Frank Waters: Problems of the Regional Imperative

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IF THE general reader has encountered *The Colorado*, by Frank Waters, published by Rinehart and Company in 1946 as one in their Rivers of America series, he may have been moved to explore the further works of a Southwestern writer who, in this volume at least, brought to regional history an excellence rarely attained in this genre. Further exploration will not yield evidence of comparable achievement in Frank Waters’ other volumes, mostly novels, and the reader will have to satisfy himself with the knowledge that *The Colorado* is a consolidation of themes, convictions and borrowing researches which Waters was unable to negotiate in the terms offered by fiction. The critic of regional literature, however, may not allow himself the luxury of the general reader’s disposal of the matter. He feels obliged to sift the valuable meanings from the unachieved material in order to find the crux of Frank Waters’ literary disparities and in the hope of illuminating the errors of the regional imperative. In so doing, he may also hope that his pursuit will not appear to be largely negative. Criticism can very often only support values by pointing to their absence in the particular work on hand.

Although *The Colorado* is, in sequence of publication, Frank Waters’ seventh book and, except for *The Yogi of Cockroach Court*, his most recent, it claims priority of critical attention,
for it establishes, in many ways, criteria of regional interpretation and suggests narrative power and psychological audacity in its author which are remarkably absent from or confused in his literary output before and since. Nominally, The Colorado is the history of a river and of the social variety produced by the country through which it flows. Beyond this plan, however, it engages a complex subject for which I am submitting, in the absence of an available definition, the coinage, geopsychology: this is to say, the attribution of influences upon mankind from the conditions and from the structure, itself, of physical environment. Geopsychology is an interpretative method of great antiquity, appearing over the centuries and across cultural lines wherever man and his landscape have been recognized as concrescent.

The late D. H. Lawrence gave to the subject the supreme expression in English for our time and it is in his terminology and, specifically, in his New World revelations that we are justified in seeing Waters' prophetic point of departure in The Colorado, if not in the novels that preceded it, where Lawrence's presence was overshadowed by Thomas Wolfe's. No doubt Waters has evolved his own ambivalent sense of identity with the Rocky Mountain region of his growing up and has suffered personal dislocation in adjusting his part-Indian bloodstream to the pulses of a white technological society. No doubt, also, that he must have welcomed the rationale of Red-Man-and-White enmity provided by Lawrence, as he had welcomed the "forever homeless" plaint of Thomas Wolfe. Lawrence believed that part of the great unrest in the American soul was the mark of "the demon of place," the secret influence of the murdered indigene.

The moment the last nuclei of Red life break up in America, then the white men will have to reckon with the full force of the demon of the continent. At present the demon of the place and the unappeased ghosts of the dead Indians act within the
unconscious or under-conscious soul of the white American, causing the great American grouch, the Orestes-like frenzy of restlessness in the Yankee soul, the inner malaise which amounts almost to madness, sometimes. The Mexican is macabre and disintegrated in his own way. Up till now, the unexpressed spirit of America has worked covertly in the American, the white American soul. But within the present generation the surviving Red Indians are due to merge in the great white swamp. Then the Daimon of America will work overtly, and we shall see real changes.—Studies in Classic American Literature, 1917-1922. (T. Seltzer, N. Y. 1923)

Much of the time Waters has swallowed Lawrence's theory whole, yet he has moments when he leaves open the possibility of a more affirmative exchange between the land and its people, and between the aborigine and the newcomer.

So today, in its broadest terms, we have reached the apex of our struggle. Both have reached their last oubliette—the white with his monstrous individualism and the Indian with his vast impersonality. . . . Today the drums are beating again. A new and belching volcano has suddenly and miraculously risen out of a sleeping cornfield. A new god is being born. A new race is rising out of America with a culture and a civilization the world has never seen. A god, race and civilization neither white nor red, neither blindly materialistic nor spiritually withdrawn into itself. This is our new destiny.

This is highly figurative language, far looser than Lawrence's, and it emphasizes the anxiety with which, elsewhere in this book, Waters edits his melancholy conviction of irreparable loss, the loss of the mystical Spirit of Place, the destitution of psychical identity. He is far more convincing when, in the latter mood, he recapitulates the fugitive odysseys of the conquistador, the padre, the trapper.

Human history is but the story of man's adaptation to his en-
The deepening relationship of a people to their earth. That is the essential truth we read here in this vast heart of America, the upland basin of the Colorado. In the conquerors, whom it defeated. In the padres, whom it rejected. In the trappers, who overcame the land physically and were caught by it psychically. The secret of its hold upon us is the treasure the prospectors sought. Until we find it—the profound and haunting secret of the reciprocal relationship that must exist between man and land—we will still remain outcasts.

This could have been the topic paragraph for The Colorado and the tensions between its stated propositions are the tensions within Waters' attempted synthesis. "The deepening relation of a people to their earth" and "Until we find it . . . we will still remain outcasts." Thus, Waters tries to serve two masters: the suspicion, on the one hand, that the American promise has been permanently cancelled and, on the other, a faith in Anglo-Teutonic-American destiny, aided by industrial collectivism, overcoming alienation. Like Mary Austin, in The Land of Journeys' Ending, and as hazily, he derives an unqualified optimism from the supposition of a creative merging with the native remnant. But the affirming belief in solidarity is never, in Waters' pages, as well grounded in the facts of character fulfillment as his recitals of the successive failures: failures, that is to say, in the sense that the Southwest experience, from Waters' account, has bought for the white man, sterility and isolation.

Waters finds the stuff of tragedy in the wilderness adventure suffered by Spanish and Anglo-American alike, but his attitude toward it, when he is working under the checks of psychological discipline, is not epical. It might be said that his assumptions are metaphysical, that his method is psychoanalytical and that his conclusions are teleological. This triangulation serves him better when he is explaining the past than when he is predicting the future. He renews the conquering of the Southwest with
all the fatality of a Spengler and with the clairvoyant derision of a D. H. Lawrence. No matter how often the reader of Southwest Spanish history has read rehearsals of the Esteban-Marcos de Niza trek to the pueblo of Zuñi, he will not have read a more imaginative construction of it than Waters'. And on the subject of the trappers, Waters' twenty-page accounting is worth more than all the volumes written by Stanley Vestal and his predecessors, for here is the naked truth of the trappers' pyrrhic victory over raw environment.

On the surface, the physical struggle to surmount the lofty peaks, to ford the turbulent rivers, to cross waterless deserts. To live like beasts, crisscrossing a thousand miles between campfires with the sure instinct of birds migrating with the seasons. What need had they of the detached rational observance of the padres? A prickling of the scalp, a tingle up the spine or less, were their compass and barometer, warning them of danger, change of weather, and the slow revolving directions. Wholly, intuitively, they gave themselves up to the forces surrounding them. . . . And yet they had lost as the Spaniards in this region never had, nor as the French and English east of the Missouri. Wilderness America had put its stamp upon them forever. They were never to outlive it. This is a tremendous psychical fact. Here, out of their apocryphal conflict, was created a new breed. Men European on the outside and Indian inside, men neither wholly white nor wholly red.

Waters obviously believes here that the demon which Lawrence predicated had already defined itself and was taking effect in the middle of the last century. The whole chapter from which I have taken this paragraph has the quality of insight that Harvey Fergusson needed so badly to deepen and expand the implications of his novel, Wolf Song. (A. B. Guthrie, in his novel of the river-and-mountain man, The Big Sky, 1947, has adequately duplicated, in a style fitting to its subject, Waters' feeling for this phase of frontier existence.)
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If, in the directions I have pointed out, Waters has approached the outlines of myth, he was working from its very center in his generical monograph on the outlaw, included in *The Colorado*. For Waters, "the outlaw was the negative new American," dominated by fear of the Western landscape, fear of its spirit-of-place, its impersonal suggestions of a mocking timelessness, and driven by the outcast psychology into compensatory violence.

Lacking real strength, he had no gentleness. Lacking all but a desperate physical courage, he gave no odds and shot on sight. Without trust, he had the cold unsteady eyes which were forever wary of approaching strangers and friends alike. Even his face—the long western mold of fiction with deep cheek crescents—was an unemotional mask to match his taciturnity. Appearance and action, both added up to a complete and frozen inhibition. A man wholly self-conscious, forever tense and unrelaxed and completely inhibited by his secret and unadmitted fear. . . . A man with the temperament of the schoolboy bully who forever carried a chip on his shoulder to prove his courage—and who usually died with his boots on at the first instance his bluff was called. He is the most to be pitied, for he suffered most. We understand this suffering. It is what makes him our favorite American.

This, within its limits, is the key diagnosis of the Western Bad Man, the inevitable determination by psychology of the critical hints, half resolved, in the augural sketches of Mary Austin on Jimville and the Outliers, in the documentation of Emerson Hough, in the pragmatic cowboy of Fergusson’s *Rio Grande*.

Unfortunately, the visionary section of *The Colorado* is not always substantiated by diction that clarifies its content. It is redundant, overcharged, and could be resumed in two-thirds of the space it occupies. When one examines the physiographical

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1 By myth, here, I mean the development of archetypes from living patterns of attitude and behavior.
information which fulfilled Waters' obligation to Rinehart's more popular purpose, the strains are especially evident. Besides being a treatise on regional ambitendencies, *The Colorado* is also a factual summary of the geological character and natural resources of the Colorado Basin country, bristling with statistics concerning the Imperial Valley, the Colorado River Project, the Grand Canyon and Boulder Dam. The metaphysical skepticism which underlies the cultural treatment in the book is constantly subject to mitigation by a bombastic practical idealism and by rhapsodic excursus on the length of rivers, the heights of mountains and the percentage of the world's mineral ores taken from the ranges of Colorado. Much of this data will be familiar to anyone who has read Waters' biography of Stratton, "the Midas of the Rockies," overfamiliar to those who have read the novels written before 1940. Yet even if one came to the material unknowing, he might fairly complain that once is enough to be told that in Colorado alone there are fifty-one peaks over 14,000 feet high! It is in this vein, when he is most professionally Western, a pose he chastises in others, that Waters is least acceptable. His satire of the Cowboy Cult in "The Inheritors," is crude and overwritten: his fantasy of Pyramid City is unworthy of the talent that created the chapters on the Shining Mountains and the Outcasts, and his Grand Canyon finale is composed from equal parts of legitimate enthusiasm and sheer platitude.

How is it, the reader may then ask, that so noble a superstructure as Waters erects in this volume can be fractured at the base by these insecurities of craftsmanship and taste? And how, having mastered at least the alphabet of geopsychology, can Waters fail to build from it a vocabulary that will sustain any further analyses of the subject he undertakes? That he has not done so is clear, for the essays he has recently published are but glosses on his adopted obsession, catching the easy editorial way by recourse to such either-or antitheses as the Atomic Bomb project vis-à-vis the Indian kiva. His latest novel, *The Yogi of*
Cockroach Court, although tougher in material and sentiment and more concretely dramatized than most fictions he has written, marks a depressing descent from the shining mountains of The Colorado; not that it is less heroic but that it is cheaply conceived. These perplexities can best be clarified by relating Waters' problems of content and form to those of the Western regional writer generally.

I think it may be acknowledged that the literary interpreter of the Southwest faces, in the confounding experience of size, his salient obstacle. Western literature at large (the early works of Mary Austin and the early lyric poems of Robinson Jeffers are redoubtable exceptions) declares its failure to find theme and language correspondent with the magnitude of its territorial horizons and a correlative disability for sacrificing scope to epitome so felt, imagined, disciplined, as to involve the total view. A generalizing verdict on the literature of Frank Waters will recognize that, in almost every case, it shows, in prominent relief, the peril of writing up to the immensities of the Western physical scene. The error has been calamitous for his novels, as I shall demonstrate, and in any form he chooses, essay, biography, or history, it intimidates coherence. It sadly illustrates Morton D. Zabel's determining judgment of Robinson Jeffers' poetry, "the confusion of size with greatness." This confusion is the basic emotional fallacy in Waters' scheme; the basic intellectual fallacy is his assessment of truth as incorporating rather than evaluative, as developing from accumulations of knowledge—in his case, geological, paleontological, medical, ethnological and so forth—rather than from an ordered and reciprocal relationship with moral experience. He consistently protests this supposition but his prevailing infatuation with the lumber of intellectual phenomena is witness against his protest. When assailed by the eternal verities of the Indians' microcosm, of which he is a shrewd interpreter, as I have implied, he will assert that "It is not dead knowledge we need but the intuition of
the living moment. . .” “Life must be lived, not learned from.” His literary practice usually defends the passive process.

To discover the origins of the inbred danger that always threatens Waters' fabulous possibilities, it is necessary to examine the method of his fiction. If I seem, in the ensuing outline, to give undue stress to this part of his achievement, clearly the more negligible part, it is because I believe that in Waters' fiction can be found the pressures, the corruptions, the waste and the occasional glories which belong to a whole class of writing in this country.

IN ANOTHER AGE OR another culture Frank Waters might have been a prophetic poet or a Medicine Man. In this one, he has had to satisfy his will to significance by writing novels and interpretive history. I have shown, in the preceding section of this essay, the pitfalls he narrowly avoided in *The Colorado*, with its pansophic digressions and its divergent theses. His novels have paid more dearly for similar departures, since the distinguishing character of fiction is its traffic not with universals but with particulars: the sensory gestures of the moment, the tree near at hand. Frank Waters has no love, no attentiveness, for particulars; he is doggedly male in his preference for concepts and if it cannot be said that he overwrites his subject—for his subject is always colossal—it can be said that he overwrites in advance of his subject.

Evidently the metaphysical meaning of mundane relationships and forms was premeditated by Waters before ever he wrote a word for publication; his major task, thereafter, was to deliver, as often as possible, the same message in a variety of structures. The message comprised the psychic dimensions of America, coordinate with its great space and "depth," the conflicting experiences with the Western America spirit-of-place, the overwhelming factual majesty of diastrophic change and the
doctrine of metempsychosis, gleaned chiefly from Oriental religions. These concepts, to which Waters adds a native habit of dialectic, purely nineteenth-century European, were predigested and their tractability for the art of fiction undefined, therefore never mastered. Frequently, while his back is turned, so to speak, they contradict each other. Waters could not make them viable in the novel which, though conceding to the *absolute*, proceeds by way of the *contingent*. In the broadest possible sense, Waters has known, before writing it, what each of his novels was going to be about. The novels have served the themes; the themes have not grown organically from the immediate content of the novels. With this limitation, the cardinal fallacies unavoidably follow.

**THE VISION, PREFABRICATED.** Each novel starts from an abstraction and its internal development, less slipshod in the post-1940 books, is throughout shadowed by the abstraction. Long before the events in the Rogier trilogy have engendered their own meanings, we know that this is more than the story of Rogier’s family sacrificing itself to Rogier’s pursuit of gold. It is a sermon on Place; it is the tragedy (by formulation only) of Man’s combat with the Land; it is a drama in which the adversaries are Will and Intuition, Granite and Adobe, Space and Depth, centrally symbolized in the defeat of Rogier by the Mine (The Subconscious) and the liberation of his grandson, March Cable, by return (in garrulous spirit) to Indian earth. The section titles of the volumes in this trilogy, “Silver-Gangue-

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2 For example, “Men are free only when rooted to a living homeland,” yet there is “inherent cruelty lurking in the very earth of America.” Also, the Tao are quoted to the effect that “Man, like a bird, passes on, leaving no trace.” Elsewhere, Waters affirms the traces, “the lingering vibrations of the life that had never died but only lost its non-essential bodily form.”

3 In this analysis I am taking his work as a simultaneous corpus, for there is, in fact, fluctuation, not steady development.

4 *The Wild Earth’s Nobility* (1935), *Below Grass Roots* (1937) and *The Dust Within the Rock* (1940) comprise the Rogier trilogy and largely concern the same set of characters.
Gold,” “Granite-Adobe-Sylvanite,” “Concentrate-Tailings-Silver,” are the signposts of these polarities, conformed with relentlessness. People of the Valley depends on mineral analogy, also. Maria, half-Indian, a force of nature, “like the talus slope behind her house, the decomposed granite eroded from the cliffs and now congealing into stone again . . . at any moment was likely to come roaring down with invective into the valley.” Against her untutored wisdom is set the dam, the máquina of progress, and this Hegelian thesis and antithesis is, a priori, rigorously denominated.

The Man Who Killed the Deer, as the title announces, employs a symbolic incident entirely appropriate to the Pueblo Indian world of its story, but the reader is not left to his own resourcefulness in extending the deer's significance. This is driven home at every available juncture until, at the end, when the reintegrated Martiniano, whose slaying of the deer has resulted in the restoration of his pueblo's sacred lake, sees the Pleiades in the sky and knows “that there is nothing killed, nothing lost, if one looks far or deep or high enough to see how its transmuted meaning is imprinted for all men to read and understand,” the reader is likely to feel cheated of exercising his own perceptions. (And may wish to add to Waters' text an adaptation from Wilde—“Each man kills the deer he loves.”)

The Yogi of Cockroach Court, a sordid bordertown novelette, is directly suggestive of Steinbeck's Cannery Row, with its levels of horizontal and vertical meanings, its inscrutable Chinese shopkeeper and its unfruitful animal-natured protagonists. Barby, a halfbreed, drunken derelict, and Guadalupe, a “percentage girl” with a latent Lesbian drive, succumb to The Part, while Tai Ling, explaining the action as it goes like an old-fashioned Chorus, contemplates The Whole. From his view, which is overexerted throughout the novel, Barby and Guadalupe have simply been insufficiently incarnated, hence their ineludible failures.
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EDITORIAL OMNIPRESENCE. This sin of commission is contained in the initial fallacy. Waters sees Truth with a capital letter; consequently, he maintains an anxious vigilance over the integrity and directions of his symbolic meanings, as we have seen in the matter of subject. If the abstractions I outlined above had been derived from the disposition of the events and developments within the fiction without coercion from the narrator, they would yield an aesthetic and critical satisfaction that would grow in one's appreciation as they were released in one's mind. Insisted on as they are by every shift of didacticism, they emerge stillborn, with no chance to initiate their own effects; what should issue as thematic key is, instead, a schematization. No fiction can retain artistic vitality, no creatively submissive reader can fail to be insulted, when a theoretically imaginative work is inhibited by some such redundancy as the following:

They all were ore. In the vast mills of men the best and worst went through the test. Rogier could see his own. . . . Sprung from the red earth, their bones, hardened by the selfsame iron that stained the rocks, nurtured by the great breathing mountains, they all had their chance to remain open and receptive to the press and vigor of these blind forces at the center of the world. Some of them would assay. The rest, for all his tears, were tailings to be cast aside.—Below Grass Roots.

This is the meaning of any dam: that it would obstruct the free flow of faith which renews and refreshes life and gives it its only meaning. It is self-enclosing. It means stagnation. It means death. Faith is not to be dammed. It is not to be measured. . . . —People of the Valley.

(But compare with the above, Boulder Dam as "the Ninth Symphony of our day," in The Colorado!)
in his mind's eye the jungles of vast cities; watched the beasts of nations creep upon others with the soft padded feet of diplomacy; heard the doctors of science wreaking death. . . .—The Yogi of Cockroach Court.

In a realized novel, a quotation of its controlling theme or conclusion does not take the place of the qualifying details. Too often, a novel by Waters can practically be read by eliminating everything but a sequence of its thesis paragraphs.

The Devastation of Style. John Peale Bishop, not without affection, has indicated as a felt condition in American English: "Take care of sound and sense will take care of itself." The axiom is reduced to absurdity where language is driven desperately toward incorporation of its object, as in the diction of Frank Waters when he tries to equal, in the most vehement possible prose, the gestalts of science and metaphysics. Pathetic fallacies, the confusion of leitmotiv with mere reiteration, and what I should like to call, following Waters' geological bent, literary pseudomorphism are the normally distressing materializations of his will to significance. The most outrageous extensions of this vice can be found in the shameless figure of a surgical operation performed upon the earth (The Dust Within the Rock), in the Southwest-as-Metropolis conceit (The Colorado), in the analogy of a border town with the human brain—Tai Ling's grocery is the "pineal gland" (The Yogi of Cockroach Court), but in any chapter of Waters' writing lurks the spectre of absurdity. Thus, the "clap-clap-clap" of tortilla-making is "an echo of the cosmic beat of a continent" and the mountains "would rear solidly aloft until the stars themselves were pulled from their sockets by the hand of Time."

And by some strange mode of osmosis, Waters, in his anxiety to create a style, has fallen heir to familiar cadences. Beyond the possibility of simple coincidence the reader can underline in rapid succession the abstract genitives of Joseph Conrad, the
euphemistic sonority of Herman Melville out of Thomas Browne, the hyphenated, exclamatory constructions of D. H. Lawrence, and the rhetorical cosmic questions of Thomas Wolfe. The climax of the latter influence occurs in *The Dust Within the Rock* (seven eighths of which is written in this fashion), easily the lowest incarnation of the Wolfean inflection on record. This voracious ransacking of other men's accents proves the insecurity of Waters' insights; conviction disciplined by possession and tested by knowledge will infallibly produce its own idiom. By way of redress it may be gratefully admitted that when poetic license is submitted to mundane demands, Waters' prose can express the power of place with independent authority. It does so with welcome frequency in *The Colorado* and, notably, in the graphic treatment of La Oreja in *The Man Who Killed the Deer*, the echo of Lawrence transposed to Waters' own pitch, fact and metaphor amiably consorting:

Shreds of yellow straw and flecks of mica in the adobe reflected the bright sunlight. The walls shimmered, and the shimmer seemed a shake. As if the sturdy walls were continually trembling from a volcanic stirring deep below, under the pulsing mountain. And the shimmer showed deep in the bright black eyes of their Mexican inhabitants. The scrawny little women in rusty black rebozos splitting wood in bare feet, and forever smearing more mud upon the rain-washed walls. And the squat muscular men in blue denim trousers sauntering out to loaf in the village plaza, their heavy inert bodies sullenly acclimated, curiously resilient, to the faint illusive shake and throb of the earth below. . . . La Oreja. It shimmered on the shelf midway between desert and mountain, in the center of that sage-brush triangle whose points were the pueblo above, the deep river gorge below, and the gun sight pass beyond which lay the railroad junction. To which of these points was attuned the unknown ear for which the town was named no one knew. The far-off whistle of the daily train blew faintly through the pass. The Rio Bravo roared through the gorge. But the Ear—people,
plaza and town itself—seemed perpetually turned toward the soft indented breast lifted above the body of the Reservation. The high-keyed vibrant quality of the air, the shimmering illusion of shaking walls, the epileptic tension in the bright black eyes, and the sullen impacted flesh—all these seemed curiously attuned to the deep, soundless, pulse-beat of the mountain.

**The Elimination of Conflict.** The belief in transcendentalism, manifest destiny, Karma, predestination or any other metaphysic with a fatalistic blueprint is suited, perhaps, to epic poetry, philosophy of history, essay and parable; in unskilled hands it is mortal to the novel, since it is likely to understate the imperative of conflict, which is the moral fabric of character depiction. If decisions cannot arise from the resolution of passion through action, which is to say, through the interplay of human needs with the revelations gained in active engagement of the forces of good and evil, there is no psychological ground for the novelist. In Frank Waters' novels there is insufficient conflict to subjugate our attention. Moral suspense is vitiated. The battleground of his contenders' struggles is too often the cosmic editorials prepared by Waters, himself. The fatality of Rogier's folly, for example, induces an overdressed narrative if for no other reason than that Rogier is fighting against time, rather than against space or personality. His conflict, like March Cable's, is chronological or linear. The climax, in each career, is a result not of any precise moral drama so much as of sheer verbal exhaustion, since, for both of these characters, the drama is spun out of arguments with fate. Similarly, Marla, in *People of the Valley*, faces no problem save that of survival. And if Barby and Guadalupe are doomed to the despotism of their lusts until another incarnation, their problem within the confines of Cockroach Court is a bankrupt one. Only in *The Man Who Killed the Deer* does conflict fruitfully support thesis. Martiniano's inward struggle with his renegade allegiances is given representation made firm with native imagery and milieu.
Waters realized a more sophisticated technique of intrusion here by resuming his exhortations in italicized passages masquerading as the tribal consciousness. The book is none the less sententious but it has beauties of scene and form which ensure its superiority to all the other novels.

THE NULLIFICATION OF CHARACTER. If conceptual prefabrication is the origin and cause of the above errors, the voiding of character will be the inescapable result. Character, the very life of fiction, cannot flourish to any account if its mobility is impeded by editorial anticipation, stylistic eclecticism, and the substitution of casuistic prophecy for empirical commitment. Martiniano is never externalized as sharply as the trader, Byers; like María, he is merely the sum of his attributes. To create physical personality, Waters sets his character up like a Christmas tree and decorates it with identifying expressions, gestures, idiosyncrasies: Rogier shouts "Dom!"; Teodosio, María's son, fumbles with his unbuttoned trousers; Jonathan Cable has a dark, hawk face with obsidian eyes; Guadalupe's hair has "smooth black wings" which confuse Barby even more than do Tai Ling's perorations. Dialogue, the last refuge for the auto genesis of character, is likewise pre-empted. Not incapable of writing dialogue faithful to observed rather than dictated sources, Waters more often raises the perceptions of his characters to a level of rhetoric incommensurate with their backgrounds. María, the paisana of Mora Valley, suddenly flowers into forensic elegance:

"I do not oppose the dam, new customs, a new vision of life; I oppose nothing. But I uphold the old ways for they are good too. I awaken in men their love for their land for they are a people of the land. It is their faith. And so I place that faith above all the lesser benefits they might derive from that which would oppose it. . . ."

Willfulness must have created this impropriety, for in another
part of the book Waters permits Marfa this same argument, vividly harangued in her own rhythmic idiom:

"Fools! Burros!" spat out Marfa. "Because if there is a dam you won't have any land! Will the dam be built in the empty air? No! It will be built on land. The water it will hold back will cover more land. The roads to it will require still more land. A lot of land, Señores. Whose land? Antonio's land; Guadalupe, your land; Trinidad's, Casimiro's, Berabe's—the land of you all. Now without land what will you care if there are no more floods and droughts? What will you do without water? You will have no crops."—People of the Valley.

Just as his people convey reality most when they ideate it least, so Waters' prose is most secure when, in such a circumstance as the foregoing, it is congruent with indigenous observation.

MAN IS HIS EARTH, yet more than his earth, as Waters is disastrously eager to capitulate. He is, among other things, however he prides himself on his insurgence, the creature of his social-intellectual conditioning. The division of forces in the prose and in the philosophy of Waters is a domestic affliction but aggravated by theopathic claims. The provincial floridity of statement, the unsophisticated worship of size, the anxiety that rapes sensation to educe livingness, the hatred of Europe that tends to become hatred of the mind in anything more than its pragmatic issues—mixed with a paradoxical engagement with the Sublime—these may have very personal departures in Frank Waters' literary case. But are they not recognizable as symptoms of a permanent pathology in American literature, always to be reckoned with and mastered whenever artistic consciousness is incited? The transcendental tendencies have always been in combat with the more critically exercised forces in art, as in life, here in America. Men of greater fame than Frank Waters
have been seized by the corruption of the inexpressible; their occasional or ultimate triumphs over it, however, do not demand imitation of the initial confusion. In the melodramatic peripheralism of Herman Melville (the wooden leg of his conditioned greatness), in the enumerations of ecstasy unfurled by Walt Whitman, in the verbal elephantiasis of Thomas Wolfe, the puerile rhodomontade of Maxwell Anderson—of a piece with his banal misapplication of tragic theory and his sulky martyrdom in the face of critical deprecation—in the unpoetic lamentations of the latter-day Jeffers as well as in the impossibly vulgar locutions of Eugene O'Neill and Tennessee Williams, the ancestry and accompaniment of Waters’ deranged search for The Word to fit The Appetite is recognizable. Eaten into by great spaces as one kind of American may be—this is Waters’ very fitting metaphor—he is ever provoked to flout the disposition by brandishing an untamed vocabulary in the service of Multiplicity, Extension, and the Apotheosis of the Raw.

The native experience finding its free and lucid embodiment without surrender of the larger meaning is substantiated by such artists as have consciously resisted the demon of Inclusion: in the direction of Waters’ general interests one may proffer Mary Austin, Walter Van Tilburg Clark, Allan Seager, John Collier. Criticism cannot, indeed must not, reproach Frank Waters with not having written The Land of Little Rain, The Ox Bow Incident, The Inheritance or The Indians of the Americas, but it may reproach him with not learning from the false starts or from the acquired dignities of other writers how best to enfranchise his own literary operations.

What remains of Frank Waters as a spokesman of the Southwest experience is, naturally, subject to the same reservations as his national involvement. In a platitudinous way he is bursting to sing the American myth and no Eastern reader can be expected to recognize that despite all his vocal derivations he is very close to its epiphanies. But even a myth needs to be
founded on language and characters adequate to its symbols. Waters has helped show the way in The Colorado, shown how titanic a subject regional history can be and within the same pages given fair warning that the large utterance can choke on its own breath. The Man Who Killed the Deer is, I think it will be agreed, the best of his novels, for the reasons given above. Whether or not Waters can return to its relative perfection of form and add a more immediate sense of living development will depend on the direction from which he meets the responsibility of his ambition. At present his art, still at odds with its own crudity, is the art of generalization; it is the art of specification which is, above all, the novelist's, and the only art that can give truth and symmetry to his convictions. Possibly, Waters is a victim of expression in a medium false to his real talent.

A minor writer with major visions, a superb reporter with a cosmic itch, Waters may yet rebuff his past limitations. If he can break through the contrivances of his style and the truculent defenses of his Big-Country insularity, if he can transform the method of his mystical proselytizing from the shape of Los Angeles occultism which it now assumes and if he can learn to go to the root of individual, moral character, before succumbing to the easier triumph of vatic altitude, he may yet, either on Southwestern or on more general American grounds, rescue insights inaccessible to safer talents at present superior in execution.

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