

I came to see that our lives, as Proust said in . . . *Swann’s Way*, are so small, so fleeting, that they must be attached to some larger conception of things if they are not to be wasted. Consider that this room, in geologic terms, is a mirage, a fleck of time, and we ourselves ghost who appear upon the film of world-history for the least part of a second. The film goes on, leaving our passions and our acts behind, and only if our purposes have struck root in the largest and most essential patterns of our time can we aspire to be more than blips in the film. What can a man—or even a society—do to sustain its reality, to fix its “having-lived” upon that onrushing pattern? I believe that we must become giants, and the only way to do that is to live for one another, to enter that vast communion of the saints. If we do not, as single persons and as a culture, come from something and tend toward something, then we are nothing. We are less than the trilobites that one can find stuck absurdly in the sediments left over from Devonian time. Is all this abstract metaphysics? Yes, but it is also the precise theme of a piece of contemporary poetry:

We are but a moment’s sunlight,  
fading in the grass . . .

That is so. We are ephemeral, but we are, if we choose to be, in Schopenhauer’s words, “Lords of eternity.” And it is from this beginning that all great work . . . springs.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Corrington notes John Crowe Ransom’s observation “that every poet, every critic, must first have an ontology, a view of Being, before he can set to work . . . .” “The Academic Revolution,” *supra* note 47.

<sup>77</sup> “The Academic Revolution,” *id.* *Swann’s Way* is the first volume of Marcel Proust’s seven-part, much celebrated novel, *Remembrance of Things Past*, which was published in 1913. The novel is, it seems, still being read and celebrated. See Alan de Botton, *HOW PROUST CAN CHANGE YOUR LIFE: NOT A NOVEL* (New York: Pantheon, 1997); Phyliss Rose, *THE YEAR OF READING PROUST: A MEMOIR IN REAL TIME* (New York: Scribner, 1997); Malcom Bowie, *PROUST AMONG THE STARS* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998); Maria Paganini, *READING PROUST: IN SEARCH OF THE WOLF-FISH* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994)(Caren Litherland trans.).

The “contemporary poetry” Corrington cites is from a Dino Valenti (pseud. Chester Powers) song, “Get Together”:

Some may come and some may go,  
We shall surely pass  
When the one that left us here  
Returns for us as last  
We are but a moment’s sunlight  
Fading in the grass

Corrington, from his earliest novels to his later legal fiction, and in his jurisprudential writing,<sup>78</sup> works toward this “larger conception of things.” The lawyers in Corrington’s fiction learn, painfully, to take responsibility for the knowledge that we “come from something and tend toward something.” If we do not know this, and live according to this knowledge, “then we are nothing.”<sup>79</sup> In his fiction and philosophical writing, Corrington found a way “to live for” history and to enter, by way of his writing, into a “vast communion of the saints.”<sup>80</sup> Harry Cohen, the lawyer in Corrington’s “The Actes and Monuments,” when offered help by another attorney, says: “Yes, I told him. Hell yes. Only small boys and large fools stand alone when they might have allies.”<sup>81</sup> We become giants, in Corrington’s view, by honoring the saints and the demands they make on us.<sup>82</sup>

Corrington may have been fishing deep waters, but there was often a playful, dark, farcical element in his fiction.<sup>83</sup> But the comic farce is

“Get Together” (Irving Music, 1963). Valenti/Powers (aka Jesse Oris Farrow)(a man, it seems, of many aliases) was lead singer with a group called Quicksilver Messenger Service. The group met an early demise but Valenti’s “Get Together” became an icon of the music scene in the 1960s, popularized by Jessie Collin Young and The Youngbloods. The song was also covered by other groups: The Dave Clark Five, The Carpenters, and The Indigo Girls.

<sup>78</sup> See John William Corrington, *Logos, Lex, and Law*, 26 Legal Stud. F. 709 (2002); *The Law and the Prophets*, 4 (2) The Forum 5 (October, 1973) [26 Legal Stud. F. 705 (2002)].

<sup>79</sup> “There is no use in recalling once more those dark and magical ghosts who answer to the names of Jefferson and Byrd, Lee and Calhoun—that almost endless line of men who took in hand the most difficult of the colonies, who helped to create a union, and then, for cause, tore it asunder. It is only useful to point out that Southern literature to this day still flushes out those ghosts, is still moved by their specters, their dreams, the content of their lives, the stuff of their principles and resolution.” Corrington & Williams, “Introduction,” to *Southern Writing in the Sixties*, *supra* note 36, at xiv [26 Legal Stud. F. 721, 725 (2002)].

<sup>80</sup> Robert E. Lee was one of Corrington’s saints: “[Lee] we know was cast in the mold of what every man dreams himself to be when he is smart and honest enough to dream at all. It is the deep passion of every man to be a saint and a hero: to be *right*, and to give that rightness the force of his own unbreakable personality.” Corrington letter to Charles Bukowski, dated April 17, 1962. On April 26<sup>th</sup>, with Lee still on his mind, Corrington writes Bukowski: “We are not Lees or Jacksons, but we will have to do until the real article comes along again.” Corrington letter to Charles Bukowski.

<sup>81</sup> “The Actes and Monuments,” *supra* note 37, at 234 [26 Legal Stud. F. 181, 200 (2002)].

<sup>82</sup> “Every man is the end product of a line of gods, major and minor. Pray that the gods were good ones.” Corrington letter to Charles Bukowski, dated September 14, 1961.

<sup>83</sup> See e.g., John William Corrington, *SHAD SENTELL* (New York: Congdon & Reed, 1984)(*Shad Sentell* does not feature lawyers). “[H]umor is always a great mangy claw. It is subversive to make fun of nuclear bombs. I don’t know what else you can do. Like

always in service of his larger purpose, envisioning the lives of ordinary men and women caught up in the “onrushing pattern” of a reality<sup>84</sup> that extends beyond a single life (even of the most purposeful sort). In a letter to Charles Bukowski, Corrington says, “I am only playing the lines and watching the corks bobble until and if I get a strike.”<sup>85</sup>

Corrington used his fiction to explore the myths and mysteries that envelope us: “[I]f a man is any kind of writer at all, that capacity to bequeath the mystery to another generation, to send the message onward, is the only thing that matters.”<sup>86</sup> Masterful as he was with language, Corrington had little interest in trying to dazzle the reader. What he did with a story was try to shock the reader into recognition of those deeper truths and mysteries that lie all about us. This requires, “[s]tories about the most serious and deepest feelings and thoughts. . . . Stories of the kind that Faulkner said were the only ones that mattered: stories of the human heart in conflict with itself.”<sup>87</sup>

scream. I know a guy who’s been screaming since 1945. Bad throat.” Letter to Charles Bukowski, undated, probably August, 1962.

<sup>84</sup> “[W]e are only a frame in the film of man’s history. The movement of that history goes on, flood tide toward destinies we cannot imagine.” John William Corrington, “The Academic Revolution,” *supra* note 47.

<sup>85</sup> Letter to Charles Bukowski, dated April 24, 1962. Corrington, in this comment, appears to be a man of some patience. “All things come to him who waits . . . who waits in the place where all things come.” Corrington letter to Tom Bell, dated October 31, 1961.

A fisherman must, at times, know how to sit still, fuss with the bait, and try to get it all just right. But even the patient fisherman knows he must move on when the fish quit biting. With fishing it is always this matter of working on the bait and the depth at which it is fished, or moving on. (Fishing looks easier than it turns out to be.) While writing shares some similarities with fishing, there is for Corrington more at stake than the quiet pleasures of catching enough fish for an evening meal.

<sup>86</sup> Corrington, “The Mystery of Writing,” *supra* note 52 [26 Legal Stud. F. 503, 518 (2002)].

<sup>87</sup> *Id.* at 512. The phrase Corrington draws on here, one that he would use frequently, is from William Faulkner’s acceptance speech for the 1949 Nobel Prize for Literature:

[T]he young man or woman writing today has forgotten the problems of the human heart in conflict with itself which alone can make good writing because only that is worth writing about, worth the agony and the sweat.

“Address upon Receiving the Nobel Prize for Literature: Stockholm, December 10, 1950,” in James B. Meriweather (ed.), *ESSAYS, SPEECHES & PUBLIC LETTERS BY WILLIAM FAULKNER* 119-121, at 119 (New York: Random House, 1965). In notes made to accompany his “Mystery of Writing” presentation, Corrington notes that: “It is the writer’s task to tell stories that reveal . . . wanting and fearing, loving and trusting as if it is in the secret hearts of his characters.” Handwritten Notes accompanying “The Mystery of Writing,” four pages, handwritten, numbered. Corrington Papers, Centenary College.

There could be no more apt description of Corrington’s legal fiction than his description of what he imagined himself doing in writing a poem: “It was always my

Corrington's commitment to serious fiction was put to the test in the decade he wrote TV daytime dramas, writing that meant absolutely nothing to him intellectually. While there is no way to measure or assess how much this work diverted his intellectual energies,<sup>88</sup> it certainly never softened his talents. But in making the choices he did, Corrington never deluded himself.

It had become obvious by the mid-fifties that there was an inverse proportion between the amount of money a man could make—and the quality of his writing. If you wanted to make a lot of money, you wrote crap. If you wrote quality fiction, you weren't going to make any money. My junior year in college had given me an example. I was working at the *Shreveport Times* in those years, and when I wasn't on the police beat or doing general reporting, I did book reviews. They gave me a big thick novel to review. It was one of the finest novels I've ever read. It was called *The Recognitions*, by William Gaddis. It cost \$7.95 when the

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philosophy in a poem to strike hard, and get clear of the falling bodies. Nothing is as bad as a poem that hangs around too long." Corrington letter to Charles Bukowski, dated April 17, 1962.

<sup>88</sup> There is, with writers like Corrington, who produce brilliant gem-like work, but have not been accorded great fame, a temptation (on the part of the needy reader) to ask whether it might have turned out different had he not been distracted by his other work. Perhaps it would be better to say: Corrington gave us what he did, and as William Mills notes, "[h]e attempted much and succeeded." William Mills, "Introduction," to *Southern Man of Letters*, *supra* note 16, at 6 [26 *Legal Stud. F.* 891, 897 (2002)]. There is, as we know, something sick in the relentless quest for reputation and greatness. Corrington was no mole, no recluse from the world, and he did not write in the fashion of a secret man. He wanted less to be great than to *do* great things in his writing. He told his friend, Charles Bukowski: "Like excess weight, wanting to be a Name is sick and unworthy of any kind of man because only the work counts, and the name is always, after long enough, either a bad name or a huge lie that fuddles readers and pricks critics. . . ." Corrington letter to Charles Bukowski, dated November 7, 1961. It was the writing that counted for Corrington and he didn't waste much time in self-promotion.

Corrington's work may not be widely read today, but he belongs on the short-list of great Southern writers, and top of the list of writers of legal fiction. Lloyd Halliburton contends that Corrington's "reputation as a craftsman of the short story and the novella should rank him among the most polished of the second half of the twentieth century in American letters." Lloyd Halliburton, "Autobiography in the Fiction of John William Corrington," in *Southern Man of Letters*, *supra* note 8, 170-180, at 172 (an assessment which Halliburton repeated in his biographical sketch of Corrington for the *American National Biography*). See Halliburton, *supra* note 48, at 536. Catherine Savage Brosman, a poet, essayist, and professor emeritus at Tulane, sees Corrington's "strong style, range of voices and tones, skills in various genres, persuasive rhetoric, concern for values, and emphasis upon tradition, combined with a powerful (yet not anarchic) literary individualism" more than sufficient to "make him one of the major Southern writers of his period." Catherine Savage Brosman, "Son of the South," *The Times-Picayune*, May 8, 1994.

average novel cost \$3.95 or \$4.95, and of course it made no money at all for its publisher.

Years later, I talked to an editor who had worked at Harcourt, Brace in 1955. He remembered the meetings surrounding the publication of *The Recognitions*. "We knew there was no money in it," he told me. "But everybody thought the book had to be published. In those days, there was still a thing called American literature, and we felt we had to publish a book as splendid as *The Recognitions*. We just had to."

That was then. This is now. I think it safe to say that no American publisher would risk three dollars and ninety-five cents in the name of American literature. There is little reason to suppose that *Raintree County* would be published today. Less reason to think that any of Faulkner's major work would find print. Can you really imagine a contemporary publisher reading *As I Lay Dying* or *The Sound and the Fury* and, as they like to say, "committing corporate funds" to it. This is the age of Herman Wouk and John Updike, John Irving, Steven King, and inevitably, James Michener.<sup>89</sup>

And there was never to be any illusion that he would ever be able to spend all his time writing fiction:

I suppose I had some intuition that things might go that way as far back as the late 1950's. That's why I went on to graduate school and entered college teaching. Not so much for love of teaching as for a little security while I got on with what it was I thought I should do in life.<sup>90</sup>

Corrington was knowledgeable about the world of publishing and he was a realist:

Joyce Corrington and I have consistently been paid best for our worst work. Neither of us could make a decent living writing what we want to write, writing in the great literary tradition that T.S. Eliot told us extends from the work of Homer to the present. If we are willing to write garbage and not complain, we can make thousands of dollars a week. If we insist on doing the best work we can do, we'll be lucky to make ten thousand a year.<sup>91</sup>

With the realization that he could not make a living as a fiction writer, Corrington simply divided his time, between the TV daytime dramas that could earn him a good living and the fiction where he would explore "the larger conception of things." It was a world divided between writing fast and furious (and doing it efficiently and for money) and writing as slowly as it might take to make something meaningful (and

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<sup>89</sup> "The Mystery of Writing," *supra* note 52 [26 Legal Stud. F. 503, 505-506 (2002)].

<sup>90</sup> *Id.* at 507.

<sup>91</sup> *Id.* at 512.

doing it for posterity). Making a living, and writing to explore the “larger conception of things” are, in Corrington’s world, two different enterprises.

If anyone has anything serious to say, writing should under no circumstances be undertaken as a way to make a living. Be a carpenter or a lawyer, a doctor or a teacher. Do something you like to do which leaves you time for the writing. I always thought running a fishing-camp would be a great way to make a living. When Faulkner was asked what job would be best for a writer, he said he thought the ideal job would be to be the landlord of a bordello. You’d have all your time free, and everything you’d need close at hand.

Writing is no more a career than loving, marrying, raising one’s children is a career. It is a way of living that entails seeing into the flow of one’s own life and that of others—either close by, or immeasurably far away—and then to make use of one’s hard-gained skill to recreate that life in language. So that the life thus preserved intersects the ongoing life of generations, even nations—as yet unborn.<sup>92</sup>

#### BECOMING A LAWYER

Writing poetry, Corrington knew he wanted to write fiction (and he did).<sup>93</sup> Teaching, he knew he wanted to be a writer (and he was).

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<sup>92</sup> Notes which accompany “The Mystery of Writing,” *supra* note 87. When asked his opinion about the ideal job for a writer, Faulkner said: “Landlord of a bordello! The company’s good and the mornings are quiet, which is the best time to write.” James B. Simpson (ed.), *SIMPSON’S CONTEMPORARY QUOTATIONS* 209 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1988)(attributing the statement to *Life*, January 20, 1962). For a variation of the statement see Robert Andrews (ed.), *THE COLUMBIA DICTIONARY OF QUOTATIONS* 500 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993)(attributing the quote to a Faulkner interview in *Writers at Work: The Paris Review Interviews: First Series*, edited by Malcolm Crowley, 1977, 1958).

<sup>93</sup> Corrington’s work as a poet, and what he called his “interest in the statesmanship of verse,” was never as compelling to him as the idea of the big story and the larger canvas it provided. Corrington carried on an extended conversation about poetry and fiction with Charles Bukowski, whose poetry he admired and championed. In a letter to Bukowski dated April 2, 1962 Corrington explained that he had not written poetry for some time and that it didn’t bother him.

I feel good when I have done a good piece of prose. When I used to do a ‘good’ poem, I felt embarrassed—like selling somebody a book full of blank pages. I don’t know why, and maybe all of a sudden I will be a poet again. But I feel very good being a novelist except for the danger of some sonofabitch getting the idea that being a novelist, ergo I am a businessman. In which case it will be necessary to write more poetry to prove that I cannot be trusted and am essentially in the left-field bleachers. The good thing about poems is that they class you as a kind of anarchist. Which I am. Which, unknowing, my patron saint Thomas Jefferson was. Which

Somewhere, somehow, he got the notion he would be a lawyer, or more accurately, that he needed to study law. How does a man, at age forty, who has already moved his intellectual baggage several times, secured a position as an English professor, who has taken up the writing of Hollywood film scripts, become a law student? What prompts such an undertaking? The pursuit of yet another career?

For some years now I've tried, by various means, to encourage my students to become more reflective about the work they will undertake as lawyers, the means they will adopt in that work, and the way their minds might be bent and shaped to accommodate this work. It's not at all clear how this reflection and introspection are to be undertaken. And so, I simply ask my students: What brought you here? Corrington, in response to this question, says:

Well, I was sick of academia, so I got out of that in '72 and started law school at Tulane. I think part of it was the fact that my dad had been a lawyer and had always wanted me to be one and I had always said, "No, I'm going my own way." But then I had a little bit of spare time and we were financially OK and why not do that for him, even if it was posthumously? There was one other reason: when I told my father I had a job at LSU, he said, "Well, son, teaching at LSU for a while is OK, but

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every man is unless he corrupts himself into believing that he has the balm for all mankind, or that he is responsible for all human actions.

Corrington letter to Charles Bukowski, dated April 2, 1962.

Corrington was an ambitious writer and he had the skills and talent to paint a large canvass in lush, vibrant colors. Fiction also provided Corrington a way to more fully develop his sense of history and place, and explore how we are at times asked to transcend that history and place. In one of his letters to Bukowski, Corrington tells how he has written a poem—"Viva Zapata"—but its still fiction he is thinking about.

[T]o write a novel is a good good thing because it is big and requires a lot of memory and you have to really believe it (not in a poem: poems are too short to require belief, and you are embarrassed to become famous writing poems because poems come easily or they are not worth much).

Poems say that a man has eyes and knows words. But a novel shows you what his insides are like because it is hard to write a novel . . . unless you care very much about what you are writing.

Handwritten letter to Charles Bukowski, dated February 4, 1962.

Corrington's views of poetry are similar to those attributed to A. E. Houseman by Clarence Darrow. Darrow reports that he met A. E. Houseman for the first time in the summer of 1927. Of the meeting, he says: "He has been called the greatest Latin scholar in the world, and he seemed to take some pride in his Latin; not so much in his poetry." Darrow goes on to say that Houseman told him "he didn't write poetry except when he felt he had to." Clarence Darrow, "Facing Life Fearlessly," <[http://www.infidels.org/library/historical/clarence\\_darrow/facing\\_life\\_fearlessly.html](http://www.infidels.org/library/historical/clarence_darrow/facing_life_fearlessly.html)> (report of a lecture delivered at the University of Chicago, under the auspices of the Poetry Club and the Liberal Club).

when are you going to get a job?" He didn't regard teaching school or writing novels—or doing movies, God knows—as serious work fit for a responsible and bright man. But when I became a lawyer, you see, I had a place in the social order just like everybody else.<sup>94</sup>

When Corrington says his father, John Wesley Corrington, was a lawyer, he means he graduated from law school and was admitted to practice law, not that he actually practiced law.<sup>95</sup> When the family moved in 1942 to Shreveport, Corrington's father, who had been working in the insurance business in Ohio, stayed in the business he knew best. Pat Wykes, Corrington's sister, does not remember her father making all that much of the decision not to practice law, but he was clearly proud of having graduated from law school. It was part of the family lore that their father had "graduated first in his class and 2<sup>nd</sup> in the state."<sup>96</sup> Corrington seems, in some way, to have been deeply affected by his father's wistful remembrance of his law studies.

Bill Corrington was, as his law school friend, Art Dula says, a "thinking man" and he may well have gone to law school more to think about law than with any idea he would ever practice law for a living.<sup>97</sup> Indeed, William Domnarski, says, "What he took up at the age of forty, when he turned to law, was a grand intellectual adventure."<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> "CA [Contemporary Authors] Interview," in Ann Evory & Linda Metzger (eds.), CONTEMPORARY AUTHORS 113-117, at 116 (Detroit, Michigan: Gale Research Company, 1983)(New Revision Series, Volume 8)(interview by Jean Ross) [hereinafter Ross Interview] [26 Legal Stud. F. 695, 699 (2002)].

<sup>95</sup> In a letter to Charles Bukowski dated August 27, 1962, Corrington mentions that his father went to law school at night and passed the bar.

<sup>96</sup> Telephone communication with Viva (Pat) Wykes, Dartmouth, New Hampshire, April 3, 2002.

<sup>97</sup> Art Dula, personal telephone communication with James R. Elkins, March 18, 2002.

<sup>98</sup> The "intellectual adventure" was made possible by the Corringtons long-standing agreement to support each other as they undertook various educational endeavors. Joyce Corrington says of her husband's decision to study law:

It was made possible because I had finished my doctorate at Tulane and was on the Chemistry faculty at Xavier University. We had a habit of one working and the other going to school. When we married I worked as a chemical engineer and saved the money that we used when we went to England to get Bill's doctorate. Then he taught at LSU and Loyola while I got my MS and PhD in Chemistry at LSU and Tulane. So my working while he got his JD fit this long-standing pattern.

The move was also made financially possible by the fact that we had just accepted an offer to write "Battle for the Planet of the Apes" which we would write while Bill was a law student.

Joyce Corrington, email message dated March 13, 2002. The Corringtons had, in the four years preceding Bill's days as a law student, written film scripts for *Von Richthofen and Brown* (1969), *The Omega Man* (1970), *Boxcar Bertha* (1971), and *The Arena* (1972).



It was an “intellectual adventure” set in motion by Corrington’s growing disenchantment with academic life and a spirited, bruising, well-publicized fight he had undertaken at Loyola (where he was Chair of the English Department) with the Jesuits who ran the school. According to Joyce Corrington, taking up the study of law was “a way out of an unpleasant situation” at Loyola:

When Bill was invited to move to Loyola from LSU and become chairman of the Department of English, he was told that Loyola was embarking on a “campaign of excellence” and he was being hired to build a distinguished department. Bill brought with him from LSU, Miller Williams, a publishing poet, and Thomas Blouin, a man who read everything, delighted in teaching, and was well liked by students. Then the Jesuits decided to fire Blouin. While it was never said outright, it was clear that their only objection to him was that he was gay (though never accused of having involved himself sexually with any students). Bill felt responsible for Blouin and he rallied the Faculty Senate to his cause. Bill was a very good politician when he chose to be. There were student protests and an AAUP hearing which, as I recall, found for Blouin. Ultimately, the president, vice-president and dean of Loyola were ousted from office as a result of the Blouin affair. However, the Jesuits had depth and brought in new people to fill the vacated positions (ironically the new Loyola president was the same man who as principal of Jesuit High School in Shreveport had kicked Bill out of school for “having the wrong attitude”). Despite all Bill’s efforts they were eventually able to dismiss Blouin, the faculty grew tired of fighting, and Bill found himself required to teach more hours than he wanted to teach. It was during the Blouin fight that Bill observed that in the modern world one needed to be a lawyer to stand up for one’s rights.<sup>99</sup>

Addressing a Shreveport writers conference in 1985, Corrington elaborated on his disenchantment with academic life.

By 1972, though I’d become chair of an English department and offered a full professorship, I’d had enough of academia. You may remember that in the late sixties and early seventies, the academic world was hysterically attempting to respond to student thugs who, in their wisdom, claimed that serious subjects seriously taught were “irrelevant.” The Ivy League gutted its curriculum, deans and faculty engaged in “teach-ins,” spouting Marxist-Leninist slogans, and sat quietly watching while half-witted draft-dodgers and degenerates of various sorts held them captive in their offices. Oddly enough, even as this was going on, there was a concerted effort to crush the academic freedom of almost

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<sup>99</sup> Personal communication from Joyce Corrington, email message dated March 13, 2002.

anyone whose opinions differed from that of the mob or their college-administrator accessories. It seemed a good time to get out and leave the classroom to idiots who couldn't learn and didn't know better, and imbeciles who couldn't teach and should have known better.

I went to law school at Tulane. At least in Southern schools, the lawyers were having none of this educational anarchy. The work there is simply too demanding and too competitive to allow for pretensions of any kind. It was a good time for me, and it produced a series of short stories dealing with life from the point of view of lawyers and the law that hasn't finished yet.<sup>100</sup>

The suggestion that he left teaching because of the politics and turmoil of the times is probably overstated. Corrington had never found much satisfaction in classroom teaching, and although he was undoubtedly a strong, dynamic teacher<sup>101</sup> and a serious literary scholar, his real commitment had always been to his writing (and in particular, his fiction and his philosophical writing), rather than to teaching.

Corrington's scholarly writings (published and unpublished) are impressive. He had sharply defined opinions on the poets of his day, and on the literary greats—Faulkner, Hemingway, Wolfe, Camus. He published critical academic articles on poets as diverse as Charles Bukowski (with whom he had a close, if long-distance relationship, that lasted for much of the 1960s) and Wallace Stevens, Lawrence Ferlinghetti and James Dickey, and sharply critical writings on Robert Creeley and Denise Levertov (for whose poetry he had little but disdain). His essays appeared in literary journals and in scholarly books. His poetry was published in small poetry mags as well as established journals, basically wherever he could find a willing editor. Corrington's written lectures on the "theory of the novel" and "the 20<sup>th</sup> century novel" were sufficiently well-developed that they could easily have been published. Corrington, as an intellectual historian, had a long-standing interest in the history of humanities and he wrote several scholarly papers on the subject.<sup>102</sup> He was adamantly devoted to the proposition that the South was a place of great literature

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<sup>100</sup> "The Mystery of Writing," *supra* note 52 [26 Legal Stud. F. 503, 507-508 (2002)].

<sup>101</sup> Corrington taught English literature for 10 years at LSU and Loyola-New Orleans. He was a visiting professor at the University of California-Berkeley for the Spring Quarter in 1968.

<sup>102</sup> See note 49, *supra*.

and wrote both popular<sup>103</sup> and scholarly works<sup>104</sup> on the South and its place in literature.

In addition, during the twelve years he taught, he managed to get a D. Phil. from the University of Sussex (1965), serve as a visiting Professor at the University of California, Berkeley (spring quarter, 1968), get into a rather fractious fight with the Jesuits at Loyola, and during all this he wrote like a man afire. These were the years in which he wrote his first novels, *And Wait for the Night*<sup>105</sup> and *The Upper Hand*,<sup>106</sup> and his first collection of short stories, *The Lonesome Traveler and Other Stories*.<sup>107</sup>

Corrington seems to have put his mind to teaching and his scholarly pursuits in the same focused, intense way he wrote fiction. Yet, he seems, even early in his teaching career, to have had no great affection for classroom teaching. In an August, 1962 letter to his friend Tom Bell, some two years after he started teaching, he says, "Summer school is a drag. You might as well talk to cans of chicken-soup."<sup>108</sup> Corrington describes that 1962 summer teaching stint, in a letter to Charles Bukowski, as a "cosmic agony of spirit, but necessary to make money."<sup>109</sup> The summer before, Corrington had written Bukowski expressing similar sentiments:

These kids this summer that I teach: they are as different from me as elephants from panthers. No insight, no reflexes, no passions—only the desire to get lost in some crowd and to make it to the plain of mediocrity and feast there forever.<sup>110</sup>

We might be reminded here of Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*<sup>111</sup> and the young Scout Finch's observations about the teaching of literature to first grade students. Scout, off to school for her first day, has studied with Atticus Finch, her lawyer father, and she's already smart enough to get in trouble with teachers who had just as soon she didn't know quite so much. Her first grade teacher, Miss Caroline Fisher, as new to Maycomb and teaching as Scout to formal schooling, wants to get things

<sup>103</sup> See John William Corrington, *Are Southerners Different?* 4 (1) *Southern Partisan* 16 (1958) [26 *Legal Stud. F.* 733 (2002)]; *From Another Country: The Southern Redneck, Today* (December, 1965)(published by the Claretian Fathers, Chicago, Illinois); *A Letter From a Southerner*, 26 *Legal Stud. F.* 739 (2002).

<sup>104</sup> Corrington & Williams, *supra* note 36.

<sup>105</sup> See note 73, *supra*.

<sup>106</sup> John William Corrington, *THE UPPER HAND* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1967).

<sup>107</sup> John William Corrington, *THE LONESOME TRAVELER AND OTHER STORIES* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1968).

<sup>108</sup> Corrington letter to Tom Bell, dated August 8, 1962.

<sup>109</sup> Corrington letter to Charles Bukowski, dated June 18, 1962.

<sup>110</sup> Corrington letter to Charles Bukowski, dated July 14, 1961.

<sup>111</sup> Harper Lee, *TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD* (New York: Popular Library, 1962)(1960).

started well with her new students. So, she reads them a story about cats. "The cats had long conversations with one another, they wore cunning little clothes and lived in a warm house beneath a kitchen stove."<sup>112</sup> Scout tells us that "[b]y the time Mrs. Cat called the drugstore for an order of chocolate malted mice the class was wriggling like a bucketful of catawba worms." The children have grown restless and distracted, Scout explains, because Miss Caroline was "unaware that the ragged, denim-shirted and floursack-skirted first grade, most of whom had chopped cotton and fed hogs from the time they were able to walk, were immune to imaginative literature."<sup>113</sup> Bill Corrington in his courses at LSU was simply dealing with students "immune to imaginative literature."<sup>114</sup>

Corrington, in what is undoubtedly an exaggeration all decked-out to get the attention of his decidedly anti-academic friend, Charles Bukowski, says:

The way you teach an English class is the way, I expect, you fight a battle. Most of them are either dead or sure to be killed. Ok, this is the way it is. Shake [Shakespeare] says: "this must be." You do not sob over the fact of gravity, and you face the reality of that bad Sunday at Appomattox. And you write with one hand and once in a while you salvage a little something out of the stew with your left.

But I could wash dishes and feel good when I got through a day without any breaking. It is bad to equate people, young or old, with crockery, but I am only recognizing: I didn't make them stupid fucking self-satisfied potential corpses. And not being dr. frankenstein, I cannot bring them around. So I talk—the way you would to a man with a terrible gut-wound who might start crying (and neither your nor he want that) when he feels death shaking its rattle in his ear. And I keep thinking how chickens in a cage, in full sight of the execution-place, pay no heed until the hand closes on their own specific needs: o god what individualists.<sup>115</sup>

Teachers are commonly confronted with the problem of unengaged students, and Corrington, no less well prepared to deal with them than his colleagues, has simply got bigger fish to fry. In a still earlier letter to a friend, Tom Bell, Corrington says he finds LSU, where he was then teaching, "all right," but adds that "anyplace is all right. They leave me

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<sup>112</sup> *Id.* at 21.

<sup>113</sup> *Id.*

<sup>114</sup> I know the problem first hand; many of my students are not only immune to literature but proudly assume that they have taken up a profession and a life's work where they will be spared the notion that literature (imaginative or otherwise) might be good for them or in anyway instructive as to their professional lives.

<sup>115</sup> Corrington letter to Charles Bukowski, dated October 3, 1962.

alone and I sure leave them alone.”<sup>116</sup> He is, even in this first teaching position, ready to flee not only LSU but teaching itself. As he tells Bell, he wants to “talk to cabdrivers and former suicide pilots and emasculated diplomats.”<sup>117</sup> What we see here is a writer in need of experience, looking

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<sup>116</sup> Corrington letter to Tom Bell, undated (probably October, 1960). Corrington, writing to Charles Bukowski with news that Harper’s was offering him a contract to publish his first novel, *And Wait for the Night* (published by G.P. Putnam’s Sons rather than Harper’s) saw the new novel as a “way out of the classroom. I want out of this silly rats ass dead-end university scene (which I make okay, but which I suspect will one day pickel me surer than your booze ever will you.)” Corrington letter to Charles Bukowski, January, 1962 from LSU, Baton Rouge. In a letter later that month to Tom Bell, Corrington says of the new contract: “Harper’s has offered me a contract for the book. \$1000 advance: 500 now, and the balance on delivery—and 10% for the first 5000 sold. Now they’re hooked. They got to publish it or lose all that loot. What a break—and on top of that, the writing is going well.” Corrington letter to Tom & Jody Bell, dated January 22, LSU, Baton Rouge. By the following summer, Corrington would make still more explicit his thoughts about teaching:

I may as well lay it on the line about my job. I regard it as a way to make money. Once I had this thing for being a great teacher, and then I found out that the great teacher is oneself. I had great teachers at Centenary—but that was because I knew how to make use of them, and was forever hounding them after class hours. If any of my students do this, they find me ready to do whatever I can for them. Past that, I feel my obligation is to go into the classroom prepared and present them with a body of information, dishing it out in terms of my experience. And that’s the sum and total of it.

Corrington letter to Tom Bell, dated March 1, 1962.

Corrington corresponded frequently with John Leggett, the Harper & Row editor who was working with him on *And Wait for the Night*. Leggett had written encouraging and supportive letters until his bomb-shell of April 24, 1963 asking for extensive revisions far beyond anything he had hinted at in previous communications with Corrington over the two years the novel was in Leggett’s hands. Corrington refused to make the revisions and the book was then picked up and published by G.P. Putnam’s Sons.

<sup>117</sup> Corrington was, by all reports, a consummate talker. “Bill can rattle your ears off with quotations from Thomas Aquinas, Giovanni Battista Vico, Eric Voegelin, Albert Einstein, and scores of other thinkers most of us only dimly remember from Introductory Philosophy.” Louis Gallo, “Corrington: From Poetry to ‘Killer Bees,’” *The Courier* (New Orleans Journal of Leisure, Entertainment and the Arts), Nov. 27-Dec. 3, 1975. After Bill’s death, one of his colleagues wrote Joyce Corrington: “His range of interests was so wide and his enthusiasm so contagious that each conversation was an event.” Letter to Joyce Corrington, dated November 29, 1998, signed John (probably John Willingham, one of Corrington’s professors at Centenary College). Corrington dedicates one of his essays on the humanities to his old professor, John Willingham. See John William Corrington, *The Recovery of the Humanities-II*, 26 *Legal Stud. F.* 805 (2002)(previously unpublished).

Corrington once tried to explain the way he talked to his friend, Bukowski: “[Y]ou got to remember that I grew up with the dance-bands. The way I talk is part Southern backwoods, part Dizzy Gillespie, and part literature. I am the victim of a fragmented generation. But I am expressive.” Corrington letter to Charles Bukowski, dated September, 19, 1962.

for a life that will make it possible for him to write. "I think you have to keep having things happen in order to really know them . . . ." <sup>118</sup> Corrington could not content himself with teaching because he did not see it as a way for a writer to live. And while he may have set off to law school on an intellectual and philosophical quest, <sup>119</sup> what he ended up finding, in the practice of law, was a world rich enough to capture his imagination as a writer. Teaching and poetry were preludes to fiction, and his work as a lawyer would become the source of his best fiction.

Whether Bill Corrington's departure from Loyola-New Orleans was a strategic retreat or a planned change of career, <sup>120</sup> Domnarski is right, it was the kind of intellectual venture one learns to expect of Corrington. That Corrington took up the study of law as an intellectual foray, is further supported by Joyce Corrington's observations on the influence of Eric Voegelin and his philosophical study of history on her husband. <sup>121</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Corrington letter to Tom Bell, dated July 14, 1961. In a letter to Charles Bukowski, dated November 7, 1961, Corrington writes that he's eager to live:

Sure it's all been done and we are only marching over Thomas Wolfe's land and the rest, but it is a good march and the mornings are full of treason, the afternoons slick like a kindly syrup—the nights full of half-blind believing. Nothing is free, and we pay for living with our lives. Cheap at twice the cost, huh? Anyhow, you have to march till, full of days and baby monuments, you fall off like a sated tick.

<sup>119</sup> Corrington's interest in teaching was intellectual, rather than emotional; he was forever a "thinking" man and oddly enough, some thinkers don't find themselves all that attracted to classroom teaching. See e.g., Norman Malcolm, *LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN: A MEMOIR* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970)(1958).

<sup>120</sup> Some teachers abandon teaching (or find themselves pushed out of the teaching profession) because they cannot (or will not) devote themselves to scholarly writing. The writing was not a problem for Corrington and he was, during his early years as a teacher, a prodigious scholar. But, for some reason, whether because of his ambitions and commitment as a writer, the dynamics of classroom teaching, or the salaries paid English professors at state universities in the South, Corrington was resolved to do something else. Bill Corrington was never a man to suffer fools gladly, and did not, with the exception of his Berkeley students, have students who were prepared to be real students. Even the Berkeley students, Bill said, "had no sense of history and no sense of humor." Personal communication from Joyce Corrington to the author, April 19, 2002 (notation on a manuscript version of this essay).

<sup>121</sup> Joyce H. Corrington, "The Evolution of Bill Corrington's Metaphysics," *supra* note 60, at 107, 111-112 [26 Legal Stud. F. 659, 659-660, 663-665 (2002)]. Ellis Sandoz, who knew both Corrington and Voegelin, notes that:

What Corrington's wide reading found in Voegelin was a major philosopher who both recovered the learning of the ages as a means of escaping contemporary ideological reductionism and, simultaneously, brought to bear in the philosophy of human affairs theoretical perspectives analogous to those of contemporary natural science, especially the perspectives of the century's most creative chemists and physicists.

Corrington was first introduced to Voegelin's work while teaching at LSU in the early 1960s. Voegelin, who had been teaching at LSU, had left by the time Corrington arrived. LSU Press was publishing Voegelin's monumental four-volume *Order and History* and Corrington got introduced to the Voegelin work by Dick Wentworth at LSU Press.<sup>122</sup> When asked about Voegelin's influence on his thinking, Corrington noted that after reading Voegelin's *Israel and Revelation* "the world looked different, less arbitrary and more intelligible. And it has stayed that way."<sup>123</sup> In Voegelin's work, Corrington found an intellectual historian whose work "pulled together all the things that interested me: theology, literary criticism, symbolic studies, even psychology—everything I knew a little bit about fed into and was made coherent by Voegelin's work. And it's still going on."<sup>124</sup> Joyce Corrington notes that after this early reading of Voegelin in the 1960s, Bill followed up in the 1970s with reading in Hellenic and modern philosophers and that Voegelin had certainly figured in his decision to study law.<sup>125</sup>

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Ellis Sandoz, "Bill Corrington's Philosophical Quest," in *Southern Man of Letters*, *supra* note 8, 117-133, at 118.

<sup>122</sup> Bill credits his introduction to Voegelin's work to Dick Wentworth:

Professor Voegelin had taught at LSU when I was an undergraduate there, but I didn't know him. When I went to LSU as a faculty member, I was reading manuscripts for the LSU Press. They couldn't pay you money so they gave you books. The director of the LSU Press at that time, Dick Wentworth, offered me the three volumes of *Order and History*. I was very much interested in Southern history then and said, "Ah, Dick, I don't want these." He said, "Listen, everybody says they're great; you ought to read them." So I went home and read *Israel and Revelation* and thought it was the greatest book I'd read on any subject, and then read the other two and spent the rest of my time finding everything I could by Professor Voegelin. I would say his work is probably the greatest influence on my intellectual life.

Jean Ross Interview, *supra* note 94, at 115 [26 Legal Stud. F. 695, 696-697 (2002)].

<sup>123</sup> *Id.* See Eric Voegelin, *ISRAEL AND REVELATION* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1956)(Vol. 1, *Order and History*).

<sup>124</sup> *Id.*

<sup>125</sup> Joyce H. Corrington, "The Evolution of Bill Corrington's Metaphysics," *supra* note 60, at 107 [26 Legal Stud. F. 659 (2002)]. Corrington was, of course, aware of Voegelin's early interest in the law. In a letter to William Domnarski he notes that: "Eric Voegelin was a graduate assistant back in 1928 with Hans Kelsen, the father of 'pure Law' theory." Corrington letter to William Domnarski, dated July 30, 1982.

The influence of Voegelin on Corrington's work extended well beyond his philosophical reading and his decision to attend law school. Corrington would eventually write a number of scholarly articles on Voegelin and there can be no doubt that Voegelin's influence on his writing and philosophical thinking was substantial. See John William Corrington, "Order and Consciousness / Consciousness and History: The New Program of Voegelin," in Stephen A McKnight (ed.), *ERIC VOEGELIN'S SEARCH FOR ORDER IN HISTORY* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978); Robert Anthony Pascal,

There would always be, for Corrington, recurring thoughts that he might someday take up teaching again, and he entertained thoughts of returning to Shreveport to teach at Centenary College.<sup>126</sup> But as often as he would mention going home, and a return to teaching, there was little effort to make it happen.<sup>127</sup> Indeed, he seems to have known, at some level, that the pull of Shreveport, Centenary College, and the idea of teaching, were the stirrings of myth, and not to be actualized. "Perhaps I should have behaved myself and stayed in academia—but I don't think so. My boredom threshold gets lower as [my] age increases."<sup>128</sup>

In 1980, two years after he left the practice of law, Corrington began a journal that he would continue until just weeks before his death. In some 1,200 journal pages, Corrington makes only brief reference to the three years he practiced<sup>129</sup> and the years he spent at Tulane Law School. It was only in interviews, asked directly about what took him to law school, and in a presentation to a Louisiana writers conference, that Corrington would talk about his decision, at age forty, to study law. But he had little to say about his experiences as a law student at Tulane and seems to have left no account of those years.

Joyce Corrington, commenting on Bill's decision to practice law, says:

He was offered a position on graduation by Steve Plotkin, whom he met during the Blouin fracas [a battle with the Jesuits at Loyola-New Orleans over Blouin's tenure]. Steve guaranteed him a base salary of (as I remember) only \$10,000 per year but generously gave him \$500 to buy suits for court appearances and another \$1000 to furnish his office. I

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James Lee Babin, and John William Corrington (eds.), *THE NATURE OF THE LAW AND RELATED LEGAL WRITINGS* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1991)(Vol. 27, *Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*). See also John William Corrington, *The Philosophies of History: An Interview with Eric Voegelin*, 3 (2) *New Orleans Rev.* 135 (1973).

<sup>126</sup> In a Journal entry dated September 5, 1980, Corrington notes:

I begin to wonder if a teaching job . . . might not be best for me. I'd love to return to Shreveport and teach at Centenary. It's the right size, the right atmosphere—and that's where my only roots are. I'd feel that my life had come full circle if I could go back there and serve the school which gave me so much.

But there was, for Corrington, always a realist's assessment that he might never get back home. In the journal entry of September 5<sup>th</sup> he adds: "But . . . I may spend my days with the sour taste of a stranger's bread in my mouth, climbing the stairs to sleep in a strange room over soil that is not mine."

<sup>127</sup> Joyce Corrington, email message dated April 3, 2002.

<sup>128</sup> Journal entry dated September 8, 1980.

<sup>129</sup> In a May 11, 1976 letter to Miller Williams, Corrington writes to inform his old friend that he has been thinking of him and notes: "I have walked some strange ways since last we met. As you will note from the letterhead, I am now allowed [to] do the law, and stand before the courts of the United States, speaking and doing, and no one has found me out. You would enjoy the spectacle."



recall helping him do both. Steve Plotkin's practice was largely personal injury and Bill eventually told Steve he would go to court and try the cases but he'd be damned if he'd interview any more clients, clients who wanted to tell him their whole life history.

Bill felt great responsibility for his clients and took his trial work very seriously—so much so that he would come home during a trial and down a pitcher of martinis to deal with the stress.

I do not recall that he wrote much during this time since establishing himself in a field where he was a 40 year old with the knowledge of a 20 year old demanded a lot of his time. He was proudest of writing appellate briefs. In one case, Steve gave Bill a \$10,000 or \$15,000 bonus for that work.<sup>130</sup>

Steve Plotkin, now a Louisiana judge, notes that Corrington was a good lawyer but was more intrigued by the moral and philosophical issues presented in the cases than the cases themselves.<sup>131</sup> Corrington set out to be a litigation lawyer but eventually decided, notwithstanding the competence he developed in his early trial assignments, that he was better suited for appellate work,<sup>132</sup> and more interested in writing briefs than trying cases.

Professions, law among them, involve disciplined work; new initiates are admitted to the profession only after they undergo the rigors, rituals, and rationalizations that prepare them (somewhat) for what lies ahead. New initiates adopt and adapt, or they opt-out. They take up assigned roles and look to various sources for the meaning to be derived from law work. For many, the practice of law requires not just knowledge and skill but an identity (an identity which connects the work to the person, a connection that provides a sense of the worthiness of the work). This business of identity, taking one on, dealing with one already in place, can be tricky. And for a man like Corrington, established and accomplished when he arrives as a student, this business of taking on a new identity

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<sup>130</sup> Personal communication, Joyce Corrington, email message dated March 13, 2002. Steven Plotkin was elected to the Louisiana Court of Appeals in 1987. For a short biographical sketch of Plotkin, see "New Orleans Bar Association, It's the Law," <<http://www.neworleansbar.org/itslaw/plotkin.htm>> (visited January 15, 2002). A Corrington letter dated August 27, 1976 on firm letterhead, lists in addition to Plotkin, Owen J. Bradley, James C. Azcona, Joseph M. Singerman, Jonathan M. Lake, and Martin L. Broussard, Jr.

<sup>131</sup> Telephone Interview of Judge Steven R. Plotkin, April 4, 2001. Corrington compared the practice of law to war: "[I]t is 99% boredom, and 1% hysteria." Corrington letter to William Domnarski, dated July 30, 1982.

<sup>132</sup> *Id.* Corrington confirmed, in the 1981 Ross Interview that he was more attracted to appellate work than to litigation. Ross Interview, *supra* note 94 [26 Legal Stud. F. 695, at 700 (2000)].

would be rather different than for a student who shows up in law school only months after graduating from college.

I don't know whether it's possible to teach an old dog new tricks or not. Corrington, as a law student, was, an old dog. And more importantly, he took up the study of law with a rather impressive array of tricks at his disposal. He was an accomplished poet, novelist, teacher, reader of the classics, and a student of philosophy; he was a writer and an intellectual. We don't get many Bill Corrington's in legal education.

Whatever Corrington did during those law school years, law school didn't seem to capture his imagination—he would have little to say about his student years at Tulane Law School.<sup>133</sup> That law school, with its pseudo-drama, the great earnestness and striving of the students, and the constant drumbeat of talk about learning to “think like a lawyer,” did not find a place in Corrington's fiction is somewhat more surprising. While Corrington found no place in his fiction for law school, lawyer's fared a great deal better. First, he had real fondness for lawyers<sup>134</sup> and he found in their existential struggle, material he could build into his stories. In “The Southern Reporter,” one of his post-law-years short stories, Corrington comes as close as he would ever come to suggesting what his years as a lawyer had meant to him as a writer:

The essence of a courthouse is the play of stories that moves within it. In the clerk's office, the civil sheriff's office, between the judges' clerks, between lawyers, between the women who clean up the courtrooms and the blind man who sells sandwiches and magazines in the lobby, there is a constant current of telling and hearing, of guessing and supposing as to the cases that are being acted out before the bench. The stories have no necessary connection with what will enter the records of each case. The rules of evidence do not constrain clerks and custodians, deliverymen and lawyers outside the purlieus of the court. What passes

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<sup>133</sup> Corrington, in one of his rare comments on the situation says: “I was a bit of a queer duck in law school.” Corrington letter to William Domnarski, dated July 30, 1982. Writing to Miller Williams, his old teaching colleague at LSU, Corrington informs Williams he has resigned from Loyola-New Orleans, where he has been teaching, and reports on his new endeavor: “I'm in my second semester of Law at Tulane. Contracts, torts, property, Constitutional criminal procedure—nothing you can eat, but those cases, oh god, the humanity.” Corrington letter to Miller Williams, dated January 16, 1973.

<sup>134</sup> Corrington told William Parrill in 1985 that even though he had given up the practice of law, “I'm still a lawyer. I would not fail to pay my bar dues.” Parrill Interview, *supra* note 16, at 197 [26 Legal Stud. F. 671, 688 (2002)]. Some years earlier, Corrington, in a letter to William Domnarski observed that “[t]he best thing about it [the practice of law] is one's colleagues. I still hang out with lawyers. They are good drinkers, and, unlike our colleagues in Literature, they usually can discern some difference between truth and tripe.” Corrington letter to William Domnarski, dated July 30, 1982.

in the hallways of the courthouse may be strange, inaccurate, tainted with the passions of the storyteller. Still it may be nearer the truth than those pages that will be read by the court of appeal.<sup>135</sup>

It was the law's stories and the everyday work of lawyers pushing up against the ordinariness of tragedy, work in which a man might glimpse that larger "order of things" beyond law, that Corrington would explore in his lawyer stories. Corrington knew how to tell a titillating story, but he told them as a seer of things, of human beings and their struggles, their pains and tragedies, their conflicted hearts, and their resort to law to deal with fates from which law could not save them. Corrington knew that the law was an anchor but that it would not hold in the worst of storms. Law must always operate in the shadow of myth, the gods, and our sense of the Divine.

In "Every Act Whatever of Man," Walter Journe, learning that he is to appear before a Supreme Court Judge named Harold Walker, says:

Harold Walker. Short, jovial, a Santa Claus of a man. From their district. A fine legal scholar, an activist who used the code like a canvas to sketch out his own ideas of the meaning of the law, and who always required that whatever formula you used, you got down to the rights and wrongs of a case. Mr. Journe's heart sunk within him. Harold Walker was a pragmatist.

He remembered arguing a case before the Circuit Court of Appeal before Harold went to the high court. Mr. Journe had had a fine case. He had had the law, the code, even the precedents, for whatever they might matter. But Harold had interrupted his argument, and fixed him with that affectionate jovial smile of his, and asked, -Well, well, Mr. Journe, you've laid it all out for us, and I see what you're saying. But is it right?

Lord God, is it right? What kind of a maniac judge asks that of a lawyer? The judge is supposed to answer that question, not the advocate. No, the lawyer, having taken a case, is supposed to have only one view, and to argue that view until a final decision cuts him short. No one has the right to ask the advocate to judge. He cannot. It is not his function.<sup>136</sup>

Corrington had a practiced eye for observing lawyers. In "The Southern Reporter," Dewey, a court reporter, observing a defense lawyer named Vallee, cross-examine the prosecutrix in a rape case, says:

At first Vallee was as quiet, as gentle as Caswell [the prosecutor] had been. He asked Miranda about her past down in the country, asked

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<sup>135</sup> "The Southern Reporter," *supra* note 33, at 450 [26 Legal Stud. F. 357, 360-361 (2002)].

<sup>136</sup> "Every Act Whatever of Man," *supra* note 33, at 337 [26 Legal Stud. F. 245, 279 (2002)].

about her home life, about her religious education, asked if she had had boyfriends back then. Miranda answered openly, like one without guilt. But then the questioning closed in, became more personal. Vallee began stalking her like a wolf, moving question by question from counsel's table toward the witness stand until he enclosed it, his arms almost around it as he pressed one question after another. Dewey didn't like his method. It was almost as if he were embracing her, drawing her close, as if his questions were intimate rather than public. He wanted to know about her sexual experience as a young girl. He wanted to know about her lovers, and he was so close to her, it was as if he deemed himself her next friend rather than an attorney doing what was expected, demanded of him. Vallee wanted to know why she had chosen Jumbo's as a place to work. Surely she had known that Jumbo's was a swinging place, a place where the live crowd came. Hadn't she picked Jumbo's for that very reason? Hadn't she come up from the parishes looking for action? Wanting excitement? Wasn't that the way it was?<sup>137</sup>

Lawyers may, in their willful entanglements of reality, seem to have in mind doing their own version of fiction. Dewey, the court reporter in "The Southern Reporter," listens to the lawyers everyday, and concludes that lawyers "somehow alter reality to suit their cause. It was like listening to the serpent arguing with Eve. Only Eve hadn't been to law school as the serpent surely had."<sup>138</sup> Corrington, a student of law, and now a lawyer, knows how to listen to lawyers, and he had no plans to play Eve.

The lawyers in Corrington's fiction address themselves, when they must, as lost souls.<sup>139</sup> The unnamed lawyer in "Pleadings," who has begun to have doubts about his wife, and more troubling, fears that she now has doubts about him, says:

I tried very hard to reckon where I was and what I should do. I was in the twentieth century after Christ, and it felt all of that long since anything on earth had mattered. I was in a democratic empire called America, an officer of its courts, and surely a day in those courts is as a thousand years. I was an artisan in words, shaping destinies, allocating money and blame by my work. I was past the midpoint of my life and could not make out what it had meant so far.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> "The Southern Reporter," *supra* note 33, at 459-60 [26 Legal Stud. F. 357, 369 (2002)].

<sup>138</sup> *Id.* at 459-60 [26 Legal Stud. F. 357, 370 (2002)].

<sup>139</sup> See e.g., "The Actes and Monuments," *supra* note 37.

<sup>140</sup> "Pleadings," *Collected Stories*, *supra* note 33, 255-288, at 266 [26 Legal Stud. F. 211, 222 (2002)].

And when you've practiced law long enough, and seen enough, you begin to wear down. Mr. Landry, an old-time New Orleans lawyer, in "Nothing Succeeds," tells us how it is:

One of the results of aging in the law is that you are not easily gotten to. By the time you have been at it thirty or forty years, you have done so many things no one should have to do that something has drained out of you, to be replaced with the law, like a creature trapped in mud which is hard pressed for a long, long time, leaching away the soft parts, making everything over. In stone.<sup>141</sup>

The law didn't trap Corrington in its mud; but then he didn't put in his thirty years.

#### "I AM NOT A MODERN MAN"

Corrington disdained "the fads & lunacies of opinion & action that have cursed the age in which I have lived."<sup>142</sup> It was, he said, "an age in which any man can take pleasure running from reality."<sup>143</sup> These concerns about the modern era are to be found throughout Corrington's fiction and his philosophical writings. For example, in "Decoration Day," the story begins with Judge Finch, recently retired, taking up the gentleman's life, reading ancient Roman historians, listening to classical music, and with thoughts of writing a legal treatise. Of the treatise, Judge Albert says: "It would probe the archaic depths of the legal tradition—not as a bag of statutes and rules, but as a spiritual structure. I could be certain that no practicing lawyer worth his salt would read it. I liked that."<sup>144</sup> The law expressed in its statutes and rules is a modern conception of law. Judge Albert, retired, no longer in the statutes and rules business, is thinking about the law's "archaic depths." What we have here is pure Corrington, looking beyond the law's statutes and rules, seeking its "spiritual structure."

Another Corrington story, "Pleadings,"<sup>145</sup> begins, dinner on the table, a lawyer receiving a telephone call from a sheriff's deputy, who wants him to see a friend about a legal matter. It offers the lawyer an opportunity to say something about having his evening and his fantasies interrupted:

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<sup>141</sup> "Nothing Succeeds," *Collected Stories*, *supra* note 33, 360-411, at 394 [26 Legal Stud. F. 285, 317 (2002)].

<sup>142</sup> Journal entry dated August 28, 1980.

<sup>143</sup> Corrington letter to Charles Bukowski, undated (probably 1962).

<sup>144</sup> "Decoration Day," *supra* note 11, at 6 [26 Legal Stud. F. 1, 4 (2002)].

<sup>145</sup> "Pleadings," *supra* note 33, 255-288 [26 Legal Stud. F. 211 (2002)].

As a rule, I put people off when they want to come to the house. They've got eight hours a day to find out how to incorporate, write a will, pull their taxes down or whatever. In the evening I like to sit quietly with Joan. We read and listen to Haydn or Boccherini and watch the light fade over uptown New Orleans. Sometimes, though I do not tell her, I like to imagine we are a late Roman couple sitting in our atrium in the countryside of England, not far from Londinium. It is always summer, and Septimius Severus has not yet begun to tax Britain out of existence. Still, it is twilight now, and there is nothing before us. We are young, but the world is old, and that is all right because the drive and the hysteria of destiny is past now, and we can sit and enjoy our garden, the twisted ivy, the huge calladiums, and, if it is April, the daffodils that plunder our weak sun and sparkle across the land. It is always cool in my fantasy, and Joan crochets something for the center of our table, and I refuse to think of the burdens of administration that I will have to lift again tomorrow. They will wait, and Rome will never even know. It is always a hushed single moment, ageless and serene, and I am with her, and only the hopeless are still ambitious. Everything we will do has been done, and for the moment there is peace. It is a silly fantasy, dreamed here in the heart of booming America, but it makes me happy . . .<sup>146</sup>

In "The Actes and Monuments," New York lawyer Harry Cohen, fleeing the North and a number of life-threatening heart attacks, takes up residence in Vicksburg, Mississippi where he meets up with another lawyer, W.C. Grierson. When he visits Grierson's office he is taken beyond the public rooms of the office to a warden of rooms filled, floor to ceiling, with books. "Thousands upon thousands of books. Books in leather and buckram, old, new, burnished bindings and drab old cloth."<sup>147</sup> Many of the books are ancient classics and Cohen learns that Grierson, who will end up working with him on a brutal rape/murder case, has a rather odd preoccupation—what Grierson calls a "hobby." "I take on old cases sometimes."<sup>148</sup> But these "old cases" are not just old, they are ancient and they're odd. It turns out that Grierson writes legal briefs on behalf of the long-dead, more specifically, those who have been falsely accused. Grierson, at the time of Cohen's visit, is working "on the defense of Anne Albright, a young girl burned during the Marian persecutions at

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<sup>146</sup> *Id.* at 255 [26 Legal Stud. F. 212 (2002)]. Arthur Dula, who claims Bill Corrington as one of his best friends in law school, says that if you want to understand Corrington you have to realize that he was a "11<sup>th</sup> century Catholic." Telephone communication with Authur Dula, March 18, 2002.

<sup>147</sup> "The Actes and Monuments," *supra* note 37, at 227 [26 Legal Stud. F. 181, 193 (2002)].

<sup>148</sup> *Id.* at 239 [26 Legal Stud. F. 181, at 205].

Smithfield in 1556. It was to be a class action, aimed at overturning the convictions of all those Protestants burned under Mary Tudor."<sup>149</sup>

While Grierson may seem to be engaged in a rather bizarre form of legal work, Corrington cautions against such a judgment:

When reading fiction, don't get put off by the distance in time or in place or in manners and attitudes between you and Proust or Hawthorne or Goethe or Shakespeare. Remember that human nature is constant in the very diversity of its presentation in life. What human beings want and fear and love and trust may change, may shift in emphasis from the 16<sup>th</sup> century to now or from France to here. But human beings will always want and fear, love and trust.<sup>150</sup>

Grierson is doing, in his own, odd, and seemingly futile way, what we must all do, what Corrington does in writing fiction: "It's the business of us all to drive the past into the future so that our children will know and understand the questionable meaning of the present."<sup>151</sup> The past matters; a man's past comes back around, to be taken up again, when he retires, becomes ill, is beaten down, and gets ready to die. Corrington's lawyers know this past, and, by way of their acts of memory, we readers come to know it.<sup>152</sup>

Corrington's fiction is an evocation of memory, an effort to recapture and re-present a past that then becomes not only a critique of modern times, but instructive for a future worth pursuing.<sup>153</sup>

<sup>149</sup> *Id.* at 240 [26 Legal Stud. F. 181, at 205].

<sup>150</sup> Handwritten notes accompanying "The Mystery of Writing," *supra* note 87.

<sup>151</sup> Journal entry, May 24, 1986. But Corrington also cautions that the past too can be a trap: "Recollection of the past must be conditioned by recognition of the present—and by the prophetic vision of tomorrows yet to come. Otherwise, nostalgia is simply a refuge for the weak, an excuse for the torpid. And that kind of nostalgia is surely an intellectual crime—worse, it is probably a sin." "The Academic Revolution," *supra* note 47.

<sup>152</sup> Corrington, writing with Miller Williams, notes that, "[w]e are told that the Southerner lives in the past. He does not. The past lives in him, and there is a difference." Corrington & Williams, *supra* note 36, at xiii [26 Legal Stud. F. 721, 724 (2002)].

We are reminded here of Jean-Baptiste Clamence in Albert Camus's *The Fall*, and Clamence's meditations on memory. Corrington admired Camus and in his correspondence and journal writings outlined the nature of that admiration. He said of Camus, "[i]t is hard to overestimate the importance of his thought to our time." "Camus" notes, in "The Twentieth Century Novel," *supra* note 26. Corrington described Camus's *The Rebel* as "[t]he great statement of our age and its illness." Corrington letter to Tom Bell, dated December 6, 1961.

<sup>153</sup> Eric Voegelin, an intellectual historian who Corrington held in high esteem, observes that: "Plato appears to have coined the word *anamnesis* from *mnemosyne* (memory or remembrance; mythically, the Mother of the Muses); its meaning is remembering-again, recollection, or reminiscence." Ellis Sandoz, *THE VOEGELINIAN REVOLUTION: A BIO-*

As I told a friend once, people in America, even in the South today, throw their pasts away. Graveyards and City Directories and old dance cards and flowers pressed in [B]ibles no one remembers to enter births and deaths in any more—all of them are filled with thousands of pasts that are ignored, forgotten, thrown away. Nobody wants them, nobody sees any use in them. [Then turning to his own Shreveport]: Who knows or cares who developed Broadmoor? Does anyone remember Dehan's Restaurant or Le Chat Noir or the Peerless Cleaners? Who remembers Worm's Hilltop House or The Chef, or the Rex Theatre or Mrs. Pat's Food Market? They belong to me now, and they have appeared—or will appear—in my work as it goes forward.<sup>154</sup>

The present, however we may attribute to it the solidness of substance, is ephemeral and cannot be made to last. In a letter to Charles Bukowski commenting on his father's death, Corrington was reminded of "Pete Kelly's Blues":

"The blues ay, things were good once and they'll be good again. The only trouble is it's NOW." We can remember and we can look ahead, but NOW is always slipping out of our hands like sand—or blood. We can never hold it and get the texture of it. Everything becomes history, chas: what *is* means nothing, and sooner or later it is reduced to a few photos, maybe a rusty bayonet and some slowly melting ditches in Virginia. Given time, all of it is either lost or embalmed in the pages of history. Think that even literature may finally lose its meaning and become simply more documents to tell tomorrow about today.<sup>155</sup>

What we have now, is what the lawyer in "Pleadings" sees, as he drives back to his office after he and his client's wife have been to a state mental hospital to see the client's son:

Then I was driving toward Metairie amid the dust and squalor of Airline Highway. Filling stations, hamburger joints, cut-rate liquor, tacos, wholesale carpeting, rent-a-car, people driving a little above the speed limit sealed in air-conditioned cars, others standing at bus stops staring vacantly, some gesticulating in repetitive patterns, trying to be understood. No sign of life anywhere.<sup>156</sup>

Corrington's turn to history becomes a way to deal with the present, to find solace from the "criminal idiocy of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century," and "an

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GRAPHICAL INTRODUCTION 144 (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2000)(1981).

<sup>154</sup> "The Mystery of Writing," *supra* note 87 [26 Legal Stud. F. 503, at 510 (2002)].

<sup>155</sup> Letter to Charles Bukowski, December 20, 1962.

<sup>156</sup> "Pleadings," *supra* note 33, at 283 [26 Legal Stud. F. 211, 238 (2002)].



age of spiritual rot and rootlessness."<sup>157</sup> Finding his own era wanting, "[t]he confusions and complexities of life in the 20<sup>th</sup> century make one's spirit yearn to transcend it . . . ."<sup>158</sup>

Corrington addressed these theme in his writings, but he gave them even more direct expression in his journals and unpublished work:

I only wish I had vision enough to see what this age will evolve into. Most of my visions are unpleasant ones. Each generation of lunatics seems more clearly homicidal than its predecessor. (Journal, September 4, 1980).

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Perhaps I should set down the reasons I [despise] this age so much. I suppose I owe myself that much, lest the future see me as simply someone who was incapable of taking pleasure in this "Golden Age."

I hate this age because it is decadent, vicious, corrupt. I could have lived in the 19<sup>th</sup> century because it was barbarous, and I love guns and would have done battle with pleasure; I could have managed nicely in the 18<sup>th</sup>, because there were possibilities of civilization. But in this age, the great world of the 18<sup>th</sup>—especially in music—is over, and the barbarism of the 19<sup>th</sup> is past. (Journal, September 13, 1980).

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The past two hundred years have become a fever rather than a progress. (Journal, February 1, 1982).

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We seem to have reached a point in our national development where we are prepared to do anything rather than think, anything except examine our collapsing culture and try to determine what it is telling us—anything but face the reality that we have turned away from the heights and depths of life itself and settled into a kind of spiritual and intellectual fog from which no [judgments] worthy of the name can issue, and into which every new insight seems to vanish without a trace.

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To know who you are and what you are about seems to be a rare thing today. But it is at the very center of serious writing. And if you have that sense, it is possible to shrug off the fads and the tackiness, the poor workmanship and stupidity of contemporary writing—even if, from time to time, you are forced to engage in it. Perhaps it is a little like the meditation practice of Zen Buddhism. You possess the capacity to

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<sup>157</sup> Journal entries of September 6, 1980 and February 1, 1982.

<sup>158</sup> Journal entry dated August 31, 1980.

withdraw into a real world of real people doing intelligible—even if terrible—things. You look at the world around you as an especially perverted illusion, and turn inward to a truth that expresses itself through the symbols of language, a truth that does not depend on a moment or a popular attitude or the deformed consciousness that supposes the end of language is to make money.<sup>159</sup>

William Mills, a friend and colleague of Corrington, observes that in Corrington's "critique of modernity," his work "reflects influences of some of the best poets of the age . . ." Corrington himself sums up his stance in his rather startling claim: "I am not a modern man." It is a claim not only about himself, but one that goes to the heart of his writing.

I am not a modern man—and that may be my own personal salvation. What I love comes to me from the past, the gift of Mozart and Albinoni, Dickens and Shakespeare, Plato and the prophets, Lee and Jackson, St. Thomas and Augustine.<sup>160</sup>

### SOUTHERN ROOTS

John William Corrington landed in Shreveport at age ten,<sup>161</sup> attended Centenary College in Shreveport,<sup>162</sup> and throughout his life, proudly and

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<sup>159</sup> "The Mystery of Writing," *supra* note 52 [26 Legal Stud. F. 503,515, 516-517 (2002)].

<sup>160</sup> Journal entry, dated September 5, 1980. Corrington's "gifts"—music, some writers, a few philosophers, a couple of Confederate war generals—is part of a short and varying list, that he sometimes spells out, reminding himself who he revered. Corrington was always ready and willing to name the giants and the saints. For his thinking about the "prophets" and law, see John William Corrington, *The Law and the Prophets*, 26 Legal Stud. F. 705 (2002).

<sup>161</sup> Corrington was born in Cleveland, Ohio but raised in Shreveport. Most of his early adult life was spent in Louisiana; he was away from the state only during his years of graduate study at Rice University in Houston (M.A. in 1960) and to obtain his D.Phil. at the University of Sussex in England (1965)(dissertation on "Symbol and Structure in Joyce's *Dubliners*"). He lived in New Orleans after he accepted a teaching position at Loyola-New Orleans, but it was his TV writing which finally required him to leave Louisiana and take up residence in California, a place he knew not to be his own. Corrington's view of California features prominently in "Nothing Succeeds," the story of two New Orleans lawyers who go to California to track down the legatee of a substantial estate of one of their long-standing clients. See "Nothing Succeeds," *supra* note 33, at 360-411 [26 Legal Stud. F. 285 (2002)].

One reviewer called Corrington, a "son of the South"; he would undoubtedly have approved. See Catherine Savage Brosman, "Son of the South," *The Times-Picayune*, May 8, 1994 (Catharine Savage Brosman held the Kathryn B. Gore Chair in French at Tulane University).

<sup>162</sup> Corrington attended Centenary College from 1952 to 1956, majoring in English, with a minor in Music (with a year off to attend LSU). He was a member of Kappa Sigma fraternity. He received his B.A. in May, 1956. Corrington retained a great affection for

defiantly, identified himself as a Southerner.<sup>163</sup> He was, in contrast to some Southern writers,<sup>164</sup> quite willing for the world to know him as a writer whose work was steeped in the South, composed in honor of its heroes.<sup>165</sup> Corrington was as firmly rooted in Louisiana, as Faulkner in Mississippi, Louis Auchincloss in New York City, Lowell Komie in Chicago.<sup>166</sup> It is quite impossible to imagine one of Louis Auchincloss's

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Centenary College throughout his adult life and would often credit individual professors for the education he received at Centenary. In one of his presentations at Centenary, Corrington told his audience, his years there were "the happiest memory of my life." "The Academic Revolution," *supra* note 47. He returned to Centenary on various occasions to give presentations, and is now honored by an annual literature award given in his name. After his death, Joyce Corrington donated her husband's papers to Centenary College.

<sup>163</sup> Corrington, on several occasions, had reason to explain what it means to be a Southerner to those who might dismiss him as another Southern provincial writer. See *supra* note 103.

<sup>164</sup> "I would maintain I am a Southern writer, and if nobody else wants to be, that's fine; then we would have only one: me." Ross Interview, *supra* note 94, at 115 [26 Legal Stud. F. 695, 698 (2002)].

<sup>165</sup> While Corrington took pride in being a Southern and having his fiction identified with the South, he saw these identifications as a source of wisdom rather than a restriction to be resisted. Cathrine Savage Brosman, a fellow academic, notes that Corrington's self-avowed identification with the South does not, in fact, limit his fiction. What the South does is provide "a ground and a perspective by means of which he points to and sometimes takes positions on matters central to individual and collective life well beyond the geographic situation." Brosman goes on to note that Corrington's "most important tie with the South is his concern for moral vision, which he locates in the region he knows best not only because of its agrarian traditions, its commitment to land, family and honor, but also because of its suffering." Catherine Savage Brosman, "Son of the South," *The Times-Picayune*, May 8, 1994 (reviewing *John William Corrington: Southern Man of Letters*). Corrington, writing with his colleague and fellow poet, Miller Williams, sees in the South "an anguish as no other part of this nation has known," but it is an anguish that "has brought a kind of knowledge, a wisdom and a patience as foils to the bitter heart and the stubborn mind inevitably born of long pain." Corrington & Williams, *supra* note 36, at xviii. [26 Legal Stud. 721, 728 (2002)].

William Domnarski, reviewing Corrington's lawyer fiction, also emphasizes the moral vision of Corrington's characters. See Domnarski, *Corrington's Lawyer as Moralist*, *supra* note 8 [26 Legal Stud. F. 847 (2002)].

<sup>166</sup> For a recent collection of Lowell B. Komie's fiction, see *The Legal Fiction of Lowell B. Komie*, 25 Legal Stud. F. 1-246 (2001). See generally James R. Elkins, *Lowell B. Komie of Chicago—Writer and Lawyer*, 25 Legal Stud. F. 3 (2001); *Lowell B. Komie: An Interview*, 25 Legal Stud. F. 223 (2001). Komie inhabits Chicago and makes the city central to his fiction in much the way Louis Auchincloss features New York City in his literary writings. Komie, like Corrington, is a masterful writer, but his stories differ dramatically from Corrington's in texture and style. While Corrington's fiction fills and enlarges the writing canvas, Komie tells his stories with zen-like brush strokes leaving much of the canvas blank.

One might imagine a course of reading under the banner "lawyers and literature" devoted exclusively to the writings of Corrington and Komie. I haven't taught such a

fictional lawyers practicing anywhere but New York City. And so it is with Corrington.

I've been gone from Shreveport for almost thirty years [at the time of the writing], but, as you can see, Shreveport has never left me. It remains the subject and matrix of my work, and it always will. Not because my recollections of it are without pain, or because I lived a golden untroubled childhood here. It wasn't that way. But the experiences I had here, the places I remember, the people I loved—and even the ones I despised—have been as useful to me, as evocative, as Paris of the 1880's and 90's was to Marcel Proust. Not in a direct sense, certainly. I have never written an *roman à clef* about Shreveport, using real people with fake names. Yet at the same time all my characters live here. They fitted smoothly and anonymously into the interstices of time and space in the period between 1863 and 1960.

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Even today, with thirty years . . . between me and Shreveport, when someone asks where I'm from, I invariably answer without thinking, "Shreveport." When I start to put together a new story, I think of its setting here, or in New Orleans, or somewhere in between. Even when I write of New York or London or Los Angeles, the people are from Louisiana—simply because those are the people I know in the same way I know myself.<sup>167</sup>

Corrington was pleased to have his fiction identified with the South. In an interview with William Parrill, Corrington makes his feeling for the South clear:

WP: You strike me as the most unreconstructed of all the Southern novelists I know anything about.

JWC: I consider that just about the greatest compliment anyone could give. I can think of no reason to be reconstructed. My country is the South—especially North Louisiana and East Texas. The antique values and ways of thinking are good enough for me.<sup>168</sup>

Judge Finch, in "Decoration Day," describes a friend, a Federal District judge, as "thoroughly reconstructed," a condition which Judge Albert finds rather pitiful—"a sorry attitude for a Southerner, but one common among those who have a short memory, poor concentration, and deep pockets."<sup>169</sup>

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course, but have taken the idea of this imagined course under advisement.

<sup>167</sup> "The Mystery of Writing," *supra* note 52 [26 Legal Stud. F. 503, at 510, 516 (2002)].

<sup>168</sup> Parrill Interview, *supra* note 16, at 186 [26 Legal Stud. F. 671, 676 (2002)].

<sup>169</sup> "Decoration Day," *supra* note 11, at 53 [26 Legal Stud. F. 1, 54 (2002)]. *See generally* John William Corrington, *A Letter From a Southerner*, 26 Legal Stud. F. 739 (2002).

The South, fitful and flawed as it was, had a deep resonance in Corrington's psyche and in his work. Still early in his writing career, at a time when he was publishing poetry and writing academic papers, his first novel underway, he remarks in a letter to Charles Bukowski:

What you try not to do is fool yourself. Win or lose in the cosmic stakes, I can take it. Never having really thought I was much, or likely to be much, I am thankful for good lines, even for good thoughts, and if other people want to print what happens, okay. It makes no difference one way or the other. I am not so far impressed with what I have done, and this is forever good—because I am not depressed, either. All is well. This is what the South has done for me. I belong to something: a land, a family, a way of life. And thus I don't have to get my ego all laced up with the poetry. . . . I feel real bad for people whose writing (or editing) becomes an extension of their personalities.<sup>170</sup>

Corrington finds in the South, not the subject for his fiction, but a way to locate himself as a writer, a way to know who he is and what he's writing for. He says, "it is written of men that they do well when they are proud of what they are—and what they come from."<sup>171</sup>

In still another letter to Bukowski, Corrington identifies the South as an enigma, but also a place which had left him a legacy of giants:

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<sup>170</sup> Letter to Charles Bukowski, dated December 6, 1961. Almost twenty-five years later, Corrington would, again, make a similar claim: "I know what it means to be from somewhere, to belong to a place and a people . . . ." "The Mystery of Writing," *supra* note 52 [26 Legal Stud. F. 503, 515 (2002)]. This deep sense of "belonging" to a place and its people, its "way of life," does not come without encumbrances and burdens. Corrington would never get around to spelling them out and one assumes that his failure to do so lies in his love of the South.

<sup>171</sup> Corrington letter to Charles Bukowski, August 27, 1962. Corrington explained in an interview in 1985, the onset of his intense identification with the South:

I was in my middle twenties. At the Rice University bookstore, I casually picked up Hodding Carter's *The Angry Scar*. I had never really been all that conscious of being Southern until I read that book. It sounds ridiculous, but a hundred years later I was so god damned mad I could hardly breathe at what those Yankee scum had done to us.

Parrill Interview, *supra* note 16, at 184-185 [26 Legal Stud. F. 671, 674-675 (2002)]. Corrington refers to Carter's *The Angry Scar* as a "masterpiece." *Id.* at 185. See Hodding Carter, *THE ANGRY SCAR: THE STORY OF RECONSTRUCTION* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1959). Hodding Carter—a writer, editor, publisher—was born on February 3, 1907, in Hammond, Louisiana. He received his undergraduate degree from Bowdoin College, and studied journalism at Columbia, Tulane, and Harvard. Carter was a reporter for the New Orleans *Item-Tribune* and in 1932 founded the Hammond *Daily Courier*. During World War II, Carter was editor of the Middle East edition of *Stars & Stripes* and *Yank*, and retired from military service as a major. Carter received numerous awards for literature and journalism including a Pulitzer Prize in 1946. He died in 1972, at Greenville, Mississippi.

[T]he South was an enigma (I would probably feel that even if I was from Luxembourg): a race of giants, individualists, deists, brainy and gutsy: Washington, Jefferson, Madison, Jackson (Andy), Davis, Calhoun, Lee, and on and on. And yet the stain of human slavery on them.<sup>172</sup>

And it was among these giants, and those who had a code that guided their lives, that Corrington sought a place for himself.

Maybe this is why I love Poppa [Ernest Hemingway]. Because all my dusty fathers sing out of the soil, "There is a code. There are things one does, and things one never does. There are deaths and deaths, loves and loves. Choose. Be wise. Be strong. Be honest and humble; die rather than be reduced. There is a code."<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> Corrington letter to Charles Bukowski, January 8, 1962. Corrington, of course, wanted as a writer to find for himself a place among the giants. Joyce Corrington, points to a passage in *So Small a Carnival*, where the hero-narrator expresses a sentiment shared by her husband:

At the heart of me, I had always reckoned one day to find my own Alamo, to go down as Jesus had in the midst of blazing guns doing some great good that men would recognize, that would stand somehow even when the memory of it dimmed into legend, and the names and place were forgotten.

Joyce H. Corrington, "The Evolution of Bill Corrington's Metaphysics," *supra* note 60, at 110 [26 Legal Stud. F. 659, 662-663 (2002)] (citing John William Corrington & Joyce H. Corrington, *So Small a Carnival* 212 (New York: Viking, 1986)).

<sup>173</sup> Corrington letter to Charles Bukowski dated April 26, 1962. "Hemingway was a man in an age of half-men, that he was, at his best, as classical as Cicero, as matter-of-fact as Caesar, and as strongly-based in a philosophy of the world and our brief life in it as his ancient brother-writer, Marcus Aurelius Antoninus." "Ernest Hemingway" notes, in "The Twentieth Century Novel," *supra* note 26. "It is finally not so much what a man believes as how a man conducts himself that measures him." Corrington letter to Charles Bukowski, dated April 26, 1962. It is a theme that Corrington would frequently revisit and one that he would attribute to being a Southerner: "There are things one does and things one may not do, and these things whether in a larger context they seem good or bad, are chiefly determined by the collective authority of the people, those who owe him, and those he indisputably owes allegiance." Corrington & Williams, *supra* note 36. Corrington, in letter to Bukowski, would put his remark about how a man conducts himself in a broader perspective:

There are no remedies for anything in this life. The world will break you and finally it will kill you, but between the first scream and the last, a man can have some love, a few good days, and can learn to handle himself well. Then, in the bad days, he can hold himself together and manage to look good when the roof lands on him. There is honor, tho a man will not find it or its meaning outside himself. There is truth, and it will break your heart, but you will have to go along with it. Because the rest is bullshit and phoney and unworthy of a man.

Corrington letter to Charles Bukowski, undated (probably late spring/early summer, 1962). It was thinking about what lies ahead that prompted this remark: "What is coming for us is a thing to be done well and beyond all thought of fear and heartbreak. It would be a shame to let the edges give way or the center crumble. There is no way to repair it

It was this “code” that Corrington, student of the South and its literature, would try to explain in intellectual and philosophical terms. Corrington, writing with Miller Williams, in their introduction to a collection of Southern fiction, provides a detailed prospectus on the nature of the Southerner:<sup>174</sup>

[First, there is something called “Southern” writing] a thing of the mind, a matter of character and a point of view [and it can be identified and described.]<sup>175</sup>

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The landscape of the South that is most haunted is within the Southern man. And there, too, the ghosts have names. They have been named before, and the names are not ours, but they are good and honest names. They are Religion and History, Place and Responsibility.<sup>176</sup>

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[T]he myth of unlimited progress, of man’s perfectibility, never has had much currency in the South. Man’s will weakened, his intellect darkened by original sin, is not the foundation for Utopia.

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if you do.” Corrington letter to Charles Bukowski, dated May 20, 1962.

<sup>174</sup> Corrington & Williams, *supra* note 36. We know that Corrington was fervent, and life-long, in his devotion to the South (particularly North Louisiana) and so when he writes (with Miller Williams) about the South’s literature he is writing about a people and a body of literature that defines both him and his own fiction.

Williams and Corrington first met in September, 1962, when Williams joined the LSU English faculty and was assigned to share an office with Bill Corrington. Discovering that they both had an interest in contemporary Southern fiction, and got along well together, they decided to undertake a book in which they would collect the best of the then current Southern writing. They wrote the “introduction” to *Southern Writing in the Sixties: Fiction* independently, then from the two introductions, created the introduction that appeared in the book. Personal communication from Miller Williams, email message dated April 7, 2002.

Miller Williams is University Professor of English and Foreign Languages at the University of Arkansas and the author, co-author, or translator of thirty books, including twelve poetry collections. Williams is the founding director of the University of Arkansas Press and it was Williams who was responsible for the publication of Corrington’s *All My Trials* by the Press in 1987.

<sup>175</sup> *Id.* at ix.

<sup>176</sup> *Id.* at x.

The history of man, as seen by the Southerner, is a history of "the human heart," in Faulkner's phrase, "in conflict with itself."<sup>177</sup>

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We are told that the Southerner lives in the past. He does not. The past lives in him, and there is a difference. He knows where he came from, and who his fathers were. He knows still that he came from the soil, and that the soil and its people once had a name. He knows that is true, and he knows it is a myth. He knows the soil belonged to the black hands that turned it as well as it ever could belong to any hand and that the Confederacy did not.<sup>178</sup>

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Everyone in the United States *had* a history; the Southerner *has* one.<sup>179</sup> (Until recently, history—at least a portion of it—was almost a second religion to the Southerner.)<sup>180</sup>

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He [the Southerner] knows that in the history of the South are less happy myths that are also not fiction, stories as dark as Medea and as real as blood, stories many outside the South would know and understand . . . facts and myths which, to some degree, darken the heritage of any people.<sup>181</sup>

We might, finally, let this matter of the South rest, with Corrington's affirmation:

I am a man of place; connected emotionally to Northwest Louisiana, in spirit at least. I may never come home to stay until I'm buried here, but that won't change anything. I still function best with that myth and my

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<sup>177</sup> *Id.* at xi. The phrase Corrington and Williams draw on here is from William Faulkner's acceptance speech for the 1949 Nobel Prize for Literature. See note 87, *supra*. It was just this kind of story in which we find the heart in conflict with itself that Corrington himself seeks to write. See "The Mystery of Writing of Writing," *supra* note 52 [26 Legal Stud. F. 503, text accompanying note 33 (2002)].

<sup>178</sup> *Id.* at xiii.

<sup>179</sup> *Id.* at xiv.

<sup>180</sup> *Id.*

<sup>181</sup> *Id.* at xiii-xiv.



interest is in functioning, not in creating documentaries to some grubby truth.<sup>182</sup>

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Corrington was a man of liberal spirit,<sup>183</sup> but his identification with the South brought with it a distinctive Southern swagger in his jabs at liberals, Yankees, and Northerners. Corrington had the Southerner's notion of enemies: "You are held together in one piece and one place by the forces blowing against you from outside. Your enemies and their determination to do you in are what keep you together."<sup>184</sup> He took devilish pride in poking hot intellectual irons at those he thought ignorant of the South (and its literature), and especially liberals:

The measure of a society by liberal standards is the individual; I think that is no measure at all. The true measure is the ultimate contribution the society makes to the ongoingness of humanity.<sup>185</sup>

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[T]he Southerner remains a rebel. He resists, and will likely continue to resist, the relentless process of conformity which some recent Northern liberal was pleased to call, with characteristic obtusity, "The Americanization" of the South. For "American" in such context, one must read "Yankee," and in large measure the Southerner, in chorus with most Latin Americans, and fully half the world's people, tends to exclaim, "Yankee, go home."<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> Journal entry, September 9, 1980. The idea of place, history, and myth are central to Corrington's world-view. "For out of the cluttered and conflicting past, the postwar Southerner fashioned a pantheon, a stable of demons, myths of heroism and cowardice, greatness and barbarity in which fact and fiction are blended so masterfully that even the historian quails before the task of separating one from the other." Corrington & Williams, *supra* note 36, at xiv [26 Legal Stud. F. 721, 725 (2002)].

<sup>183</sup> "I love grace and the gesture of friendship and magnanimity. I would that every man cry for the agony of his brothers and not rest until that agony was ended." Corrington letter to Charles Bukowski, dated January 9, 1962.

<sup>184</sup> Corrington letter to Charles Bukowski, dated January 17, 1962. Walker Percy's *The Second Coming* is a mediation on the "enemy," but for Percy the enemy lies within, in the "living death" that men live. Percy, *supra* note 21. But Corrington and Percy would agree that "[n]ot to know the name of the enemy is already to have been killed by him." *Id.* at 271.

<sup>185</sup> Journal entry, September 6, 1980.

<sup>186</sup> Corrington & Williams, *supra* note 36, at xix [26 Legal Stud. F. 721, 729 (2002)].

Corrington carried on a good bit about liberals and Yankees, and while he meant to hit hard, he was mostly trying to keep the South alive and mythic for his writing:

Sure, part of the formula is cursing Yankees. I can, for limited periods, believe that Yankees and their kind made this stinking cesspool of a world, and that my people had no part in it. Sad, but I know too much to think that. It only serves for long enough to write a thing. But it never shows in the thing, does it?<sup>187</sup>

With his love of the South, his extensive knowledge of Southern literature (both fiction and poetry), and his disdain for the North, it is hardly surprising to find Corrington writing a Southern-flavored brand of lawyer fiction. Corrington was as firmly rooted in the South as an old live oak tree; a tree of great magnitude requires an enormous root structure and it was Corrington's sense of myth and his search for the first order of thing that was his root structure.

#### MYTH

A writer invites (himself and the reader) to do difficult things—to discover what is denied, old, implacable; to find and give a name to that which drives us to misery, to hope. We look back, Corrington seems to say, not in nostalgia, but in search of reality, the larger reality within which we must all live, the reality reflected in and obscured by the spin and whirl of an individual life. Corrington's fiction addresses the grand illusion that we can live in the moment and disregard the past, that we can live for ourselves and pay no mind to our ancestors, that we can literally strip from existence the gods of the old order, and live free of myth and the Fates.<sup>188</sup> In Corrington's fiction, the illusion gives way as

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<sup>187</sup> Corrington letter to Charles Bukowski, dated November 7, 1961.

<sup>188</sup> In a journal entry dated August 31, 1980, Corrington writes: "The anthropomorphic structure of religious myth is not false—as to the unfolding soul. But it tends to become opaque to the ongoingness of the spirit. How can one maintain the truth of the myth, and move beyond it? In this lies the end of ideology and the future hope of humanity?" And then near the end of his life, only a few months before his death, Corrington wrote to his former colleague from his LSU teaching days:

I've read more philosophy in the last ten years than anything else. It's not hard to do: it's kind of like field-stripping the universe and reassembling it blind-folded. . . . In philosophy, the winner (always temporary) is the one who can coherently score the most points toward answering the Great Questions—which is to say, the ones human beings are obsessed with—which is to say, maybe not the really great questions at all. Because age whispers to me that, even as cows were not created for the sake of steaks and shoes, maybe the cosmos has larger business than ourselves. Such thoughts, as you well know, are a relief.

his characters glimpse (if dimly) that “larger conception of things”<sup>189</sup> that hovers over a man’s story and the place in which he has lived that story. For Corrington, the past (and the way we honor it),<sup>190</sup> the present (and the illusions of the day), and the future (anticipating the as yet unseen) are as shaped by myth as by individual effort/design/will.<sup>191</sup>

Religion has always addressed this “larger conception of things” and takes on the role of myth in doing so, but then religion attempts to differentiate itself from myth.<sup>192</sup> Corrington accepted established religion<sup>193</sup>

Corrington letter to Miller Williams, dated October 1, 1988.

<sup>189</sup> “The Academic Revolution,” *supra* note 47.

<sup>190</sup> “We are told that the Southerner lives in the past. He does not. The past lives in him, and there is a difference.” Corrington & Williams, *supra* note 36, at xiii [26 Legal Stud. F. 721, 724 (2002)].

<sup>191</sup> Even as a poet Corrington was playing with the relationship of the past, the present, and the eternal, and what he called the “fourth dimension”:

What’s that? Maybe you could call it a sense of history: the ability to frame what we know of now against what we know of the past. . . . I can build better singings by opposing NOW to some THEN or other. I’ve got this really way out poem on the crash of the Hindenberg, the big blimp that went down in the late thirties. I think it’s good—because I tried to find the eternal element in this kind of disaster. I know you won’t think much of this, but I believe in it: this grasp of everything in the NOW and a THEN gives depth. O well, we writes ‘em, finally, the best way we knows how, huh?

Corrington letter to Charles Bukowski, dated August 16, 1961. Ultimately, as Joyce Corrington notes, Bill’s goal “was to transform the reality of time and place into myths.” Joyce H. Corrington, “The Evolution of Bill Corrington’s Metaphysics,” *supra* note 60, at 110 [26 Legal Stud. F. 659, 662 (2002)].

<sup>192</sup> Corrington, in some of his earliest academic writing, drawing as he would so often on the work of Eric Voegelin, notes the complex relationship of religion and myth.

Religion’s differentiation from primary *mythos* is clearly . . . complex. In one sense, it can be said that no true differentiation takes place, that religion as an institutional entity (as opposed to a living, unfossilized organic state with a minimum of organization and dogma) retains its position as keeper and protector of the myth so long as both continue viable. But this is not strictly true. Religion differentiates as the ritual-ethical portion of myth, and as it matures, becomes increasingly less concerned with those other aspects of the total *mythos* which are—or at least seem to be—more or less outside the sphere of its vital interests.

Corrington, “Prolegomena to a Theory of Literature,” *supra* note 61. For Corrington’s views on religion and the South, see Corrington & Williams, *supra* note 36.

<sup>193</sup> Corrington was raised a Catholic. Joyce Corrington notes that her husband told her that he had “lost his faith” while a high school student but rediscovered it while a student at Centenary College through his interaction with Father Cornelius O’Brien, a young and intelligent Irish priest, who Corrington once called, “the best of all possible Irish priests.” Corrington letter to Charles Bukowski, June 18, 1962.

Joyce and Bill were married in the Church, their four children were baptized, and they attended Mass fairly regularly until the 1970s. It was, Joyce Corrington says, in Bill’s conversations with Owen Bradley, one of the attorneys at the firm where he practiced

but he sought out, in his understanding of God, a Divine presence which transcends the Sunday practice of religion,<sup>194</sup> a presence that Rudolph Otto called the *mysterium tremendum*.<sup>195</sup> When an interviewer reminded Corrington that he had been called a Catholic writer, it's little wonder that he did not warm to the label. He pointed to a novel he had recently published, *Shad Sentell*, as not having a "syllable of Catholicism" in it.<sup>196</sup> And while another novel, *The Upper Hand*, involves an ex-priest, and one of his lawyer short stories, "Every Act Whatever of Man,"<sup>197</sup> deals with religious matters, Corrington is not a religious writer in the same way he is not a political writer.

It is the Divine (rather than religion), theology and myth, and an awareness of the "larger conception of things" that infuses Corrington's fiction. Corrington, who would have so little to say about his law school years, did speculate that law school (and its "world of rationality") had posed a threat to his "hold on a mythical world."<sup>198</sup> But Corrington knew this "world of rationality" quite well from his years of study and graduate work, conforming these studies to his own purposes as he may have done. So it seems unlikely that the rationality he confronted in law school could

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law, where Bill realized that he, unlike Bradley, attached no particular importance to individual immortality. As he began to read Indian philosophy, Corrington moved away from Catholicism to a different kind of spirituality. God became the Divine. But he never lost, Joyce Corrington says, the feeling of a close, personal connection to "that One, sensed, not seen," to which "we owe our very best." As Corrington grew older he drew away from the forms of the Catholic "religion" in which he had been reared, but his spirituality and love of the Divine remained real to him. Joyce Corrington, email to the author, February 15, 2002.

Joyce Corrington refers to a journal entry in which Bill wrote: "We have distinct personalities, but the deepest interior is likely One. It is to that One, sensed, not seen, like a shadow passing over the grass as one looks elsewhere, that we owe our very best." Journal entry dated April 23, 1983. And finally, she notes still another journal entry that provides Bill's own summary of the matter: "Nothing lasts forever—except the love of the divine and one's dedication to that ultimate reality that can never be lost, never forgotten, and who it is death to ignore or put aside." Journal entry dated March 14, 1986.

For Corrington's commentary on the role of Christian symbolism in our understanding of *humanitas* (and the humanities), see "The Recovery of the Humanities," *supra* note 49.

<sup>194</sup> See "The Evolution of Bill Corrington's Metaphysics," *supra* note 60, at 114-116 [26 Legal Stud. F. 659, 667-668 (2002)].

<sup>195</sup> See Rudolph Otto, *THE IDEA OF THE HOLY* (London: Oxford University Press, 1976)(John W. Harvey trans.)(originally published in 1917).

<sup>196</sup> Ross Interview, *supra* note 94, at 115 [26 Legal Stud. F. 695, 697 (2002)].

<sup>197</sup> "Every Act Whatever of Man," *supra* note 33 [26 Legal Stud. F. 245 (2002)].

<sup>198</sup> Journal entry dated September 6, 1980.

have seriously threatened his “mythological mind” and the uses for which he found for it in his fiction.<sup>199</sup>

We see Corrington’s “mythological mind” at work, most visibly, in his fictionalized Shreveport (and New Orleans) which became characters in his stories.<sup>200</sup>

Shreveport is a mythological construct of my mind. For my own purposes, I make it warmer, more upright, more linked to the antique virtues than it ever was; wilder, more insane, more desperate at its fringes than it ever was. Everyone does one or both in relation to his past as age comes on. It is simply that the artist knows better how to do it and make it stick.<sup>201</sup>

Corrington, conscious as he was about his mythologizing of Shreveport, was simply trying to use Shreveport to mine the mythic substratum, and get closer to what he sometimes called the Tale. Corrington says: “[E]ach of us bears a Tale, and the expression of it in some way is the ‘meaning’ of our lives.”<sup>202</sup> Fiction provides an opening to, if not a revelation of, the Tale. Corrington was no minimalist sketch-artist, and he had no desire to find a place for suburbanites and bleached-out, empty modernists in his fiction. He wanted his fiction to loom large, pulling us up close to those who, often against their will, must come to grips with the larger myths within which lives are embedded. Corrington attributes to pride, the belief that “we weave the fabric of life along our pattern instead of God’s. We make the cloth, but not the pattern.”<sup>203</sup> It is in honoring these concerns that Corrington dedicates all his fiction, A.M.D.G. Asked by an interviewer what it meant, Corrington replied: “It’s something that I was taught when I was just learning to write, taught by the Jesuits to put at the head of all my papers, and it’s the only thing that I carried away that I have any use for—that and the discipline they gave me. It stands for *Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam*, to the greater glory

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<sup>199</sup> “I have a mythological mind. My first real sally into the world of rationality was law school, which I found exceedingly easy because all that was required was mere rationality and any fool can do that.” *Id.*

<sup>200</sup> See generally John William Corrington, “New Orleans, Mon Bete Noir,” *supra* note 54.

<sup>201</sup> Journal entry dated September 9, 1980.

<sup>202</sup> Journal entry dated March 21, 1986. “I have this terrible confession to make. My demon has been since 15 the desire to become a legend. Not just fame, surely not money, but to become a mythical creature like Achilles or Stonewall Jackson or Shakespeare or James Joyce. Shameful. A man should care only for the work and for doing the work honestly and well.” Corrington letter to Charles Bukowski, dated February 3, 1962.

<sup>203</sup> Corrington letter to Charles Bukowski, dated April 10, 1962.

of God.”<sup>204</sup> In his journal he would note that the *AMDG* dedication of his fiction meant that the stories were “for the Lord’s perusal, part of the *lila*, the play—more properly, the Tale in which we are all involved whether we would be or not.”<sup>205</sup> To work with and in myth, Corrington has his characters, his lawyers, brush up against the big stuff,<sup>206</sup> to fish the same deep waters Corrington fishes. “We are all driven,” Corrington says, “by different demons: fame, love, hate, fear, rage, sympathy.”<sup>207</sup> These are the big fishes; we swim among them with our little lives, Corrington with his fiction. “It is the writer’s task to tell stories that reveal . . . wanting and fearing, loving and trusting as if it is in the secret hearts of his characters.”<sup>208</sup>

In fiction and life, we engage, resist, fall prey to, and struggle to understand the Tale. The struggle, sometimes a comedy, sometimes tragedy, sometimes both, evolves from the sense that the Tale is real, and yet we are forever unknowing as to its true source, or even its place in the day-to-day affairs of life. (And yes, there are those who claim to know the Tale, its source, and how it must be lived.) Bill Corrington told of a dream his wife, Joyce, had reported to him:

In that dream, it was clear to her that each one of us, every person alive, is a story told about God. She could tell me no more than that, but that was surely enough, for she had told me the tale she was told in dream. Some of us are destined to be triumphant stories, some tragic. Some of us may be epics, some lyrics. All that remains is the translation of what it means to be human into human language.<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> Parrill Interview, *supra* note 16, at 183 [26 Legal Stud. F. 671, 673 (2002)].

<sup>205</sup> Journal entry dated May 16, 1985. Corrington noted in this same entry that his wife had reminded him that “we are each tales told about God.” Corrington went on to note his approval.

<sup>206</sup> See e.g., Walter Journe in “Every Act Whatever of Man”; Albert Sidney Finch and old Gee (Gaspar Penniwell) in “Decoration Day”; Harry Cohen who meets a lawyer named Grierson who has undertaken unimaginable acts of penitence in “The Actes and Monuments”; the pursuit of violence by Dewey, the court reporter in “The Southern Reporter”; the tale to beat all tales, the story within the story told by the lawyer in “The Risi’s Wife.”

<sup>207</sup> Corrington handwritten letter to Charles Bukowski, dated February 3, 1962.

<sup>208</sup> Handwritten notes accompanying “The Mystery of Writing,” four pages, numbered. Corrington Papers, Centenary College.

Writing is no more a career than loving, marrying, raising one’s children is a career. It is a way of living that entails seeing into the flow of one’s own life and that of others—either close by, or immeasurably far away—and then to make use of one’s hard-gained skill to recreate that life in language. So that the life thus preserved intersects the ongoing life of generations, even nations—as yet unborn.

*Id.*

<sup>209</sup> “The Mystery of Writing,” *supra* note 52 [26 Legal Stud. F. 503, 517 (2002)].

It was triumphant and tragic stories that Corrington wanted to tell. And to do it, he knew it required a language carried from the heart. We find just such a language in Corrington's legal fiction, in the ways of his retired judge, Albert Finch and Old Gee (Gaspar Penniwell) in "Decoration Day," and we find it again in Walter Journe, the lawyer in "Every Act Whatever of Man":

It was his habit to come to the courthouse early when he had business there. He would nod to the janitor as the large ancient doors opened, and then, the rising sun behind him, he would walk up and down the silent shadowed corridor, a dog run with offices, chambers, and courtrooms off to either side.

When he had a trial, he would do the last-minute acts of mental construction at this time, search out the questions to be asked that he had not discovered yet. On those days, he would pace rapidly through the shadows, hardly noticing the dark obscure portraits of long-dead judges that adorned the walls along the corridor or even noticing later the growing number of lawyers and functionaries as they came in to begin their day. Not until his opponent, or the clerk of the court where he was to try, came up to him would he cease his pacing and look up, distracted, to see that the sun was high and it was time to work.

Other times, when there was no trial, he would go to five o'clock mass in the tiny Church of the Holy Redeemer, and then, Christ upon him, would pace the courthouse corridor, rosary in hand, his thoughts not religious in the common sense, but pieced together out of almost seventy-five years of life, fifty at the law. His study was Christendom, that long wave of meaning which had reached from Jerusalem to Byzantium, from Aachen to St. Stephanie, Louisiana. He would remember his father, a sorrowful mystery, blurred by forty years gone. He would remember the town when vegetable carts and a butcher shop had done his family and friends for a supermarket. There had been a time when young people stayed in St. Stephanie, or, leaving, spent a year or two or three in New Orleans, came back to marry and begin a family, telling no one anything of that Carthage to the east where, in the Quarter, souls were lost and sin lapped at the steps of St. Louis Cathedral, like water from the Mississippi, against levees which often did not hold.

He would consider what it meant to serve the law, to bring a poor man's suit, and walk away afterward, some small piece of justice done. He would think of what he had seen on the late news: terror, assassination, acts of vengeance, things so foul that their like had never been seen in this courthouse and, God willing, never would be.

It was as if he were forging a new rosary, one other than that handed to St. Dominic. One no less mysterious or laden with grace, but one in which the great hierophantic events in the life of the Savior were replaced with the happenings of the day. He would consider the little girl

raped, killed, her body dismembered and thrown into the river there at New Orleans. And as he considered, he would recite a decade of the rosary for the repose of that small soul, but even more for her family and loved ones who even then must be suffering an agony which the child in her innocence was far beyond.

Or he would reflect on the priests who deserted their calls—a decade to bring them faith and return of grace again. Or he would remember his very special intention: those children destroyed by abortion, whose half-formed bodies and slumbering souls had been, by the millions, given over to a holocaust as violent, vicious—and legal—as that of the Nazis against God’s Chosen Ones.

Sometimes a groan would escape him as he paced.

—Sir, the janitor might say. —Mr. Journe, is something wrong?

He would come to himself then, smile, shake his head, slip his rosary into his pocket, still keeping hold of the bead he was telling, and go on pacing as the sun rose on another day in the courts.

That morning, as he paced, a young clerk came up to him quietly.

—Mr. Journe, Judge Soniat would like to see you . . .

He looked up. Michael Soniat here at this hour? He glanced at his watch. It was barely seven-thirty, two and a half hours before court. He walked behind the young clerk, whose name he did not know—there were so many nowadays, they came and went so quickly. It was just before he reached the oaken door of the judge’s chamber that he lost count of his beads.<sup>210</sup>

#### A DEATH THAT SADDENS STILL

John William Corrington died, days short of a month after his 56<sup>th</sup> birthday, from a heart attack on a November’s Thanksgiving Day, 1988. He was still in so many ways a young man, his ideas and writing still vital, various intellectual projects underway, still restless to explore the “deeper mystery.”<sup>211</sup> And yes, his death, in Malibu, California was in an ironic, if not cruel way, his passage home, to the place in the world he loved whole-heartedly, to finally rest after a journey that carried him far.

In his final minutes, being rushed to the hospital, he turned to his wife Joyce—collaborator in life and in writing—the woman who described her time with Bill as a 30-year seminar, and said: “It’s all right.” It was the last words he would speak.<sup>212</sup>

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<sup>210</sup> “Every Act Whatever of Man,” *supra* note 33, at 301-341 [26 Legal Stud. F. 245, 246-247 (2002)].

<sup>211</sup> Journal entry dated May 16, 1985.

<sup>212</sup> Joyce H. Corrington, “The Evolution of Bill Corrington’s Metaphysics,” *supra* note 60, at 116 [26 Legal Stud. F. 659, 668-669 (2002)].



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“The only man who really dreads dying is the poor bastard who has never lived. By all measures, I have lived well. What I could do, I have pretty much done. I have cried only rarely and only small tears for what I couldn’t do. I have loved the grass and even given hours over to the sky and the clouds. I have considered my father’s courage and my mother’s endurance and have wished them well. I have given thanks where it was due, and tried failingly and with maybe some success not to want what I wanted, but what was *right and honorable to want*. The failures have been legion, but the success have held the fabric together and kept the juices flowing. Now I am nearly thirty and still not tired enough to lay off—and am almost old enough to trust myself with things of importance: like a family, like writing, like friends. . . . So much is luck. So much is the grace of God. But the part that shows and can be seen belongs to us, and neither lady luck nor god almighty is stingy enough to steal the by-line. They like to see us make it, because they know we have to die—and the making is not too much overpayment for the dying that comes after.”<sup>213</sup>

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“We all fail, as Faulkner says, but if we are brave and insist on forgetting as little as possible, we may manage to scrawl a shorthand note to tomorrow on the wall of this great pay-toilet of a world . . . if the janitor doesn’t blow up the whole damn lavatory.”<sup>214</sup>

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“I got one thing to carry into deadland with me: the certainty that I could see. . . .”<sup>215</sup>

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“I write like men paint or carve: to erect my own tombstone in advance.”<sup>216</sup> “With me it is the desire to create a piece of stone so enduring that when the earth gives way, it will survive as a meteor. Something that could stand as a tribute and an epitaph to the dignity, the glory, and the unvanquishable soul of mankind.”<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> Corrington letter to Charles Bukowski, dated May 10, 1962.

<sup>214</sup> Corrington letter to Charles Bukowski, dated December 1, 1961.

<sup>215</sup> Corrington letter to Charles Bukowski, dated August (probably August, 1961).

<sup>216</sup> Corrington letter to Charles Bukowski, dated April 24, 1962.

<sup>217</sup> Corrington letter to Charles Bukowski, dated April 2, 1962.

