

**THE MAIEUTIC ART OF PAUL ROSENFELD: MUSIC CRITICISM AND
AMERICAN CULTURE, 1916-1946**

by

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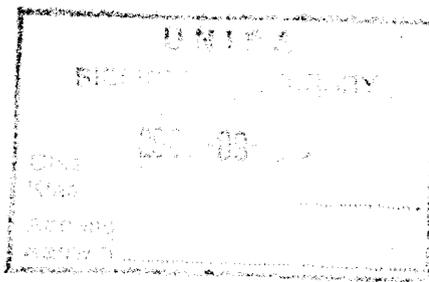
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ABSTRACT

THE MAIEUTIC ART OF PAUL ROSENFELD: MUSIC CRITICISM AND AMERICAN CULTURE, 1916-1946

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Paul L. Rosenfeld (1890-1946) almost single-handedly established the music of living American composers on a solid critical foundation in the period between the two world wars. Although he built a reputation chiefly as a critic of music, he was a man of letters who ranged across all the arts with unrivaled competence and ease. Rosenfeld's contemporaries acknowledged him as a champion of that strain of modernism which celebrated the interrelatedness of the arts. His importance for the wider culture of early twentieth-century American modernism also lay in his seriousness about the arts. Rosenfeld carried forward the American democratic and romantic belief, epitomized by Walt Whitman and Alfred Stieglitz, in the capacity of art to articulate basic values that enrich and even ennoble the human person. Such an idealistic conception of the value of art was increasingly losing favor among the American literati during the 1920s, the period when Rosenfeld enjoyed his greatest influence and prestige. During this decade of "terrible honesty," American intellectuals tended to dismiss the "ideals of men" in favor of a single-minded interest in a more bitter realism. Inasmuch as they denigrated the notion that art held any kind of privileged status as a conveyor of values, they were in effect nascent postmodernists.

This study of Paul Rosenfeld's life and work examines the achievements of Paul Rosenfeld as a critic of the arts in their relation to the wider American culture of the interwar years, and as a purveyor of modernism against the background of the first strains of postmodernism. It will also treat at length Rosenfeld's efforts as a writer, editor, and minor

philanthropist on behalf of establishing a distinctively American music, literature, and painting. This cultural nationalism, I argue, is best understood as part of Rosenfeld's modernist project. To a lesser degree this thesis also deals with the changing position of the man of letters in American life.

Key Terms:

Paul L. Rosenfeld; American music criticism; American cultural history; American music; Modernism; Cultural nationalism; American arts and letters; American literary criticism; Young Americans; American art criticism

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Chapter I

Introduction: The Significance of Paul Rosenfeld

Paul L. Rosenfeld (1890-1946) was, in the words of Elliott Carter, "the most intelligent and hospitable critic American music has had the good fortune to have." Other major American composers, among them Aaron Copland, David Diamond, Charles Ives, Roy Harris, William Schuman, and Edgard Varese, credited Rosenfeld with single-handedly establishing the music of living American composers on a solid critical foundation in the period between the two World Wars. His competence in music as well as the other artistic disciplines, all of which (in line with his Romanticism) he included in the term art, enabled him to provide a similar critical service for many modern American writers, poets, painters, and photographers. The Mexican-American composer Carlos Chavez spoke for many of his contemporaries in underscoring the importance of Rosenfeld's singular ability to write with authority and expertise across the arts. By way of a certain "multiple sensibility," wrote Chavez, Rosenfeld strengthened and advanced artistic modernism in America. He "could really, with deep insight and certainty of artistic perception, understand the new message in music, as in painting and in poetry." To Chavez, Rosenfeld was "the outstanding brilliant example of a critic -- alive, comprehensive, and informed."¹

¹ Else Stone and Kurt Stone, eds., *The Writings of Elliott Carter* (Bloomington & London: Indiana University Press, 1977), 339; Jerome Mellquist and Lucie Wiese, eds. *Paul Rosenfeld: Voyager in the Arts* (New York: Creative Age Press, 1948), 3, 36, 48, 95, 105-8, 157-9, 163-69, 237-8, 242-5. Hereafter references to *Paul Rosenfeld: Voyager in the Arts* are shortened to *Voyager in the Arts*.

Between 1916 and his untimely death in 1946, Rosenfeld produced eight books: *Musical Portraits* (1920), *Musical Chronicle* (1923), *Port of New York* (1924), *Men Seen* (1925), *Modern Tendencies in Music* (1927), *The Boy in the Sun* (1928), *By Way of Art* (1928), *An Hour with American Music* (1929), and *Discoveries of a Music Critic* (1936); he translated two others into English, Joseph Bedier's *The Romance of Tristan and Iseult* (1945) and Robert Schumann's *On Music and Musicians* (1946). In addition, he published over 400 articles and reviews on music and the visual and literary arts in such general reader magazines as the *New Republic*, the *Nation*, the *Seven Arts*, the *Dial*, *Vanity Fair*, and *Scribner's*, and in more specialized periodicals such as *Modern Music*, *The American Music Lover*, *The Musical Quarterly*, and *Opera News*.

Rosenfeld was also the driving force behind the founding and publication of five volumes of *The American Caravan*, an annual dedicated to publishing the writings of untried American writers and poets. Among his other literary efforts were two "labors of love" for his close friends Alfred Stieglitz and Sherwood Anderson: *America and Alfred Stieglitz* (1934) and *The Sherwood Anderson Reader* (1947).

The period of Rosenfeld's greatest influence was the 1920s, when according to Edmund Wilson he "enjoyed a prestige of the same kind as [H. L.] Mencken's and [Van Wyck] Brooks's." Paul Horgan, a prolific American novelist, recalled that in the 1920s Rosenfeld "had a following amounting almost to a cult." Rosenfeld used his prestige and influence to interpret, advance, and define the meaning of contemporary American music, painting, photography, and literature at a time when the idea of an American art was still taking shape. The call for a

distinctively American art goes back to the nation's founding period, but it took on a new urgency with America's new status as a great power in the late 1910s and 1920s. With the nation's rise to global preeminence in the aftermath of the First World War, American intellectuals took stock of the state of American culture. Some led by Harold Stearns complained bitterly about the inhospitable climate for artists in America, and accordingly fled to Europe as expatriots. Van Wyck Brooks, who had profoundly influenced Rosenfeld during the 1910s, was also unhappy with the condition of American culture in the 1920s, yet he fought the urge to expatriate. Although Rosenfeld was at times equally distressed about American culture, he refused to grant that an inhospitable environment hampered the production of great art. He not only refused to expatriate but his writing radiated a new confidence in the promise of America's culture; he saw in America many untapped sources of elite and popular art that could be applied to the needs of the modern world. Although Rosenfeld was rarely as brazen about the position of American culture as someone like F. Scott Fitzgerald, he acknowledged that there was an unexampled fluidity in American culture during the 1920s that admitted a wide range of artistic expressions and thinking about art and culture. Released from the servitude of European models of culture, Americans became almost giddy with the new possibilities for exalting their folkways. F. Scott Fitzgerald summed up the 1920s in his "Echoes of the Jazz Age." (1931) with a bit of irony: "We were the most powerful nation. Who could tell us anymore what was fashionable and what was fun?"²

² Edmund Wilson, "Paul Rosenfeld: Three Phases," in *Voyager in the Arts*, 4; Paul Horgan, *Encounters with Stravinsky* (New York: Farrar Straus and Giroux, 1972), 19; Fitzgerald is quoted in Ann Douglas, *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s* (New York: The Noonday Press, 1995), 4.

Closely connected to America's rise to world power was New York City's emergence as the most financially and culturally powerful city in the world. The first "world city" and "the capital of the twentieth century," New York City during the 1920s drew to itself and concentrated a critical mass of America's talent. New York's preeminence in the world amplified the influence of Rosenfeld's critical project, just as the city itself formed the core of his Americanism. Thoroughly enmeshed in its history and its intellectual and cultural life, Rosenfeld's work on behalf of American artists was inseparable from New York. He not only published out of New York, he brought together in his various New York flats composers, writers, poets, and painters from all over America. Many of them received their introduction to new painting, sculpture, and music under his tutelage in New York's museums and concert halls. Alert to New York's new position of power and prestige, Rosenfeld connected it in *Port of New York: Essays on Fourteen American Moderns* both with the emergence of new American artists, and also with modernism. Perhaps more than any other critic of his time he was aware that "the port of New York," was also, as Ann Douglas has written, "the port to America, port to the World." Or, as Rosenfeld put it, "A single plane unites it [New York] with every other port and seacoast and point of the whole world."³

Rosenfeld's strenuous efforts to establish an American art and advance the works of American musicians, writers, and visual artists in the cultural capital of the world was a highly noteworthy enterprise. The greater and wider importance of his life and work for American cultural history was his stand for idealism in life and in art in 1920s New York, a decade and a

³ Douglas, *Terrible Honesty*, 27; Rosenfeld, *Port of New York* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1924), 293.

city recently obsessed with an ethos of anti-idealism that Raymond Chandler called "terrible honesty." Douglas borrowed Chandler's term and used it as the title for her study of one hundred and twenty prominent and influential New Yorkers of the 1920s. Douglas's *Terrible Honesty* reveals a pervasive absorption with a hard-boiled realism completely untempered by the Western tradition of idealism. "Terrible honesty" manifested itself in excessive frivolity, irreverence, and irreligion. "Exponents of 'terrible honesty,'" writes Douglas, "dismissed the ideals of men" in favor of a single-minded interest in "brute facts," which often degenerated into a fetishistic curiosity to see and hear "the worst of everything."⁴

Rosenfeld, who receives only a passing mention in Douglas's study, never used the term "terrible honesty" himself but he was familiar with its ethos of impiety, especially as it manifested itself in the obsessive irreverence and cynicism of Dadaism. Such a deliberately mocking spirit was intellectually repugnant to Rosenfeld; to him it signaled the triumph in elite circles of the American lowbrow tradition identified by Van Wyck Brooks. Obstinate clinging to the real, the practitioners of "terrible honesty" to Rosenfeld had become "realistic in the narrower sense of the word," and even at times "servile and vulgar." Such narrowness of vision, among other things, ignored the higher reality of "the religious sense" wherein lay "the principle of life," an idea that was central to Rosenfeld's criticism of the arts. Whereas the partisans of "terrible honesty" trivialized art, Rosenfeld took seriously the value of art to human existence. He had always been "art-serious," as Gerald Sykes described him, but in the 1920s against the emerging cult of "terrible honesty," Rosenfeld's seriousness stood out all the more, making him, in the

⁴ Douglas, *Terrible Honesty*, 8, 21-2, 27, 28, 43, 44.

words of Allen Tate, "an anomaly in literary New York." Tate, an outsider to the New York scene and from the early 1920s a close friend to Rosenfeld, was taken with and at times perplexed by Rosenfeld's deep reverence for the value of art. Rosenfeld, recalled Tate, "sometimes became impatient with me and other men of my age for our lack of piety toward the arts," accusing some of them of being "not enough in love," meaning that they were not "sufficiently dedicated." The reason Rosenfeld revered art, as Tate eventually came to see, was that to him "it was the last medium of deep communication left to civilized men and men of good will."⁵

Although "terrible honesty" abounded in the 1920s, it did not completely dominate New York's intellectual and artistic life. Idealism held its ground in good part because of the efforts of Rosenfeld, his mentor, Alfred Stieglitz, and the many artists who gathered around Stieglitz. In fact, despite Douglas's argument for the prevalence of the realism of "terrible honesty," she concedes that a debate between realists and idealists raged with unprecedented ferocity in the 1920s. Few other periods in history, she says, made "the confrontation between them the central all-engrossing conflict at every level of the culture as New York did in the 1920s." But opposing idealism so sharply against realism in this way prohibits a proper understanding of the sort of idealism that animated Rosenfeld's critical project. It was not that Rosenfeld naively ignored reality, or denigrated its value in the manner of the American transcendentalists for whom the universe was an idea in the mind of God. Rather, Rosenfeld perceived matter and interpreted it

⁵ Douglas, *Terrible Honesty*, 104; Rosenfeld, *Port of New York*, 34, 295; Gerald Sykes, "The Archangel's Correspondent," and Allen Tate, "Anomaly in Literary New York" in *Voyager in the Arts*, 141, 173.

differently than the “vulgar” realists. The proponents of “terrible honesty” looked upon reality in essentially the same way that nineteenth-century positivists did: as a closed system that signified nothing beyond itself. The popularized version of positivism that informed the way educated Americans viewed the world put great faith in science’s ability to discover these laws. The prospect that through science all would be known about the workings of the world did not depress the positivist mind, but exhilarated it. For the devotees of “terrible honesty” the reality of living in a “block universe” governed by deterministic laws provoked neither explicit melancholy nor excitement. They met it with a joke. Against their immanentist view of the world, Rosenfeld, in line with his Platonism, viewed reality as transparent, as opening up to the Divine. God exists, he once wrote Alfred Stieglitz, “in or through certain conditions of matter.”⁶

Rosenfeld refused to disengage art from the realm of the transcendent. He spent his career cultivating a strain of modernism informed by a religious sense as an alternative to secular modernism. “Art,” he wrote in a 1916 essay on Paul Claudel for *The New Republic*, “is the handmaiden of God.” The religious sense filled Rosenfeld’s entire existence. “Life,” he said was the “fervid search” for that “great reality,” which is God, and the artist was an exemplar of a life consumed with this end. For Edna Bryner, Rosenfeld epitomized this sort of life himself. He was, she said, a “God-Seeker.” For Rosenfeld the artist’s life and work, like that of the priest or the saint, had to be unified and directed toward the transcendent. In his essay “Bernanos and the Catholic Novel,” he wrote of “a mysterious relation between the type of the Artist and that of

⁶ Douglas, *Terrible Honesty*, 40; T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), 20; Rosenfeld to Alfred Stieglitz, 6 July 1934, Rosenfeld Papers.

the Priest and Saint” insofar as “all are solitary in the present world because all have absolute values.” All are in fact citizens of “the City of God.” Accordingly Herbert A. Leibowitz in his introduction to a 1969 compilation of Rosenfeld's musical essays, fittingly chose as one of his epigraphs Stravinsky's famous lines from the *Poetics of Music* on the communitarian and transcendent powers of music. “Music comes to reveal itself as a form of communion with our fellow man--and with the Supreme Being.” Rosenfeld differed on this point from Stravinsky in his belief that these powers extended to all the arts. Also unlike Stravinsky, Rosenfeld did not profess belief in a Supreme Being in the explicitly Christian sense. Although Jewish by birth, Rosenfeld espoused no creed, but only what Paul Elmer More described in 1921 as “the religion of Plato,” with its core doctrine of idealism in art and in life, which held that truth existed and could be known, and which allowed for belief in God. As a Platonist, art for him “came out of some pure source of being.” In a letter to Edmund and Mary Wilson of September 1940, Rosenfeld summed up his position on the relation of art to the Divine and to social life. The theory he discussed in this letter centered on literature, but he would apply the same theory to the other arts as well. He agreed with Edmund Wilson that literature was “a reflection of society,” but also that “its core was a reflection of the experience of the divine, the ‘silence’ that is ‘the rest.’” For “there exists nothing worthy of the name of society, no firm coherence of healthy people, without the direction toward the divine.” This relation of the Divine and the social order, Rosenfeld held to be perhaps the most significant theme in Plato's dialogues. “Thus an aversion to Plato and his wisdom puts society in the position of Shelley's ghost in Francis Thompson's poem [*Buona Notte*], where the girl asks [Shelley] ‘Goest thou to Plato?’ and he replied ‘Ah ,

girl, no! It is to Pluto that I go.”⁷

Rosenfeld gave the most succinct explanation of his idealism and its relation to the arts in a memorial essay on Alfred Stieglitz that appeared on *Commonweal* and *Twice A Year* in 1946. Although published late in his life, Rosenfeld had subscribed to the principles he set forth in this essay from at least the early 1910s. For Rosenfeld, “as for the Platonists, the human being learns to know the externalities of nature and her creatures through perception, but the deep-lying forces at work in her and them reveal themselves to the human being only in inwardness as subjective experiences.” Art mediated these inner and outer worlds insofar as it was “the expression of these perceptions suffused with the inwardly experienced, deeper secret of things.” To Rosenfeld, then, the arts were the great bearers of truth; without them “the world possibly might wear an untrue face.” The artist’s “real subject” is the “inner truth of things,” which “remains a single truth in every age and clime,” even though “it speaks a different language or dialect.” By way of art the unseen becomes more real than what can ordinarily be seen. Art for Rosenfeld was an avowal of the invisible as the truly real; that which bears up humanity and enables men and women to face the ordinary world in a recollected manner, knowing that they are responsible before the unseen as the true ground of all things. Although Rosenfeld took a mystical view of reality, there was nothing naive in it. He did not flinch before “the simple and

⁷ Rosenfeld, “Paul Claudel,” *The New Republic*, 25 November 1916, 101; Edna Bryner, “The Mystical Aspect,” and Tate, “Anomaly in Literary New York,” in *Voyager in the Arts*, 246, 142; Rosenfeld, “Bernanos and the Catholic Novel,” *Tomorrow* (January 1945): 31; Herbert A. Leibowitz, Introduction to Herbert A. Leibowitz, ed., *Musical Impressions: Selections from Paul Rosenfeld's Criticism* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1969), xvi; Paul Elmer More, *The Religion of Plato* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1921); Rosenfeld to Bunny and Mary Wilson, 10 September 1940, Rosenfeld Papers.

holy truth” of human suffering and the problem of evil. But he differed from the purveyors of “terrible honesty” in that his acceptance of “the tragedy of human existence” did not entirely blacken life or make absurd “the ideals of men.” In the face of a “grim fate” Rosenfeld always held out the possibility of human happiness through the “perennial means” of “the life of the spirit, the life of art.”⁸

To be sure, the exponents of “terrible honesty” were also interested in penetrating through the appearance of things to their underlying reality. But the hidden reality they sought, was “reductive,” a habit of mind that Douglas says they adopted as “the quickest route to certainty” even if it meant limiting the scope of reality to that which could render such certainty. As a partisan of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century antimodernist revolt against such reductionist views of the world, Rosenfeld saw this crude realism as an extension of modernity’s tendency to delimit, demystify and desacralize existence. Throughout his life Rosenfeld strenuously opposed this aspect of historical modernity because of its dehumanizing consequences. “Terrible honesty” turned out to be a cultural support for consumer capitalism’s sharply restricted and impoverished view of human personhood, one which also precluded the transcendent or spiritual element in human beings and reduced life to the pursuit of material self-fulfillment. Against forces such as these that stymied the development of the human person, Rosenfeld proposed a culture based “upon the whole personality,” one that encouraged the integration of “spirit and matter,” “body and soul.” Rosenfeld had great faith in the power of art to help restore the integrity of the person. He thus doggedly sought out that art which he thought

⁸ Rosenfeld, “Alfred Stieglitz,” in *Commonweal*, 2 August 1946, 381, “Alfred Stieglitz,” *Twice a Year* 14-15 (Fall-Winter 1946-47): 203-4, “Stieglitz,” *Dial* (April 1921): 401, 409.

affirmed life by offering an expansive vision of the human person and the created world. This "sense of life," as Sherman Paul noted, became one of the distinguishing marks of Rosenfeld's criticism.⁹

Another hallmark of Rosenfeld's life and work which distinguished him conspicuously from the prevailing grim realism of Douglas's New York of the 1920s was his conception of love. "In the eyes of this generation," writes Douglas, "love was nothing but a sublimation of sexual need, 'a mere biological fact,' in Joseph Wood Krutch's opinion, 'ridiculous and disgusting.'" Against this "modern distemper," to borrow a phrase from another idealist, Waldo Frank, Rosenfeld sustained the tradition of romantic love together with its idealization of women. Rosenfeld regarded women as "pure and high expression[s] of the human spirit." He followed all the major nineteenth-century Romantics, who in turn had followed the Platonic tradition, in his conception of love as a powerfully unifying force, which he set against the fragmenting forces of the modern world. For him the love between a man and a woman symbolized most perfectly what Shelley described as the "universal thirst for communion." Moreover, love, even when understood simply as "the relation of the sexes" had broad public consequences; it was a basic expression for "what goes on in the outer world." "What lies between men and women from moment to moment eventually comes to pass in mundane affairs." The chief failure of American life, Rosenfeld wrote in his *Port of New York* essay on Georgia O'Keeffe, "had been a

⁹ Douglas, *Terrible Honesty*, 40, 104; Rosenfeld, "Stieglitz," *Dial*, 401-2; Sherman Paul, "Paul Rosenfeld," in *Port of New York* (1924; reprint, Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1961), xxviii, 173.

failure in men and women."¹⁰

Beyond its application to relations between the sexes, "the power of love"-- a phrase Rosenfeld drew from Plato's *Symposium*--was fundamental to the way in which Rosenfeld practiced the art of criticism. "Sometimes," he wrote to Lewis Mumford in 1943, "one feels the possibility of a love of life which asks no reward other than the power of love." Mumford, in his critical essay on Rosenfeld's achievement for *Voyager in the Arts*, quoted that sentence to sum up the essence of Rosenfeld's "writings from beginning to end." Gilbert Chase, an historian of American music, picked up the theme struck by Mumford, and attributed to it a good part of Rosenfeld's success as a mediative critic. "It was this power of love," Chase wrote in his review of *Voyager in the Arts*, "that enabled [Rosenfeld] to enter into the mind of the artists and often actually assist in the creative process." The centrality of love in Rosenfeld's work life also appealed to F. O. Matthiessen, who in 1949 positioned Rosenfeld's legacy against the many "intellectuals without love" writing at mid-century; Matthiessen agreed with W.H. Auden that such lovelessness had contributed to the "sterility" of contemporary Western culture.¹¹

Rosenfeld's conception of love as he applied it to his criticism had nothing in common

¹⁰ Douglas, *Terrible Honesty*, 48; Waldo Frank, "The Modern Distemper," in Waldo Frank, *In the American Jungle* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, Inc., 1937), 201; Rosenfeld, "Stieglitz," *Dial*, 408, and Georgia O'Keeffe," in *Port of New York*, 209; M.H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1971), 294, 298.

¹¹ Plato, *Symposium* in John M. Cooper, ed., *Plato: Complete Works* (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), 472; Rosenfeld to Lewis Mumford, 11 August 1943; Lewis Mumford, "Lyric Wisdom," in *Voyager in the Arts*, 75; Gilbert Chase, "The Power of Love," review of *Paul Rosenfeld: Voyager in the Arts*, ed. Jerome Mellquist and Lucie Wiese, *The Saturday Review of Literature*, 8 May 1948, 18-9; F. O. Matthiessen, *The Responsibilities of the Critic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1952), 7.

with the gushing, indiscriminate appreciation that marked a good deal of nineteenth-century criticism. Rather, as Allen Tate pointed out, it was a noble if ill-suited alternative to the hard-heartedness that characterized the New York literary scene between the two World Wars. In *Voyager in the Arts* Tate told an anecdote that reveals much about Rosenfeld's singular commitment to the ideal of love as it applied to his criticism. One evening Rosenfeld made a special visit to Tate's apartment in New York to upbraid him for a devastating book review he had recently written. The unnamed author of the book was someone known to both Tate and Rosenfeld. Rosenfeld agreed with Tate that the book in question was "bad," but he objected to Tate that he "needn't have made a fool of the author." "Against the tough reviewing tactics of the young savages of my generation," Tate wrote, Rosenfeld constantly recommended "the loving understanding and exposition of the good." Such, he believed was the "best attack on the bad." Although Tate found this counsel commendable, somehow he felt it was out of step with the realities of the 1920s and 1930s. Like others who knew Rosenfeld, Tate made much of Rosenfeld's gentlemanly qualities, but it would be mistaken to reduce Rosenfeld's appreciative habit of mind to his bourgeois upbringing or the spirit of Ivy League gentility. It was, rather, integral to his critical method, the purpose of which was the discovery of a deeper unseen reality. Rosenfeld quoting favorably one of Goethe's Maxims to make this point in *America and Alfred Stieglitz*, "Antagonism and hatred limit the spectator to superficialities, even when they are couple with intelligence; but if intelligence unites with fraternity and love, it can penetrate the world and humanity; indeed it can attain the sublime."¹²

¹² Tate, "Anomaly in Literary New York," in *Voyager in the Arts*, 140-1; Rosenfeld, "The Boy in the Darkroom," in Waldo Frank, Lewis Mumford, Dorothy Norman, Paul Rosenfeld, &

There is in Rosenfeld's thought still another meaning of love foundational to his critical project, and which has deep roots in the Platonic understanding of *eros*. As mentioned earlier, for Rosenfeld relations between men and women were paradigmatic of all human relations. Accordingly he was sensitive to the wider cultural consequences of the growing tendency among Americans to reduce *eros* to mere sexual pleasure, or to separate *eros* from sex. Among other things such distortions in the meaning of *eros* helped turn sex into a commodity to be manipulated by the emerging culture of consumption. They also corrupted the spiritual life of the person and the wider social order inasmuch as the commercialization of erotic desire encouraged a fundamental obsession with self-gratification, a disposition sharply at odds with what Rosenfeld insisted ought to be the basis of any culture worthy of the name: "self-giving." "Giving alone," he wrote in *Port of New York*, builds cultures and cities for men."¹³

Rosenfeld built his challenge to the distorted notions of love that circulated during the 1920s on the classical notion of *eros* as the desire for "wholeness," "full existence," "existential exaltation," and a "life of spiritual distinction." With Plato he understood *eros* to be "intermediate between the divine and the mortal...the mediator who spans the channel that divides them"; therefore in *eros* "all is bound together." The power of *eros*, which Rosenfeld saw disintegrating in the 1920s, was indispensable to the human "wholeness" he sought to encourage through his criticism of the arts. While the end of art, as he said, was the discovery and communication of "the inner truth of things," its nature was analogous to the mediative and unifying power of

Harold Rugg, eds., *America and Alfred Stieglitz* (New York: Octagon Books, 1975), 70.

¹³ Rosenfeld, *Port of New York*, 32, 186-7.

love. Drawing from Plato, Plotinus, Goethe, and contemporary Platonists such as Bergson and especially Santayana, Rosenfeld revived the understanding of *eros* as something akin to poetic rapture, and to artistic enthusiasm in general. Such joy in art was for him an epiphanic experience, one that carried one out of oneself and the normality of everyday existence. After such an encounter a person returned to ordinary life somewhat less self-absorbed. For Rosenfeld the encounter with beauty especially in works of art was equivalent to the rapturous affirmation of the beloved that made for self-forgetfulness and self-surrender. Quoting another of Goethe's maxims, he characterized such "selfless love" as "the capacity to give up our own [selfish and limited] existence, so that we may truly exist." Rosenfeld held *eros* to be perhaps the most potent power by which the human person could advance "human values" against the logic of the modern technological order, which tended greatly to impoverish and even to "enslave" the human spirit. In so doing Rosenfeld anticipated by a half-century Joachim Bodamer's insight that the classical notion of *eros* is "the one element in man that most intensely resists assimilation by the technological system."¹⁴

The many tributes to Rosenfeld and the critical assessments of his work collected in *Voyager in the Arts* and published elsewhere depict a man who made an uncommon effort to conform his life and his work to the values he espoused in his criticism. In a poetic sense, his decision to focus the greater part of critical attention on music flowed from his attraction to

¹⁴ Rosenfeld, *Port of New York*, 37, 219, 275, 294-5, and "The Boy in the Dark Room," in Frank et al, eds., *America and Alfred Stieglitz*, 70. The bracketed words are in the original. Bodamer is quoted in Josef Pieper, *Faith, Hope, Love* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997), 265.

Plato's idea that music is "simply the science of the effects of Love on rhythm and harmony."

In a more practical sense Rosenfeld's sense of love and friendship manifested itself in near-total self-giving. As Dorothy Norman wrote, "It was as though he gave himself so completely to others that he was increasingly in danger of destroying himself." In addition to advancing the work of deserving artists through his written criticism, Rosenfeld also acted as their patron, providing them with generous monetary support during critical, if financially impoverished, periods in their careers. Such selflessness contrasted sharply with the self-obsession of many of New York's literati, who, as Douglas's says in reference to the "wits" on *The New Yorker*, wrote "to lavish enormous care on no one but themselves."¹⁵

Rosenfeld's cheerful self-giving to numerous American musicians, writers, and visual artists prompted Llewelyn Powys and Lewis Mumford to apply to Rosenfeld another image of mediation used by Plato--this one drawn not from the *Symposium* but from *Theaetetus*. Powys, in a review of *Port of New York*, described Rosenfeld as a "midwife," the image that Socrates applied to himself. By way of his "art of midwifery" or *maieutics*, Socrates assisted the men of Athens in developing their latent ideas and sharpening them. Analogously, according to Powys, Rosenfeld was the "midwife to culture," a role he assumed during the crucially important period when, in the early 1920s, Harold Stearns and his collaborators on *Civilization in the United States* had abandoned "Babbitt America" because they found it extremely inhospitable to the

¹⁵ Plato, *Symposium*, in Cooper, ed., *Plato Complete Works*, 471; Dorothy Norman, "Talent for Helping," in *Voyager in the Arts*, 254; Douglas, *Terrible Honesty*, 64.

development of modern art, music, and literature.¹⁶

Mumford picked up Powys's metaphor and applied it in two of his assessments of Rosenfeld's life and work, one in 1948 and another in 1981. Even at the risk of overworking the midwife metaphor, Mumford could think of nothing more precise to describe Rosenfeld's work between 1916 and 1946 when he "aided in the gestation of the spirit at a moment of abundant, if undirected, fecundity." For Mumford, Rosenfeld's achievement lay not only in mediating between the artist and the public, which was Powys's emphasis, but also between artists' aesthetic ideas and ends and their realization in works of music, art, and literature. Numerous composers and writers, chief among them Elliott Carter, David Diamond, Lehman Engel, Roy Harris, Charles Mills, William Schuman, Kenneth Patchen, Robert Penn Warren, and William Carlos Williams, sought out Rosenfeld for his personal advice on their works in progress, at a time when, according to Angna Enters and Norman, "it was most needed," and "no one else was caring, noticing or reaching out a helping hand." "No one," Norman said, could have been more loyal than he to every new shoot of talent. No one could have been more loyal than he to every developing artist." It is thus that he earned the reputation for being in Elliott Carter's words, "a genial sage."¹⁷

¹⁶ Plato, *Theaetetus*, in Cooper, ed., *Plato Complete Works*, 166-7; Llewelyn Powys, "Midwife to Culture," review of *Port of New York*, by Paul Rosenfeld, *Nation*, 16 April 1924, 448-9; Alfred Kazin, *On Native Grounds* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1995), 509.

¹⁷ Lewis Mumford, "Lyric Wisdom," 68, and Preface to *The Writings of Paul Rosenfeld*, ed. Charles L.P. Silet (New York: Garland Publishing, 1981), xiii; Angna Enters, "Critical Patron," Norman "Talent for Helping," and Elliott Carter, "The Genial Sage," in *Voyager in the Arts*, 252, 253-4, 163-5.

In addition to helping artists to realize fully and accurately their ideas in their works, Rosenfeld mediated their creations and those of other American and European artists for the American public, mainly through his writings, but also by arranging performances of their art before small gatherings of musicians, writers, painters, arts patrons, and critics. Rosenfeld's interest in mediating between the artist and the public was for the sake of the artist, but equally for the sake of enriching American culture and particularly the nation's democratic life, which for him meant principally the formation in American of what Van Wyck Brooks called a "genial middle ground." During the later 1910s Rosenfeld grappled mightily with Brooks's analysis of American culture in *America's Coming-of-Age* (1915), a book he thought perhaps as important as any since the country's founding. A nation of highbrows and lowbrows, Americans, Brooks argued, drifted aimlessly between desiccated "high ideals," on the one side, and "catchpenny realities" on the other. There was no "genial middle," no "sense of a common existence," and its absence was the chief obstacle to forming the "wholeness" and "unity of being" in American life that was the object of Rosenfeld's own efforts. Between them, wrote Rosenfeld, "the two incomplete types of highbrows and lowbrows had riddled and muddled American life." Hence, the great desideratum of American culture was for Rosenfeld, as it was for Brooks, the formation of "a middle tradition," which he believed could be achieved only by the artist or the "poet" construed in the classical sense as one who practices *poiesis*: the divination of the spiritual in the things that present themselves to the human senses. America, said Rosenfeld, needed its Virgil. For it is such a poet as he who alone "can bring all the faculties of life moving together and procure for life that all-pervasive style that is the condition of civilization. It is the poet alone who can make society take the shape which can satisfy the human soul. It is the poet alone who

can end the schism in American men; and can turn American life toward personal ends, and develop out of an anarchical competitive horde a community of men who give and enrich themselves in giving."¹⁸

Since Rosenfeld early in his life recognized that he was no poet, he assumed the role of handmaid to the poet without at all diminishing his enthusiasm for his work. "For of criticism," he wrote, "there is a need in this country which increases with every year." His efforts at building a "middle, liberal, democratic tradition with its ideal of the self-development of different and even conflicting personalities" was the tangible means of forming his ideal civilization of love. It was also the essence of his Americanism, which he insisted had nothing in common with "the insane self-abnegation of current patriotism and nationalism."¹⁹

Rosenfeld's mediative efforts also paralleled efforts independent of his own by figures such as John Erskine, Harry Scherman, H.G. Wells, and Will Durant, who worked to establish and expand a middle area of American culture during the period between the late 1910s and the early 1950s by way of such projects as the Great Books series and discussion circles, the Book-of-the-Month Club, the various "outline" series--*The Outline of History*, *The Story of Philosophy*. Positioned between the academic or avant-garde and popular entertainments, these projects, according to Joan Shelley Rubin, "aimed to make elements of high culture available to a broad public." Rosenfeld shared in common with many of them an emphasis on the importance of mediation in achieving their aim. He distinguished himself from them mostly in the emphasis he

¹⁸ Rosenfeld, *Port of New York*, 19-63.

¹⁹ Rosenfeld, *Port of New York*, 38, 58, 288.

placed on mediating the works of living American artists, especially composers, and his aversion to the commodification of art.²⁰

Central to his efforts at mediating contemporary music, painting, photography, and literature was Rosenfeld's "ensemble idea": independent circles of like-minded artists and critics, willing to subject their work to the friendly criticism of others in the circle. Such groups were indispensable, he said, for establishing "complex" artistic movements such as modernism, which "speak not through individuals but ensembles." The success of such ensembles required an intricate intermingling of artists, critics, editors, patrons, and hosts. Because Rosenfeld at various times in his life performed each of these functions, he exemplified how each worked properly toward the end of establishing the work of living artists. Throughout his life he led or participated in a number of communal projects, impressive for their significance to American cultural history and for their diversity. These projects began in 1911 when he joined the Board of Editors of the *Yale Literary Magazine*, and continued with his involvement in the circles that gathered around Claire Raphael Reis, Alfred Stieglitz, and the *Seven Arts*. Following the collapse of the *Seven Arts* in 1917, Rosenfeld continued the group idea during the 1920s by hosting regular get-togethers of artists, critics, and philanthropists at his rooms in lower Manhattan. At these gatherings, recalled Edmund Wilson, "poets read their poetry and composers played their music. One met Ornstein, Milhaud, Varese; Cummings, Hart Crane, and Marianne Moore; the Stieglitzes and all their group; the Stettheimers, Mumford, Kreymborg." Near the

²⁰ Joan Shelley Rubin, "Middlebrow Culture," in Richard Wightman Fox and James T. Kloppenberg, eds., *A Companion to American Thought* (Cambridge and Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1995), 451.

end of the 1920s Rosenfeld assumed the greater share of editorial control on *The American Caravan*, an ensemble project that reactivated a principal goal of the *Seven Arts*: the development of a public for important new American writing. His position as coeditor of *America and Alfred Stieglitz* (1934) was his last important position of leadership in a group literary project. But the final ensemble project of his life, which he participated in during the late 1930s and early 1940s, brought him together with the remnants of the Southern Agrarians as the music editor for the *Kenyon Review*. Most recently, Rosenfeld's "ensemble idea" has been revived as the organizing principle for a series of books by Steven Watson on "circles of the twentieth century."²¹

Naturally, a man of Rosenfeld's versatility, who thrived on taking intellectual risks, had his detractors. In the 1920s Gorham Munson and Hart Crane complained that Rosenfeld embodied an outmoded ideal of bourgeois cultivation and privilege. In the 1930s Marxist critics picked up and expanded this line of criticism. Among them, Harold Clurman, Isidor Schneider, and even Edmund Wilson during his leftist phase, criticized Rosenfeld's uncritical acceptance of the social relations upon which the liberal, bourgeois order he defended rested. They were also put off by his romantic celebration of the individual talent, his cultural nationalism, and his refusal to subordinate the arts to a political program. Also in the 1930s the populist music critic B.H. Haggin resented what he saw as Rosenfeld's elitist efforts to foist musical modernism on

²¹ Rosenfeld, "When New York Became Central," *Modern Music* (January-February 1943), 84; Edmund Wilson, "Paul Rosenfeld: Three Phases," in *Voyager in the Arts*, 8-9; Steven Watson, *The Harlem Renaissance* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1995), ix-xi.

Americans who had little genuine interest in new music that was not immediately appealing to them. Ideological differences aside, the most general complaint with Rosenfeld's work centered on his prose, which was often, but not always, overwritten. "At their worst," as Llewelyn Powys wrote in the 1920s, Rosenfeld's writing reminded one of "a merchant of Samarkand unrolling with slow deliberation sashes of silk," but at their best, they carried "one's imagination on strange flights."²²

The present study examines the aesthetic and ethical controversies that engaged Rosenfeld's attention and that helped to shape and refine his conception of the critic's function and responsibility in modern America. Highly self-critical, Rosenfeld considered carefully evaluations of his work as well as positions that differed from his own, revising his critical assessments of works and artists whenever such revisions were warranted. He even willingly and publicly reexamined his life long commitment to Americanism during the 1930s when the rise of Nazism raised serious moral question about nationalism. On one essential matter, however, Rosenfeld never wavered: his conviction that art was a religious declaration, "part of the fundamental structure of life," as Lewis Mumford said. The present study thus also concerns itself with this bedrock principle of Rosenfeld's career, particularly in its relation to his Americanism and to his *maieutic* role. In addition, it investigates what persons and books informed his thought and it explicates the general themes of his criticism. Because Rosenfeld's reputation was principally as a critic of music, his writing on that subject, the composers he championed, and the extent of his influence on the musical opinions of his contemporaries and on the subsequent

²² Llewelyn Powys, "Anger at Levity," in *Voyager in the Arts*, 256.

history of American music are given pride of place.²³

The chapter immediately following this one locates the origins of Rosenfeld's romanticism and his love for music in his family life, and in two obscure figures who befriended him during his prep school years. Perhaps more than most of his contemporaries, family and ancestry were highly important to Rosenfeld; they inspired his work, they instilled in him a sense of tradition and loyalty to place that formed the foundation for his Americanism, and they provided for his financial independence as an adult. Chapter three analyzes in some depth stories that Rosenfeld wrote during his last year at prep school. More than *juvenilia*, these stories reflect the early influence on him of the turn-of-the-century Anglo-American antimodernist revolt against historical modernity's desacralization of the world. Rosenfeld struck certain themes in these stories that occupied his attention throughout his life, particularly the ideal of romantic love, the myth of Tristan and Isolde, and the idealization of the feminine. Chapter four gives an account of Rosenfeld's career at Yale and Columbia from 1908 to 1913, the period in which he adopted Platonism and Neoplatonism as the philosophical grounding for his views on art, and for unifying his aesthetic and moral concerns. The discovery of the Platonic tradition was also part of a much wider revival of his adolescent interest in the literature of antiquity, which he used as one important standard for assessing modern literature. It was during this period of his life as well that he became enamored with the idea of friendship as a prerequisite for intellectual inquiry.²⁴

²³ Mumford, "Lyric Wisdom," in *Voyager in the Arts*, 51.

²⁴ On turn-of-the-century antimodernism, see Lears, *No Place of Grace*.

Chapter five begins with Rosenfeld's rather dramatic conversion in 1914 to modernism by way of the music of European composers such as Alexander Scriabin, Igor Stravinsky, and Arnold Schoenberg. Modern music led the way to Rosenfeld's interest in the new works and developments in the other arts. It appealed to him in the first place because its sonorities and its musical vocabulary resonated with the sounds and rhythms of modern life. With the assistance of Claire Raphael Reis, Rosenfeld undertook his first effort on behalf of a new American composer, Leo Ornstein, who typified the sort of modernism Rosenfeld celebrated. This chapter also probes the profound and sustained influence that Alfred Stieglitz and his circle had on Rosenfeld's life and criticism, and Rosenfeld's role as this group's "theoretician." The next chapter, six, probes Rosenfeld's quest for a "usable past," a project that places him squarely in the tradition of his close associate, Van Wyck Brooks. Unlike Brooks though and the others who fell under Brooks's influence, Rosenfeld shunned politics even as he insisted on the fundamental value of his criticism to the public good. The problems Rosenfeld faced as a critic of the arts and as a public intellectual emerge in the next chapter, especially as seen in Rosenfeld's conflicts with Waldo Frank, and in the revealing and affectionate correspondences with his life-long friend, Sherwood Anderson. The centrality of New York City in Rosenfeld's critical project is the subject of the eighth chapter. *Port of New York*, perhaps Rosenfeld's most well-known and enduring contribution to American cultural history, reveals the particular character of Rosenfeld's Americanism. It is an understanding of American art that is at once cosmopolitan, insofar as it emerges from Rosenfeld's polyglot experience of New York, and parochial and partial because it insists on viewing American art that is produced outside of New York City through the lens of the New York arts scene. But Rosenfeld's Americanism matures, as we see

in Chapter nine. Rosenfeld's commitment to an indigenous American art that allowed for the full flowering of the human person remained firm, as he increasingly tried to free this art from its dependency on European influences. It is also in this chapter, through a discussion of *The American Caravan* project, that Rosenfeld's *maieutic* art reveals itself most clearly.

Chapter ten, on Rosenfeld's work during the 1930s and early 1940s, examines the persistence of Rosenfeld's idealism in relation to his Americanism, as both came under additional pressure from Marxists, Conservatives, and Liberal Internationalists. It was during this period that Rosenfeld exerted a highly personal influence on the generation of American composers who were then coming of age, among them Carter, Diamond, Engel, Harris, Mills, and Schuman. The final chapter concerns itself mainly with Rosenfeld's legacy, particularly as it figured in a national debate that took place in conferences, magazines, and various public lectures from 1946 to 1955 on the importance of music criticism to the enrichment of American democratic culture.

Perhaps it is because Rosenfeld performed his role as "midwife" to American artists so well that his significance for American arts and letters since his death has been understated. This condition persists despite efforts during the 1960s and 1980s by Herbert Leibowitz, Sherman Paul, and Charles L.P. Silet--scholars sympathetic to Rosenfeld's "old fashioned" critical values--to end the "scandalous neglect" of Rosenfeld's criticism. Rosenfeld remains today a shadowy figure in American cultural history. It is a chief purpose of this study to bring him out into the light for others to appreciate both the accomplishments and the shortcomings of his critical project.

Chapter II

Kaddish: 1890-1908

A Bourgeois Boyhood

Paul Leopold Rosenfeld was born to Julius and Clara Liebmann Rosenfeld on May 4, 1890 in Mount Morris Park, a fashionable bourgeois neighborhood in Manhattan's east Harlem. Julius, who had emigrated from Germany to Baltimore in 1869, met Clara at a Moritz Rosenthal piano recital in the late 1880s and married her soon thereafter. The Rosenfelds were among a number of relatively affluent and influential New York German-Jewish bourgeois families that, as Alfred Kazin says, "gave all their hopes to Culture, and particularly to the Romantic doctrines of nineteenth-century German music." Such families also produced Alfred Stieglitz and Waldo Frank, both of whom were powerfully influential figures in Rosenfeld's adult life. The German understanding of "Culture," or *Kultur*, embraced by the Rosenfelds had a highly particularized meaning; as Norbert Elias stresses, it referred "essentially to intellectual, artistic, and religious facts," over against "political, economic, and social facts." In America, according to Gerald Sorin, *Kultur* became "an important unifying force" for German-Jewish immigrants such as the Rosenfelds who tried to preserve a distinctive identity in the largely Anglo-American, Protestant New York patriciate. By their loyalty to *Kultur* the Rosenfelds formed early on in Paul's life a consciousness of being German-Jewish and American. The tension generated in him by this

ethnic dualism left its stamp on the character of the Americanism he adopted as an adult.¹

The Rosenfeld's participation in Felix Adler's Society for Ethical Culture, a powerfully assimilationist force, was another element in Paul's upbringing that shaped his sense of ethnic doubleness. Although *Kultur* provided the Rosenfelds with a general outline of values, like the Franks and many other German-Jewish families at the end of the nineteenth century, they apparently felt the need for a more palpable substitute for the traditional membership in the synagogue. Founded in New York in 1876, Adler's group met as a congregation for lectures not on Saturdays the traditional Jewish Sabbath, but on Sunday mornings, and "eschew[ed] theology, doctrine, prayer, and ritual." In his efforts to liberalize Judaism Adler went even beyond the heterodoxy of American Reform Judaism, which in 1885 had already cast off ritual

¹ Information on Rosenfeld's family and upbringing comes from: Rosenfeld's unpublished "Autobiography," Rosenfeld Papers; Jerome Mellquist, "Salute to Paul Rosenfeld," *Tomorrow* 6 (December 1946), 29-32, and "Seraph from Mt. Morris Park," in *Voyager*, xv; Sherman Paul, "Paul Rosenfeld," in *Port of New York*, viii. The secondary sources on Rosenfeld's life differ on Paul's mother's first name. Charles L.P. Silet in his *The Writings of Paul Rosenfeld: An Annotated Bibliography*, and Bruce A. Butterfield in "Paul Rosenfeld: The Critic as Autobiographer" (Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1975), record it as Sara. Hugh M. Potter in *False Dawn: Paul Rosenfeld and Art in America 1916-1946* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms International, 1980), give it as Clara. Sherman Paul in the aforementioned article on Rosenfeld notes both names without indicating which was correct. I have chosen to use Clara because it appears in the primary sources: in "Autobiography," Rosenfeld Papers, and in "Paul Leopold Rosenfeld," *History of the Class of 1912* (New Haven: Yale University, 1912), 276. Sara was the name of one of Paul's great grandmothers. Occasionally, in references to the family breweries, one finds Liebmann spelled without the second "n," but I follow Rosenfeld's own practice of spelling it "Liebmann." Potter in *False Dawn* uses the spelling, "Lieberman," which appears in no other source, and is probably a mistake. Alfred Kazin, *Inmost Leaf: A Selection of Essays* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1955), 157; Norbert Elias, *The History of Manners, The Civilizing Process, Volume I*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 4; Gerald Sorin, *Tradition Transformed: The Jewish Experience in America* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 26,32.

law and custom as obstacles to "modern spiritual elevation." Consequently, by their destruction of Jewish particularism, Adler and his followers, according to Abraham Karp, became almost indistinguishable from Unitarianism, the extreme heterodox offshoot of Christianity.²

Having jettisoned "the old stuff," which was Julius's term for traditional Judaism, music became the Rosenfelds most important means of spiritual uplift, and a kind of psychological language of the interior life. The privileged position of music in the Rosenfeld household, and in German *Kultur* in general, rested not on the idea of music as a technical discipline, a "stunting specialization," as Thomas Mann wrote of it in *Doctor Faustus*, his famous literary study of music's central place in the life of the German bourgeoisie, but rather, as Mann says, on its value in "connection with other fields of form, thought, and culture." Rosenfeld's early education in music, like Adrian Leverkühn's, the protagonist in Mann's novel, was interwoven with poetry, fiction, and literary criticism. "There was marked aestheticism and even intellectuality in both my parents," Rosenfeld wrote in 1928. "I grew amid an amount of spontaneous music-making: my mother being a talented pianist; and amid much talk of books and writers: my father being an indefatigable reader, chiefly of Dickens's novels and the histories of Gibbon, Macaulay, Schiller, Taine and others."³

²Abraham J. Karp, *Haven and Home: A History of Jews in America* (New York: Schocken Books, 1985), 92-94, 156-157.

³ Thomas Mann, *Doctor Faustus* (New York: Vintage Books, 1971), 71-2. Roger Scruton "Musical Understanding and Musical Culture," in Philip Alperson, ed., *What is Music?: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Music* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1987), 352, recommends *Doctor Faustus* as one of the two great modern apologies for music "as the quintessential bourgeois art form"; the other one is Richard Wager's musical drama *Die Meistersinger*. Rosenfeld, "Why Do I Write?" in his *By Way of Art: Criticisms of Music, Literature, Painting, Sculpture, and the Dance* (New York: Coward McCann,

For Rosenfeld, as for most children of nineteenth-century European and American bourgeois families, culture and domesticity were inseparable. His early introduction to music and letters took place within the privacy, warmth and comfort of a secure home which was essential to the formation of what as an adult he referred to as his "bourgeois soul," and also his defense of the liberal bourgeois order. In his autobiographical novel, *The Boy in the Sun*, Rosenfeld used the east Harlem brownstones that he grew up amid to symbolize the lure of lush interiors that lay hidden behind plain facades. Rosenfeld's stand-in in the novel, David Bauer invested the brownstones he spied from his bedroom window with human personalities, absorbing them imaginatively into his interior landscape. As an adult, no matter what his financial state was, Rosenfeld recreated the rich interiors of his boyhood in each of the string of apartments he rented in lower Manhattan. Conducive to his own love of personal introspection and study and of convivial friendship, his rooms became one of his hallmarks, moving many who visited them to comment on their attractiveness. Alyse Gregory, for one, wrote that his apartment on Irving Place was "an interior that might have been lifted out of some European capital--Vienna, Paris, Florence." Spacious yet intimate, it was "an interior for pleasures that were grave and thought that was gay, for conversation witty and civilized." The historian John Lukacs has drawn a parallel between the warmth of the typical European and American bourgeois home and its ability to engender in its occupants a certain "inner security." This personal trait, which Rosenfeld seemed to have possessed in greater share than many writers of his generation, enabled him to suppress his own ego to perform well his maieutic role. It also

Inc., 1928; reprint, Freeport, New York, Books for Libraries Press, Inc., 1967), 306.

freed him to reexamine and revise his critical opinions when the need arose without feeling bruised personally. Allen Tate, among others, noted Rosenfeld's remarkable self-assuredness and stability of mind, which he recognized as the product of long-practiced introspection. "For his life," Tate wrote, "quiet, steady, almost retired, consistent and elevated in tone, with the greatest sensitivity along with the greatest personal responsibility, had its own inner perfection. He had achieved it early."³

Doubtless Rosenfeld's security and poise owed much to the constant attention he and his younger sister, Marion, received from nursemaids, governesses, and downstairs and upstairs servants. But although he was well-attended as a boy, Rosenfeld was not insulated from the public life of New York City; after a year at Miss Merrington's School, he enrolled in Public School 103 at Madison Avenue and 119th Street, and after school he played on Harlem's East 121st Street, which in the 1890s bordered on pasture land. During the summers, he retreated with his family to an ethnic enclave, Elberon on the Jersey Shore, a resort so popular among American Jews at the turn of the century that John Jay Chapman once wrote of it: "Judea--Israel--the Lost Tribes--lost no more! found--very much found, increased--multiplied--as the sands of the sea--upon the sands of the sea--in the city of the sea--Atlantic City."⁴

³ Rosenfeld to Philip Platt, 7 August 1913, Rosenfeld Papers; Rosenfeld *The Boy in the Sun*, (New York: The Macaulay Company, 1928), 13; Alyse Gregory, "Dial Days," and Allen Tate, "Anomaly in Literary New York," in *Voyager in the Arts*, 20, 142; John Lukacs, "The Bourgeois Interior," in John Lukacs, *The Passing of the Modern Age* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), 198.

⁴ Rosenfeld, "Autobiography," 21-6, Rosenfeld Papers; Jerome Mellquist, "Seraph from Mt. Morris Park," in *Voyager in the Arts*, xv-xvi; Paul, "Paul Rosenfeld," in *Port of New York*, viii.

Although Rosenfeld's mother, Clara, had come from considerable wealth, Paul did not benefit from it directly until he was twelve years old, when, in 1902, his grandmother Liebmann took him and his sister Marion in to live with her. She did so because at that point Julius Rosenfeld experienced an emotional crisis brought on by his wife's untimely death two years earlier, and a series of financial reverses from which he would never recover. Before Clara's death, Julius had had no difficulty in supporting his family's affluent way of life. A modestly successful proprietor of braid and dress manufacturing businesses, he balanced gracefully the demands of running a business, raising a family, and cultivating his passionate love for music and literature. Having grown up in a family wherein social and economic interests never dampened the family's passionate commitment to arts and letters, Paul later in his life refused to equate the bourgeois spirit automatically with crass materialism and philistinism. Like Randolph Bourne, Van Wyck Brooks, Waldo Frank, Lewis Mumford, and some others who called themselves Young Americans in the late 1910s, Rosenfeld recognized that there were commendable aspects to bourgeois culture, among these were, the value it placed on the interior life, on the past as a means to understand the present, and on loyalty to place. While openly conceding the shortcomings of the bourgeois spirit, the Young America group, of which Rosenfeld counted himself a member, insisted it was a valuable resource that, in the words of Casey Blake, "had once sustained character and community and might yet do so again."⁵

Although materially secure, Paul's first ten years were emotionally turbulent, in part

⁵ Rosenfeld, "Autobiography," 38-42, Rosenfeld Papers; Casey Blake, *Beloved Community: The Cultural Criticism of Randolph Bourne, Van Wyck Brooks, Waldo Frank, & Lewis Mumford* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 13.

because he lived with the constant expectation of his mother's death. Often bedridden from "poor blood" and severe headaches, her affections toward him vacillated wildly, such that, notwithstanding the tenderness she sometimes showed him, his memory of her remained tarnished by those moments when pain caused her to reject him. In Rosenfeld's *Boy in the Sun*, David Bauer lived with the fear "of the temperamental anger which sometimes blazed from [his] tender mother" that Rosenfeld himself most likely lived with. But even though Clara's death was long-expected, it stunned Julius, Paul, and Marion. Julius tried for a short time following Clara's death to make a home on his own for Paul and Marion. Having abandoned his traditional faith, and finding little solace in Felix Adler's Society for Ethical Culture, Julius consoled himself and his children by reading aloud to them from Sir Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe*. Scott enjoyed a resurgence of interest at the turn of the century mostly among those who celebrated the martial ideal in his books; the Rosenfelds by contrast found in at least one of Scott's novels, *Ivanhoe*, a source of comfort in their bereavement. Their favorite passage described the scene of Rebecca's trial near the end of the novel. Intelligent, noble, and courageous Rebecca and her father, Isaac, were the first great Jewish figures in nineteenth-century Romantic literature. Paul took great solace in hearing of the source of Rebecca's great courage before her unjust accusers, the Knights Templar. In her farewell speech to the novel's Christian heroine, Rowena, Rebecca speaks of her recourse to God, and her steadfast resignation to His will: "He to whom I dedicate my future life will be my comforter, if I do His will."⁶

⁶ Rosenfeld, "Autobiography," 49-51, Rosenfeld Papers, *The Boy in the Sun*, 16; Lears, *No Place of Grace*, 100-1; Rosenfeld, "Why Do I Write?" in *By Way of Art*, 307-8; Sir Walter Scott, *Ivanhoe* (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), 518.

Rosenfeld never forgot "the intense emotion" in his father's voice as he read to him from *Ivanhoe*. It not only gave him a new insight into his father, but also led to a deeper appreciation and enjoyment of literature. Later on Paul found a copy of *Ivanhoe* in his school's library. Already an omnivorous reader by his early teens, Rosenfeld had read the recommended books for young men at the turn of the twentieth century: "the usual [Horatio] Alger, Oliver Optic and [George] Henty." But reading *Ivanhoe* on his own offered him "a new and intenser pleasure," setting in motion a "Scott craze," during which he read "*Ivanhoe* fifteen times over the next two or three years." Rosenfeld's discovery of the pleasures of literature set off a wider fascination with books, which prompted him to join with his younger cousin, Henry L. Furst (eventually a highly successful New York attorney) in publishing books by pinning together stories they wrote for one another. The *Ivanhoe* episode was also Rosenfeld's initiation into the thrill of reading literature that he discovered for himself. After Scott's Waverly novels he read, among other works, John Dryden's *Alexander's Feast* (1697) and *An Ode for St. Cecilia's Day* (1687), and John Keats's *The Eve of St. Agnes* (1819). Reading these poems, said Rosenfeld, "was a little as though someone had poured the contents of jewel-boxes over my dizzied head." Thanks to a series of events set in motion by his father, Rosenfeld by the time he graduated from prep school had an uncommon mastery of the prose and poetry of Shelley, George Meredith, Walt Whitman, William Morris, Walter Pater, and the pre-Raphaelite works of W.B. Yeats.⁷

Rheingold: The Liebmann Influence

⁷ Rosenfeld, "Why Do I Write?" in *By Way of Art*, 307-8.

Julius Rosenfeld continued to have a significant influence on Paul, and was often the only source of affection he received during the period that lived with his grandmother Fanny Liebmann. Although Fanny took Paul into her home--"the Victorian ark on Carnegie Hill," and provided for his material well-being, she did so out of a sense of obligation and icy indifference, which she apparently did little to conceal from young Paul. "If it weren't for your mother, I'd throw you out of my house!" are the words Rosenfeld put in the mouth of David Bauer's grandmother Arnstein in *The Boy in the Sun*. It is highly probable that young Paul had heard similar words from his own grandmother Liebmann. The nearly two years that Paul lived with his grandmother before he went away to prep school, were not especially happy. He recalled something of this unhappiness in a 1920 essay he wrote for the *Dial* about his German governess, Fraulein, "an unforgettable personage," from whom he and his sister were "seldom separated." In this article Rosenfeld retold the fantastic stories Fraulein told him and Marion during their outings in Central Park. The last time Rosenfeld saw Fraulein was when she visited the Liebmanns on Carnegie Hill. "I remember a sudden relief and gladness at the sight of her," Rosenfeld wrote. As she said her good-byes, he "wanted to go with her."⁸

With its delight in the descriptions of his governess's eccentricities, "Fraulein," exemplified what Edmund Wilson called Rosenfeld's "humor of exaggeration," but it also memorialized with a sense of gratitude a woman who had been a significant influence in his early life. In a spirited 1928 essay for *On Parade* entitled "Why Do I Write?" he expressed a similar sense of gratitude to his father, grandfathers, and even his great grandfathers, assigning to them

⁸ Rosenfeld, "Autobiography," 101-11, Rosenfeld Papers, *The Boy in the Sun*, 100, and "Fraulein," *The Dial* (June 1920):747, 768.

most of the credit for his lively and restless intellect and his vocation to write. Among the six patriarchs Rosenfeld treated in this article two of them were the brewers who had provided him with a modest inheritance which paid his way through prep school, college, and graduate school, and which allowed him a certain degree of financial independence that later in his life made possible his "little non-commercial career." The other four were "professional men: a doctor, a schoolmaster, a cantor and a banker." In his unpublished Autobiography, Rosenfeld extended the line of influence even further back on his father's side to the Strausses of Baden who in the 1600s established and operated a flour mill under the patronage and protection of the Archbishop of Mayence.⁹

Although Julius's personal influence on his son was profound, the Liebmann side provided him with the financial resources. The Liebmanns had amassed a sizeable fortune in the brewery business. Founded in 1855 by Samuel Liebmann, the Liebmann Brewery (which eventually became the Rheingold brewery) was one of the most success breweries in America. Rosenfeld's share of the Liebmann fortune supplied him with an annual income anywhere between \$5,000 and \$10,000. To be sure Rosenfeld collected fees for his writing, but by themselves these were not enough to support him. He therefore depended on Liebmann money to the extent that Edmund Wilson and Lewis Mumford felt compelled to mention it in their assessment of his life's work. In his *Voyager in the Arts* essay, Wilson recalled a conversation he had with Rosenfeld in which Rosenfeld confessed that his inheritance "had unfitted him to struggle with the world." Wilson argued that because of the security provided him by the

⁹ Rosenfeld *By Way of Art*, 306, and "Autobiography," 150-72, Rosenfeld Papers.

Liebmann wealth, Rosenfeld, to his detriment, never understood "that writing was a commodity like any other, which from the moment one lacked a patron, had to be sold in a hard-boiled way."

Mumford agreed essentially with Wilson's view of the debilitating effect of Rosenfeld's inheritance insofar as it had kept him inordinately attached to "the bourgeois world of his youth." A dependence that "masked itself as independence," it actually "prevented him from making sufficient efforts to put his own life on a completely self-maintaining basis." On the other hand, music critics, such as Alfred Frankenstein and Max Graf, looked favorably upon Rosenfeld's financial independence because it freed him from the regime of the daily press, permitting him the necessary time to reflect and study the music about which he wrote on. Graf, for instance, averred that music criticism "after all is an art of ideas," and ideas need some leisure to develop and to crystallize.¹⁰

Piety and Selfhood

Besides providing for his material well-being and encouraging a love of arts and letters, Rosenfeld's family helped cultivate in him a strong sense of tradition and place, the bedrock of his mature Americanism. Like inwardness and the sense of inner security, respect for the past and loyalty to place were characteristically bourgeois values, which, according to Christopher Lasch, were also "positive contributions" to American nationalism around the turn of the century. They were valuable resources that Rosenfeld drew on as a critic in his drive to form a "middle,

¹⁰ Rosenfeld, "Autobiography," Rosenfeld Papers; Paul, "Paul Rosenfeld," in *Port of New York*, xi; Gerald Sykes, "The Archangel's Correspondent," Wilson, "Paul Rosenfeld: Three Phases," Mumford, "Lyric Wisdom," Alfred Frankenstein, "Critic's Sheaf," and Max Graf, "Reprise from Vienna," in *Voyager in the Arts*, 16, 50, 145, 146, 172.

liberal, democratic tradition" in America. For they provided the necessary common ground, common standards, and a common context without which," as Lasch writes, "society dissolves into nothing more than contending factions, as the Founding Fathers of America understood so well--a war of all against all."¹¹

Like Bourne, Brooks, Frank, and Mumford, Rosenfeld's respect for historical continuity made him unique in a culture that, in Casey Blake's words, "dismissed the past as irrelevant to present concerns." Rosenfeld became a writer in part because of a need he felt to probe the mystery of "the past and the future," and "particularly [his] own past and that of the city of New York." Frustrated with many Americans' impoverished historical sense, he once remarked that the "present state of culture...at best possesses a memory with a span of possibly ten years." The value Rosenfeld placed on history was integrally connected to the sense of filial piety that pervaded Rosenfeld's whole outlook on his own past, and to the religious piety that informed his criticism of the arts and American culture. With the possible exception of William Carlos Williams, Rosenfeld's contemporaries missed the essential link between these two expressions of piety, a link that, as the historian Christopher Dawson observed, was central to the classical conception of piety. Filial piety, in his words, "has an essential relation to Religion which is the cult of God as our first principle. For Rosenfeld piety had nothing in common with mere sentiment or social custom. It was rather a moral principle that was foundational to a thriving culture. Like religious piety and the value of inherited human ideals, filial piety with its ethic of gratitude to one's forefathers and, in general, to the past, was an embattled idea in America

¹¹ Christopher Lasch, *The Revolt of the Elites* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1995), 48-9; Rosenfeld, *Port of New York*, 38.

between the World Wars. Among Rosenfeld's contemporaries, only E. E. Cummings shared in common with Rosenfeld a profound sense of gratitude to his father. As Alfred Kazin put it, "In the new American scriptures, fathers don't count."¹²

The themes of filial piety and historical continuity permeate Rosenfeld's unpublished "Autobiography," in which Rosenfeld presents a detailed family history extending back to the early seventeenth century. Such close attention to his ancestry, as Hugh Potter points out, indicates how important this history was to Rosenfeld's identity and self-knowledge, and, as Rosenfeld himself revealed, to his vocation to write. The same themes are also strong undercurrents running through *The Boy in the Sun*. Begun in 1920, the novel is the fruit of intense introspection and the sifting of memories. In preparation for writing it, he told Stieglitz, that he had written down "everything" about his past that came into his head, except what he knew to be "positively trivial." The story of *The Boy in the Sun* is told through David Bauer, or "Divvy," as his first name sounded in the German-Jewish accents of the Bauers. Like many autobiographical novels, its chief concern is with remembered anguish and the bold awakening to adult realities. William Carlos Williams pithily conveyed the book's plot in his review of it for the *Dial*. "It's a good story, all about a little Jewish boy that grew up in New York. It starts in scenes of Old Testament violence, but comes out in the end on the banks of the Hudson River in

¹²Blake, *Beloved Community*, 13; Rosenfeld, "All the World's Poughkeepsie," *The Musical Quarterly* 29 (October 1943): 470, and *By Way of Art*, 304; Christopher Dawson, "Tradition and Inheritance," *The Dawson Newsletter* (Summer 1989): 2, reprinted from a 1949 number of *The Wind and the Rain*; Alfred Kazin, "E. E. Cummings and His Fathers," in Kazin, *Inmost Leaf*, 195.

April."¹³

At the time of the novel's publication most of its reviewers missed its pervasive theme of filial piety and emphasized its related and more timely concern with a German-Jewish boyhood in Protestant America. The Macaulay Company brought out *The Boy in the Sun* amid a spate of books in the 1920s on the so-called "Jewish question," and took advantage of the reading public's interest in the issue by promoting the book in this direction. Although Rosenfeld was grateful to Macaulay's promotional efforts on behalf of his novel, he told Stieglitz that the effect was to "overplay the racial problem." In so doing Macaulay drew attention away from the book's deeper theme of filial piety by which Rosenfeld interpreted his experience of being a German Jew in America. Writing *The Boy in the Sun* helped Rosenfeld greatly to sort out the meaning of his relation to his parents, his forefathers, and eventually his whole Jewish past, which then gave him greater confidence in negotiating the contradictions of his ethnic double consciousness.¹⁴

Jerome Mellquist, Rosenfeld's friend and protégé, was the only writer to see that among Rosenfeld's most important achievements in writing *Boy in the Sun* was to have "carve[d] out a touching likeness of his father" in the character of Albert Bauer. Rosenfeld himself revealed how central Julius Rosenfeld was to the novel in a letter to Stieglitz in which he rehearsed the merits and shortcomings of various titles, each of which had something to do with filial piety. Before settling on *The Boy in the Sun*, Rosenfeld seriously considered *Kaddish* for his novel's title,

¹³ Potter, *False Dawn*, 8; Rosenfeld, *By Way of Art*, 304; Rosenfeld to Stieglitz, 30 August 1920, Rosenfeld Papers; William Carlos Williams, "Impasse and Imagery," review of *The Boy in the Sun*, by Paul Rosenfeld, *The Dial* 85 (November 1928): 431-32.

¹⁴ Rosenfeld to Alfred Stieglitz, 6 October 1928, Rosenfeld Papers.

making him perhaps the first in a succession of Jewish-American artists to invoke relate their works to this ancient Hebrew prayer. Other works of that title include David Diamond's *Kaddish* for Violoncello and Orchestra, Allen Ginsburg's poem, *Kaddish*, Leonard Bernstein's *Kaddish* or Third Symphony. "You know its meaning, don't you?" Rosenfeld wrote to Stieglitz. "It is the Hebrew prayer for the dead embodying filiation. My novel is a queer prayer." And even though "it is the very reverse of formal religion," because its origins lay in personal experience and not in revealed dogma, he found that writing it "was related to whatever it is that finds its outlet through the saying of *Kaddish*." Aside from its liturgical use among Orthodox Jews, the word, "Kaddish," as Alfred Kazin noted in his autobiography, *A Walker in the City*, persisted as a reference to the continuity between human generations among Jews who were not devout. "My father," wrote Kazin, "always introduced me around, very shyly but with unmistakable delight, as his *kaddish*." For religious skeptics like Kazin's father the word had lost its religious significance; but it was "kept up as a matter of course, out of fatherly pride: 'See the one who comes after me!'"¹⁵

Rosenfeld was sensitive to the association of *Kaddish* with Jewish nationalism and, in a private letter to Stieglitz, repudiated the association at once. "Nothing in the text," he insisted, "suggests any return to something pertaining to a narrowly tribal past." Then, to dispel any lingering notions of ethnic particularism, he moved on immediately to consider another title for the manuscript, *Piety*, which had much broader cultural associations in the history of the West.

¹⁵ Mellquist, "Salute to Paul Rosenfeld," 31; Rosenfeld to Stieglitz, 18 September 1927, Rosenfeld Papers; Alfred Kazin, *A Walker in the City* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1951), 37.

Indeed, Rosenfeld heavily favored *Piety* for his title, but finally decided against it because it did not have the "Latin connotation for English ears," and the English word sounded "cold." The traditional idea of the Latin, *Pietas*, conveys the sense of personal continuity and the self's link with history that one also derives from the act of reciting the Kaddish. *Pietas* supplements this historical sense with loyalty to a particular place. The term *Pietas*, as Dawson explained it, connotes "the cult of parents and kinsfolk and native place as the principle of our being, by whom and in which we are born and nourished." After "Piety," Rosenfeld briefly considered two other titles for his novel, *Sunwise* and *Filiation*. He rejected both: the first because it was "a little thin"; the second because, like *Piety*, it was "cold."¹⁶

Kaddish, *Piety* or *Pietas*, *Sunwise*, *Filiation*, and even *The Boy in the Sun*, with its homonymic play on "sun" and "son," all indicate the importance of filial piety in Rosenfeld's novel. Writing *The Boy in the Sun*, according to Lewis Mumford, was for Rosenfeld "a grateful task," an attempt to repay what can never be repaid. The elements associated with classical piety converge in the book's final climactic scene, when David Bauer, now in his late teens, is momentarily overwhelmed by a feeling of terrible isolation. Walking through the Catskill mountains in upstate New York, David thought of his mother "long since dead," and his "father helplessly sick." Mountains symbolic of persistence and continuity, "came out of the past, carrying into the invisible future. He [David] was still; feeling strength, seeing the strength of eternal mountains. On earth and above it, all was right. They were together in him, his parents, permeating him like a nervous system, one with the thread of his woof." Emboldened anew,

¹⁶ Rosenfeld to Stieglitz, 18 September 1927, Rosenfeld Papers; Dawson, "Tradition and Inheritance," 2.

David walked on "resolutely," steeled for the work before him, the "trig" exam, the first hurdle toward a career in architecture. He felt inside the gentle prodding of his father, whom he had come to see as "a good friend and guardian. And harmonious, the two trotted together through the cold spring evening; a preceptor with his pupil; a father with his son."¹⁷

Walking New York: The Importance of Place

The importance of physical place that had its roots in Rosenfeld's piety was no where more evident than in Rosenfeld's impassioned attachment to the city of New York. His introduction to the city came by way of long walks he took with his father, Julius. Not only did New York City become central to Rosenfeld's Americanism; it was also an integral part of the bourgeois spirit he grew up with. As John Lukacs argues, long before the bourgeoisie became nearly synonymous with capitalism, members of the European and American Bourgeoisie, until very recently, had always associated themselves closely with city life. To be "free citizens," not the goal of capital formation, was the original aspiration of the European bourgeoisie. The word, "bourgeois," and such variants of it as "Burger," "burgher," and "borgnese" all meant city dweller. Not at all an idea confined to Europe, Lukacs found that the bourgeois ideals of a free citizenry, a convivial city life, as well as the value of interiority, were also central to the lives of the seven prominent early twentieth-century Philadelphians he profiled in *Philadelphia: Patricians and Philistines, 1900-1950* (1980), one of whom was Rosenfeld's Yale classmate

¹⁷ Mumford, *Voyager in the Arts*, 53; Rosenfeld. *The Boy in the Sun*, 263-66.

William C. Bullitt.¹⁸

Probing the bourgeois ideal of loyalty to place, which most often meant loyalty to the city, in relation to Rosenfeld's Americanism responds to one of the "research priorities" that the historian John Higham recommended toward reconceptualizing American national history. "To regain a national focus on a culture that is permeated by the energies of differentiation," Higham suggested examining the unexpressed sense of "belonging," and of "being at home," that underlay the more conscious expressions of "loyalty to and pride in a nation" in "myth, symbol, and ideology." It would be difficult to find a more suitable example of a need to belong than Rosenfeld's *Port of New York*, a book whose underlying impulse is a powerful desire to feel at home in New York, which for him is the gateway to America. Rosenfeld's sense of belonging, "the gravity that held him," as he revealed in *Port of New York*, owed much to growing up in close relation to the city's physical landscape, which is why he placed such great emphasis in *The Boy in the Sun* on the importance of New York's buildings, museums, and public spaces in the boyhood and adolescence of David Bauer. The roughly parallel discussions of Rosenfeld's upbringing in New York in his unpublished "Autobiography" strongly suggests that David Bauer's experience of New York was very much like Rosenfeld's own.¹⁹

Very often Bauer turned to New York's public places as sources of consolations during periods when he felt alienated by disturbances in his family life. For example, after one particularly harrowing rejection by his ailing mother, a very young David Bauer took comfort

¹⁸John Lukacs, "The Bourgeois Interior," 196.

¹⁹John Higham, "The Future of American History," *The Journal of American History* (March 1994): 1306; Rosenfeld, *Port of New York*, 292.

and strength from the buildings he saw outside his playroom window. "Divvy felt the houses across the way archly aware of him," making him forget "the sharpness with which his mother had driven him away." Moments before "he had been fretting in exile on his floor," but now "the rows of dwellings sported with him leaning on the sill,...and it was like a dawn in him. David took the measure of himself against "the house heights," their "tallness" had urged him to man-size." Buildings continued to fascinate him and steel him through the emotional crises of his early adolescence, when, for example, he was overwhelmed by the feeling of being unwelcome in his grandmother's home, he looked to "his friend," a new building going up next to his grandmother's brownstone. He marveled at the building's quick progress toward completion. "The bricklayers had ascended relatively close to him now, and their chipping trowels made a clear fine stony music....David felt the marvel of the realization of brick, granite, and mortar flesh in space."²⁰

Other reflections of the importance of the physical reality of New York City on Rosenfeld were the descriptions of David Bauer's walks through the city and its museums with his father Albert, which, again according to Rosenfeld's "Autobiography," were fictional recreations modeled on the walks that Rosenfeld took with father, Julius. Julius's walking tours through New York's public spaces were as significant and enduring in their effect on Paul as the appreciation for literature that he also had imparted to him. In the *Boy in the Sun* Rosenfeld has David's introduction to classical architecture come by way of one of his and his father's frequent visits to Grant's Tomb. Like the buildings David befriended outside his playroom window,

²⁰Rosenfeld, *Boy in the Sun*, 13-5, 107-8.

David's most memorable encounter with the newly built Grant's Tomb was set in relation to a crisis in his family life, in this instance it was a particularly nasty quarrel that his parents had had just before he and his father set out on their walk. Riverside and Grant's Tomb was "his [David's] favorite Sunday beat and Pappa's." David asked his father about the architectural style of Grant's Tomb; his father's quick and emphatic answer: "Classic architecture!" provoked a more probing question from David. "Is classic architecture the finest architecture, Pappa?" Albert Bauer replied: "I feel since the Greeks and the Romans, who were after all the most advanced of mankind, used it, it *is* the finest." While David looked upward toward his father as he spoke, his eyes were drawn higher by the upward thrust of the columns of Grant's Tomb to its dome; they settled on the famous inscription above the portal: "Let Us Have Peace!" David, still disturbed by his parents' quarreling, found the inscription applicable also to his own deep personal hope for familial peace. Like the brownstones David observed outside his bedroom window, this architecture was drawn into his interior world.²¹

When David was older and living with his grandmother his Sundays with his father now included, besides an education in New York's buildings, tours of the New York museums. It was "an accepted fact that the two of them, father and son, should eat their Sunday dinner in the shadow of reconnoitering tours." Their Sundays out had the added benefit, from young David's perspective, of keeping his father from dinner with his grandmother and uncles, during which Albert usually talked himself into a rage, railing against the tyranny of large industrialists and the corrupt politicians of New York City. During their walks and museum visits, Albert provided

²¹ Ibid., 28, 31.

"answers to all the questions that perplexed [David] during the week. His copious explanations and declarations" established David "in a region where it was good to breathe, like to some eminence above the chasm of river, close to blue hills and white shining cloud-battlements." Sundays with his father energized young David; he lived the rest of the week anticipating the next Sunday, when "life was somehow saved again." Eventually, David began visiting museums on his own. He studied the exhibits of classical architecture and sculpture at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, comparing and contrasting what he saw in the Museum with the instances of classical architecture his father had pointed out to him on their walks. He studied the statues and edifices of "the Greeks and the Romans," and was touched by "a mysterious cheer," as an awareness dawned on him of a deeply personal connection between the museums and the life of New York City. David's museum studies also inspired him to read the children's histories of the ancient world: *Pausanias for Schools* and *A Friend of Caesar's*. Thus, Julius Rosenfeld inspired his son's interest in classicism just as he inspired his interest in Romantic literature.²²

The significance of these city walks in *The Boy in the Sun* and in Rosenfeld's unpublished "Autobiography" is somewhat similar to the role that walking the city as a boy played in the development of Lewis Mumford's appreciation for the importance of cities and architecture in the formation of human community. As Casey Blake has pointed out, like Rosenfeld, Mumford's city walks provided "a release" from a troubling family life, which in Mumford's case was the problem of fatherlessness. To underscore the lasting effect of being a young city walker on Mumford Blake writes that when as a man Mumford "confronted an

²² Ibid., 119-25.

intellectual 'father' in the writings of urban theorist Patrick Geddes, he must have experienced a moment of déjà vu. Geddes's urban surveys began with a technique long familiar to Mumford: walks through the city." While Mumford's father had no part in raising him, he enjoyed the constant attention of his mother's stepfather, Charles Graessel, who introduced Mumford to New York and made him feel at home in the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the American Museum of Natural History. Especially important for Mumford were the regular visits to New York's museums under Graessel's tutelage; for these shaped in Mumford's young mind the ideal of the museum as an integral part of civic culture at a time when museums and other arts institutions in America were fast becoming hallowed spaces set apart from ordinary life. Indeed this "education" he received in New York's museums was partly responsible for his later attraction to Rosenfeld and others who wrote for the *Seven Arts* insofar as they stood "against the servile colonialism and museum worship of the newly rich with its counterpart in our whole Academic life." Like Rosenfeld, Mumford sought the reintegration of art and ordinary life. One aspect of this common interest was the work painters and sculptors were doing on the buildings of New York. Mumford recalled, for instance on one of his and Rosenfeld's "many walks up Lexington or Park Avenue," a particularly engaging and detailed discussion that he had had with Rosenfeld on "the theory of color and ornament that Ely Kahn had applied to a Park Avenue office building." Such memorable episodes in their friendship impressed Mumford with just how "vividly alive" every aspect of the city and its architecture was to Rosenfeld.²³

²³Blake, *Beloved Community*, 21-23, 24; Lewis Mumford, *Sketches from Life: The Autobiography of Lewis Mumford, The Early Years* (New York: Dial Press, 1982), 129-30, and "Lyric Wisdom," in *Voyager in the Arts*, 46, 64.

Rosenfeld's walks through Manhattan were not just admiring studies of New York's architecture; they were also immediate studies in urban contrasts, studies which early on established in Rosenfeld a sensitivity to the interplay of the city's colors, shapes, sounds, and rhythms. His experiences of these contrasts prepared the way for his attraction to modern artists who works he viewed and heard as commentaries on these experience of the urban reality. In *The Boy in the Sun*, Rosenfeld writes of lush brownstones huddled close together offset by long "unbuilt" stretches of empty, "oozy lots," strewn with "piles of rusty tomato tins." In the streets beside the "friendly sidewalks" where Albert and David Bauer strolled "drivers reined their teams and tandems," and bicycles veered this way and that around carriages and pedestrians. They observed the growing skyline of lower Manhattan, which added an element of titillating uncertainty to this period captured in images of handsome, horse drawn cabs, and rain-swept plazas, such as are seen in Stieglitz's photographs --"The Terminal" (1893), "Spring Showers" (1901), "The Flat-Iron" (1902), and "The City of Ambition" (1910). During one of Albert's and David's visits to the Flat-Iron building at the juncture of Twenty-third Street, Fifth Avenue, and Broadway, David was taken with the view northward from the Flat-iron. Albert pointed out to David how the landscape went sharply flat until it met Central Park. Further north, the two picked up "dusty unbuilt St. Nicholas Avenue," which in Rosenfeld's words emerged "perplexingly out of the low regions of Central Park North and fled northwest into remote spheres of storage warehouses." As Mumford later pointed out in his essay for *America and Alfred Stieglitz*, Stieglitz's New York photographs during this period that Rosenfeld was writing about, from 1890 to 1905, reveal "the feeling and thinking and acting" that underlay the city's astonishing physical transformation. Indeed, Rosenfeld's strong, indeed filial, attachment to

Stieglitz later in his life lay probably had something to do with the correspondence between what Stieglitz had captured in his photographs and what Rosenfeld experienced as boy walking New York with his father.²⁴

A Denizen of Poughkeepsie

In 1903 Rosenfeld left New York City to board at the Riverview Military Academy in Poughkeepsie, New York. His family sent him there, Rosenfeld said, "after vain attempts to place [him] in choicer institutions" had failed. "My family had sent me to this old school," he wrote, "consoling itself with the then lingering superstition that military academies were uniquely disciplinary, with the dream that I'd acquire a desirable military carriage." The dream remained unrealized. Although Riverview had prepared Rosenfeld well enough for Yale, the military training he received there apparently did little to reform his bearing or even to ready him for the physical rigors of "drilling and digging ditches" that he would have to undergo as a draftee at Camp Humphrey in Virginia in 1918. Unable to avoid being caught up in the massive mobilization for the Great War, once he found himself in the army Rosenfeld energetically sought and finally received a job typing, which, as he told Waldo and Margie Frank with great relief, rescued him from "the hardest physical labor" usually assigned to privates.²⁵

His unsuitedness for strenuous physical activity and, in general, his lack of athleticism,

²⁴Rosenfeld, *Boy in the Sun*, 28-29, and *By Way of Art*, 304; Alan Trachtenburg, *Reading American Photographs: Images as History: Matthew Brady to Walker Evans* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1989), 212; Waldo Frank, et al., eds., *American and Alfred Stieglitz*, 48.

²⁵ Rosenfeld, "All the World's Poughkeepsie," 468; Rosenfeld to Waldo and Margy Frank 14 August 1918, Special Collections, Van Pelt Library, University of Pennsylvania.

persisted beyond his military career, and often figured in the impressions he left on his contemporaries. The literati of the 1920s, as Ann Douglas writes, had become preoccupied with the body; one's weight became "a matter of daily and calculated vigilance." Amid the growing emphasis on trim bodies, Rosenfeld's plumpness invited comment. Even as a Yale undergraduate, Rosenfeld's classmates often compared him in looks to G.K. Chesterton without the pince-nez. In 1916, James Oppenheim, the editor of *The Seven Arts* described Rosenfeld as "voluptuous." Sue Davidson Lowe, a niece of Alfred Stieglitz's who met Rosenfeld at her uncle's estate on Lake George in 1920, recalled how completely unfit Rosenfeld was for manual labor. "Soft as a pillow," Rosenfeld earned the nickname "Pudge," which Lowe never called him to his face. Rosenfeld seemed especially languid and mechanically inept in comparison to her father; Stieglitz described him to Rosenfeld as "a real worker," whose yeoman's work habits "infected" all those who were staying with Stieglitz during the Summer 1920, to the extent of inspiring them to rebuild "an old shanty" on the grounds.²⁶

The literary critic Edward Dahlberg saw Rosenfeld's softness as "feminine." To Llewelyn Powys Rosenfeld's physique predisposed him to a life of over-refinement. "It was sufficient to set eyes on Paul Rosenfeld," wrote Powys in 1926, "to appreciate the diathesis of his personality. Plump as a grain-fed pheasant, he was a man of brave parts and deep culture." Lewis Mumford was far more charitable in his handling of Rosenfeld's shape. He looked upon Rosenfeld's "tendency to fatness" as reminiscent of "the rich vitality of the sixteenth century, the

²⁶ Douglas, *Terrible Honesty*, 52; Rosenfeld to Platt, 13 March 1913, and Stieglitz to Rosenfeld, 28 August 1920, Rosenfeld Papers; Charles L.P. Silet, "The Seven Arts: The Artist and the Community" (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1973), 48; Sue Davidson Lowe, *Stieglitz: A Memoir/Biography* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1983), 236, 274.

spirit of Rubens, when fleshiness signified "a natural efflorescence of good spirits." Moreover, mindful of an American tradition of associating a love of arts and letters with effeminate and even homosexuality, associations that Dahlberg and others had already drawn with reference to Rosenfeld, Mumford felt compelled to defend Rosenfeld's masculinity. "He was not ostentatiously manly; but that is only another way of saying that he had no doubts or anxieties about his own virility." Rosenfeld's devotion to the aesthetic, wrote Mumford, was not, for him, "a substitute for the heterosexual life, but an enrichment of it." Mumford also could not dissociate Rosenfeld's "spiritual health" from "its bodily aspect." He argued that such a division was symptomatic of that modern tendency to fragment selfhood. Mumford: "There are those who believe that the poet's vision and his toothache belong to two different worlds; but I do not hold with them...[rather], they remain unified, active parts of the same organism." So, to Mumford Rosenfeld's "rounding contours" were like those of "a pregnant woman," a "happy manifestation of the fertility of life," a physical reminder of the "zest and eagerness," and the "playful sense of abundance" that Rosenfeld brought to his work.²⁷

Melomania

Rosenfeld's own remembrances of Riverview Academy rarely touch on any of the regimes and rituals for impressing cadets with the virtues of a strenuous physical life and the "martial ideal" that were all the rage during the early twentieth century. Instead, he recorded one instance when

²⁷ Edward Dahlberg, *Alms for Oblivion* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1964), 6; Llewelyn Powys, *The Verdict of Bridlegoose* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1926), 137; Mumford, "Lyric Wisdom," in *Voyager in the Arts*, 54-5.

he made a novel use of his musical training on the Riverview parade ground. "I discovered the advantage of piano lessons," he wrote, "Correctly to execute the maneuvers when the command was 'Squads right!' or 'Squads left' I found I had merely to imagine myself at the keyboard. Promptly I knew which of my hands was left, which right. It made me a trifle slow, but never fatally so. Finally, I attained a sergeant's rank." A visit in 1943 to the grounds where Riverview had once stood brought back other memories of his prep school days which he recorded in the *Musical Quarterly* as a prelude to a tribute to two men--Arthur Moore (Billy) Williamson and Charles H. Hickok --who worked without much acclaim to enrich the cultural life of turn-of-the-century Poughkeepsie. Feeling compelled to document lost landscapes, Rosenfeld described for his readers Riverview's "massive, red-brick" main building that had dominated the campus but by the 1940s was gone. From its roof, "sharp Catskills to the north seemed near, dark in the thunder-blue of the Rip Van Winkle legend." Seemingly, "highlands" that lay "ragged" and "noble" over the Hudson river were "closer than he had remembered them." "New roads straight to the Mid-Hudson Bridge sadly gashed one hill. From another hill momentarily there seemed to rise a memory of hepaticas, saxifrage and a pair of rattlesnakes found in its woods one spring; of scattered light by night blinking from homes and farms upon its flank."²⁸

Although as a boy Rosenfeld sang with his family and heard many discussions about music, he never studied an instrument until his Riverview years. He did not "dote upon piano lessons," but suffered them under "orders from home." He learned piano with Miss Virginia Gorse of Poughkeepsie, according to "the noiseless method." Rosenfeld took great glee in

²⁸ Lears, *No Place of Grace*, 107-39; Rosenfeld, "All the World's Poughkeepsie," 468.

describing his first meeting with Miss Gorse, when she laid his hand palms down, inspected them, and said, "I'm glad to see you have rounded finger-nails. People with flat finger-nails, you know, always are deceitful." Later he studied piano with "Billy" Williamson, a highly introverted, "infinitely sensitive" figure who during lessons quoted William James and read aloud from Drummond's sermons, Whittier's hymns, and "An Epistle" by Browning. Williamson urged Rosenfeld to hear local performances given by pianists such as Ignace Jan Paderewski, Mme. Szumowska, and Harold Bauer. Rosenfeld advanced quickly in his piano studies. Thanks in large part to Williamson's influence, the piano became "his indispensable companion," and music in general came to accompany all of his ordinary activities. It was during Mme. Szumowska's performance of the Chopin E minor Concerto with the Boston Symphony under Karl Muck that "for the first time" his heart jumped as he heard "piano cascades glitter and ring like jewels." The next day, Rosenfeld wrote, "as I walked through a passageway, suddenly, luminously there flew into my mind the triumphant cadence and spinning melody of the Finale."²⁹

Immediately following this epiphany Rosenfeld recalled himself "waiting, watching for opportunities of hearing fine music." While other cadets were devising strategies to get home, Rosenfeld, with the help of a classmate, trumped up some family emergency in order to get away to hear a concert. After riding a cab, a train, and a subway to get from Poughkeepsie to Manhattan, he arrived at Carnegie Hall, "climbed the steep ascent to 'heaven,'" and took his seat just as the conductor's baton came down. "The 'sickbed of the uncle' of *this* precious pupil of a

²⁹ Rosenfeld, "All the World's Poughkeepsie, 469-72; Gerald Sykes, "The Archangel's Correspondent," in *Voyager in the Arts*, 173.

military school," Rosenfeld later confessed, "was...the balcony of Carnegie Hall on a day when Vassily Safonoff put the *6th Symphony* of Tchaikovsky through the paces of one of his sensational readings." Music, as noted earlier, also intruded on the parade ground. "Winging my gun in the effort of military calisthenics while the band thumped on, I asked the gods, 'Why don't they play the bullfight music from *Carmen* or the drinking-song from *Otello*. They'd put some life in it.'" An awareness of a new realm of sound "annexed to the world" grew on him.

"Phrases of music haunted me, along with a desire to recapture their sweetness whole. Passages of it singularly gave indications as with pointing fingers, of mysterious perfections known to it on earth, in rarer air, at no great distance." He began listening to the sounds of the natural world and associating them with various compositions. As an adult he used that technique in the interpretation of twentieth-century music, especially that of Edgard Varese and Leo Ornstein, which consciously referred to and commented on the sounds of the country and the city.

Rosenfeld remembered on one afternoon at Riverview, when "thunderheads drove over the school buildings," and "the rhythm of the 'Valkyries' Ride sprang to mind, rivaling the black clouds, emphasizing Nature's stormy strength, revealing the existence of a music that measures itself against her wildness."³⁰

During his last year as a "denizen of Poughkeepsie" Rosenfeld began to cultivate an interest in neo-romantic and impressionist composers and their music. He read Lawrence Gilman's *Music of Tomorrow* (1907) in the closet of his dormitory room "by the light of the

³⁰Rosenfeld, "All the World's Poughkeepsie," 472, "Grand Transformation Scene-1907-1915," *Twice A Year* (Fall-Winter, 1940), 352-4, and "The Minority and Tchaikovsky," *The American Music Lover* 6, 1 (May 1940):3.

perennial electric lamp dimmed in a laundry bag." Gilman "charmed" him with quotations from "Yeats, Rossetti, and Materlinck," and the promise of hearing "new and difficult music by Debussy, Loeffler, and d'Indy." Rosenfeld also poured over musical scores, revisiting again and again Richard Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde* and Robert Schumann's A minor Piano Concerto. He relished the discoveries he made on his own about music, writing of one instance in particular when he heard for himself that "the mysterious charm" of the final theme in Schumann's Concerto lay "in the...singular major-minor oscillation." The melomania that Williamson had inspired in Rosenfeld culminated in perhaps Rosenfeld's first important conceptual discovery about music criticism: that interpretations of music could be challenged, the weight of academic authority behind them notwithstanding. This insight came during a discussion in which Rosenfeld and Williamson considered an assertion made by "Good Professor Gow of Vassar" that *Madame Butterfly*, which had premiered in 1904, was "the greatest tragedy ever written. Could an Italian opera be such?" In a flash, Rosenfeld wrote, he and Williamson "recognized that this was Professor Gow's *opinion*."³¹

Self-Giving: The Basis of Culture

In an unpretentious way Williamson had been an invaluable guide in the development of Rosenfeld's musical life, a debt that Rosenfeld attempted to repay by dedicating his first volume of music criticism, *Musical Portraits* (1920), to Williamson. It was Williamson who also told him about Charles H. Hickok, a man whom Rosenfeld met only once, but who, like Williamson,

³¹ Rosenfeld, "All the World's Poughkeepsie," 468, 472-3.

impressed him as an exemplar of the self-giving that makes culture possible. On Rosenfeld's return visit to Poughkeepsie in 1943, the words "We cannot separate true life from true music" stood out from among the Papers that Hickok had left to the local library. Hickok owned a local music store and "tried to manage certain concerts of fine music in Poughkeepsie," but could not make them pay for themselves. Rosenfeld recalled "so many rows of empty red-plush and cast iron seats" during one of Hickok's presentations of the Boston Symphony. A few days after this particular concert Rosenfeld met Hickok outside his store and learned that Hickok had incurred "an enormous debt" in bringing the Boston Symphony to Poughkeepsie. Although they were mostly well-to-do, Hickok said, the people of Poughkeepsie would not support him even "to the extent of buying the two-fifty seats." Reflecting on this conversation years later, it called to mind for Rosenfeld something that Goethe had written in his *Italian Journals* just after a visit to the Palladio in Vicenza.

We acquire little thanks from people when we strive to elevate their inner necessities, to give them a great conception of themselves, to bring to consciousness in them the magnificence of a true, gracious way of being. I say this not to humiliate my friends, I merely say that thus they are, and that we ought not to be astonished that everything remains as it does.³²

In drawing a comparison between Hickok's experience in Poughkeepsie and the sort of ingratitude that Goethe wrote of, Rosenfeld raised the particular position of men such as Hickok to a universal, and persistent condition: "If half the world is Ispahan," said Rosenfeld, "the whole of it is Poughkeepsie: Poughkeepsie of the past, the present, the future!" In a "salute" to Paul

³²Quoted in Rosenfeld, "All the World's Poughkeepsie," 474.

Rosenfeld for *Tomorrow* magazine, Jerome Mellquist suggested that Hickok was not only a model of "community responsibility" for Rosenfeld, but that he anticipated the life that Rosenfeld would himself live: "The life of ideas through art--which ideas he then poured back into the community as an enhancement of it, no less, indeed than the giving of Mr. Hickok in Poughkeepsie."³³

The Outcast Defiant Stinking State

Apparently, there was no one among the students or faculty of Riverview Military Academy whose influence in Rosenfeld's life rose to the enduring importance of Williamson and Hickok. In fact, Rosenfeld never warmed to his prep school, a feeling he conveyed by renaming Riverview Coldskill Academy in *The Boy in the Sun*. Through David Bauer he connected the "sense of exclusion" he felt there in part with being a Jew in an Episcopalian prep school. But he resented Coldskill also because it had taken him away from his father for extended periods. In a way to make up for his father's absence, David imagined how his father would act in certain circumstances which he found to be disagreeable in the prep school regime--required chapel and sermons, hazing and the swagger of upperclassmen. David Bauer, wrote Rosenfeld, "moved on Papa's *elan*." When he felt pressured at Coldskill to confess Christianity and repudiate his Judaism, Bauer resisted out of loyalty to his ancestry, "his blood, his grandmother, the old doctor in Karlsruhe,...his father." Rosenfeld himself in writing these words must also have recalled his father's reading of Rebecca's words near the end of *Ivanhoe*, when Rowena invited Rebecca to

³³ Rosenfeld, "All the World's Poughkeepsie," 466-7, 471; Jerome Mellquist, "Salute to Paul Rosenfeld," 31.

remain in England and convert to Christianity. Rejecting Rowena's advance, Rebecca said, "I may not change the faith of my fathers like a garment unsuited to the climate in which I seek to dwell."³⁴

David Bauer's identification with Albert Bauer in *The Boy in the Sun* extended even to an emulation of his father's increasingly bohemian behavior. In Rosenfeld's own boyhood experience, according to Jerome Mellquist, Julius Rosenfeld, after losing his business, had to live in "cheaper and cheaper lodgings" in Harlem until just before Paul's graduation from Riverview; at that time when the family was forced to commit him to an asylum. Mellquist himself took some delight in hearing Rosenfeld speak of Julius's bohemianism. "Who could forget this Rosenfeld pere?" Mellquist wrote, "gazing at bosomy ladies in restaurants, persisting in more drinks than were good for him, and sliding deeper into his rooming-house dinginess." In *The Boy in the Sun*, Albert Bauer justified his eccentricities by referring constantly to the eccentric Romantic literary figures he so relished. There was hardly an encounter between David Bauer and his father during this period of Albert's mental decline wherein Albert did not have some book of German, English, or French poetry open before him. Emulating Albert's identification with those Romantic authors and characters who had snubbed their noses at convention, David also searched among the Romantics to validate his own estrangement during his first years at Coldskill Academy, and to legitimate his own adolescent self-pity. In this period--his "outcast defiant stinking state," he immersed himself in the writings of Shelley, Henrik Ibsen, and especially George Gordon Byron. He read and reread Byron's story of the Faust-like Manfred,

³⁴Rosenfeld, *Boy in the Sun*, 133-4,144; Scott, *Ivanhoe*, 518.

who lived isolated in an Alpine castle, tortured by guilt for "some half-maddening sin." With David's discovery of the poetic drama, *Manfred* (1817), "Lord Byron took up residence at Coldskill." Doubtless in Rosenfeld's actual life Manfred's celebration of piety as a foil against evil and adversity strengthened Rosenfeld's own filial piety. As the dark spirits appear near the end of the story to claim Manfred's soul, Manfred defies them assured by his companion, The Abbot of St. Maurice, that they have "no power where piety has power." Manfred:

In knowledge of our fathers--when the earth
Saw men and spirits walking side by side,
And gave ye [evil spirits] no supremacy: I stand
Upon my strength--I do defy--deny--
Spurn back, and scorn ye!--³⁵

Inspired by such passages, David Bauer cut a Byronesque figure--the Romantic image of the isolated and estranged seer of beauty--amid the "unruffled philistinism" of his schoolmates. Rebelling against Coldskill's overly moralistic evangelicalism, David, during his freshman and sophomore years, dismissed Christianity as hypocritical and narrow, and instead flaunted a brazen atheism. From his reading of Ibsen's *The Pillars of Society*, and George Bernard Shaw's *Widowers' Houses*, he attributed all the world's evils not to man's inherently flawed nature but to powerful big interests and social forces. His overt defiance of Coldskill's conventions drew harassment and even beatings from his classmates, as well as scores of demerits from the Doctor Headmaster. These punishing actions did little to deter David's rebellion; indeed, he became more full of himself when he discovered from his reading of contemporary literary criticism in

³⁵ Mellquist, "Salute to Paul Rosenfeld," 31; Rosenfeld, *Boy in the Sun*, 145-51, 156; George Gordon (Lord) Byron, *Manfred in The Works of Lord Byron* (Boston: Phillips, Sampson, and Company, 1852), 232.

periodicals such *Harper's*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, and *The Nation* that his own knowledge of literature was equal to and sometimes more sophisticated than those who wrote for these magazines.³⁶

According to Rosenfeld's account of his Riverview years in his unpublished Autobiography, he experienced the dawning of a certainty about his literary knowledge much like David Bauer's. Rosenfeld sought to demonstrate his new confidence in a series of short fictional stories that he published in *The Riverview Student*. These stories are significant not only because they establish themes that Rosenfeld returned to throughout his life and which informed his criticism, but also because, taken together, they signify Rosenfeld's dissent against the prevailing Protestantism at Riverview. As such they form part of the much wider body of American writing at the turn of the century which the American cultural historian T. J. Jackson Lears has labeled antimodernist. Much of it, like the majority of Rosenfeld's Riverview stories, looked to the past and particularly to the Middle Ages for an ideal of culture through which they could express their dissatisfactions with modern American life. Chief among these dissatisfactions was the waning of any serious belief in the supernatural which had at one time given purpose and meaning to life. To be sure, as Lears writes, antimodernism was an ambivalent movement: it gave rise to certain modes of expression that actually accommodated the modern culture of consumption, but it also struck a note of protest against modern consumerism and the bureaucratic, capitalist order. Although they eventually diverged, both of these strains began as "a reaction against secularizing tendencies," which tried "to salvage

³⁶ Rosenfeld, *Boy in the Sun*, 164-5.

meaning and purpose amid the crumbling Protestant culture of the late nineteenth century.” It was precisely on these religious grounds that Rosenfeld established his antimodernism, for by the time he began writing fiction for *The Riverview Student* he had already rejected his earlier atheism and begun a career as a “God-seeker.” Unmoved by the ostensibly enlightened, ethical platitudes that passed for religion at Riverview, Rosenfeld, like many others before him, went in pursuit of God by way of the exercise of imaginative literature.³⁷

³⁷ Rosenfeld, “Autobiography,” 129-72, Rosenfeld Papers; Lears, *No Place of Grace*, xv.

Chapter III

The Riverview Stories: Rosenfeld and Antimodernism

When Rosenfeld was a man of thirty and getting very little done on the novel that would eventually be *The Boy in the Sun*, he tried to move himself forward by recalling his days at Riverview when he found writing enjoyable. "One Evening," he wrote to Alfred Stieglitz in 1920, "I suddenly remembered a feeling about writing which I used to have when I was at prep school. It was the feeling that writing was a fun, a pleasure, and I have been trying to live again in the way that will make it fun for me." It was during this earlier period of delight in writing that Rosenfeld produced his five stories for *The Riverview Student* which represent his first literary treatments of the themes that would later appear in *The Boy in the Sun*: his search for God and meaning, the development of his selfhood in tension with his loyalty to his patrimony, his ethnic double consciousness, his impatience with the superficiality of many in the New York patriciate, the feminine principle, the heroic ideal, authenticity of experience, and the crisis of his vocation. Whereas *The Boy in the Sun* explored these themes in the form of an autobiographical novel, the Riverview stories treated them obliquely, and most often in the form of the historical romance. Like most immature writing, Rosenfeld's Riverview fiction has a transparency through which the reader can see its dominant influences, which in Rosenfeld's case were the magazine stories and historical novels packed with heroic deeds that streamed out of the publishing houses during the 1890s, but also Walter Scott, and the more sophisticated Romantic literature with

which Rosenfeld had been immersing himself during his prep school days.¹

Stylistically derivative though they were, the Riverview stories reveal some modest talent: a solid ability to tell a story and the control of its form, and lavish attentiveness to the details of each story's setting. Thoroughly familiar from boyhood with the novels of Scott, he seems to have instinctively absorbed from them what Georg Lukacs has identified as their most original feature: "the derivation of the individuality of characters from the historical peculiarity of their age." Rosenfeld set his stories against well-formed historical backdrops out of which individual characters emerge and develop as much as they can within the confines of a short story. Two of the five stories are set in the Middle Ages, a third in Elizabethan England, another in New Spain of the seventeenth century, and the last one in early twentieth-century America. Their derivative and immature qualities notwithstanding, the Riverview stories deserve to be considered a part of the late-nineteenth- and early twentieth-century literature of authenticity and deep feeling characteristic of this period's cultural antimodernism.²

Turn-of-the-century antimodernists, as T. J. Jackson Lears has shown in *No Place of Grace*, recoiled from the prevailing ethos of rational instrumentalism that "desanctified the outer world of nature and the inner world of the self, reducing both to manipulable objects." They also revolted against the calcified and artificial elements in American bourgeois culture. As prominent members of the American bourgeoisie, they felt that bourgeois existence had become "stifling and unreal," and that "modern life [had] grown dry and passionless"; thus they sought

¹ Rosenfeld to Stieglitz, 30 August 1920 Rosenfeld Papers

² Georg Lukacs, *The Historical Novel*, trans. Hannah and Stanley Mitchell (Boston: Beacon Press, 1962), 30-63.

“to regenerate a lost intensity of feeling.” In its quest for “real life” antimodernism, says Lears, “reinforced the shift from a Protestant ethos of salvation through self-denial to a therapeutic ideal of self-fulfillment in *this* world through exuberant health and intense experience.” But, when it “preserved higher loyalties outside the self,” such as Rosenfeld did, antimodernism sustained a critique of modern culture, especially the modern rejection of the reality of the transcendent.³

Primarily a literary movement of disaffected Protestant elites--“the leadership class,” Rosenfeld’s German-Jewish background makes him an anomalous figure in this movement; of the sixty-six “dramatis personae” from “the educated strata of the Northern bourgeoisie,” whose writings provide the support for Lears’s thesis and argument, only one, Horace Traubel, an editor, writer, and leader of the arts and crafts movement, was, like Rosenfeld, from a German-Jewish family. But in another way Rosenfeld also fits well Lears’s profile of the sixty-six WASP, bourgeois antimodernists. For like them, Rosenfeld was not himself a businessman or a politician, nor did he subscribe to the world view of the powerful businessmen and politicians of his class, even though he was connected to such men by blood, by educational background, and by his source of income. His German-Jewish roots notwithstanding, his criticisms of the bourgeois culture resonated with those of “the moral and intellectual leaders” of the American Protestant patriciate. Rosenfeld’s immersion from boyhood in the German and English romanticism disposed him to the American antimodernist revolt that Lears documents. What is more, since this revolt manifested itself in an adventure of the imagination, it was comparatively safe, inasmuch as it kept the jolt of things unforeseen within the boundaries of bourgeois

³ Lears, *No Place of Grace*, xi-xii, xvi, 7.

experience. As Rosenfeld put it in the mid-1910s in a slightly different context: while he relished mystery, his “bourgeois soul detest[ed] the unexpected.”⁴

Like early nineteenth-century European romantics, turn-of-the-century American antimodernists looked for alternatives to the prevailing ideas and cultural practices of their time in medievalism, orientalism, and primitivism. Not only are Rosenfeld’s Riverview stories reflective of this antimodern interest in alternative cultural traditions, but indeed all of his attempts at writing fiction until 1920 reflect a fascination with the European Middle Ages, ancient oriental cultures (particularly Zoroastrianism), and primitivism. These antimodern tendencies persisted in Rosenfeld’s writing on music, for instance, in his lifelong championing of Horatio Parker’s opera, *Mona*--“the great American opera,” based on one of Brian Hooker’s poem about primitive Britain. Hooker, a prolific author of medieval romances and a translator, is one of the figures in Lears’s study of antimodernism. In the same vein, Rosenfeld in 1916 wrote a deeply reflective and glowing review of Charles T. Griffes’s *The Kairn of Koridwen*, a dance-drama set against the background of primitive Celtic culture.⁵

As Lears argues, turn-of-the-century antimodernists’ revolt against the complacency of modern life was not simply a resurgent romanticism but, rather, reflected “a kind of cultural

⁴ Lears, *No Place of Grace*, xii, xvi, 119, 171, 172, 313-23; Rosenfeld to Philip Platt, 7 August 1913, Rosenfeld Papers.

⁵ Rosenfeld, “The Lesson of *Mona*: Horatio Parker’s Opera and Its Fate,” *Arts & Decoration*, 13 October 1920, 334, *Musical Chronicle*, 54-60, “*Maria Malibran and Mona*” *The New Republic*, 19 June 1935, 167, *Discoveries of a Music Critic* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1936), 310-14, “One of the Parents,” *Modern Music* (May-June 1942): 215-21. “Mr. Griffes en Route,” *Seven Arts* (April 1917): 673-5, “Griffes on Grand Street,” *Modern Music* (November-December 1940): 27-30.

asphyxiation among the educated and affluent,” whose yearning for spiritual, moral, and physical regeneration led them to relish the imaginative evocation of “the intense experiences of the medieval craftsman, warrior, or saint.” Henry Adams, an exemplar of antimodern dissent, summed up the crisis of feeling among American patricians in the context of his discussion of *The Song of Roland in Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres*. “Our Age,” he wrote, “has lost much of its ear for poetry, as it has its eye for colour and line, and its taste for war and worship, wine and women. Not one man in a hundred thousand could now feel what the eleventh century felt in these verses of the *Chanson*.” Adams, whom Rosenfeld regarded with Whitman as among the greatest American writers, found in such medieval ideas and practices as chivalry, knighthood, craftsmanship, Roman Catholic interiority, mysticism, art and liturgy, and the simplicity and authenticity of belief an intensity of feeling similar to the “intenser pleasure” that Rosenfeld had experienced in reading *Ivanhoe* for the first time on his own.⁶

“The Princess Irene” and the Chivalric Ideal

In the Riverview stories the longing for intensified experience manifests itself most often in evocations of the chivalric ideal and its associated cult of romantic love. Rosenfeld set “The Princess Irene,” the first of the stories, in a “fair realm of long ago,” where people “lived peacefully.” “Here the arts flourished long before the rest of dead Europe heard of them, here chivalry threw its beams on men's lives, and the poor were protected--there were few poor,

⁶ Lears, *No Place of Grace*, xii, 262-97; Henry Adams, *Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1905), 29; Rosenfeld to Alfred Stieglitz, 30 August 1920, Rosenfeld Papers.

indeed, for in all the land there was seldom a peasant who had no cottage, with its acre of ground to till, and a fowl in his pot; and the king over this land was King Reinald,...a good man, a brave knight, and a great king.” The story centers around the profound transformation in the character of the Princess Irene. Motherless for most of her life and spoiled by her overly good-natured father, Irene grew up to be insufferably haughty and selfish. Against her father's deepest wish, she refused to marry, and instead “amused herself by breaking the hearts of all the gay cavaliers.” So the king, who was beside himself for having spoiled his daughter, hatched a ruse with the cooperation of the Princess's “roguish” page, the object of which was to have the Princess marry the king's cousin and heir, Count Florian. The page, whose “extensive reading in romance-epics had taught him much about women,” attended the princess when she retired alone to a secluded grove of extraordinary beauty, which “had become sacred to her, and was known as the Princess's Throne.” He noticed that despite her pose of outward indifference, in her retirement she “grew a little serious” with the knowledge that Flavian would soon be arriving at court expecting her hand. The page also saw in “the statue of Sappho” and “the history of Tristram and Yseult” that was carved in a wall encircling the Princess's “Throne” signs of the princess's unspoken attraction to the ideal of romantic love. He thus advised the king to have Florian make his advance to the princess disguised as a knight, Sir Jock. True to his name, which means a rustic and even a clown, Jock's shabby dress, clumsiness, and insulting improprieties at first enraged the Princess, but gradually, his “quiet nobility” won her over, and the surprising discovery of her love for him “brought her own guilt home to her” over the way she had been conducting her life, and led her to repent bitterly “her violent rage” and “her unwomanliness.” Yet even after this transformation, she did not intervene to prevent a contest between Jock and a

knight of superior strength, her champion, who avenges a minor affront to her honor that Jock had committed by his clumsiness. It was not until Jock appeared to be losing the contest with his superior opponent that Irene broke down and stopped it. She then begged her father: "Let me go to some convent, and there expiate my wicked life." At that point the king reveals Jock's true identity, and the whole ruse. Irene not only forgave all the conspirators but indeed she was "glad that her lover had made his way sure to win her," and "she loved him all the more."⁷

The story's concern with romantic love is at times light-hearted, a reflection of Rosenfeld's youthful playfulness. But as Rosenfeld matured his reflections and writing on romantic love grew more serious. The idea of romantic love became one of his chief intellectual interests, especially as it manifested itself in the ancient legend of *Tristan and Iseult*. There can be little doubt that Rosenfeld identified himself with the page in "The Princess Irene," whose knowledge of romance-epics enabled him to read and interpret correctly the signs surrounding the "Princess's Throne"-- Sappho and the Tristan carvings, which then led to the story's resolution. The figure of the page anticipates Rosenfeld's later view of the man of letters, who by his ability to read and interpret the deep significance of art has a palpable, even regenerative, effect on lives. Of all the romance-epics Rosenfeld had read as a boy none affected him as deeply and as permanently as the Tristan story, which he read during his boyhood "Scott craze." In a 1945 article on the history of the Tristan legend that Rosenfeld published in *Tomorrow* magazine, he noted that Scott in 1820 had published the English fragments of *Tristan*, which in turn "became the base of the Tristan poems by Arnold, Tennyson and Swinburne." Rosenfeld, of course, also

⁷ Rosenfeld, "The Princess Irene," *The Riverview Student* 17 (December 1907): 62-72.

knew well from his teenage period of melomania the story's most famous nineteenth-century realization, Richard Wagner's "stupendous" musical drama, *Tristan und Isolde* (1859) based on Gottfried of Strasbourg's version of the story. Indeed, it was Rosenfeld's persistent dissatisfaction with Wagner's treatment of romantic love that inspired him to translate Joseph Bedier's *The Romance of Tristan and Iseult* (1900) from French to English. For Rosenfeld had found little evidence that the relation of Tristan and Isolde in Wagner's musical drama--which was widely purported to be "the high song of love"-- had anything to do with the empathetic self-surrender he expected from romantic love; instead he found it marked by "the fierce longing for utter consumption, the extinction of the flaming torch." Seeing in Wagner's *Tristan* the roots of the twentieth-century separation between *eros* and sexual pleasure, Rosenfeld argued in 1920 that sex for Tristan and Isolde is not unitive but "utter oblivion"; between them "there is no tenderness, no awareness of each other." By way of contrast, Bedier's rendering of the *Tristan* story, said Rosenfeld, "is the sole one which quite convinces us that what the protagonists feel for each other really is love."⁸

The Rosenfeld translation of Bedier's *Tristan*, and his persistent interest in the chivalric ideal which lay at the heart of his undertaking the translation in the first place, struck Marianne Moore as somehow singularly representative of Rosenfeld's way of being, especially his way of being with women. Apparently something of Princess Irene's page remained with Rosenfeld into his manhood. Moore, who remained grateful to Rosenfeld for rescuing Bedier's *Tristan* "from

⁸ Rosenfeld, "The Tristan Story" *Tomorrow* (October 1945): 58; Rosenfeld, trans., *The Romance of Tristan and Iseult*, Joseph Bedier (New York: Pantheon Books, 1945); Rosenfeld, *Musical Portraits* 4, 8.

the half-scholarship of judicious translating," saw in Rosenfeld himself some of the features that were celebrated in the medieval romance-epics; "a man of deeds" inspired by "imagination," he was "a figure best praised by his own myriad chivalries." According to Moore, Margaret Naumburg, Gertrude Stein, "and many another," although Rosenfeld never married, he was not among those modern men of whom Henry Adams said had lost their "taste" for women.

"Women were charmed by him," wrote Gerald Sykes. To Alyse Gregory, who met Rosenfeld through Randolph Bourne, her evenings out with Rosenfeld in the late 1910s and the early 1920s were like pages out of a romance. Despite his German-American upbringing, she found him unique among the New York literati for his cultivation of "French finesse," and his preference for "Latin manners" over "the Anglo-Saxon." "On warm spring evenings," she recalled, "he [Rosenfeld] would call for me at Milligan Place and take me in a gay, shabby Victoria--like a Paris *fiacre*--with an antiquated coachman snapping an antiquated whip over the shanks of an antiquated horse, up the wide deserted asphalt of Fifth Avenue, lighted by electric globes hanging like clusters of pendent moonstones. We would go into Central Park where the leaves rustled and turned in the faint breeze and I would feel as if I were living in the pages of a Balzac novel." Gregory wrote that, like other educated women of her generation, she was "largely obsessed with a sense of moral obligation," but found these and similar "gestures of adventurous life-acceptance" that she experienced with Rosenfeld to be "strangely liberating" from such obsessions. It is not clear whether or not Gregory knew that Alfred Stieglitz had entitled one of a series of four photographs he took of Rosenfeld "The Little Balzac."⁹

⁹ Marianne Moore, "A Son of Imagination," Gerald Sykes, *The Archangel's Correspondent*, and Alyse Gregory, "Dial Days," in *Voyager in the Arts*, 21-3, 39-40, 169; Stieglitz to Rosenfeld,

The chivalric ideal that Rosenfeld first explored in "The Princess Irene" affected more than his mature relations with women. He continued to believe to the end of his life that the sense of honor that animated the chivalric ideal could be the basis for reordering America and the West after the defeat of Nazism. In his 1944 essay, "Vision of a Christian Society," Rosenfeld emphatically endorsed George Bernanos's idea in *Plea for Liberty* (1943) of rebuilding Europe on the "semi-monastic association based on honor, Chivalry." Bernanos, the "hairy-man-of-letters," Rosenfeld wrote, was "quite right in taking encouragement from the history of Chivalry. The old order of honor did rise out of a time not unlike ours, the terrible Ninth Century; and but a short while before its flowering was unthought of. Yet by the year 1000 it was in bloom; and for all its shortcomings, upheld courage and enterprise, and raised the level of the world from barbarism to civilization." Such faith in the power of the chivalric ideal to regenerate the social order was a mainstay of the early-twentieth century antimodern literature of which "The Princess Irene" was a part. As Lears points out, aside from the martial values of the medieval knight, who was the principal agent of the chivalric ideal, the knight "could embody purity and honor, and point toward moral regeneration." Rosenfeld's persistent and undaunted belief in the knightly code as the foundation for the reconstruction of Western civilization after World War II set him far apart from the main body of American intellectuals of the mid-twentieth century, when the cynicism and "terrible honesty" that had set in among them in the 1920s seemed to find even greater justification in the horrors of the second World War. But far from a quixotic fancy, his commitment to the romantic ideal of chivalry was apparently well-considered, having survived a

15 December 1920, Stieglitz Papers, Yale University Library.

fundamental rethinking of his values in light of World War II, and a series of “spiritual deceptions” and “demoralizing financial losses.” In a conversation Rosenfeld had with Edgard Varese two days before his death in July 1946, Rosenfeld said, “I feel that all these unpleasant experiences of the last decade have made it necessary for me to revise my scale of values and, moreover, in spite of the emotional anguish I went through during the war, I am almost grateful to it, for it acted as a much needed filter.”¹⁰

Rosenfeld's thoughtful commitment to the rehabilitation and reconstruction of Western civilization on the ideal of chivalry, along with his predilection for Latin manners bears out Norbert Elias's insistence that “for all its secularization, the watchword ‘civilization’ always retains an echo of Latin Christendom and the knightly feudal crusade. The memory that chivalry and the Roman-Latin faith bear witness to a particular stage of Western society, a stage which all the major Western peoples have passed through, has certainly not disappeared.” Written in 1939 from Switzerland, Elias, by his tone, is mildly suggestive of a certain sympathy for a return to the chivalric code.¹¹

Rosenfeld's lifelong attachment to romantic chivalry was not the only strain of medievalism with roots in his young adulthood. The chivalry code was inseparable from the vision of the middle ages he first set forth in “The Princess Irene” as a well-ordered society wherein art thrived and social justice followed effortlessly from the organic nature of society.

¹⁰ Rosenfeld, “Vision of a Christian Society,” *The American Mercury* 58 (June 1944): 755-7; Lears, *No Place of Grace*, 101; Ann Douglas, *Terrible Honesty*, 8; Edgard Varese, “Wine of Good Omen,” in *Voyager in the Arts*, 238.

¹¹ Norbert Elias, *The History of Manners: The Civilizing Process, Volume I*, 53.

This vision resonated with the antimodernism of the turn of the century, but also with the vision his fellow Young Americans, Bourne, Brooks, Frank, and Mumford, each of whom also had discovered this ideal in his youth. Like Rosenfeld, they looked to the medieval period as the last satisfactory organic social order in the history of the West, its unity, integration and interconnectedness standing out all the more in comparison to the desultoriness of modern life. While Brooks figures prominently among the sixty-six antimodernist writers in Lears's book, the other three do not. But Bourne himself wrote that "if we must set a starting point from which we have been moving" it must be located "about the beginning of the sixteenth century." Accordingly, Bourne at least implicitly accepted the widely held view that modern civilization began with the Italian Renaissance. In Frank's work the loss of medieval totality was central to his entire critical project. "The life of Western man as an organic Body," wrote Frank in 1929, "reaches fullness in what we call the Middle Ages," and its literary zenith in Dante Alighieri. That period's unity of life which was engendered by the Catholic Church, meant that "from Pope to serf, from atom to the Lord, there was a hierarchized unity of life for individual, social, aesthetic, and religious actions." Frank even saw Sigmund Freud's work as an effort to find a substitute for "the broken synthesis of Catholic Europe." Mumford's understanding of modern life began also with the disintegration of "the inner harmony of medieval culture." Like Bourne, Mumford laid emphasis on the Italian Renaissance as the origins of the modern drift toward fragmentation. In that period we see the beginning of "the long breach between art and life" which Mumford dedicated his life to repairing.¹²

¹² Lears, *No Place of Grace*, 251-7; Randolph Bourne, "Seeing, We See Not," *Youth and Life* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1913), 222; Waldo Frank, "A Prophet in France," *Seven Arts* I (April

“Percy the Poet”: Art, Authenticity, and the Ruling Class

The second of the five *Riverview* stories in order of their publication departs sharply from the other stories' premodern settings. "Percy the Poet" is set against the backdrop of an early twentieth-century high society party in Manhattan: "Mrs. Addington Baker was receiving." The story is about a would-be poet, Percy Pemberton, the foppish son of a well-placed family, and his encounter with a gathering of narcissistic socialites, "a meeting of mirrors, all casting reflections." Rosenfeld satirizes the forlorn soul who turns to poetry as a pose, imagining himself, as Percy does, to be a "Marius the Epicurean." The guests at the party outwardly indulged Percy's pose, but mutter their doubts about his veracity. "He is a poet because he eats too much," his own mother whispered to another guest. A man within earshot chimed in, "It is the desire of every cultivated bored youth to be thought a Marchbanks. What does this case imagine he suffers from?" Although satirical in style, the story also points to the more serious problem of the commodification of art and its link to the rise of consumerism. Percy was emphatic that the poet had to be original. "One must be different from other people, it does not matter how, so long as one is different." Accordingly, Percy refused to have his work published for fear that it would be received as imitative or that what he published would itself be copied. The question of originality and imitation is given a curious sort of emphasis by the introduction

1917): 639; "Sigmund Freud (1934)," in *The American Jungle 1925-1936* (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1937), 83; *The Re-Discovery of America: An Introduction to a Philosophy of American Life* (New York: Charles Scribner's sons, 1929), 15, 17; Lewis Mumford, *American Taste* (San Francisco: The Westgate Press, 1929), 4; *The Golden Day: A Study in American Literature and Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957), 21, 282; *Sticks and Stones: A Study of American Architecture and Civilization* (New York: Dover, 1955), 234. Mumford even rehabilitates the unfavorable depiction of urban life in the Middle Ages in *The Culture of Cities* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1970), 35-44.

into the story of a comical mishap: the mistaken exchange of identical pocket-books, involving Percy and a woman at the party. The appearance of a purse identical to Percy's greatly confounded him; he insisted that he had designed the purse himself. Yet there was its duplicate. "How is it your purse is like mine, when I designed my own?" he asked the woman. The woman laughed as she answered: "You know how tradesmen are--they've no more honest than playwrights. They take others' thoughts and sell them as their own."¹³

At its deepest level "Percy the Poet" marks an early stage in Rosenfeld's interest in the seriousness of words and language, and in particular, the rejection of their arbitrary use in relation to reality, including the reality of human emotions and experiences. Percy imagined himself "imposed upon" by the philistinism of the party guests and therefore at odds with them and their values. But at root he and they are bound together by their frivolous use of language. Sustained superficial chatter is the metier of the socialite set, as exemplified by "a Mrs. Pemberton," who is especially deft at this work, having "tied the talk securely to her apron strings; she was becoming exhausted of topics, but hold the field she must." Percy is all the more culpable in the abuse of language since he claims to be a poet, one whose choice of words must be careful and authentically expressive of his experience of reality.

Related to this question of language and expression, "Percy the Poet" represents the first instance of Rosenfeld's own use of musical metaphors in his writing; he wrote, for example, of the party as an "air"-- the highly melodic movement of a Baroque suite that is distinct in character from its other dance movements. Such musical metaphors had become popular literary

¹³Rosenfeld, "Percy the Poet," *The Riverview Student* 17 (January 1908): 104-8, and *The Boy in the Sun*, 213-4.

devices in nineteenth-century writing as a way to interweave music and literature. Rosenfeld's metaphor in full reads: "For blocks away the wild reception could be heard. As the astonished look of the pedestrian approached the center of the air's rendition, he discovered that the roar consisted of human vocals; the excited voices of the women could be distinguished playing violin-obligato to the loud guffaws of the men; the tumultuous sound-waves rose, and fell, and broke." The great sound overwhelmed everyone except "the female servants" who had become "as deaf as ear-trumpets" to it all. Mrs. Baker's cook, "a rotund German, insisted that now, for the first time, she really appreciated Richard Strauss." The earthy cook's cryptic reference to Strauss hints at Rosenfeld's developing sense that the American upper class and "the opulent purples" of Strauss's some poems to which it swooned shared in common a certain superficiality and disingenuousness. Like "The Princess Irene," "Percy the Poet" contains ideas in embryonic form that incubated in Rosenfeld's mind and which he later developed and shaped as he matured. Twelve years after "Percy the Poet," in a celebrated essay for the *Dial* on the life and music of Richard Strauss, Rosenfeld indicted Strauss for reflecting instead of challenging the commonplace and mistaken notion that what is important in life is "to live luxuriously and keep your name before the public....In so doing one will have lived life as fully as it can be lived. And after one is dead what does it all matter?"¹⁴

The careful and detailed description of Mrs. Baker's party apparently proceeded from

¹⁴ Mary H. Hellman, "The Musicalization of Fiction," *The Musical Mercury* V (February 1928): 67-8; James Anderson Winn, *Unsuspected Eloquence: A History of the Relations Between Poetry and Music* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981), ix-xii; Lawrence Gilman, *Phases of Modern Music* (Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1968, reprint of 1904 edition), 61; Rosenfeld, "Percy the Poet," 104, 106, and "Strauss" in *Musical Portraits*, 53.

Rosenfeld's own experience and dissatisfaction with such affairs, which he fictionalized and probed in some depth in *The Boy in the Sun*. David Bauer's introduction to New York's upper crust soirees came by way of an older cousin, who during Bauer's junior year at Coldskill Academy became engaged to a young lady from a prominent New York Anglo-Protestant family. Although there is nothing to suggest that Bauer's cousin and his new fiancé were not genuinely in love, their marriage obviously would do much to strengthen the Bauers and the Arnsteins social position. According to Rosenfeld's fictionalized account of the episode in *The Boy in the Sun*, Carl, Bauer's cousin in the novel, held up his own engagement as an example for David's emulation. Carl even introduced David into the elite social circles in which he and his fiancé circulated with great ease. David for a while found himself seduced by this new world, in part because of a crush he had on his cousin's betrothed, whom Rosenfeld named Evelyn in *The Boy in the Sun*. The real-life model for Evelyn must have been powerfully impressive, for as William Carlos Williams wrote, Rosenfeld's "evocation" of Evelyn in the novel could not have been "more precisely yet delicately true." In his own mind Rosenfeld associated Evelyn with George Moore's "the woman of thirty" in *The Confessions of a Young Man*. "A great favorite" of Rosenfeld's, Moore's famous description of this *femme ideale* signified "a malady the ancients knew of and called nympholepsy," a state of frenzy in men brought on by gazing on a nymph. Evelyn, it seems had had a similar effect on David Bauer; she was, wrote Rosenfeld, the "sheer stuff of Pre-Raphaelite art...a moonbeam in woman-shape, ideal as a Rossetti phrase." David's infatuation with Evelyn and his idealization of her womanly beauty deepened as he accompanied her and Carl to symphony concerts and the opera. At one opera David slipped Evelyn a hastily composed sonnet under the cover of darkness in which he associated her with the heroine on

stage. For Hugh M. Potter this scene from *The Boy in the Sun*, in which poetry, drama, music, and romantic love are interwoven around the figure of Evelyn, transformed her womanly beauty into “the essence of the music itself.”¹⁵

The episode of David's crush on Evelyn is also enmeshed with the novel's other themes of ethnic and religious conflict, inasmuch David's infatuation with Evelyn ultimately led him to a bitter disaffection from the predominantly Protestant New York Social Register set. The climactic encounter of these conflicts in *The Boy in the Sun* comes during a party much like Mrs. Baker's in “Percy the Poet.” Frustrated with the glib artificiality he saw all around him, David burst out with “an extravagant monologue about the rough beauty of New York Bay.” In a conversation with Corinne, the girl with whom his cousin had paired him for the party, and through whom his path to a place within the New York upper crust was virtually assured, he spoke rhapsodically of New York City its “flying steam, metal cables, shrilling grimy tugs, all the crass, earthy life of the waterfront. He invented freely, and Corinne snubbed him.” David acknowledged to himself that he was out of place: “What had he to do with all these elegant people, so thin and difficult. 'David,' he said, 'old boy, you're middle class. Just a plain kike.’” The final blow to his idealization of Evelyn came when at the party he thumbed through a copy of “Town Topics,” lying on a table; Evelyn had told David that she read it “for its dramatic criticism”; the most penetrating...in all the city. He [David] recognized a deception.” At this

¹⁵ Rosenfeld, “Percy the Poet,” *The Riverview Student* 17 (January 1908): 104-8; *The Boy in the Sun*, 182-94, 212-32; Williams, “Impasse and Imagery,” *Dial*, 432; George Moore, *Confessions of a Young Man* (New York: Brentano's, 1917), 81-8; Rosenfeld to Philip Platt, 24 November 1913, Rosenfeld Papers.

Hugh M. Potter, *False Dawn*, 15.

moment his thoughts went to his father, who had sharpened his eyes to see through such pretenses. "Pappa was right. His old sly father!"¹⁶

"The Golden Galleon": Selfhood, Ethnicity, and the Burden of Patriarchy

"The Golden Galleon," the third of Rosenfeld's Riverview stories, was his first attempt through fiction to shape his selfhood in relation to his father and to his past. Set in seventeenth-century Mexico, it is clearly a rehearsal of Rosenfeld's struggle between his sense of filial loyalty and the lure of individual autonomy which sprang from the Romantic ideal of expressive individualism, and which was reinforced by the prevailing cult of the self-made man, which Rosenfeld soaked in from his reading of Alger, Optic and Henty, and was everywhere celebrated in American life. This crucial moral conflict between personal autonomy and filial loyalty was not something peculiar to Rosenfeld's Jewish background, as Edmund Wilson would have it; it was a much more widely-felt conflict among late American Victorians. Henry Adams, a Unitarian and then an agnostic, struggled with it; in fact, as Lears writes, it was for Adams was "a central moral question." The protagonist of Rosenfeld's "Golden Galleon," Juan, had been raised in a Dominican monastery since birth. He was placed there by his Spanish mother in reparation for the apostasy to the Catholic Faith of Juan's father, "a dog of England," who remains unnamed in the story. Refusing to atone for the sins of his father by remaining with the Dominicans, Juan stows away on a Spanish ship. Once found he is thrown overboard by the sailors who think that harboring a runaway priest is bad luck. As fortune would have it he is rescued by an English war

¹⁶ Rosenfeld, *The Boy in the Sun*, 212-32.

vessel. On board he renounces any association with Spain and claims the birthright that came down to him through his father. "I am no longer a Spaniard. My father was an Englishman." As they set sail for "merry England," a cheerful sailor "slapped him [Juan] on the back and cried, 'My lad you're English now.'"¹⁷

Written in the afterglow of the American victory over the Spanish in the war of 1898, "The Golden Galleon" used a comparatively current event to explore the intermingled themes of filiation and ethnic doubleness that Rosenfeld worked out more fully in *The Boy in the Sun*. Rosenfeld's sympathy for "merry England" was influenced by his immersion in the English literary tradition, but also by the constant celebration of the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race that permeated the early twentieth-century cult of medievalism. Both of these influences intensified his inner conflict between an attraction and a revulsion to American WASP bourgeois culture.

The Heroic Ideal of Womanhood: "The Queen's Head" and "At Moonrise"

Rosenfeld's attraction to the English literary tradition continued in "The Queen's Head," which he set in Elizabethan England. The protagonist of this fourth Riverview story, Wilfred, descended from a landed family but when he came of age abandoned the country for the court life of London. By happenstance, on his way to London he encountered the imprisoned Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots, sequestered in a castle. Raised a Puritan, Wilfred is at first repulsed by the sight of the Papist Mary, but her exquisite and noble beauty won him over. Queen Mary

¹⁷ Lears, *No Place of Grace*, 262; Rosenfeld, "The Golden Galleon," *The Riverview Student* 17 (February 1908): 132-40.

begged him to leave her, for if he were found with her he would likely be killed as a traitor. Before Wilfred can flee, an embassy of nobles and ladies arrived from Queen Elizabeth. Mary hid Wilfred. From his hidden position he heard Lord Gladesdale, the leader of Elizabeth's embassy, accuse Mary of high treason, and then offer her a reprieve from the execution that is sure to follow on her conviction if she "became his." No sooner had Gladesdale made his offer one of soldiers discovered Wilfred; Wilfred drew his sword against Gladesdale but was subdued by Gladesdale's men. Before Wilfred was led off to prison, and Mary to her trial, Mary turned to Wilfred and said: "farewell, mayhap sometime you can thrust a sword to revenge yourself--as for me, I care not, but for this!" Immediately she grasped her crucifix and kissed it. "There will come a time when you can strike a last blow for me." Vowing to avenge himself and Mary, Wilfred's chance came just after his release from prison, when at the public beheading of Queen Mary, he recognized her executioner as Lord Gladesdale himself. Having beheaded Mary, Gladesdale is overwhelmed with guilt for his crime and collapses next to Mary's headless corpse. Once revived, he flees to Ireland with Wilfred in close pursuit. The guilt continued to gnaw at Gladesdale leaving him a "wreck of a man." One night just as Wilfred was about to seize Gladesdale, an apparition appeared against the moonlit sky, visible to Wilfred and his company and to Gladesdale. The image seemed "as the face of a woman gazing steadfastly out upon the sea, immobile, yet ever set toward the sea, as the face of Mary Stuart gazing into eternity. And from the man who had slain her came a sudden scream that shivered into the night, then another pierced their ears, scream followed scream, a last despairing cry, the anguish of a damned soul, all was silent." Wilfred and his men found Gladesdale dead, fearful "they knelt before the

apparition of Mary Queen of Scots "as in the presence of God."¹⁸

As in "The Princess Irene," it is the intervention of a noble woman at a crucial moment in the story that prevents a man's violent death, a resolution that conforms to Rosenfeld's unflagging admiration for the power and the primacy of the heroic ideal of womanhood epitomized by the character of Rebecca in *Ivanhoe*. The noble ideal of womanhood, even when it was obscured by self-centeredness as it was in the character of Princess Irene, nevertheless inspired heroic deeds, as it did in the case of Count Florian as Sir Jock, who joined a contest with a knight of superior martial ability for the sake of his beloved. In "The Queen's Head," Mary's great dignity triumphed over deeply ingrained religious differences to win Wilfred's devotion: it destroyed Gladesdale through vexing guilt over his horrific misdeeds.

The triumph of the heroic woman also lies at the heart of "At Moonrise," the last of Rosenfeld's Riverview stories. In contrast to the other four this one takes the form of a poetic drama after the style of Byron's *Manfred*. Set like "The Princess Irene" in the High Middle Ages, its hero is Sir Robert, a knight of great noble bearing, who is treacherously murdered by the evil knight, Tancred, who boasts: "Of Satan at my poignard's point pierced his steel." Margaret, whose extraordinary beauty and nobility is reminiscent of Queen's Mary's in "The Queen's Head" is the object of Robert's and Tancred's love. For most of the story, Margaret is unaware that Tancred had murdered Robert, believing instead that Robert had gone away without a farewell. The keeper of a key to her father's great treasure house, Margaret shifts gradually from serving as the object of Tancred's love to the object of his consuming greed. Tancred and a

¹⁸ Rosenfeld, "The Queen's Head," *The Riverview Student* 17 (March 1907): 158-65.

band of his outlaws accost her on a road at moonrise and menacingly demand the key from her. Shocked at Tancred's betrayal, Margaret refused, which prompted Tancred to reveal that he had murdered Robert "with a dirk dipped in hell's fire," and that he is prepared to murder her as well.

Fight all you will, your struggle's nearly
done,
For to the weak belong defeat and death!

As in "The Queen's Head," Rosenfeld effects the story's resolution through a mystical apparition; an image of Robert appears in gleaming white armor, striking terror into Tancred and his band. Margaret moves toward the image of Robert and entrusts the key to it. Robert "clasps her once in his arms, and she sinks down upon the earth." Margaret's self-sacrifice at once deprived Tancred of his victory and joins her to Robert in a love-death reminiscent of the love-death scene that concludes Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde*.¹⁹

The Feminine Ideal and Religious Belief

Rosenfeld's early interest in the figure of the heroic woman in "At Moonrise," "The Queen's Head," and "The Princess Irene" conformed to the antimodern interest in "the feminine principle." Henry Adams typified this interest among American writers, reaching its height in the figure of the "vitalist Virgin" in Adams's "Prayer to the Virgin of Chartres" (1901), *Mont-Saint Michel and Chartres* (1904), and *The Education of Henry Adams* (1907). Adams set the virgin in opposition to masculine self-satisfaction and its excessive confidence in the technological mastery over the natural world. In *The Education*, for example, he wrote "All the

¹⁹At Moonrise," *The Riverview Student* 17 (April 1908):189-94.

steam in the world could not, like the Virgin, build Chartres...the Virgin had acted as the greatest force the Western world ever felt.” It was precisely Adams’s eloquence in puncturing the hubris of modern men that attracted Rosenfeld. Few figures, in Rosenfeld’s estimation, did more to sustain “the tragic sense of life” against the tendency of Americans to believe that they had overcome the bitter aspects of living.²⁰

In Lears’s analysis, Adams’s cult of the virgin as dynamo “uncovered alternatives to the pallid mid-Victorian ideal” and “mainstream banality,” providing Adams with the “maternal complement” he needed to offset the pressure he felt to submit himself to “the male achievement ethos.” It also eased the burden on him of having to live up to the demands of the venerable Adams dynasty. The feminine ideal functioned similarly in Rosenfeld’s life; he saw it as a realm of untapped passion, a maternal corrective to his father’s emotional instability, and a palliative for the burden he felt under the weight of his own venerable patrimony. Although Rosenfeld had been let down emotionally by his mother, grandmother, and the real-life woman he idealized as Evelyn in *The Boy in the Sun*, his sister Marion apparently embodied something of the feminine strength he admired. In 1913 just after his graduation from Columbia, he wrote to a friend about Marion’s cheerful realism in the face of physical adversity. Generalizing from his sister’s example, he wrote that “women have a courage far more complicated than have men,” and that “they accommodate themselves to things more quickly, and will do almost anything for someone they love.” This practical courage was for him uniquely feminine, and differed from that of

²⁰Henry Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1918), 388, Rosenfeld to Stieglitz, 30 August 1920, Rosenfeld Papers; Lears, *No Place of Grace*, xvi.;

suffragists like Emmeline Pankhurst, whose “courage is masculine” inasmuch as “she suffers for an idea, a principle.”²¹

At any rate, what Rosenfeld sought in the heroic ideal of womanhood was someone like Queen Mary who would aid him in his struggle for self-definition and lead him to discover his true vocation. “Moulded out of dreams,” Mary entered suddenly into young Wilfred’s life and transformed it, giving it a passionate sense of purpose that it had not had before. Her outward serenity concealed a contagious interior passion and courage that flowed from her devotion to the self-sacrificing love symbolized by the cross of Christ. “I care not, but for this!” she said as she seized “the heavy golden crucifix that lay on her breast,” and “pressed it to her lips.” In the story these words drove Wilfred to his knees before her. This identification of the cross with feminine vitalism in “The Queen’s Head” parallels the same identification that Adams made in his *Education* in which he described the “the Cross and the Cathedral [at Chartres]” as “forces” that were “interchangeable if not reversible.”²²

For Rosenfeld, like Adams, such religiosity exemplified the heroic passion that was missing from American Protestantism and the bourgeois morality it supported. But it also signified his own groping toward the medieval man’s uncomplicated faith in God and a basis for creating a unity of life. The inner force of romanticism, in particular, did much to drive his interest medieval Catholicism. As Marcel Brion wrote in *Schumann and the Romantic Age*,

²¹ Lears, *No Place of Grace*, 270, 278; Rosenfeld to Phillip Platt, 5 December 1913, Rosenfeld Papers.

²² Henry Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams*, 381; Rosenfeld, “The Queen’s Head,” 159, 162.

“romanticism was always religious,” and in a sense a *way of being catholic*.” For the Romantics “poetry merged into contemplation and communication with the Sacred. The word became The Word, the poem a prayer and a mystic exploration.” Rosenfeld certainly would have agreed with Brion, and also with Adams’s assertion that the European high middle ages was “the point of history when men held the highest idea of himself as a unit in a unified universe.” But Adams and Rosenfeld are united more closely in their sympathy toward medieval Catholicism through the importance each gave to the symbol of the cathedral as a spur towards religious faith in an age when belief does not come easily to men raised in the critical intellectual tradition of the enlightenment. In *The Boy in the Sun*, it is David Bauer’s study of the cathedral of Chartres, encouraged by a teacher at Coldspring Academy that eventually led him to abandon the defiant atheism he had adopted as a new cadet. In his discovery and deep appreciation for “the impulse that made people run cathedrals up to the greater glory of God,” Bauer found the resolution for the problem of the evil: “how was it possible for men to love God or feel that God loved them, when the world was so full of cruelty and of ugliness?” Examining a book of photographs of the cathedral at Chartres in the light of his teacher’s insistence that “God is; just is!” occasioned a spiritual epiphany in Bauer by which he rid himself of his doubts about the existence of God and the goodness of the world. At the moment of his epiphany he felt himself bathed in “warm pearly spiritual light,” drawn toward a luminous sky by the upward thrust of the cathedral’s spires. Such for Rosenfeld was the epiphanic power of art.²³

²³ Marcel Brion, *Schumann and the Romantic Age* (London: Collins Press, 1956), 21-2; Lears, *No Place of Grace*, 279-80; Rosenfeld, *Boy in the Sun*, 235-40.

The Feminine Principle, Self-Transcendence, and Cultural Renewal

Aside from serving as an idealized replacement for motherly influence and an inspiration to religious belief, the heroic ideal of womanhood was for Rosenfeld, as it was for the other Young Americans, an antidote to the stifling formality of the Victorian ideal of womanhood with “its sterile notion of cultural excellence as the acquisition, if not the mastery, of classical canons of knowledge, and its grotesqueries of interior decoration and domestic entertainment.” They were not alone in the revolt against the Victorian woman’s domination of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American culture. According to Ann Douglas, the whole movement of New York modernism during the 1920s sought not only to liberate America from the influences of Europe, but also and especially from what cultural modernists perceived to be “the powerful white middle-class matriarch of the recent Victorian past.” For Rosenfeld, as for Bourne, Brooks, Frank, and Mumford, the revolt against bourgeois Victorian patriarchy meant above all rescuing music, literature, and the visual arts from feminine preciousness, and also puncturing the image of the artist as an effete, withering aesthete. Along these lines Marianne Moore recalled a memorable phrase she had heard from Rosenfeld; the artist, he said, was “no 'lily-leaning wistful willowy waning sentimentalist,' but 'a man of stomach,' producing 'hard form which reveals itself the larger the more it is heard.’” Notwithstanding his dissatisfaction with the prevailing ideal of femininity as he found it in American bourgeois culture, Rosenfeld, like his fellow Young Americans, saw in the feminine ideal an untapped source for cultural renewal. Amid the wreckage of “illegitimate ideologies” such as the popular reductionist applications of psychoanalysis, the various strains of theosophy, and Eastern occultism, “it alone,” writes Casey

Blake, "seemed real" to them.²⁴

Rosenfeld and each of his Young American associates interpreted this ideal in a distinctive way, or with a different stress. It evoked "visions of a return to the mother, of merging souls, of mystical unity with the physical environment and ultimately the cosmos, and the dissolution of the self into a loving community of friends." For Rosenfeld the feminine ideal expressed above all else the Platonic notion of the unitive and mediative power of love. But these different emphases aside, they all saw in the feminine principle a principle of self-transcendence, which for them was a prerequisite for the rehabilitation of American culture. One particular idea or sense that they all found particularly useful, and which had links to the feminine ideal was the "oceanic feeling"--one's sense that the boundaries between self and world are indistinct. Each of them knew this idea from Sigmund Freud's and Romain Rolland's treatment of it. In a well-known exchange between Rolland and Freud on the "primary nature" of the oceanic feeling, which Freud referenced in his *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Rolland argued that one may justifiably call oneself religious "on the ground of this oceanic feeling alone." The ground of "religious energy," this feeling gives one a sense of eternity, of "something limitless, and unbounded," as well as the sense that there exists "an indissoluble bond of being one with the external world as a whole." Ultimately such a feeling was subjective, and whereas Rolland claimed never to be without it, Freud had never experienced it. Freud finally rejected the

²⁴ Blake, *Beloved Community*, 24, 32; Douglas, *Terrible Honesty*, 6; Moore, "Son of Imagination" in *Voyager in the Arts*, 38-9.

“oceanic feeling” as the irreducible foundation of religion.²⁵

Rosenfeld favored Rolland’s interpretation of the “oceanic feeling” over Freud’s insofar as it viewed the religious sense in humans as irreducible. The whole edifice of Rosenfeld’s critical project rested on taking seriously “the religious sense”; as he wrote in *Port of New York* and many other places, the cultural transformation of America depended on its irreducibility. So, for instance, he was friendlier to the therapeutic techniques of Carl Jung than to those of Freud because they encouraged men and women “to take their religious instinct seriously and give it ample play,” whereas Freudian therapy dismissed this instinct as illusionary. Like Rolland, Rosenfeld himself claimed never to be with the “oceanic feeling,” attributing to it his urge to write. Writing, he explained in 1928, best enabled him to probe this “curious oceanic substance” which he felt “moving within himself and surrounding him, entrancing him, and soliciting him ‘incessantly.’” But because he associated this feeling with the feminine principle as well as with the religious sense he, very much like Henry Adams, worried that such a persistent urge to self-transcendence, could, if left unchecked, lead to self-annihilation, the very obliteration of consciousness that he so deplored in Wagner’s treatment of the Tristan myth.

Therefore to counteract the self-disintegrating tendencies of the feminine principle, Rosenfeld cultivated a fierce independence of mind, a quality that revealed itself with a special urgency during the 1930s, when he launched a defense of the integrity and inviolability of the human person against Marxist writers’ attempts to devalue it. With its emphasis on the collective and the advancement of party interests at the expense of individual ones, Marxism

²⁵ Blake, *Beloved Community*, 24, 32; Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Standard Edition, tr., James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1961), 10-12.

represented to Rosenfeld a political and cultural manifestation of the dark, all-devouring side of the feminine principle. Edmund Wilson was a particularly sharp observer of these personality traits and their consequences in Rosenfeld's life and work. In his essay for *Voyager in the Arts* Wilson recalled a particularly dramatic example of Rosenfeld's strident independence during a 1930s election rally where writers "paid their homage to Communism as a literary restorative and bracer." Already well-known for his vehement opposition to the leftward drift of many American artists and intellectuals during the 1930s, Rosenfeld, recalled Wilson "attracted unfavorable attention" during this rally "by pointedly refusing to rise when the *International* was sung."²⁶

Another aspect of Rosenfeld's individualism was his uncommon predilection for self-regenerative solitude. The value of interiority had been instilled in him early as part of his bourgeois upbringing, but Rosenfeld, with great naturalness, cultivated it to a point approaching the medieval ideal of the contemplative life. Although Rosenfeld went to great trouble and expense to put on the famous gatherings he hosted in his Manhattan apartments, he rejected the endless socializing that went hand in hand with the accelerated pace of life in New York during the 1920s. The city's "stepped up rhythm" became a much celebrated part of the culture of "terrible honesty," even though it caused "its share of casualties." The "city may kill what it quickens," wrote Ann Douglas. Eugene O'Neill once referred to the New York scene between the wars as a "swirl of excited nothingness"; New York, he thought, would "do in" anyone who

²⁶ Rosenfeld, *Port of New York*, 295, "Psychoanalysis and God," *The Nation*, 30 April 1938, 511, and "Why Do I Write?" in *By Way of Art*, 304; Lears, *No Place of Grace*, 278-9; Edmund Wilson, *Axel's Castle* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1931), 2, and "Paul Rosenfeld: Three Phases," in *Voyager in the Arts*, 13-4.

tried to live there. It is “nothing but a peaceable Verdun,” he wrote to E. B. White. Edmund Wilson had been caught up in this frenzy, and found Rosenfeld’s fondness for solitude deeply refreshing. “I remember,” wrote Wilson, “what a relief it was to talk about art with Paul [in his rooms] in an atmosphere completely free from the messy dissipation and emotion that were characteristic of the twenties, and to get a good night’s sleep in a house where everything was quiet and simple.” Rosenfeld’s very being, it seemed to Wilson, was a potent corrective to New York’s “excited nothingness.” That night he stayed at Rosenfeld’s Wilson had a “delightful dream,” which he remembered distinctly two decades later. The dream, wrote Wilson, was of “little figures that were really alive though much less than life-size, dancing with slow grace to an exquisite Mozartian music which filled me with peace and joy. It was an antidote to the stridencies of the jazz age which Paul’s spirit had managed to exorcize.”²⁷

The self-regenerating power of solitude served Rosenfeld well. Gerald Sykes connected it with Rosenfeld’s habit of self-criticism, which in turn led him to undertake “strenuous” efforts at self-education in order to master the new bodies of knowledge he needed for his critical writing. Moreover, for Sykes, Rosenfeld’s deliberate efforts at cultivating a sure sense of his selfhood served to steel him in his conviction that writing criticism was a service to the common good. Near the end of the 1920s when the usual outlets for his writing were closing off to him Rosenfeld persisted in sending out manuscripts. It was useless, wrote Sykes, “to recall to him the environmental odds against him.” Rosenfeld initially brushed aside the “general lack of art-seriousness and [the] growing politicization of thought and emotion,” believing that he should be

²⁷ Douglas, *Terrible Honesty*, 22-3; quotations from O’Neill are also from these pages. Wilson, “Paul Rosenfeld: Three Phases,” in *Voyager in the Arts*, 5.

“more than equal to any and all antagonists.” But eventually he came to recognize the limits to what a thoughtful individual could achieve against formidable cultural obstacles. At that point in the late 1920s he turned to his ensemble efforts: *The American Caravan* projects and “the communal work” that produced *America and Alfred Stieglitz*.²⁸

Rosenfeld’s careful and somewhat unusual efforts at sustaining the integrity of his selfhood gave his ideal of self-transcendence a unique stamp. For him, the self-giving that was the ground of culture had to be accompanied by a constant act of self-possession that had nothing in common with a greedy self-possession because the ultimate dignity of the human person lay in the act of self-donation. Lucie Wiese, a coeditor of *Voyager in the Arts* and Rosenfeld’s literary executrix, described how this understanding of selfhood and self-transcendence informed Rosenfeld’s critical method. Unlike other critics, Rosenfeld was not primarily interested in assigning works to categories or in merely accepting or rejecting them. Rather he peered “into the rearedos of the artist’s mind ’til he perceive[d] the pattern of the tapestry,” and then said “he means to say, and says it thus.” Rosenfeld, she said, took upon himself “the offset of the doer’s design so that the *decalquage* became his very own...It is the sinking of the critic’s ego and the sublimation of the artist’s id.” For Wiese, Rosenfeld practiced “this empathetic reflection to a superb extent, and depth. A mature critic, he kept himself so stripped of his own purports that those whose firstling works he scanned came to look upon him as their other selves.” For Lewis Mumford such empathy towards artists and their work, distinguished Rosenfeld from Bourne,

²⁸Gerald Sykes, “The Archangel’s Correspondent,” in *Voyager in the Arts*, 173.

Brooks, Frank, and “their original leader,” James Oppenheim. “Of all these good men,” Mumford wrote, “Rosenfeld was the most generous and outgoing to all the new manifestations in the arts: the readiest to search sand and grit, laboriously, for the sake of the grain or two of gold he might bring to light, the most ready to submerge his own identity in that of other creative talents.” This self-subordination was for Mumford the essence of Rosenfeld’s maieutic art, and made him “a skilled helper to those who labored in the spirit.”²⁹

Insofar as Rosenfeld sustained a commitment to higher loyalties beyond the self, his antimodernism, even after 1914 when it embraced modernist modes of expression, sustained a protest against narrow and reductionist views of reality, whether they were proffered by old line positivists or the proponents of “terrible honesty.” As noted earlier, in general, turn-of-the-century antimodernism failed to realize its potential as a critical or “subversive” counter-current to the dehumanizing forces in modern American culture precisely because the pursuit of “real life” and intensity of experience became “merely self-referential.” Accordingly, antimodernism offered a very limited foundation upon which to construct alternative cultural values. “Instead,” Lears writes, “it became assimilated--largely if not entirely--to a new idiom of domination. The new idiom was therapeutic rather than religious; it promised self-fulfillment through intense experience rather than salvation through self-denial; it expressed a new version of possessive individualism for a new corporate society.” By way of contrast, Rosenfeld, even as he energetically engaged modern music, art, and literature, represented, in principle, a line of

²⁹ Lucie Wiese, “A Man of Empathy” and Lewis Mumford, “Lyric Wisdom,” in *Voyager in the Arts*, 108-9, 48, 69; Phillip Platt to Albert Godbout, 1963, Rosenfeld Papers.

unreconstructed antimodernists who refused to capitulate to a consumer culture based principally upon an ethic of self-gratification. Rosenfeld's early explorations of antimodernist themes, particularly chivalry and romantic love, led him in his adulthood to appreciate the cultural importance of self-giving and a view of reality that leaves it open to the transcendent.³⁰

But as Rosenfeld prepared to leave Riverview Academy for Yale University, he did not yet foresee that his antimodern sensibilities could find their outlet in criticism. Writing in the yearbook of the Riverview Military Academy Class of 1908, Rosenfeld had his heart set on writing fiction. He predicted that after graduating from Columbia Law School, where he would be "the original literary delight," he would serve for a while as "the attorney for one of Brooklyn's largest breweries," and then retire early and return to his writing. But in 1908 these aspirations were far from settled in his mind, for even in his imagined retirement, a life dedicated to writing fiction seemed not to fit him. As he himself put it, "he was still searching for his affinity."³¹

³⁰ Lears, *No Place of Grace*, xii.

³¹ Paul Rosenfeld, "The Prophecy" in *The Riverview Orbit* (Poughkeepsie, New York: Riverview Military Academy, 1908), 12-18.

Chapter IV

Prelude to the Grand Transformation Scene, 1908-1913

In an autobiographical essay Paul Rosenfeld wrote in the early 1940s for *Twice a Year* he referred to the years between his graduation from the Riverview Academy in 1908 and the beginning of his professional career with *The Seven Arts* in 1915 as a “grand transformation scene.” It was a period in which he underwent a dramatic conversion to modern forms of artistic expression prompted by his hearing of music by Alexander Scriabin, Leo Ornstein, Igor Stravinsky, Bela Bartok, Arnold Schoenberg, Edgard Varese and other twentieth-century composers. Concert-going consumed Rosenfeld’s interest during his teens, so much so that the recitals and concerts he heard during the 1910s form the main thread of his autobiographical writing on this period of his life. Around Rosenfeld’s history of concerts is closely woven important developments in his aesthetic, literary, philosophical, and ethical sensibilities.

A certain restlessness with the concert life of the 1910s preceded Rosenfeld’s “grand transformation.” It stemmed from his growing sense that the expressive rapture of Richard Strauss, Max Reger, Gustav Mahler, and the other neo-Romantic composers whose music dominated concert programs of the period had little to do with the experience of modern life. The “awareness” that had once “passed in ecstasy” in the concert hall no longer sufficed. Although such music occasioned a self-transcendence of sorts, it remained essentially a self-referential aesthetic experience, devoid of ethical significance. What he wanted was music that communicated something of the moral essence of the present world in which he lived, and, in

particular, engaged, enlivened, and mediated the rapidly changing cityscape of New York. Immediately preceding Rosenfeld's embrace of musical modernism he was unsettled by the disjuncture between the music of the concert halls and the new industrial and commercial realities of New York, "the flat buildings on upper Broadway the electric signs and automobile displays." As he put it, "I had an almost comic awareness of a world successive to the lyrical" that had as yet been given no expression in music.¹

Rosenfeld's dissatisfaction with what he regarded as mere lyricism was not a repudiation of the autonomous aesthetic musical experience but a desire for something fuller, something that brought together the aesthetic and the moral. The "grand transformation" he underwent during his mid-twenties was actually the reconciliation of two social and intellectual traditions in which he had been immersed since his boyhood: the bourgeois and the romantic. Recently, the musicologist Carl Dahlhaus has done much to illuminate the relation of these traditions, identifying each of them with a particular way of thinking about and experiencing art and music. It was typical of the bourgeois mind, for instance, to understand music and the other arts as "means of discourse about problems of morality, i.e. the social coexistence of human beings." Romantics, such as Karl Philipp Moritz, whose writings influenced Goethe, and Schiller, fashioned a view of music in opposition to the bourgeois view. For them the appropriate response to music and the work of art in general was one of "aesthetic contemplation" in which self and world are forgotten." For these romantics such self-forgetting was the summit of "the

¹ Rosenfeld, "Grand Transformation Scene--1907-1915," 354-5.

pure and unselfish pleasure that beauty grants us.”²

For Rosenfeld the enlargement of the experience of music extended not only to moral and social questions, which concerned people, but also to concerns for the physical things with which he came into contact. Rosenfeld was among those early twentieth-century New Yorkers who were highly sensitive to the importance of their city’s changing spaces and structures in their lives, and expected composer, artists, and writers to help mediate these changes. William R. Taylor’s *In Pursuit of Gotham* (1992), is a history of how city dwellers such as Rosenfeld learned to live amid their new physical surroundings, and “to enhance its disruptive character with a new aesthetic that found positive qualities in its forms and modalities.” Like Alfred Stieglitz, who Taylor recognizes as the first photographer to see in the city of New York the source of a great creative potential for raising photography to the level of a fine art, Rosenfeld saw the rhythms and the sounds of New York as largely untapped sources that cried out for treatment by American composers. He therefore listened carefully for composers whose music captured the new elements of modern urban existence, but which also brought the listener into contact with the deeper, unchanging verities from they sprang. Unapologetic about his Platonic conception of art, Rosenfeld expected modern artists to do what artists had always done: probe beneath the historical expressions of human culture to communicate its perennial truths about the human condition. To claim that modern urban, industrial life was inhospitable to artistic creation as Harold Stearns had done, was to imply or perhaps even concede that a truly human culture was impossible in twentieth-century America. Rosenfeld therefore searched for new modes of

² Carl Dalhaus, *The Idea of Absolute Music* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), 4-5.

musical expression, not for the sake of facilitating uncritically his and others' adjustment to modern urban life, or to justify it. He did so rather to discover insights into its "deep-lying forces," or, as he read in Lawrence Gilman's *Music of To-Morrow*, "the vibrations of the spirit beneath."³

Before 1914 Rosenfeld had been ignorant of the most recent developments in European music, in part because there were few outlets for them in America and they received little serious attention in the American press. Fed a steady diet of lush neo-Romantic music, Rosenfeld had come to expect little in the way of strikingly new musical developments from American orchestras. "In those days" he remembered, concerts and recitals of new music "promised me nothing." His discouragement abated when, during a tour of Europe, he heard the music of Russian composers Scriabin, Ornstein, and Stravinsky. Their compositions, he wrote, were "the direct sounds of souls in contact with present existence: infinitely delicate and serious representations of the complex and nervous pattern of experience rising out of the relationship between the organism and the modern environment; encouragements to the accurate expression of every living sensation, perception, emotion." In these composers he found a voice for his own heretofore unarticulated experience of urban, industrial existence, for what he too had felt before "machinery," and "swinging cranes and rusty derricks," and "under bridges [and] mountainy stone masses." In part, it was his enthusiasm for these composers that prompted him

³ William R. Taylor, *In Pursuit of Gotham* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 1-8; Lawrence Gilman, *The Music of Tomorrow and Other Studies* (Port Washington, New York: Kennukat Press, 1907), 11.

to consider a career in music criticism. Such music as theirs, he decided, was crucially important for sustaining a living tradition of artistic expression, and in turn a genuinely human culture. As a critic of music he could place his talent for writing at the service of introducing Americans to the new European music and to encourage American composers to develop a modern musical vocabulary of their own.⁴

On the face of it Rosenfeld's embrace of modernism appears to be a turning away from his earlier antimodernism, with its antipathy to modern existence and its cultural and artistic expressions, and a capitulation to its industrial and urban character. But like Henry Adams, whom Rosenfeld admired greatly, and some other American antimodernists, Rosenfeld's understanding of modernism is a logical extension and a refinement of the main currents of the antimodernist position. For example, a consistent theme in both Rosenfeld's antimodernist and modernist phases, is a strong antipathy to the desacralization of twentieth-century life. Modern music fulfilled his antimodernist longing to restore a sense of mystery and sacredness to "the externalities of nature and her creatures" and to the interior realm of the self, both of which had been "desanctified" and even deadened by the predominance of a positivistic and rationalist view of existence. The composers whom he had been hearing before his exposure to the moderns--Strauss, Mahler, Charles Loeffler, Victor Herbert, and even Claude Debussy--had failed to satisfy this longing; their music left the world "without bloom, without mystery; dusty, smart and empty." Ignoring the new physical realities of twentieth-century life, their music "drove home the sense of the passage of the deep, dark world where springs murmured and lilacs hung; the

⁴Rosenfeld, "Grand Transformation Scene--1907-1915," 359-60.

substitutions of a hard, external direction of the spirit through science and commerce.” Yet another consistency between Rosenfeld’s antimodernism and his modernism is his dissent from the pervasive materialism of modern industrial life. Striking a theme common to many modernists of the early twentieth century, Rosenfeld exalted the spiritual above the material, which in the sphere of music meant the liberation of concert music from the pervasive influence of Wagner, whose massive music epitomized for Rosenfeld the desire for “material triumph” and “the victory of industrialism.” Freed from Wagnerian weightiness, the music of the new European composers he heard soared “into spiritual realms.”⁵

In view of these consistencies Rosenfeld can be called an “antimodern modernist,” a term that T. J. Jackson Lears applies to Henry Adams. Rosenfeld, like Adams, held fast to a critique of the “secular, urban, bourgeois culture of the modern West” that was informed by an undogmatic, non-creedal, religious sensibility. In Rosenfeld’s case this sensibility derived mostly from Platonism and the mysticism of the neo-Platonic philosophers. Rosenfeld discovered the writings of Plotinus while he was a graduate student at Columbia University from 1912 to 1913, prompting a transformation in him even more fundamental than his more celebrated turn to modern music. For his discovery of Plato and Plotinus provided the theoretical grounding and justification for the moral elements in his aesthetic. To be sure, as a member of the European-American bourgeoisie Rosenfeld expected music and the other arts to engage moral and social concerns, but his study of Platonism and neo-Platonism supplied him with a set of convincing first principles to justify this expectation. His reading of Plato and Plotinus

⁵ Rosenfeld, “Grand Transformation Scene--1907-1915,” 354-60, “Alfred Stieglitz,” *Commonweal*, 2 August 1946, 381, and *Musical Portraits*, 7; Lears, *No Place of Grace*, xi.

convinced him that there existed an “inner truth of things” which it is the artist’s task to reveal and to communicate to his or her audiences. Before Rosenfeld’s discovery of Plato, he was more quickly dismissive of music that violated the existing canons of composition; afterward, having become more sensitive to the possibility that a deeper significance underlay what he was hearing, he listened more patiently and attentively, entering more fully into the mind of the composer and allowing him the chance to communicate some essential truth by way of his music. Rosenfeld’s embrace of Platonism also contributed to his belief in the privileged role of the artist in a complex civilization as one who through their works reveals the very ground of being which would otherwise go undiscovered to those caught up in the frenzy of modern existence.⁶

The main elements of Rosenfeld’s modernism—its “religious sense,” and its aspiration to the “ideal” and to “spiritual growth”—enabled him to resist absorption into the twentieth-century cult of self-fulfillment and consumption precisely because its loyalties were to “absolute values” beyond the self, and preeminently the value of self-giving. Such was not the case for a competing strain of modernism that sprang from non-religious origins and included, according to Lears, such figures as Alfred Jarry, Guillaume Apollinaire, and e.e. cummings. This more secular wing of modernism, even though it too at times advanced sharp criticisms of historical modernity, according to Lears, “was more easily accommodated to newer, more permissive modes of capitalist cultural hegemony. Under a twentieth-century regime which multiplied wants and sanctioned total gratification, the avant-garde cult of self-fulfillment sometimes only

⁶ Rosenfeld, “Alfred Stieglitz,” 381, and “Grand Transformation Scene--1907-1915,” 355; Lears, *No Place of Grace*, 296-7.

exaggerated the culture it set out to repudiate.”⁷

Rosenfeld’s “antimodern modernism” was also unique in America insofar as its impulse and concern was primarily musical and not literary. Although he saw the new painting and sculpture at the Armory Show in 1913 before his “grand transformation,” it did not jolt him the way the new music did. Modern music, as it turned out, not only transformed the way Rosenfeld saw New York’s city scapes, it also prompted his deeper understanding of painting, and, in some instances, even literature. In this respect, Rosenfeld followed in the steps of the music critic Lawrence Gilman, whose writings he strained his eyes to read at night in the dimly lit closet of his dormitory room at Riverview. For Rosenfeld, as for Gilman, music was the interpretive key for understanding modernity and its cultural products. Music in the early twentieth, wrote Gilman, was the best suited of all the arts to capture and express “the order of mysticism which has crept into being in our time.” As he looked ahead in 1907 to the music of the future Gilman predicted a new music that would realize as yet “undiscovered potencies of communication, of revelation.” It would be a new “speech” that was at once “luminous and esoteric, importunate and profound,” which would lead us closer “to the gates of our being.....where are the fountain-heads.” In Rosenfeld’s criticism of music, he too wrote of modernism in music and the arts as foremost a “language or dialect,” one unique to the modern era that however unclear or even undecipherable it was still no less than the language of any other historical period a communication of some enduring truth.⁸

⁷ Rosenfeld, “Bernanos and the Catholic Novel,” 31; Lears, *No Place of Grace*, 296-7.

⁸ Gilman, *Music of To-morrow*, 14-5; Rosenfeld “Alfred Stieglitz,” *Commonweal*, 381.

Finally, Rosenfeld's happy discovery of the Platonic tradition was part of his deepening sense during the early 1910s of the enduring relevance of the Ancients. Immersed in classicism from boyhood, the thought and culture of Antiquity not only informed his aesthetic sensibilities, but also his social thought and practices during this "grand transformation" period of his life. Typically, when faced with something new, whether in the arts or in social life, Rosenfeld took the measure of its value against the writers of Antiquity. Thus, for example, confronted with the ubiquitous cult of friendship and fraternity at Yale and the disingenuousness that often animated it, he reflected seriously on the classical ideal of friendship found in such works as Plato's *Lysis*, Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, and Cicero's *On Friendship*. These reflections found their outlet in his fiction, poetry, and essays for the *Yale Literary Magazine*, a periodical which when he joined its editorial staff in 1911 also provided him with his first experience of serious friendship, and the prototype of his "ensemble idea." The friendships he had developed with the four other editors of the *Yale Lit*, as it was called, reminded him of the teaching of Plato and Aristotle, among other ancient writers, who proposed friendship as perhaps the most appropriate, even necessary, context for intellectual inquiry.⁹

But the most fundamental value that Rosenfeld brought forward from the Ancients was the sense that the real was the spiritual. The ancient Greeks' notion that the spirit was both real and substantial lay at the root of Rosenfeld's modernist preference for the enduring value of the spirit and the soul. Greek metaphysics understood God as an immaterial being, *nous*, and man as a rational animal whose soul (*psyche*) was not only real but more real than the body. The

⁹Rosenfeld, "Autobiography," 240.

latter was passive and determined by the soul; but the former was the active and dynamic principle of life, incorruptible, indivisible, and immortal. In the twentieth century the most pressing challenge to this time-honored dualism derived not so much from the materialism associated with industrialism and the growing cult of consumption, but rather from a pervasive preoccupation with empirical values, which centered human attention on the world's tangible things. Rosenfeld agreed with Carl Jung's assessment of the new, twentieth-century notion of reality, whereby a "metaphysics of matter" had supplanted a "metaphysics of mind." For Rosenfeld, as for Jung, this shift was "an unexampled revolution in man's outlook upon the world." Rosenfeld's modernism based upon the classical belief that reality is the unseen ran up against the increasingly dominant view that what is real is everything that can be experienced in space and time. The unreal in this view is whatever is claimed to exist but does not square with this norm. On these premises "the religious sense," which Rosenfeld thought to be the great desideratum of American culture, belonged to the unreal. Rosenfeld, therefore, through his criticism of music, the visual arts, and literature combated the notion of religion sensibility as mere illusion, and sought to reestablish its historical identification with reality.¹⁰

Volker at Yale

The development of Rosenfeld's thinking about the arts and their relation to the wider culture is inseparable from his search for community, fellowship, and above all, friendship. Rosenfeld's high school story, "Percy the Poet," reflects a rather mature appreciation for the importance of

¹⁰ Rosenfeld, "Psychoanalysis and God," *The Nation*, 23 April 1938, 510-11; Carl Jung, *Modern Man in Search of a Soul* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1933), 174.

the social and cultural context of the arts, and his scorn for social pretensions and deception in human relations, especially where the arts were concerned. This vehement dislike for disingenuousness made him particularly critical of what he perceived to be the pervasive insincerity in the character of Yale's social life. Yale undergraduates' effusive praise for friendship seemed to him artificial, and instrumental toward their main end, social prestige. Ever tactful in his criticism, Rosenfeld included himself among his "beloved classmates" when he told them in a 1911 essay entitled, "From a German Forest," for *The Yale Lit.* that one thing consumed them and him "with heart, soul and mind--social distinction." From "the opening of Freshman year," he said, "we craved certain friendships...because we wanted to get somewhere, to see ourselves rewarded with success."¹¹

Put off by this cult of success and the lack of authenticity it promoted, Rosenfeld "roomed alone," preferring to remain on the periphery of Yale's undergraduate life. His German-Jewish background and his preparation at a less distinguished academy further contributed to his relative isolation, for they almost automatically excluded him from the more high profile, mainly Anglo-Saxon social circles on campus. According to his closest friend at Yale, Philip Platt, a chemistry major, Rosenfeld's circle of friends at Yale "was small at first, mostly limited to the literati which his position on *The Yale Literary Magazine* assured him. But he had the respect of a number of his more discriminating classmates." Platt himself regarded Rosenfeld as "an artistic, brilliant soul," and an "unfailing source of information and inspiration

¹¹Rosenfeld, "From a German Forest," *The Yale Literary Magazine* (October 1911): 2-3.

on matters of literature, art, music.”¹²

The image of Rosenfeld as a comparatively solitary figure who kept company with a small circle of friends is a fairly common one. Although famous for his gregarious personality, he was stolid in his bearing and serious in purpose, traits which kept some at bay. Rosenfeld’s photograph in the *History of the Class of 1912* suggested to the historian, Sherman Paul, a face that is “a bit Prussianly severe.” The personal history below the photo reveals no nickname for Rosenfeld similar to the “Haps,” and “Buds” printed under other portraits in the yearbook; gone is “Beccy,” Rosenfeld’s *Riverview Orbit* nickname. It also reveals the main circles he traveled in-- Chi Delta Theta, the Pundits, and the editorial board of *The Yale Lit.* the least popular publication on campus according to the class survey. Through his membership in the close-knit Pundits, one of Yale’s most “prankish and arcane” clubs, he befriended Cole Porter (‘13), William Bullitt (‘12), and Waldo Frank (‘11).¹³

Rosenfeld was among the few affluent and predominantly secularized sons of German Jews attending Yale before the Great War. Even at Yale, the Ivy League school most open to ethnic pluralism in the early twentieth century, all Jews, according to the historian Daniel Oren, still faced bigotry and obstacles to their social advancement set before them by other, non-Jewish students. One way Jews were stymied socially at Yale was by their exclusion from Yale’s infamous Secret or Senior Societies. Social prestige at Yale and one’s success after graduation

¹² “Paul Leopold Rosenfeld,” *History of the Class of 1912* (New Haven: Yale University, 1912), 276; Philip Platt to Albert E. Godbout, 1963, Rosenfeld Papers.

¹³ “Paul Leopold Rosenfeld,” *History of the Class of 1912*, 276; Sherman Paul, “Paul Rosenfeld,” in *Port of New York*, vii-viii; Daniel A. Oren, *Joining the Club: A History of Jews and Yale* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 340-1.

attended upon election to one of these Societies. Only the top 15 percent of each class rose to the status of the elect, supposedly in recognition of their talent--not necessarily academic-- and the contribution they had made to life at Yale. The formal power of these Societies subsisted within the network of fraternities on campus. Insofar as fraternity members elected those students to the Senior Societies who took part in the "right" activities or moved in the "right" social circles, they and the Senior Societies powerfully shaped undergraduate life at Yale, and sometimes very directly, significantly affected the institutions of American society. "The influence of Secret Society alumni in American academe, business, and government," Oren writes, "was (and remains) substantial."¹⁴

Rosenfeld, who did not receive election into one of these societies, was profoundly aware of the great and wide influence of the Yale Societies, and the social and financial advantages that accrued to their members. Writing perhaps in part to steel himself against the less privileged path that lay ahead of him after Yale because he had not been elected to a Society, Rosenfeld reminded his classmates in one of his editorials for *The Yale Lit.* that "an election to a Senior Society isn't by any means a proof of superiority." Turning exclusion into an asset, Rosenfeld viewed non-election was an occasion for self-conquest, self-discovery, noble work, and genuine fraternity. It "is as much a benefit to those let out as those included," he wrote. "For, the man excluded has the greatest chance in the world; he has to fight himself, and he that conquers himself, we know, is the strongest. Not only that, for he has to find himself. He discovers the thing he can rely on--ability to do a man's work, and the love of his friends." Indeed, Rosenfeld

¹⁴ Oren, *Joining the Club*, 27.

concluded, "if a man turns sour" after not being elected to a Senior Society, "he proves he is unworthy of the honor."¹⁵

This criticism of the Secret Societies reveals vividly Rosenfeld's fierce individualism, which, because it was always tempered by the value he placed on the necessity of authentic friendship, never degenerated into rugged individualism. It is important to grasp the right understanding of Rosenfeld's idea of individualism because during the 1920s Rosenfeld's critics characterized his insistence on the artist's responsibility to communicate effectively with his public--its disposition to the arts and the artist notwithstanding--as an expression of "rugged individualism." Rosenfeld's individualism is best seen not in opposition to communal cooperation and civic responsibility, but to unthinking conformity. Although he himself was a product of the Euro-American bourgeoisie, Rosenfeld nevertheless in his critical writing at Yale and later on during the interwar years attacked its tendency to conformism. In his "German Forrest" essay he acknowledged the many virtues and good qualities of his classmates, among them "their whole-hearted love of athletics, healthy ideas in regard to women, [and] good citizenship." But he also upbraided them for being "complacent, self-satisfied, dead," and obsessed with social position to the exclusion of other ideals necessary for civic life. "But there are things that exalt life into a poem," he wrote, "there are things that glorify and console, there are spiritual windows and we know them not. For we are dead. We have no individuality, we have no imagination, no love for art, enthusiasm for little besides sport, absolutely no passion,

¹⁵ Rosenfeld, "Volker the Fiddler," *The Yale Literary Magazine* (March 1912): 196-7.

neither for God nor Man.”¹⁶

Conformism not only impoverished the individual person but had social consequences including the debasement of education. The “faculty and the social system” at Yale, he wrote, molded undergraduates into a “type,” and sustained the influences that had since birth conspired to blind his classmates to all else but “social success.” Some Yale professors he thought had taken the late works of Tolstoy seriously “and decided to throw out Beethoven so that we may all be simple, unsophisticated *moujiks*.” Apparently the faculty had forgotten that social reform and human betterment required heroic souls and “intellectual giants.” Given Yale’s preeminence in providing leaders for American institutions, and Rosenfeld’s own commitment to community service, which learned to value at Riverview, the entire issue for Rosenfeld came down to the question of “real public service.” Rosenfeld wrote in 1911: “The nation asks for bread, and we are allowed to petrify, and develop a sense of humor.” Yale it seemed would turn out many “little ‘pillars of society,’” but “men of no intellectual prominence” or “fire.” Having formed men by “faulty standards,” by demanding little of them, and by valuing them for “what they don’t do,” Rosenfeld wrote, even “the devil wouldn’t buy one of our souls.”¹⁷

As an antidote to the conformism of his time, which came to be equated with conservatism, Rosenfeld called for “a true conservatism” that looked to the past to sustain a radical critique of the present rather than conformist conservatism content with modest reform programs. Anticipating the charge from some quarters that his enthusiasm for ideas, love of

¹⁶Rosenfeld, “From a German Forest,” *The Yale Literary Magazine* (October 1911): 2-3

¹⁷ *Ibid.* 4.

beauty, and, in general, his call for “the transvaluation of all values,” was merely a self-indulgent aestheticism, Rosenfeld argued that such charges ignored his emphasis on other-directed community service that linked his classmates’ desire for power to ideals. Rosenfeld then struck the theme that informed his life’s work--the need for a rich interior life that was integrally connected to “absolute values” external to the self. “I am not talking aestheticism or subtle emotion. I insist on the love of what is fine in art, thought, in prophesy only because such love is the expression of inward depth and riches and bigness, whereas love of success is the expression of an abysmal vulgarity. Love of power bridled with worthy ideals will carry you far; given free reign, will destroy. The nation needs idealists far more than it needs good business men.” Ideals for Rosenfeld meant “something that comes from the inner heart” and that directs effort “away from the pigmy prominence” to which Yale undergraduates aspired. Above all they referred to authentically human goods irreducible to utilitarian ends “We must write because we love art; we must act because we love acting and poetry; we must make friends because we crave friendship; we must go to prayers because we love God. Believe that it is enough to do something fine; believe that virtue rewards itself; love something outside of yourself--otherwise your work is worth nothing.”¹⁸

Rosenfeld’s interest in Yale’s Secret Societies as symbols of the cult of success persisted after he graduated from Yale in 1912. In April 1913 he wrote Platt about an article on the “S----- S-----“ that he was preparing for publication in the *Yale Independent*. The article was a response to the *Independent*’s call for an open discussion on the nature and purpose of these

¹⁸ Ibid.

societies in view of Yale's commitment to the fair treatment of all of its students irrespective of their ethnicity and social class. Rosenfeld never submitted his article because he remained undecided about what to say. One idea that never got to print was "an imaginary conversation without a conclusion, and that would not do for the *Independent*." In outlining the exchange in this unpublished fictitious dialogue, Rosenfeld exhibited no bitterness toward the Societies, nor did he indicate that he had suffered any maltreatment from their members because he was Jewish. In fact, the very existence of an open debate in the *Independent* encouraged him because it signaled progress toward better realizing Yale's ideal of fairness. Yet, paradoxically, he worried that in writing on the Secret Societies he might suffer an unpleasant backlash, not so much for what he would say, but rather for the mere act of breaking the cult of secrecy surrounding the Yale Societies. Before Rosenfeld decided finally to scrap the whole idea of writing on the Societies he wrote Platt: "I shall do my best to be just, and show that the present agitation [over the Secret Societies] but a proof of Yale's vitality in adjusting itself to present conditions. Of course, if I have the luck to have this paper accepted, it will queer me, I suppose, but I wouldn't miss such an opportunity to talk in public for worlds." Alas, he allowed the opportunity to pass him by.¹⁹

Such ambivalence toward Yale was already evident early in Rosenfeld's undergraduate career. Against those such as his friend Platt who scorned Yale for its undemocratic character, and its preferential treatment of the wealthy and well-born, Rosenfeld insisted that Yale was "still the 'poor man's college'" precisely because its system of preferences presented an

¹⁹ Rosenfeld to Philip Platt 18 April 1913, Rosenfeld Papers.

opportunity for one to be an “overcomer,” and to “conquer one’s self.” Moreover, while his editorials in *The Yale Lit.* spoke frankly about the shortcomings of the faculty, curriculum, and the undergraduate life at Yale, he remained fiercely loyal toward “strong Mother Yale.” Only one issue provoked anything like outrage in him, and that was the maltreatment of undergraduates entering Yale from less prestigious prep schools. “Those who need a fair show are deprived of it right off,” Rosenfeld wrote Platt. Apparently two of Rosenfeld’s cousins who succeeded him at Yale had been assigned inferior rooms on campus allegedly because they weren’t from the first tier preparatory academies. “Is Yale so badly off that it has to cater to the big prep-schools?” In a moment of bellicosity Rosenfeld said that if he had “absolute proof” that their inferior assignments had been deliberate he would “raise one of [his] old-fashioned howls in the *Alumni Weekly*.”²⁰

Besides Rosenfeld’s criticisms of Yale’s cliquey social life, he extended the criticisms of Yale’s intellectual life that he began in the “German Forest” essay. The two strains of criticism—the social and the intellectual—overlapped in his thinking. “Conduct is everything and ideas nothing” at Yale, wrote Rosenfeld. Increasingly, the course of study at Yale was being redirected toward “training” for the professions. George Pierson, an historian of Yale, describes early twentieth-century Yale as “the mother of colleges and outstanding citizens,” which, as Rosenfeld had seen plainly, translated into an emphasis on social advancement at the expense of the integrity of the academic disciplines, respect for the enduring importance of liberal learning,

²⁰ Rosenfeld, “From a German Forest,” 2-6, and “Volker the Fiddler,” 195-8; Rosenfeld to Platt 8 May 1913, Rosenfeld Papers.

and, in general, the life of the mind. A committee of Yale faculty reported in 1903 that “scholarship has apparently declined throughout the country; certainly at Yale.” Among Yale graduates, writes Pierson, “Euclid would be forgotten. The Greek and Latin, too.” Yale “trained you to work. It made you a man and fitted you for public trust....Yale made you succeed in life and in your success remained the best part of you.” The History of the Class of 1914, for example, seemed to savor its distinction of having “more gentlemen and fewer scholars than any other class in the memory of man.” The profile of Rosenfeld’s Class of 1912 was similar to what Pierson saw in the Class of 1914; indeed both classes typified most of the graduating classes of the early twentieth century at Yale and at the other Ivy League schools. Among the 298 who graduated from Yale with Rosenfeld, 57 were headed for the law, 54 for business, 20 for medicine, and 10 for finance; the rest were uncommitted to a field. Whether or not they were settled on a vocation, the members of the Yale class of 1912 radiated an indomitable confidence signified by the tone the entries in its yearbook: “Symington will enter Wall Street.” Among the courses that this class found most valuable were “Social Conditions,” “Elementary Economics” and “Tennyson and Browning,” the last one was taught by the highly popular William (Billy) Phelps. Rudyard Kipling was its favorite prose writer; Alfred Lord Tennyson, its favorite poet. “Crossing the Bar” was the favorite poem, and Scott's *Ivanhoe*, the favorite novel. Politically, the members of the Class of 1912 were mainly Republicans, with a majority of them supporting William H. Taft in the forthcoming U.S. Presidential elections.²¹

Rosenfeld's name does not appear in any of the prestigious categories in the Class of 1912

²¹ George W. Pierson, *Yale College: An Educational History, 1871-1921* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952), 3-4, 7, 25. *History of the Class of 1912*, 1-10.

yearbook, which were “best athlete,” “best dressed,” “best natured,” “most original,” or “most brilliant.” But he did make it onto the least prestigious list of the “most scholarly.” As Oren writes in history of Yale, “Enthusiastic intellectuals” were among the most despised undergraduates along with the “grade grubbers.” Rosenfeld’s own lamentations about his schoolmates’ indifference to the life of the mind supports Oren’s assertion. “Go and listen for ideas in undergraduate conversation!” Rosenfeld wrote. “I confess it is pleasing to find that the undergraduate body loses no sleep sighing for Academe, but it is depressing to find evidence that practically no reading is done. In the line of thought our assets are a few parlor agnostics and a debating society that evokes flattering comparisons with the Oxford Union.” Turning to his own major field of study, Rosenfeld predicted that no great author would come from the English department because its students “feel nothing,” and seem unwilling to open themselves to inspiration from something beyond themselves.” In the end, the lack of seriousness about ideas made “splendid slaves of us all,” and undermined everything that made for deserving prominence.²²

For the intellectual stimulation and fellowship he sought, Rosenfeld relied not only on his friends on the editorial board of the *Yale Lit* but also on those in the Pundits. Billy Phelps, the group’s founder, handpicked its ten members, who then tried to conceal themselves from “the barbarian world” behind their motto, “T.B.I.Y.T.B” – “The Best is yet to be” -- from Browning’s “Rabbi Ben Ezra”: “Grow old along with me!/ The best is yet to be,/ The last of life, for which the first was made.” Phelps’s enthusiasm for new literature, his infectious cheerfulness, and his

²² “Paul Leopold Rosenfeld,” *History of the Class of 1912*, 276; Oren, *Joining the Club*, 20, 340-1; Rosenfeld, “From a German Forest,” 4-6.

love for sports made him an attractive figure among Yale students; many of them forgot what they learned in his course on Tennyson and Browning--popularly known as "T & B," but they never forgot Phelps. Phelps contradicted the conventional image of the austere and intransigent gentile professor. Indeed, he stirred up some controversy when he introduced his undergraduates to such modern writers as Ibsen, Tolstoy, and others, many of whom Rosenfeld had already read during his Riverview years. With Phelps's encouragement, Rosenfeld deepened and broadened his interest in contemporary writers. He read more of William Morris, and immersed himself in the writings of George Meredith (1828-1909), William B. Yeats (1865-1939), George Moore (1852-1933), Walter Pater (1839-94), and Arthur Symons (1865-1945). These last four writers inspired the "high style" that, for better or worse, marked Rosenfeld's prose writing. Rosenfeld first met Waldo Frank through the Pundits. Later, in the mid-1910s, Frank would play an important role in Rosenfeld's professional career in music criticism by introducing him to the composer Leo Ornstein, the philanthropist Claire Reis, and by inviting him to help start *The Seven Arts* magazine. Whereas Rosenfeld owed Phelps a debt of well-timed encouragement and good fellowship; Frank owed him much more. It was through Phelps's efforts that Frank graduated Yale in 1911 with the highly prestigious, honorary title of "Fellow of the University."²³

Although Rosenfeld earned high grades at Yale in the common course of study leading toward a Bachelor of Arts in English, his academic performance fell short of Frank's dazzling

²³ Robert Kimball, ed., *Cole* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1971), xi; Joan Shelley Rubin, *The Making of Middlebrow Culture* (Chapel Hill & London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 282; Rosenfeld, *By Way of Art*, 308.

record at Yale. Besides the course Rosenfeld took in his major, English, he had concentrations in Languages--Latin, German, and French, and in History. Reflecting back on his college work from middle age Rosenfeld regretted having not studied more philosophy. "What was I doing at college?" he often said to the writer, Gerald Sykes. "I don't know the ABC's of philosophy." He felt particularly hampered by the limited formal college study he had done in the works of Plato, to whom Rosenfeld had an unwavering devotion his whole life. Rosenfeld read Plato mostly on his own at Yale, and fashioned an interpretation of his philosophy on the arts and the moral life that was influenced heavily by his reading of Pater's essays "Pico Della Mirandola" in *The Renaissance*, and "Plato's Aesthetics" in *Plato and Platonism*. Rosenfeld grappled with Platonic ideas his whole life and remained unsatisfied with his grasp of them until he was in his forties. "Would you believe it," he told Sykes in the early 1930s, "I'm just now learning what Plato was all about!" Rosenfeld's Yale transcript indicates that he took only one philosophy course, and apparently missed the opportunity to study with the philosopher William Ernest Hocking, whose work Frank found particularly compelling. Throughout the 1910s Frank corresponded frequently with Hocking on certain philosophical questions and readings of common interest to them both. In 1912, Rosenfeld's final year at Yale, Hocking published *The Meaning of God in Human Experience*, which argued the case for the existence of God and religious belief from the ground of experience. Doubtless Frank discussed Hocking's writings with Rosenfeld during the period of their close association in the mid-1910s. But there is no evidence that Rosenfeld studied with Hocking or knew his work. More's the pity because Rosenfeld would certainly have been receptive to probing more deeply into Hocking's thesis in

The Meaning of God in Human Experience that religion was the “mother of the Arts.”²⁴

The regrets Rosenfeld expressed later in his life about the inadequacy of his philosophical studies at Yale were weighing on him during his senior year, and led him already in 1912 to an extended reflection on the nature and purpose of a liberal education in the modern world. Two months before his graduation he felt a certain anxiousness about soon having to confront “that monster, Life.” To allay his worries and those of classmates who felt as he did, Rosenfeld looked to the “noble fiddler,” Volker of *The Nibelungenlied*. A “gentleman amateur” musician, and a warrior of great physical prowess and flawless courage, Volker conquered by the sword but more often by his art. Throughout *The Nibelungenlied* Volker and his companion in arms, Hagen, were aware of the ultimate doom that would befall them. Nevertheless, Volker did not let fear of this certain end weigh him down; rather he used his musical art to sustain himself and the grim-faced Hagen. At one point in the story, according to Rosenfeld’s interpretation of it, “the strength and art” of Volker’s playing turned back a group of assassins. Volker had come to represent for Rosenfeld the victory of poetry and music over fear and the powerful forces that threaten to crush life.²⁵

But what resources could the graduate draw on to steel himself to face the uncertainties of modern existence in a way consistent with the nobility with which Volker faced his fearsome

²⁴Yale College Scholarship Record for Paul L. Rosenfeld, Class of 1912; Jerome W. Kloucek, *Waldo Frank: The Ground of His Mind and Art* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms, Inc. 1958), 23-52; Mumford, “Lyric Wisdom,” in *Voyager in the Arts*, 51; William Ernest Hocking, *The Meaning of God in Human Experience* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1912), 14. The italics are Hocking’s.

²⁵ Rosenfeld, “Volker the Fiddler,” 195-6, 198; A.T. Hatto, trans., *The Nibelungenlied* (New York: Penguin Books, 1965), 226-29, 337-8.

destiny? Rosenfeld's answer stood in marked contrast to his earlier sharp criticisms of the intellectual life at Yale, and it exemplifies willingness to revise and modify his opinions after more carefully considering criticisms of them. Looking back on his four years, he discovered after all a certain coherence and purpose to the liberal education offered at Yale which had theretofore evaded him, but which he had become convinced was a sufficient and "practical" preparation for the activities that lay before him and his colleagues. Education enabled people "to grow...to get the most life has to offer by bringing them to see it proportionately. A man who knows where to look for happiness has received a liberal education. And Yale offers that sort of learning. One has to go through the whole of college to see what it's all driving at, and many of us face about in our opinions." Rosenfeld's education at Yale, both inside and outside of the classroom, had led him to the great discovery that life's "real difficulties are spiritual ones." Speaking for himself and his classmates, he said, "we are all undergoing the temptation of St. Anthony translated onto modern terms." To counter it they had to assert genuine human ideals against those things that are "overvalued" at Yale and in the wider modern American culture, among them, family background and connections, physical strength and athleticism, and personal attractiveness. The shortcomings of his classmates notwithstanding, Rosenfeld expressed faith that Class of 1912 exemplified "the triumph of idealism and the 'impractical,' of those who have unattainable goals." For Yale had shown them "what most men learn in the labor of a lifetime, that it is only the intangible that they can carry into the earth with them--self-respect, affection, the music of the invisible world." Such intangibles took on real substance, he concluded, in context of authentic friendship, or as he put it in "the warmth emanating from the intergrowth of splendid natures." "To have found five or six men is more than a giant's strength." Thus at his

graduation from Yale, Rosenfeld already saw clearly that a circle of friends was indispensable to sustaining and advancing great human ideals. He would put this lesson into practice throughout his life in the many and varied artistic circles to which he belonged and through which he advanced the works of new American composers, visual artists, writer, and poets.²⁶

Philosophy was not the only discipline that Rosenfeld slighted in his course of study at Yale. His transcript contains no music courses, and unlike the regret he expressed for his neglect of philosophy, his lack of formal study in music never bothered him. But it did bother some writers during the 1920s and 1930s, leading them to question the soundness and usefulness of his music criticism. Why Rosenfeld decided against enrolling in one of Horatio Parker's classes in the history and theory of music for non-music majors is unknown. For beginning in 1916, Rosenfeld was unsurpassed in his persistent advocacy for Parker (1863-1919) and his music. Parker epitomized for Rosenfeld the composer fully engaged with contemporary American life; he was the only American Rosenfeld associated with European composers such as Scriabin, Ornstein, and Stravinsky. Four years after his graduation from Yale Rosenfeld wrote in *The Seven Arts*, "Were it not for Horatio Parker, one might suppose a divorce from reality the inalienable destiny of the American composer." Although Rosenfeld did not study with Parker, he did hear an organ recital of his in Yale's Woolsey Hall in 1911. Parker's playing impressed Rosenfeld as "strikingly authoritative and sincere." It appears also that Rosenfeld attended the premiere of Parker's opera *Mona* at the Metropolitan Opera House in 1912. What further contact

²⁶ Rosenfeld, "Volker the Fiddler," 196-7.

beyond these two events Rosenfeld had with Parker at Yale is unknown, but there probably were others, for Rosenfeld considered himself among the “body of amateurs” that Parker had educated.²⁷

Parker had achieved notoriety in America and in England during the 1890s with his most celebrated work, the church cantata, *Hora Novissima* (1893). In 1912 Parker’s opera, *Mona*, won the Metropolitan Opera prize of \$10,000, but the New York run that went with the prize was a disappointment. While Rosenfeld acknowledged that *Mona* had its flaws, he nevertheless throughout his life championed *Mona* as the finest American opera ever composed. “Today,” wrote Rosenfeld in 1942, “it still stands a peak solitary on the continent,” ranking with Claude Debussy’s *Pelleas and Mellisande* and Richard Strauss’s *Elektra*. Dismissed as a genteel and imitative composer by the early 1940s Parker was “as good as vanished” from America’s musical landscape, a condition which compelled Rosenfeld to remind his readers in *Modern Music* that Parker was “the most cultured, versatile and internationally esteemed American composer of the pre-World-War-I period.” Rosenfeld consider Parker, “one of the parents” of American concert music. His students formed a distinguished group of contemporary American composers “larger than that directed and counseled by any other American musician”; among them were Charles Ives, David Stanley Smith, Roger Sessions, Quincy Porter and Douglas Moore.²⁸

Along with his admiration for Parker’s musical compositions, Rosenfeld celebrated

²⁷ Rosenfeld, “The American Composer,” *Seven Arts* (November 1916): 93, *Discoveries of a Music Critic* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1936), 310, and “One of the Parents,” *Modern Music* (May-June 1942): 215.

²⁸ Rosenfeld, “One of the Parents,” 221; William K. Kearns, *Horatio Parker, 1863-1919* (Metuchen, New Jersey & London: The Scarecrow Press, 1990), 25-6.

Parker's achievements as "organizer, teacher, choral and orchestral conductor." Beginning in 1894 Parker developed Yale's music department "from out a double-room in an ancient edifice with a piano and blackboard for instruments." Like Billy Phelps, Parker did not fit the profile of the genteel professor who stood aloof from ordinary life. Despite Parker's heavy teaching load, he helped to found and then direct and conduct the New Haven Symphony Orchestra as part of his mission to cultivate "a body of [musical] amateurs." Parker's revision of Yale's music curriculum included linking the activities of the music department to the New Haven Symphony. In so doing he formed one of the first university-community orchestras, an innovation which music critics and educators across America held up as a model of university and community cooperation. Moreover, because Parker understood that the technical preoccupations of students composers often overpowered the primary purpose of music--the communication of "musical ideas," Parker arranged for the New Haven Symphony to perform his better students' new compositions so that they could test, not only the quality of their workmanship, but also how well they succeeded in communicating their musical ideas to a lay audience. Parker's efforts at integrating Yale's musical life into that of the city of New Haven caught the attention of a reporter for *The Boston Herald* who expressed extraordinarily high hopes for Parker's work with the New Haven Symphony: "Professor Parker has started out under the patronage of Yale to develop another Boston Symphony." But Parker's work in New Haven did more than enhance the musical life of the community; it partly alleviated the "indifference" that characterized relations between Yale's students and townspeople. For as Daniel Oren points out, "The typical

Yale student thought of New Haven as existing in a universe different from [his] own."²⁹

The Yale Lit

Rosenfeld continued to publish fiction during his four years at Yale, three stories in all. He also expanded into other forms of writing: the essay, a poetry, and drama. His college writing for *The Yale Literary Magazine* continued to develop certain themes from his Riverview stories--the high importance of living by ideals, romantic love, heroic self-sacrifice, and the question of artistic authenticity. His persistent call to idealism, self-conquest, and self-transcendence in the essays "From a German Forrest" (1911) and "Volker the Fiddler" (1912) treated in the foregoing section were outgrowths of these earlier themes. In his college writing Rosenfeld also explored his ideas on authenticity in work and in human relations through fictional treatments of its opposite, falsehood and deception. Finally, Rosenfeld published two critical works on Yeats and Whistler. In these we see Rosenfeld's first expression in cultural nationalism, a main subject of his interwar writing.

Although the theme of nationalism in literature and in painting predominates Rosenfeld's Freshman essay on Yeats (1865-1939) and his sophomore essay on Whistler (1834-1903), they also reflect a continuation of his interest in the musicalization of literature and painting, which he had treated in "Percy the Poet." For both Yeats and Whistler adhered and attempted to realize in their works the "Impressionistic" doctrine made famous by Walter Pater that all art should aspire to the condition of music. For Yeats, said Rosenfeld, beauty emerged from establishing a

²⁹ Rosenfeld, "One of the Parents," 216; Kearns, *Horatio Parker*, 35-6; Oren, *Joining the Club*, 31.

“musical relation” among the elements of “sound and color and form.” This idea received even greater development in Whistler’s thought and painting. It is through Whistler’s rearrangement and refinement of the colors and forms of nature, Rosenfeld wrote, “that Whistler’s art becomes an exquisite music composed of harmonies of color and tone and forms that blend like beautiful sounds.” More than any of his contemporaries, Whistler “realized the law that art should strive, not toward poetry, but after a closer identification of subject-matter and treatment, approaching a condition like music. And this scheme of making painting fulfill the laws of music became the background of his art.” Whistler himself conceived of his paintings as “symphonies” and “nocturnes,” and spoke of their “tonal” manner. His most daring attempt toward realizing a musical idea on canvas was *Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket* (1874), which provoked John Ruskin’s famous line: a “pot of paint flung in the face of the public.”³⁰

Besides the musicalization of poetry and painting, another common element in Rosenfeld’s criticism of Whistler and Yeats is their education among the Pre-Raphaelites. Rosenfeld pointed out to his readers that in 1863 Whistler lived near Dante Rossetti and in that year his paintings were distinctly like those of Rossetti’s, especially “in their evocation of beauty and reverie. But Rossetti’s influence did not persist long in Whistler’s work. For one thing Rossetti’s belief that a painting ought to have some literary value seemed to Whistler “an unwarranted intrusion,” a unnecessary literalism that blocked the assent of his painting toward the state of music. “The Falling Rocket,” with its “absence of the literary and pathetic typifies

³⁰ Walter Pater, *The Renaissance* (New York and Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1961), 21; Rosenfeld, “William Butler Yeats,” *The Yale Literary Magazine* (January 1909): 148, and “Whistler and Japanese Art,” *The Yale Literary Magazine* (November 1909): 55-6, 60.

his own idea of art," which increasingly owed more to the influence of Japanese art than Pre-Raphaelitism.³¹

Rosetti's paintings exerted a greater and more enduring influence on Yeats than they did on Whistler according to Rosenfeld. Yeats thoroughly absorbed from Rosetti the romantic idea that the same external sensations can be realized by an artist alternately in poetry, painting, or music. Moreover, Yeats's understanding of symbolism, which had become central to modern poetry, derived from Rossetti. "Symbolism to them both," wrote Rosenfeld, "means the appeal through the senses to the soul of certain mysterious combinations of words, of the scent of flowers, and of the beauty of women. Roses and poppies were not only to express Love and Sleep--they had qualities of shape and perfume that gave sensations as did music and the curve of a throat."³²

But the most important commonality in Yeats and Whistler that drew Rosenfeld's attention was the presence in their works of self-conscious national elements. What interested him was how their works used expressive vocabularies particular to certain national cultures to transcend the limits of those cultures. For example, in the essay on Yeats, Rosenfeld acknowledged the overtly nationalist strain in some of Yeats' plays, especially *Cathleen ni Hoolihan*. He reminded his readers of how the performance of *Cathleen* ("the Irish Marsallie") provoked riots in Dublin in October 1902 which had to be quelled by a strong force of police. But Rosenfeld's main concern in this essay is to explore the relevance of the ancient Celtic

³¹ Rosenfeld, "Whistler and Japanese Art," 56.

³² Rosenfeld, "William Butler Yeats," 148.

tradition to Yeats's modern nationalism typified by *The Land of Heart's Desire* (1894).

Although teeming with Celtic influences this play, strikes "a truly universal note," which prevents his works from sliding into a narrow parochialism. The existence of an ancient tradition and the ability to access and use it intelligently were, to Rosenfeld's mind, indispensable to the various nationalist youth movements in Europe. The absence of such a tradition in America would in the late 1910s present itself to Rosenfeld as a major impediment to the establishment of an American art, music, and literature.³³

For Rosenfeld, Yeats embodied ancient Celticism, summing up "in himself" the various elements that belong to the contemporary "Celtic Renaissance": "the spirit of the Gallic romance, the delicate mysticism, the intense patriotism, moulding them, with a Saxon cleanness and sanity with his exquisite art." These characteristics of Yeats's poetry, together with the way in which Yeats fused "ancient feeling with modern thought" resonated strongly with Rosenfeld and encouraged him to continue to develop his own aesthetic that blended classicism and modernism. Yet the spirit and material conditions of the Ireland Yeats grew up in could not have been more different than Rosenfeld's experience of America. Whereas turn-of-the-century America pulsed with confidence and material ambition, Ireland during that period had lost its "youth and virility"; it was a land, Rosenfeld said, "out of which all strength [had] gone, where there are only old people who love among dreams and shadow, and children who may grow up half-witted because of the belief in ghosts and fairies." Against this depressed condition, Yeats searched for heroes to reinvigorate his countrymen, and thus revived "the antique Celtic world" in his

³³ Rosenfeld, "William Butler Yeats," 150-1.

romances. "Nature, love, suffering, everything that goes to make up life, is seen through the haze of these romances--the lordly men and women representing, perhaps, the qualities he values most highly."³⁴

The Yeats's essay is the first expression of the importance of memory in Rosenfeld's thinking about the arts. Memory is central to Yeats's work, argued Rosenfeld, not only for its obvious importance in the retrieval of the Celtic heroic age, but also because it is necessary to beauty itself. "Memory," wrote Rosenfeld, "plays a part in beauty." Drawing on Yeats's aesthetic theory as it bore upon human emotions, Rosenfeld explained that impressions of sound, color, and form, because they contain "pre-ordained energies" or because of "long association," evoke in us indefinable and yet precise emotions. As Yeats put it, they "call down among us certain disembodied powers, whose footsteps over our heart we call emotions." Yeats's poem, "The Valley of the Black Pig," exemplified Yeats's remarkable ability to blend memory, emotion, and national feeling. In it the Irish peasantry await the coming of a great battle that will vindicate the power of the unseen God, "master of the still stars and of the flaming door."³⁵

This poem also evokes the tradition of Irish mysticism, and particularly Roman Catholicism which for Rosenfeld is an indispensable feature of Irish nationalism: "A poetry that is essentially Irish must be saturated with the mysticism peculiar to that race." Rosenfeld pointed to another of Yeats's poems, "The Hour Glass," wherein Yeats seized upon "the immensely poetical side" of Roman Catholicism. The poem had a special appeal to Rosenfeld insofar as it

³⁴ Ibid., 146-7.

³⁵ Ibid., 148-9.

spoke with great economy and immediacy to Yeats's struggle with belief in God, and in particular the obstacles that a certain kind of learning presents to unselfconscious faith. The poem's character Teigue the Fool, Rosenfeld wrote, "seems to be the embodiment of the feeling that things divine are revealed "to the pure and the childish when they cannot be comprehended by worldlings and men of learning." A simple man's *Divina Comedia*, "The Hour Glass" for Rosenfeld was "the absolute poetry of religion," and a testament to Yeats's extraordinary "craftsmanship." Central to Rosenfeld's interpretation of the poem was a compact angelic revelation of Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven. "Teigue, do not forget the Three Fires," says the Angel; "the Fire that punishes, the Fire that purifies, and the Fire wherein the soul rejoices forever." Contrasted with this simplicity and directness, "the doubting Wise Man cries in agony to find one creature that believes, 'all creatures that have reason doubt. O that the grass and the planets could speak--somebody has said that they would wither if they doubted O speak to me, O grass blades! O fingers of God's certainty, speak to me. You are millions and you will not speak.'" Dying, Rosenfeld noted, the Wise Man confesses his "beautiful belief." "One sinks in God; we do not see the truth; God sees the truth in us."³⁶

Its particularly Celtic and Catholic quality aside, Yeats's religiosity contributes to its universal appeal, because the world beyond Ireland, according to Rosenfeld, finds other elements in Yeats's use of the Celtic tradition also compelling. By way of the Celtic folk tradition, Yeats explores in *The Land of Heart's Desire* the general themes of alienation, homesickness, and "the indescribable longing for distant unknown things." There is something in "the unearthly beauty

³⁶ Ibid., 149.

of these themes” and in the music of Yeats’s verse that for Rosenfeld is “unmatched in any literature.” Unabashedly and authentically Celtic, the play’s “elfin chorus” transcends the boundaries of Irish ethnicity.

And the lonely of heart is withered away
While the fairies dance in a place apart,...
For they hear the wind laugh and murmur and sing
Of a land where even the old are fair,
And even the wise are merry of tonque ³⁷

While Rosenfeld celebrated the “essentially spiritual” Celtic elements in Yeats’s poetry and drama for giving them their universal appeal, he also pointed out that such a feature in unskilled hands could be as disastrous as art that is too narrowly nationalistic. Asserting a principle that later informed his Americanism, Rosenfeld wrote: “Provincialism is always a menace to poets who narrow themselves into purely patriotic channels alone.” But at the same time a vapid spiritualism by which the poet surrenders himself to “vague reveries and exotic emotions” runs the risk of being “unintelligible to any but himself.” For Rosenfeld Yeats’s singular achievement is his masterful negotiation of these extremes. “He has seized that which is universal in the patriotism of Young Ireland,” wrote Rosenfeld. “Mr. Yeats has something to say to Ireland and the world, and he has said it marvelously well.”³⁸

Finally, Yeats’s interest in the heroic resonated with Rosenfeld’s antimodernism, and particularly with an interest he shared in common with the other Young Americas: the use of a mythic past as the basis for cultural rejuvenation. “In his [Yeats’s] treatment of the great loves

³⁷ Ibid., 152.

³⁸ Ibid., 152-3.

and deaths of the shadowy heroic folk of Gallic myth, he has preserved that element of strength and fervor alike in all northern romances.” Although Rosenfeld modified his position on the ethical and social importance of Yeats’s work, here Rosenfeld saw in Yeats a model for how the aesthetic could affect the social. “It is an achievement worthy of the greatest of poets to have influenced a modern audience through purely aesthetic means.” It was enough for Rosenfeld as an undergraduate that Yeats’s achieved this effect by “his devotion to the great qualities of truth and beauty.”³⁹

Rosenfeld’s Whistler essay, which he published a year after the one on Yeats, revisits the question of nationalism in the arts by way of a study of the Japanese influence on Whistler’s paintings. Like Yeats’s poetry and drama, Whistler’s painting transcended its obviously Japanese elements. But unlike Yeats, Whistler achieved his universalism not by drawing on an indigenous mystic tradition, but through craft or “technique” directed toward an esoteric intellectualism devoid of sentimentality. “The art of Japan has no greater exponent than Whistler,” wrote Rosenfeld. The obvious presence of a “direct foreign influence” notwithstanding, Rosenfeld said “that art is cosmopolitan, that it transcends the bounds of nationality.” According to Rosenfeld, Whistler destroyed the popular “fallacy” by which Japanese art is limited to mere decoration “peculiar to that land.” Rosenfeld credited Whistler with the discovery that Japanese art “is largely a matter of technique, a different way of seeing things as practicable in the Occident as amid its native scenery.” In Whistler’s mature works

³⁹ Ibid.

especially Rosenfeld saw how certain “canons and aesthetics” of Japanese art had prepared the way for Whistler’s greater concern with craft and eventually a concern for the most abstract elements of painting. In Whistler’s portraits and nocturnes there is “an increased attention to the purely technical aspects of his subject, the striving after an absolute perfection in the visible handling of material.” Japanese artists’ concern for economy of expression and their “love of comeliness of lines and masses” became “in Whistler’s’s work an end in itself.”⁴⁰

The Whistler essay also marks the first instance of Rosenfeld’s treatment of impressionism in the visual arts. Rosenfeld had at the time been immersed in the impressionist style of criticism typified by Arthur Symons, whose style and analyses powerfully influenced Rosenfeld’s music and literary criticism during the 1920s. A student of the European impressionist painters, Whistler fused their style with the Japanese theory of decorative art. Both styles, wrote Rosenfeld, concerned themselves with “spontaneity,” “disinterested judgments” of nature, and a “law of design that subordinates natural truth to a sense of the decorative.” Rosenfeld was taken with how Whistler’s subdued naturalism encouraged viewers’ participation in the completion of the painting and it how it could potentially reshape the way in which they viewed the natural world. For Whistler, he said, relied heavily “upon the spectator’s imagination to complete the picture, Nature is rendered only by suggestion....It is primarily the viewing of a thing with an eye for technicalities, and after practice all Nature seems to form designs.”⁴¹

Rosenfeld’s emphasis here on the potential for art to change one’s outlook on the world

⁴⁰ Rosenfeld, “Whistler and Japanese Art,” 55, 57.

⁴¹ Ibid.

reflects his shift in interest from art's ecstatic power to its transformative power. But in it also lies the seeds of Rosenfeld's mature thinking on the crucial question of democratizing culture. Christopher Lasch said that "a whole book could be written about the debates concerning the democratization of culture that took place during the progressive era." These debates were not restricted to that period, as Edwin Avery Park pointed out in his essay in *Paul Rosenfeld: Voyager in the Arts*; they persisted well into the 1920s. Park said the chief burden of art, music, and literary critics in the American democracy during the 1920s was to make "art more available and enjoyable rather than rare and less attainable." Park was dissatisfied with Rosenfeld's efforts toward these ends; he apparently missed Rosenfeld's sustained criticism in *Musical Chronicle (1917-1923)* of the social artificiality of the concert hall and his championing of people's concerts in new settings such as New York's Metropolitan Museum. But more important, Park's criticism completely missed Rosenfeld's more interesting position in the debate on democratizing culture. To Rosenfeld the democratization of the arts went beyond the question of their wider access and "comfortable enjoyment" to the question of closer participation in the work of art, or "co-creation" as he called it. His thinking in this direction was already evident in his Yale study of Whistler. For Rosenfeld democratization was an invitation into the very process of creation. The invitation would always be subtle and unforced and it would flow naturally from the inner logic of a painting, a musical composition, or a work of literature. True to his classical influences and sympathies, Rosenfeld located the origins of this participatory ideal for the arts in Europe's classical period when composers expected their audiences to "co-create" through the experience of listening. Music was not to wash over them or merely entertain them but actively engage them. Like the argument in an essay, the sonata form of the classical

era invited the listener to enter imaginatively into its sonic world. It was in part Igor Stravinsky's revival of this principle of "co-creation" in modern composition that powerfully attracted Rosenfeld's interest in his music. Indeed, no other composer received more critical attention from Rosenfeld than Stravinsky did.⁴²

Rosenfeld's discussion of Whistler's unique use of impressionistic theories and techniques foreshadowed another debate in which Rosenfeld found himself immersed during the 1920s and 1930s: the relation of art and emotion, and related to it the longstanding conflict between romanticism and classicism. Edmund Wilson, Lewis Mumford, Kenneth Burke and others took for granted that Rosenfeld's criticism was informed chiefly by romantic sensibilities which he absorbed from Ruskin, Morris, Whitman and Pater among others. Rosenfeld himself was plain about his loyalty to romantic conceptions of art, and, in particular, romanticism's celebration of feeling. In an essay on the novels of George Bernanos, he wrote, "The object of literature in general is delectation through the expression of feeling." With some modifications Rosenfeld would not resist the application of this object to the other arts as well. Curiously, in "Whistler and Japanese Art," Rosenfeld celebrated not feeling but precisely the absence of emotion and the more purely cerebral elements in Whistler's impressionistic style. Typically, impressionist art is thought to be highly subjective, inasmuch as it re-presents external realities filtered through the personal experience of the artist. Such art is also often suffused with

⁴² Christopher Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven: Progress and Its Critics* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991), 554; Edwin Avery Park, "Sociological Compulsion," in *Voyager in the Arts*, 112; Rosenfeld, "Stravinsky," *The New Republic*, 14 April 1920, 207-10.

personal emotion, something that is noticeably absent from Whistler's painting. Instead, for Rosenfeld, it is a pure ideal of the beautiful that raises it above its Japanese nationalist influences and supplies its universal appeal. Whistler's portrait painting best demonstrated this effect. "It is the absolute lack of emotion," wrote Rosenfeld, "that gives Whistler's portraits their intellectual value....The absolute negation of the painter's own feelings puts more of Whistler than his subjects into his canvasses; one recognizes the Japanese artist in what he left out." Speaking of Whistler's entire body of painting, Rosenfeld said "There is no literary nor sentimental value attached to his pictures....A painter for the primarily intellectual he will always be, and perhaps because he only aimed at giving refined pleasure." The "joyousness of art" for Whistler was "a joy in beauty for Beauty's sake," whether it be found in "the Parthenon, or brodered with the birds upon the fan of Hokusai,--at the feet of Fusiyama."⁴³

Rosenfeld's stress on the classical ideal of pure beauty in Whistler's use of the impressionist style departs from the usual associations of impressionism with the romantic tradition and its concern for emotions. There is little doubt that Rosenfeld's emphasis on the cerebral and the classical here derived from his reading of George Moore's *Confessions of a Young Man*, wherein Moore made a brief and assertive reference to Whistler's classicism. "Whistler's art is not modern art, but classical art," insisted Moore, "yes, and severely classical." These classical elements and influences in the early development of Rosenfeld's thought are important insofar as they give weight to Lewis Mumford's careful characterization of Rosenfeld's critical perspective. Impatient with those who categorized Rosenfeld as "a mere

⁴³ Ibid., 57-61; Rosenfeld, "Bernanos and the Catholic Novel," *Tomorrow* (January 1945): 29.

impressionist," Mumford praised Rosenfeld's singular sense of balance. "He could value Eliot without becoming hostile to [Van Wyck] Brooks." Mumford provided other examples of Rosenfeld's breadth of appreciation, but his mention of Rosenfeld's respect for Eliot is particularly relevant to the presence of classical and romantic influences on Rosenfeld's critical outlook, and, even more broadly, the conflicts between the classicists and the romantics of which, according to Edmund Wilson and Alfred Kazin, Rosenfeld was a major casualty. Kazin agreed with Wilson that the dominating influence of Eliot's critical standards between the World Wars reduced drastically the literary outlets available to Rosenfeld's criticism. While there is much truth in this explanation for the waning of Rosenfeld's influence in the 1930s and 1940s, it leaves one with the mistaken impression that Rosenfeld was some sort of anti-classicist. Mumford himself perhaps underestimated how much common ground there was between Rosenfeld critical values and Eliot's neoclassicism, particularly Eliot's theory of the impersonality of the poet," which he presented in his famous essay, "Tradition and the Individual Talent." Indeed, Rosenfeld's great appreciation for "the absolute lack of emotion" in Whistler's portraits," "the absolute negation of the painter's own feelings," and the notion of "refined pleasure" anticipates Eliot's theory of "significant emotion" which called for the poet's "escape from emotion," holding that "the emotion of art is impersonal." This affinity with Eliot's ideas will become even more prominent during the climax of Rosenfeld's "grand transformation" in 1914, when he transposed his own theory of impersonality from painting to modern music, and, in particular, Scriabin's music. Rosenfeld sustained this vision of the impersonality of the artist alongside and in tension with his celebration of romantic self-expression. The paradoxical

relation of the two provided his criticism with a distinctive and attractive dynamism.⁴⁴

After William Butler Yeats and "Whistler and Japanese Art" Rosenfeld wrote one more essay for *The Yale Lit.*, "Anonymous: An Appreciation" (1911). Somewhat sophomoric in its humor, the essay was the first instance of the style of humor that became emblematic of Rosenfeld's mature writing and conversation. Often including elements of the fantastic, Edmund Wilson called it the humor of exaggeration, and Rosenfeld used it with great effect in his essay "Fraulein" for the *Dial* during the early 1920s. Rosenfeld fashioned Anonymous to be a "great Greek poet," who lived long enough to influence the literary and political life of Athens, Alexandria, Jerusalem and Rome. "It would be impossible to enumerate all the things in which Anonymous was interested. He even wrote hymns for the early Church." His death coincided with "the first manifestation of the modern spirit," with its more careful concern for attributing works accurately to identifiable authors. Still the spirit of Anonymous lives on "in popular fancy." Some in the nineteenth century attributed the Waverly novels to him, and newspapers "to this day," Rosenfeld wrote, palm off "their bad articles and poems as recent discoveries of Anonymous's work." These final little digs suggest that "Anonymous: An Appreciation" is not without some serious intent. It bears a relation, however understated, to a theme that Rosenfeld first treated in "Percy the Poet" and took up again in his creative writing for *The Yale Literary*

⁴⁴ George Moore, *Confessions of a Young Man*, 126-8; T. S. Eliot, *The Sacred Wood* (New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc. 1960), 53; Wilson, "Paul Rosenfeld: Three Phases," in *Voyager in the Arts*, 10; Kazin, "The Solitude of Paul Rosenfeld," 156.

Review: the ideal of authenticity and the bitter consequences of deception.⁴⁵

Self-deception and the deception of others figure prominently in Rosenfeld's fiction: "The Light" (1909), "Aubrey Beardsley" (1910), and "Mere Vecharde" (1911), and the play, "When Half-Gods Go" (1912). Read as complements to Rosenfeld's insistence in some of his *Yale Lit.* essays on the necessity of faith and idealism, these works underscore that for Rosenfeld belief and the sense of assurance that it brings flowed from the necessary conviction and comfort that one is not deceived in one's belief. Doubtless, Rosenfeld would agree unreservedly with Shelley, who for him was the prototype of the Romantic Platonist, that "self-deceit is the veiled Image of unknown evil."⁴⁶

In "The Light," Rosenfeld's examines the destructive effect of self-deception as it manifested itself in the life of a fictional American composer whom he called merely Friedrich. The drama of this story unfolds during a weekend retreat at Friedrich's spacious country home where Friedrich's "foremost pupil" Gregory had come to enjoy the hospitality of his master. Gregory relished the opportunity for such intimacy with Friedrich, to live through and understand his "dramatically contrasted moods." While they together analyzed the Beethoven Seventh Symphony against the beauty of the rural countryside, Friedrich's mood was "generally idyllic," but later at dinner it "turned cynical." For Friedrich now felt compelled to reveal to Gregory "the secret burden of his life." Friedrich began his confession by way of a discussion of

⁴⁵ Rosenfeld, "Anonymous: An Appreciation," *The Yale Literary Magazine* (January 1911): 169.

⁴⁶ Rosenfeld, "The Light," *The Yale Literary Magazine* (October 1909): 27-31; P.B. Shelley, "A Defense of Poetry," 172.

a certain music critic's recent harsh words for his works. Gregory, a loyal student, dismisses the critic as an entertainer who wrote his book *Sentimentalists: A Book of Poses*, "to amuse his public," presenting a "portion of the truth" as if it were "the truth." But Friedrich persists in defense of the critic acknowledging that much of what he said was true, even if he said it cleverly and condescendingly. "Do you for instance believe," Friedrich asked Gregory, "that the Alpha and Omega of modern tone-poetry consists in the first three bars of the *Tristan* Prelude." The accuracy of such a dramatic overstatement notwithstanding, Friedrich accepted it as "a figurative way of scoring the unoriginality of many of us." Anticipating the revelation of what burdened his own conscience, Friedrich agreed with the unnamed critic "that the trouble with the composer of the present time is the desire for renown for the fame of the minute, by means of ear-racking harmonies or sensational programs and librettos. Anything for notoriety!" Gregory abandoned his defense of Friedrich and retorted with some agitation, "The composers of to-day are as sincere about their art as was Beethoven." To which Friedrich responded that men better than himself had been destroyed "by the desire for fame."⁴⁷

With the intention of preventing Gregory from committing his own mistake, but also because he felt the overwhelming need to unburden himself, Friedrich revealed that the theme for the symphony that established his reputation as a great composer was stolen from a musician who had lost his mind. The pilfered theme was the only tune this musician played. Friedrich suspected its brilliance and plotted to get it. The sense of "the hideousness of stealing" gave way to a vision of "ecstatic hope" when from a distance he heard the insane musician's tune. He ran

⁴⁷ Ibid., 29.

toward the “solitary lamplight” shining from his room. “On I hastened,” Friedrich told Gregory, “mad with expectation, desiring only to reach the light that was to me as the symbol of success and fame.” The price he payed for the appearance of originality cost him his peace of soul. “And now, in my old age, I must think that my whole life-work is nought, for the one composition upon which my fame rests, was stolen. It would have been better to have remained in the shadow of obscurity than be forced to feel that!”⁴⁸

The symbol of the “light” which provided Rosenfeld with his title for this story, prefigures Rosenfeld’s use of it in *The Boy in the Sun*. In this story it functions not only as that searching interior luminosity by which the composer sees clearly the truth of things, but also as a false, luciferian light which leads to an apparent good but ultimately to self-destruction. Besides the story’s main theme of authenticity, “The Light” introduces some themes that occupied a more central position in Rosenfeld’s music criticism. Reminiscent of “Percy the Poet,” there is Rosenfeld’s simmering suspicion of Strauss’s veracity and his crude efforts at stimulating the cult of the celebrity around himself. Given Rosenfeld’s antipathy to Strauss discussed in the previous chapter, it is difficult to resist applying the references to “ear-racking harmonies” and “sensational programs” to Strauss. Another theme concerns how unmediated nature enhances the experience of certain pieces of music; in this case it is the Beethoven Seventh Symphony. Later, as a professional music critic he will develop this notion with respect to modern music.

The pivotal role of the music critic in “The Light” reflects some of Rosenfeld’s early thinking about music criticism; in particular, the story reflects a certain ambivalence about the

⁴⁸ Ibid., 31.

function of music criticism. Although the critic in this story was the occasion for the revelation of truth, Rosenfeld suggests that the critic himself is no less than the composers he criticized interested in the pursuit of fame. For he was a writer known not so much for his penetrating musical insights but for "his cleverness and his caustic, mannered style," who took "a great deal of pleasure in poking fun" at Friedrich's music. For his part Gregory already presumes that the debased function of the critic's office should not lead one to expect too much from the critic. "He has to amuse the public." And, although Friedrich sees some truth in the critic's book, he too concedes that "the man is writing down to his public." Rosenfeld's recognition in his fiction of such defects in American music criticism doubtless made him resolve to correct them in his own.⁴⁹

Rosenfeld continued to probe the themes of deception and authenticity in an usual dream-like story about the illustrator, editor, and writer, Aubrey Beardsley (1872-1898). An exemplar of fin-de-siecle decadence, Beardsley, like Yeats and Whistler, was a Pre-Raphaelite whose tastes and work moved decisively toward the rococo. Perhaps his most famous illustrations were for Oscar Wilde's *Salome* (1894), and the text for Strauss's opera of the same name. He was art editor of *Yellow Book* in 1894 when the Wilde scandal forced his dismissal, and a new position in 1895 as art editor of the *Savoy*. His most significant literary achievement was the erotic romance, *The Story of Venus and Tannhauser*. In 1897 Beardsley converted to Catholicism; he died the next year of consumption. In Rosenfeld's short fantasy, Beardsley's life and work come

⁴⁹ Ibid., 28-9.

off as a pose. Set in a curious theater that has an atmosphere of a carnival, Beardsley the author of the evening's events, appeared before his audience as the embodiment of the ironic. "He was pale, consumptive, but dressed fastidiously in evening clothes that stood out clearly against the whole linen curtain. With a fantastic bow, he began singing a satirical song about the triviality of life, about the ugliness of all things, that made the audience weep with laughter. Then, to the tinkling music of mandolins, he danced a measure, and with a final smirk at the audience, vanished from the stage. The house went wild with applause."⁵⁰

A bacchanal ensued which featured all that had become associated with the life and work of Beardsley--figures in the style of the Pre-Raphaelites Rossetti and Burne-Jones, the music of Richard Wagner and Richard Strauss, including appearances by Isolde and Salome. At the height of the frenzy, the story's narrator slipped out of the theater and caught a glimpse of Beardsley wandering away. "Curious, I followed him, expecting every minute to hear his biting laugh break through the still air." Instead he wandered listlessly, "depressed." Thinking he was unobserved, Beardsley sobbed violently, "threw himself upon the ground, and wept." The narrator's notice of "the gleam of a silver cross" hanging from Beardsley's wrist suggests the presence of an ideal pressing on him with great seriousness that exposed the affected and disingenuous nature of his decadence. "Aubrey Beardsley" signifies Rosenfeld's use of fiction to work out his rejection of aestheticism and decadence. Apparently, from what we read in this story and in his letters to Philip Platt, he found these movements somewhat alluring, but

⁵⁰ Rosenfeld, "Aubrey Beardsley," *The Yale Literary Magazine* (June 1910): 444-6.

ultimately he could not square his attraction to them with the demands of authenticity.⁵¹

Rosenfeld's only extant play, "When Half-Gods Go," is his strongest and most straightforward treatment of the deleteriousness of self-deceit. A variation on the Cinderella story. "When Half-God Go" hints slightly at Rosenfeld's passionate defense of fairy tales during the literary and social tumult of the Second World War. Mary, the play's heroine, is an ugly girl who becomes beautiful by drinking a potion fixed for her by an old woman. Her new beauty attracts the man she has always admired from a distance. The two attend a ball together and then marry. The rub is that Mary drank the potion knowing that the beauty it gave her would last only one year. The happiness she sought was very short-lived. As their love deepened over the course of the year, her happiness turned to intense suffering as her "sin seemed to grow more hideous." It destroyed her peace. Seeing the old woman once more she said: "I have committed the crime greater than all others—I have poisoned my love. The thing that is the world to me, the only thing worth living for, I have built upon a deceit. It is knowing that that has ruined my happiness." Still Mary does not regret taking the potion because it taught her what "the highest things in life," are and "the utter baseness of all deceit." Unembittered by the deceit played on him, John embraces Mary; for her "year of suffering" made him a man. In John's noble act, the reader cannot but hear echoes of Tristan whose love for Isolde began with a potion—a deception of sorts, but through the suffering it brought him he finally learned how to love.⁵²

⁵¹ Ibid., 446.

⁵² Rosenfeld, "When Half-Gods Go," *The Yale Literary Magazine* (March 1912), 205-13.

Rosenfeld's concern for authenticity and the ruinous consequences of self-deception was not confined to their effect in the life and work of the artists, or to the relations between men and women, but extended to human friendship in general. Although these are distinct areas of concern—truth in creating, and truth in one's dealing with other people, for Rosenfeld they were closely intertwined; for the artist's work sprang from and was nurtured by a rich circle of friendships—the ensemble. As noted earlier, Rosenfeld was displeased with the debased ideal of friendship at Yale. In part his own inability to establish many meaningful friendships early in his career at Yale contributed to his displeasure. "At the Cross-Roads," a three-stanza poem, and the short story, "Mere Vecharde" bear the mark of Rosenfeld's sense of isolation at Yale. They represent his attempts to work through and to understand the experience of isolation and of difference. According to Philip Platt Rosenfeld "longed for appreciation and friendship." Gradually, he came to see that his friendships would "come from only a few kindred Spirits."⁵³

Written near the end of his freshman year, "At the Cross-Roads" celebrates the value of friendship, particularly its enduring influence and its mysterious and transformative power. In the poem two men, one of them the poet, cross paths. Their meeting occasions a remembrance and the reestablishment of some primal state of human solidarity.

You had a place within my life of yore,
Now it is yours again.⁵⁴

The two men who meet in "At the Cross-Roads" come from very opposite places—one from an "austere mountain way," the other from a "lonely dell." The distance between them suggests

⁵³Platt to Godbout, 1963.

⁵⁴ Rosenfeld, "At the Cross-Roads," *Yale Literary Magazine* (April, 1910), 355.

something of the great distance that Rosenfeld felt between himself and his Anglo-Protestant classmates. But strengthened by the ideal of human solidarity, Rosenfeld, at least in the poem, resists the temptation to bitterness over his alienation and instead is grateful for having known for another person for however brief a time.

And will your spirit, from your mountain throne,
Gleam o'er a life unlit save for one star?
I will not care, contented to have known
You, friend, for what you are.⁵⁵

Rosenfeld intertwined the themes of friendship and the experience of difference once again in "Mere Vecharde." The story is set in a French village during an unspecified conflict between France and Prussia. Mere Vecharde is an aged woman embittered by her long-standing hatred for a local noblewoman, Madame de Belfort, who deliberately destroyed a friendship between their sons. In his youth, and unknown to Madame de Belfort, Jaques Vecharde had befriended Madame de Belfort's son and inspired in him "all his fine dreamy ways, his love of reading." In Mere Vecharde's words, "they were friends from boyhood, ...and what that friendship meant to my boy I never knew until it was broken off. Everyone used to call them David and Jonathan, they were so attached to each other." Once Madame de Belfort discovered "this degrading intimacy" she sent her son away to school; on his return he spurned Jaques. When they grew to adulthood, Jaques served in the regiment commanded by his boyhood friend. One day while the regiment drilled in the village commons, Jaques committed a misstep for which he received a slap from Lieutenant de Belfort. This insult to her son festered. So that

⁵⁵ Ibid.

when news came to the village that Jaques had fought bravely for his regiment and that Lieutenant de Belfort had fallen in a crucial battle, she gloated openly and crudely lorded it over Madame de Belfort. Mere Vecharde saw God's justice in the death of the Lieutenant. But she is brought down by her own boasting. She told the whole story to a wandering soldier, who unknown to her had been sent to investigate the backgrounds of the Lieutenant and Jaques. As it turned out her son was suspected of shooting Lieutenant de Belfort in the back just as the regiment was about to engage the Prussians. Acknowledging finally what she had done by telling her story, she cried "I have betrayed him. I have killed my son through my boasting."⁵⁶

The imprint of Rosenfeld's frustration with the false ideal of friendship at Yale is evident here again in "Mere Vecharde." But there is also in this story more interest on Rosenfeld's part in the debilitating, dehumanizing, and destructive consequences of resentment, which is exemplified in the character of Mere Vecharde. The simmering indignation and the malicious pleasure she took in the death of Madame de Belfort's son not only led her to betray and to destroy her own son, it completely distorted her sense of the moral order. The distortion was so complete that it "transfigured" her physically as she addressed the investigating officer on his departure from her village. Having just learned that her son had shot the Lieutenant in the back as the enemy was charging his regiment, she cried out. "Tell my son that, though he die by my hand, he need not be ashamed of his death. What he did was noble, what he did was splendid—any brave man would do it." Rosenfeld's treatment of the corrosive effects of resentment reveal the roots of one of his arguments with Marxism, namely that class struggle was

⁵⁶ Rosenfeld, "Mere Vecharde," *The Yale Literary Magazine* (January 1911), 151-4.

institutionalized resentment. And just as resentment ultimately destroys the human person, class struggle finally destroys the social order, and is therefore no basis at all upon which to build a human culture worthy of the name.⁵⁷

The initial difficulty Rosenfeld had in cultivating friendships at Yale did not in any way diminish his enthusiasm for the ideal of friendship. In fact it spurred him to learn and to write more about the ideal of friendship. He compared it favorably to the Ancients' ideal of friendship, which was a first principle of their common life, and to the medieval conception of friendship in such epics as *The Song of Roland* wherein friendship formed the foundational human bond upon which the social order stood. In his early twenties, Rosenfeld idealized friendship as something exalted and mystical, an outgrowth of his prep school fascination with the knightly ideal. "Friendship," he wrote to Platt in 1913, "is but one of the manifestations of the eternal miracle of love, miracle and revelation! For it contains the peace of earth that seems to me to be the answer of the riddle of the universe." In another letter to Platt he recommended the famous lines from Schiller's "Ode to Joy," and the Beethoven Ninth Symphony which made friendship equal in importance to romantic love.⁵⁸

He that's had that best good fortune,
To be his friend a friend to be,
He that's won a noble woman,
Let him join our jubilee!
Ay, and who a single other

⁵⁷ Rosenfeld, "Mere Vechard," 154.

⁵⁸ Rosenfeld, "At the Cross-Roads," *The Yale Literary Magazine* 75 (April 1910): 355; Platt to Godbout, 1963, Rosenfeld to Platt 26 February 1913, Rosenfeld Papers.

Soul on earth can call his own...⁵⁹

Rosenfeld was probably unaware that a few months before he wrote these letters to Platt, Randolph Bourne, who would collaborate with him in the *Seven Arts* venture of 1916 and 1917, had written his famous essay for the *Atlantic* on “the excitement of friendship.” In that article Bourne celebrated friendship with the same zest as Rosenfeld did. It was for Bourne, an “adventure and a romance,” with the power to transfigure “personality.” Like Rosenfeld, Bourne had grounded friendship in common interests. “Our friends must be pointed in the same direction in which we are going, and the truest friendship and delight is when we can watch each other’s attitude toward life growing increasingly similar, or if not similar, at least so sympathetic as to be mutually complementary.” Bourne’s emphasis on how one’s friends become interwoven with one’s own selfhood recalls Aristotle’s emphasis on “a friend as another self,” an idea which permeates the Western tradition of thought on friendship through Emerson’s 1840 essay on “Friendship,” after which, in America at least, this idea fell into desuetude.⁶⁰

As Lucie Wiese’s assessment of Rosenfeld suggests, the traditional idea of friends as other selves gives more substantial meaning to Rosenfeld’s well-known habit of befriending artists. Cultivating friendships with artists and supporting them financially when need be was for him not exterior to his critical attitude toward their work. His philanthropy was not a distinct activity separated from his criticism. Rosenfeld’s self-effacing empathy toward the works of

⁵⁹ Rosenfeld to Platt 28 October 1913, Rosenfeld Papers.

⁶⁰ Randolph Bourne, “The Excitement of Friendship,” in *The Radical Will: Randolph Bourne Selected Writings 1911-1918*, ed. Olaf Hansen (New York: Urizen Books, 1977), 106-14; Michael Pakaluk, Introduction, *Other Selves: Philosophers on Friendship* (Indianapolis, Indiana and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1991), vii-xiv.

artists, in Wiese's words, led artists "to look upon him as their other selves." In the wider sense Rosenfeld's and Bourne's interest in the traditional elements of friendship reflected their interest in cutting a course between the hard-boiled egoism and self-interest associated with America's industrial and commercial culture on the one side, and the insubstantiality and abstractions associated with mere altruism or "love of humanity," on the other. Of greater relevance, the rediscovery of friendships built upon shared interests and directed toward a noble ideal formed the basis of Rosenfeld's "ensemble" idea. The *Seven Arts* project that Rosenfeld undertook with Bourne represents Rosenfeld's most energetic effort on behalf of this ideal. But it was foreshadowed in Rosenfeld's work as editor of *The Yale Lit.*, a position in which he worked with six other undergraduate "literati" to produce a monthly magazine of recognizable quality, and the achievement for which he was remembered most by his classmates.⁶¹

In The Afterglow of Yale

After his graduation from Yale in May 1912, Rosenfeld moved back to Manhattan and took an apartment with his sister, Marion, on the upper west side. Rosenfeld's decision to enroll immediately in Columbia University's new Graduate School of Journalism for the Fall 1912 semester must have been rather sudden. Either that, or he concealed it from his Yale classmates. He gave no hint of it in his personal history for the *History of the Class of 1912*, which indicates that he remained "uncertain as to his future occupation." The choice for journalism followed obviously from his interest in writing and from the experience he had had reporting for a New

⁶¹ Lucie Wiese, "A Man of Empathy," in *Voyager in the Arts*, 108-9.

Haven daily. Although Rosenfeld learned much from the urbane Dr. Talcott Williams at Columbia, Rosenfeld's time and effort were seriously misdirected; he proved to be a complete failure as a reporter. Cyril Brown, a close friend and Yale classmate of Rosenfeld's who went on to a long career as a foreign correspondent for the *New York Times*, upbraided Rosenfeld, calling him "silly," for attending Columbia. The criticism seemed to have hit the mark insofar as it stirred up Rosenfeld's own misgivings about the decision for graduate study in journalism. Nevertheless, he hoped that Brown was wrong and in good humor he set the comment aside as "not quite in the spirit of Christianity" or "neo-Platonism." In any case Brown's criticism came too late; for Rosenfeld was well into the program when Brown decided to speak up.⁶²

The course of study at Columbia was demanding, yet during 1912 and 1913 Rosenfeld found time to keep up his Yale friendships by way of correspondences--over 50 lengthy letters to Philip Platt alone, and by way of attendance at alumni dinners, weekend reunions, football games at Princeton and Harvard, and smokers at the Yale Club in Manhattan. He also worked faithfully on three novels and a few plays, which he circulated among his friends for their review. Their working titles suggested the persistence of Rosenfeld's antimodernist interest in the exotic--*Sakuntala*, *The New Philistia*, and *The Emperor of Trebizon*. According to Platt, none of these works survived Rosenfeld's "own critical judgment or for that matter that of his friends."⁶³

Much of what we know about Rosenfeld and his work during his year at Columbia and his brief stint on the *New York Press* from July to December 1913 derives from his many letters

⁶² "Paul Leopold Rosenfeld," *History of the Class of 1912*, 276; Rosenfeld to Platt, 26 February 1913, Rosenfeld Papers.

⁶³ Platt to Godbout, 1963, Rosenfeld Papers.

to Platt during this period. Reading through these correspondences in the early 1960s, immediately before he made them public for the first time, Platt found them “truly revealing” of Rosenfeld’s “state of mind and his interests and activities” during the early 1910s. The Rosenfeld-Platt correspondences contain much about the doings of their Yale classmates. But they also reveal with a directness not often found in Rosenfeld’s later critical essays, his thinking about old and new music, literature, and painting. Platt said that he had always looked forward to receiving Rosenfeld’s letters because they were helpful in directing his reading of contemporary authors; thus they also exemplify how easily and how well Rosenfeld assumed the role of literary advisor and critic, foreshadowing the role he played for many American writers, painters and musicians between the wars.⁶⁴

Besides what these letters reveal about Rosenfeld’s aesthetic sensibilities, they also show that Rosenfeld’s efforts at sustaining his Yale friendships were accompanied and inspired by his sincere commitment to the ideal of friendship, which began at Yale and found reinforcement during this period in his reading of Romain Rolland’s *Jean Christophe*. In one letter to Platt Rosenfeld praised Rolland’s tribute to friendship in the eighth and ninth volumes of *Jean Christophe*, “Love and Friendship” and “The Burning Bush.” Rosenfeld especially relished the summation of Christophe’s reflections on friendship in the latter volume. “Rare, very rare, are those men who have real friends. But the happiness of it is so great that it is impossible to live when they are gone. The friend filled the life of his friend, unbeknown to him, unmarked. The friend goes: and life is empty.” One finds a similarly strong attraction to friendship in the most

⁶⁴ Ibid.

famous of Rosenfeld's Yale friends, and fellow Pundit, Cole Porter. According to Alfred Kazin, Porter's disillusionment with the ephemeral quality of the show business acquaintances he had made during the full swing of his commercial success on Broadway in the 1920s and early 1930s, led him to think seriously about the value of real friendships, such as those he had had at Yale. These reflections supplied much of Porter's "creative energies," as well as the inspiration for the song "Friendship" in his 1939 burlesque extravaganza *Du Barry Was a Lady*. Curiously, despite their common interests in music and literature, and their common membership in the Pundits, Porter and Rosenfeld let whatever friendship they had established at Yale fall into desuetude. Rosenfeld's only reference to Porter in all of his considerable body of writing appeared in letter to Platt of May 1913 in which he described a performance of Porter's *The Kaleidoscope* at a Yale Club smoker. A burlesque treatment of a boy's dream of attending college, *The Kaleidoscope* was received by a writer for the *Yale Daily News* as a "complete success, the music superior to most Broadway musical shows." Rosenfeld himself found it "awfully clever." Porter, Rosenfeld wrote to Platt, "had all the scraggly little fellows dressed in ball costumes, and no chorus could ever think of beating the one presented." Two numbers, "The Militant Sophomore" and "I'm a member of the Yale Elizabethan Club"--dedicated to Billy Phelps the first president of the club--were "local hits."⁶⁵

Many of Rosenfeld's friendships were founded in good part on a common interest in

⁶⁵ Platt to Godbout, 1963, Rosenfeld Papers; Romain Rolland, "The Burning Bush" in *Jean-Christophe*, trans., Gilbert Cannan (New York: The Modern Library, 1938), 253; Roger Kimball, *Cole*, 21-3; Alfred Kazin, "Parading His Serenading," review of *The Complete Lyrics of Cole Porter*, ed., Robert Kimball in *The New Republic* (January 9 & 16, 1983): 27-8; Rosenfeld to Platt, 8 May 1913, Rosenfeld Papers.

literature and music, the latter especially occasioned many of his get-togethers in Boston with his Yale classmates. The Boston Symphony and its music director Karl Muck thus became especially important to Rosenfeld, as did “the incomparable music news of the *Boston Transcript*.” Attending concerts with friends intensified the pleasure that Rosenfeld took in music. It was in this four-year period between his studies at Yale and the beginning of his work as a professional critic that he began the breathless pace of concert attendance that he sustained until his death in 1946. Extended absences from the concert hall, he wrote in 1920, would produce in him a “pestiferous unwelcome hunger” for music that even the consolation of literature, his other great love, could not satisfy. Hardly a letter he wrote to Platt during 1913 and 1914 failed to mention something about the music he had heard recently. There are also in these letters subtle signs of his growing discontent with the neo-romantics, especially Richard Strauss, which set the stage for his openness to the new of music Schoenberg, Stravinsky, Scriabin, and their contemporaries. In his letters to Platt, Rosenfeld’s discontent with the neo-Romantics had more to do with their compositional and expressive flaws, than with their music’s disconnection from contemporary life. He would take up the latter complaint later in his life.⁶⁶

The neo-Romantic composer with whom Rosenfeld grappled the most during the period leading up to his “grand transformation” was Gustav Mahler. His diligent efforts during the latter part of 1913 to arrive at a deeper, more critical understanding of Mahler’s Fifth Symphony, composed between 1900 and 1905. Such conscientious and painstaking effort in listening and studying had already become second nature to him; it would serve him well in his professional

⁶⁶ Rosenfeld to Platt, 14 October 1913, Rosenfeld Papers; Rosenfeld, *Musical Chronicle*, 3.

career as a check against the tendency to judge new compositions rashly. Although Rosenfeld in part was attracted to Mahler because he identified with Mahler's own struggle with his Jewish past, this identification never overtook Rosenfeld's burning interest in the music itself.

Rosenfeld's study of Mahler's compositions reveals a characteristic attempt to balance his emotional and intellectual reactions to a piece. Rosenfeld was so arrested by the sheer emotional power of the Mahler Fifth at his first hearing of it in Boston that he returned to hear the Boston Symphony perform it again a week later at Carnegie Hall in Manhattan under Karl Muck. He brought along a score to accompany his second hearing. The "result," he wrote Platt, was "an entirely different impression of the symphony." Following the score as the orchestra played it provided him with a "mental enjoyment of the work," which helped him put into perspective the piece's great emotional power and "grand effects" which had overwhelmed him the first time.

"Having heard it without a score," he wrote, "I realize how completely Mahler addressed himself to the simpler human feelings, and got there by sheer effect." But even during his more studied second hearing he could barely keep "from shouting." "I believe I started to sing with the orchestra," he told Platt. Always uppermost in Rosenfeld's mind in his assessment of a new work was whether or not it would become part of the musical canon: Despite its sometimes drawn out length and lack of originality and inventiveness, he thought the Mahler Fifth would "survive." In some ways it was comparable to the Beethoven Eroica Symphony which contained some of the same flaws as the Mahler; yet it too communicated to its audience "by its simple strong effects." In consideration of his hard-won understanding of the Mahler, he remained nonplused and slightly amused by the glib reaction of one of his cousins who he met as he was

leaving the hall. "I think it's simply exquisite," she said.⁶⁷

Rosenfeld complemented his serious interest in music during his year of study at Columbia with an equally serious interest in literature. He wrote to Platt: "Read, read, read, what else should Paul do?" Indeed, he read so "omnivivorously" that he thought his overindulgence would somehow endanger his ability to write. Widening the circle of neo-Romantic authors he began reading as an undergraduate, he read the decadent writers J. K. Huysmans and Oscar Wilde, and the symbolist Maurice Maeterlinck. He discovered *Evelyn Innes* by George Moore, and ranked it with *Jean Christophe* as "one of the best musical novels ever written." He also read more deeply into the works of the early nineteenth-century German romantics that he had begun reading in prep school: Heine, Holderlin, Schiller, Herder, and, especially, Goethe. In good part because of his boyhood exposure to the culture of Antiquity, he delighted in the neo-Hellenism of the Romantics, reflected in such works as "Beautiful. Nature, Beautiful Greeks," from Schiller's *On Simple and Sentimental Poetry*, "Mignon's Song" from Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, Holderlin's *Hyperion's Song of Fate*, and "The Isle of Greece" from Byron's *Don Juan*. Here again, against the early twentieth-century tendency to set classicism against romanticism, Rosenfeld sought ways to reconcile the two styles. For example, he saw in the *Aeneid*, and especially Virgil's treatment of Dido, the origins of "romantic literature," a thesis that Edith Hamilton would popularize in the 1930s when the debate between classicism and romanticism in England and America had reached its greatest intensity. But more important, Rosenfeld, in line with Pater and Moore, began to see in the Ancients a "timeless modernism."

⁶⁷ Rosenfeld to Platt, 5 December 1913, Rosenfeld Papers.

He often compared modern characters with Ancient ones; Antoinette Jeannin, in *Jean Christophe*, for example, reminded him of Dido because both women “lived and moved and had their being in Love.” Well-formed in the classical tradition, Rosenfeld often looked to the literature and art of antiquity as a standard by which to judge the value of new writing. This grounding enabled him to see the shortcomings of modern movements like aestheticism and decadence. Once while reading Havelock Ellis’s *Social Hygiene* he recognized as if for the first time “how all life should aspire to beauty--not the stale morbidezza of aestheticism, but the clean wild beauty of the Greeks.”⁶⁸

In his many “literary letters” to Platt, Rosenfeld discussed other contemporary works, such as Johan Strindberg’s three-part work *Road To Damascus* (1898-1901) and Alexander Berkman’s *Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist* (1912). His discussion of these books reveals the first instance of Rosenfeld’s life long antipathy to the literature of self-absorption, and the efforts of those such as Hutchins Hapgood’s to subordinate literature and the other arts to partisan political programs. Rosenfeld, for instance, applauded “the mixture of realism and mysticism” in *Road to Damascus*, and Strindberg’s originality in “putting himself as the hero of the play on the stage.” But this novelty was not enough to redeem this generally “poor” work, mostly because

⁶⁸Rosenfeld to Platt, 18 April, 15 July, 28 October, and 24 November 1913, Rosenfeld Papers; Wilson, *Axel’s Castle*, 1; Edith Hamilton, *The Roman Way* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1932), 141-53. “The quarrel between Romanticism and Classicism had been going on for a century,” according to Christopher Dawson. In “The Origins of the Romantic Tradition,” in *Mediaeval Religion and Other Essays* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1934). Dawson noted that more ink had been spilt on this controversy than “any other literary controversy, even that of the Ancients and Moderns,” and yet the debate seemed fruitless, for things stood “very much where they were at the beginning”(123).

Strindberg's mental anguish came off as "childishly-egotistical," with the result that his effort at self-discovery through the writing of this story failed in the end to produce self-knowledge. "He knows himself no better at the end than at the beginning, save that he had suffered all his life for being unwilling to believe any good, and nothing but evil."⁶⁹

Drawn to new writing that explored human interiority, Rosenfeld read Berkman's prison memoir, which he thought was unsurpassed as a reflection of "the mental state of a man put to rot" in a Pittsburgh prison. But if Berkman, a Russian emigre who was imprisoned for shooting Henry Clay Frick in 1892, "had only been a poet, we should have had a biography as great as that of Rousseau. But the man is an incomprehensible, commonplace idealist, to whom an 'attentat' against a capitalist is as justifiable a thing as eating a piece of bread to you." Although unsympathetic to Berkman's self-confessed nihilism, Rosenfeld's accepted the advice of the columnist Hutchins Hapgood, who in the Introduction to Berkman's memoir wrote: "Read to understand...Do not read to agree, of course, but read to see." Doubtless Rosenfeld heartily celebrated with Hapgood Berkman's heroic effort to preserve himself mentally and physically in surroundings deliberately intended to crush and annihilate Berkman's selfhood. But Rosenfeld drew the opposite conclusion from Hapgood on the book's moral effect. Whereas Hapgood argued that it complicated "the present simplicity of our moral attitudes," Rosenfeld argued that the book reduced morality to abstract idealism.⁷⁰

⁶⁹Rosenfeld to Platt, 15 July 1913, Rosenfeld Papers.

⁷⁰ Rosenfeld to Platt, 15 July 1913, Rosenfeld Papers; Hutchins Hapgood, "An Introduction," to Alexander Berkman, *Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist* (New York: Schocken Books, 1912), ix-xi.

Rosenfeld's displeasure with Berkman's idealism requires some clarification of the various meanings Rosenfeld invested in such words, as "idealist," "idealism," and "ideals." Rosenfeld himself championed idealism and ideals in the arts, by which he meant an art that somehow offered a glimpse of the unchanging Idea. This meaning, even when he was not explicit about it, went back to Plato's notion of the Idea. His praise of e. e. cummings, for example, sprang from cummings's ability to see, and then convey in his poetry this Idea. This sense of idealism that one finds often in Rosenfeld's writings is specifically philosophical. But he was an idealist in another, more political sense. In fact what the historian John Lukacs said of Rosenfeld's classmate William Bullitt applies equally well to Rosenfeld himself, especially as it concerned the extremist doctrines of the political left and the right. Lukacs called Bullitt "an idealist and a realist—among his generation of Americans a rare combination." The political and social idealism advanced by Rosenfeld and Bullitt was never illusionary or sentimental. Their idealism retained its faith in the better part of human nature, while never underestimating the human potential to harbor and commit evil. This view of human nature was indeed rare, especially among progressives such as Hapgood. The idealism that Rosenfeld condemned was closer to what today would be called ideology—the tendency to substitute a part of reality for the whole of it. Like the cultivation of resentment, idealism of this sort cares little or nothing for the received moral order: "an 'attentat' against a capitalist is as justifiable a thing as eating a piece of bread."⁷¹

⁷¹ John Lukacs, *Philadelphia: Patricians and Philistines 1900-1950* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1981), 185; Rosenfeld, "The Enormous Cummings," *Contempo*, 25 July 1933, 1,3; John Storey, *An Introduction to Cultural Theory and Popular Culture, Second Edition*, (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1998), 5.

Of all the books that Rosenfeld read in the early 1910s none absorbed his interest more than *Jean-Christophe*. Its concern for romantic love resonated deeply with Rosenfeld's long-standing interest in this theme. In guiding Platt through the ten volumes of this novel, Rosenfeld insisted on the central importance of Volume IX, "The Burning Bush" for Platt's "appreciation and comprehension of *Jean-Christophe*." What Rosenfeld drew attention to in this volume reveals something of Rosenfeld's own sense of the world. Volume IX, he wrote, contained Christophe's "terrible love affair," which led "to the discovery which every thinking, feeling human being has to make, if life is to mean anything to him. You know the dead period in the life of J. S. Mill and Tolstoy? You remember the decadence of Shakespeare after King Lear, and the rebirth that gave us his last sweet tragic-comedies? So don't fail to read that book [The Burning Bush]." Christophe's "discovery" was the sudden and unmistakable recognition of God's presence in the world. This epiphany transformed his lifeless, meaningless existence into one of great significance and energy.⁷²

Rosenfeld found in Christophe's discovery an affirmation of the link between romantic love and religious belief that he had explored in some of his Riverview stories. It also was very probably the inspiration for David Bauer's climactic epiphany in *The Boy in the Sun*. Indeed, the scenes of David Bauer's struggle with the meaning of his life after his father's mental breakdown owed much to the Burning Bush scene in *Jean Christophe*. Rosenfeld and Rolland both compared their protagonists' dark night of the soul with Jacob's struggle with the angel; both of them accepted such struggles as unavoidable, but neither of them expected to be transformed by

⁷² Rosenfeld to Platt, 24 November 1913, Rosenfeld Papers.

their struggles. Wrestling with the angel is a common enough allegory for inward strife, but what is unique to these novels--*Jean Christophe* and *The Boy in the Sun*--is that both Christophe and Bauer drew strength in their contests from their memories of their fathers, memories which as they emerged in their minds became enmeshed with a sense of nationalism. David Bauer steeled himself for the future with the memory of his parents, and his union with them and his ancestors symbolized by his sense of oneness with the physical landscape around him. Jean Christophe persevered in his interior struggle by the thought of those who were "sustained by the fortitude of their race in the hours of eclipse of their lives! Though his body was near breaking-point, the strength of the father and the grandfather held him up: the energy and impetus of his robust ancestors sustained his broken soul, like a dead knight being carried along by his horse." Immediately following this recollection, Christophe experienced his transforming epiphany: "a blast of wind through a broken widow forces him out of his bed to the floor, Gaping, gasping, choking." It was as though the living God were rushing into his empty soul. The Resurrection!"⁷³

The Discovery of Plotinus and Neo-Platonism

Rosenfeld's preoccupation with epiphanic experiences prompted him to consider more closely their moral significance. The "awareness that passed into ecstasy"--his late adolescent experience of art--would no longer do, for it remained too self-absorbed. At the same time he called into question the bourgeois world of his youth. Although he was grateful for how it had

⁷³ Rolland, "The Burning Bush" in *Jean Christophe*, 331-35; Rosenfeld, *Boy in the Sun*, 140, 262-6.

formed his moral sense; he also acknowledged that he could no longer accept it in its totality, for it was fast losing its coherence and its public credibility as a reliable ordering of reality. Like many other educated Americans of his time, he searched conscientiously for a new ordering principle, a search that for him began with what he knew best, the transformative experience of beauty. He was struck by how his own epiphanies before works of art and before nature affirmed the goodness of being, and he wondered how such personal resonances could be made the basis of a wider cultural renewal. In search of an ideal that united art and ethics more substantially and more systematically, he read through Walter Pater's *Plato and Platonism*. Pater's reminder that "Platonic aesthetics...are ever in close connection with Plato's ethics" affirmed Rosenfeld's aspiration. Even as Plato anticipated "the modern notion that art as such has no end but its own perfection--'art for art's sake,'" wrote Pater, "it is life itself, action and character, he proposes to color; to get something of that irrepressible conscience of art, that spirit of control, into the general course of life, above all into its energetic or impassioned acts."⁷⁴

Rosenfeld found in Pater's lecture echoes of Schiller's *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*, which he read with his father just before his mental breakdown, and then again on his own in 1913. In this famous work Schiller elevated art and beauty above morality because for him the experience of art was an all encompassing experience of wholeness, liberality, and free play which incorporated morality within it. The harmony, freedom, and playfulness that flowed from the experience of the beautiful made the person spontaneously desire to be good in the accepted sense, and therefore to have a richer and more ennobling moral sensibility than one who

⁷⁴ Rosenfeld, *By Way of Art*, 307, and "Grand Transformation Scene," 354; Walter Pater, *Plato and Platonism* (New York: The Confucian Press, Inc., 1981), 268, 280-2.

sternly follows duty alone. But reading Pater and Schiller worried Rosenfeld; for in the exaltation of art above ethics, there lay the danger that the higher fulfilment offered by art could lead one to spurn the received moral tradition. To be sure this tradition stood in need of reform, but it still had much to commend it in Rosenfeld's view. Rosenfeld saw precisely this danger of a full blown moral rebellion in the pure aestheticism of Huysman, Wilde, and the other decadent authors he had been reading, authors who had absorbed the full impact of Pater's aestheticism and none of his concern for the integrity of the moral order. As a critic, Rosenfeld could not accept Wilde's first principle of aesthetic criticism: "the sphere of art and the sphere of ethics are absolutely distinct and separate." Rosenfeld, as Lewis Mumford observed, rejected vehemently any interpretation of the aesthete's motto, "art for art's sake," that divorced "the esthetic achievement of the artist from its moral and political content."⁷⁵

Rosenfeld's disaffection from extreme aestheticism is also exemplified in the change of mind he had toward a favorite poet of his youth, W. B. Yeats. The change occurred after his first essay on Yeats for *The Yale Lit.* Although sensuously appealing, Yeats's poetry, he began to see, was devoid of moral sense and too removed from reality. "As far as I am concerned," he wrote Platt in early 1914, "you needn't read Yeats at all, for I no longer make propaganda for him." Then with a stylistic flourish worthy of Yeats himself, Rosenfeld dismissed him. "Yeats's poems have little ethical import; they are simply dreams that the drowsy gods breath on the

⁷⁵ Rosenfeld, "Autobiography," 56, and Rosenfeld to Platt, 28 October 1913, Rosenfeld Papers; J. C. F. Schiller, *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*, bilingual edition, ed. and trans. E.M. Wilkinson and C.A. Willoughby (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), XXVII. Edgar Saltus, ed., *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde, Volume V*, (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1923), 210; Mumford, "Lyric Wisdom," in *Voyager in the Arts*, 67.

burnished mirror of the world, and then smooth out with ivory hands, and sigh little mood-pictures, often obscure, often unreal, but oftener very delicate and full of vague beauty. He is a great phraser, but one has to be an aesthete to love phrases for their music."⁷⁶

Rosenfeld's growing concern with the relation of art and ethics made him highly receptive to Talcott Williams's suggestion that he read the *Ennead* of Plotinus (c.205-70), the Alexandrian philosopher and mystic. Immersed, like Rosenfeld, in the Romantic Hellenism of the late-nineteenth century, Williams often took the measure of modern writers in relation to the Ancients. Accordingly, he met his students' frenzy of excitement over the vitalist philosophy of Henri Bergson with a sobering reference to the antecedents of Bergson's vitalism in Plotinus and the wider neo-Platonic movement. A part of the great transvaluation of values at the turn of the century, Bergsonianism appealed mightily to Europeans and Americans, who sought a philosophy of energetic living to replace Judaism and Christianity. Bergson established himself as a world class philosopher in the late 1880s and 1890s with the publication of *Time and Free Will* (1888) and *Matter and Memory* (1896). According to Jacques Maritain, a student of Bergson's and later a friend to Rosenfeld, the mainstream French academy dismissed Bergson's vitalism ignominiously as a reactionary revival of "Judeo-Alexandrine mysticism." Nevertheless, throughout the 1890s Bergson's classes at the College de France across from the Sorbonne were packed with students eager to hear about the "*elan vital*." Apparently students in America were equally enthusiastic about Bergson's philosophy; Rosenfeld wrote Platt in 1913 that he believed one of their Yale classmates "sleeps with a copy of *Time and Free Will* under his

⁷⁶ Rosenfeld to Platt, 11 February 1914. Rosenfeld Papers.

pillow.”⁷⁷

Periodicals that catered to the American Bourgeoisie in the 1910s—*Everybody's*, *The Little Review*, *The New Republic*, and *Outlook*--lavished attention on Bergsonianism. Theodore Roosevelt and Lyman Abbott, the influential editor of *Outlook*, seized upon Bergson's theory of the “elan vital” as further support for their “practical idealism,” which Henry May characterized as a rough stitching of German idealism and evolution in its scientific and social gospel form. The American publishing house that carried *Creative Evolution* sold half the amount of copies of this book in two years as sold in France over the course of fifteen years. Bergson delivered his first American lecture at Columbia in February, 1913 when Rosenfeld was in his second semester of graduate work there. Frenzy surrounded the lecture; automobiles, then only within the grasp of the well-to-do, jammed Broadway. Pressed by the crowds pushing through the lecture-hall door, a woman fainted. Seats were rare with “eighteen hundred applications for each of the three hundred seats.” Most students at Columbia were driven from the lecture hall by well-dressed patrons, but Rosenfeld, who was “very anxious” to attend the Bergson lecture, secured a ticket through the influence of Talcott Williams.⁷⁸

The lecture and its aftermath proved to be pivotal in Rosenfeld's intellectual development,

⁷⁷ Rosenfeld to Platt 26 February 1913, Rosenfeld Papers; Henry F. May, *The End of American Innocence: A Study in the First Years of Our Own Time* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1959 and Chicago: Quadrangle Books, Inc., 1964), 168-9; 228-32; Jacques Maritain, *Bergsonian Philosophy and Thomism*, trans. Mabell L. Andison with J. Gordon Andison (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), 11-60, 74, 252.

⁷⁸ May, *The End of American Innocence*, 227-9, 328-9; Rosenfeld to Platt, 26 February 1913, Rosenfeld Papers; Joan Shelley Rubin, “In Retrospect: Henry F. May's *The End of American Innocence*” in *Reviews in American History* 18 (March 1990): 144.

especially as it bore upon the question that preoccupied him during his early twenties: the moral significance of the epiphanic experience of art. Rosenfeld submitted a report on the lecture for Williams, after which Williams recommended he read Plotinus. Before he followed Williams's recommendation, what little Rosenfeld knew of Plotinus had come from Walter Pater. In an essay on Pico Della Mirandola Pater described Plotinus as "that new Plato, in whom the mystical elements in the Platonic philosophy had been worked out to the utmost limit of vision and ecstasy." Pater's interest in Plotinus's writings was limited to their influence in the Platonic revival during the Italian Renaissance of the fifteenth century. Rosenfeld read Plotinus principally in relation to developments in modern philosophy. Reading Plotinus he felt "surprise and terror," for he "found that Plotinus had advanced on Bergsonian lines to a position even more modern than Bergson, because it included a system of beauty and morals." When Rosenfeld told Williams that he found Plotinus much more to his liking than Bergson, Williams "laughed" and said that he sent Rosenfeld to Plotinus simply "to cure him of running after every new personality that presents itself." For Williams, Bergson was merely a transitional figure to a coming "age of dogmatism," in much the same as "Plotinus prepared the way for St. Augustine." For Rosenfeld, Bergson was the gateway to a metaphysics of art and ethics that proved to be highly durable. Allen Tate was struck by Rosenfeld's deep conviction that art "came out of some pure source of being"; he recalled that one of their last conversations was "about Plotinus."⁷⁹

⁷⁹ Walter Pater, *The Renaissance*, 59-60; Rosenfeld to Platt, 26 February 1913, Rosenfeld Papers; Allen Tate, "Anomaly in Literary New York," in *Voyager in the Arts*, 142.

The Armory Show

Talcott Williams did more than bring Rosenfeld to a deeper understanding of Plotinus: he also influenced the way in which Rosenfeld experienced and interpreted the Armory Show of 1913, perhaps the most well-publicized artistic event of the Progressive era. Officially entitled the International Exhibition of Modern Art, the show exposed as many as half-a-million Americans in New York, Chicago, and Boston to the contemporary works of European painters and sculptors, among them Matisse, Picasso, Kandinsky, Brancusi, and Duchamp. Rosenfeld attended the Exhibit with Williams and eleven of his classmates from Columbia. His experience of the exhibit is remarkable for how seemingly unimpressed he was by it. There is nothing of his characteristic ebullience over a meaningful new discovery, such as he exhibited when he discovered Plotinus and, a little later, the music of the new European composers. In Spring 1913 when Rosenfeld visited the show, he had no idea of how Alfred Stieglitz had prepared the American public for the Armory Show by way of his many exhibits of contemporary European painting, photography, and sculpture at the 291 Fifth Avenue Gallery. Stieglitz also published articles on them in his well-crafted and handsome magazine, *Camera Works*. In fact, until Waldo Frank brought Rosenfeld to a gathering at the 291 gallery in 1915, Rosenfeld had only known Stieglitz from a distance as someone who had married into his extended family.⁸⁰

In a seminar following his class's visit to the Armory Show, Williams offered an interpretation of the show's Cubist painters which set their works in relation to music. Rosenfeld

⁸⁰ Edward Abrahams, *The Lyrical Left* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1986), 171; Rosenfeld to Platt, 10 March 1913, Rosenfeld Papers.

was taken by Williams's assertion that sculpture and music were "the two extremes of art, the arts of mass and vibration." Accordingly, the Cubists, whose work caused such a sensation at the exhibition, "were attempting to get painting back from the vibratory light of the pleinairistes [a school of French Impressionism] to the handling of mass." When Rosenfeld asked Williams why they worked with cubes, Williams replied that they were "the simplest mass-equation." To illustrate his answer Williams drew from a recent exhibit of children's works that he had seen at Stieglitz's 291 gallery, an exhibit meant to establish the relation between children's aesthetic perception and the new abstractionism in painting and sculpture. Williams pointed out how children left to their own devices make "portraits with their blocks." Although delighted by the children's exhibit, Rosenfeld remained unconvinced by Williams's example, in a letter to Platt, he said that children are not "given a choice of what they might build with."⁸¹

Influenced by Alfred Stieglitz and some of the painters in his circle--especially, Arthur Dove, Marsden Hartley, John Marin and Randolph Bourne, Rosenfeld's initial indifference to the Armory Show turned to an obstinate public silence during the 1920s when Rosenfeld was deep into his Americanist phase. Like Stieglitz, he looked back with disgust at the circus atmosphere that surrounded the show. He also was put off by the link that Hutchins Hapgood had made between artistic modernism and anarchistic "political revolution." But most of all the Armory Show exemplified to Rosenfeld what Randolph Bourne called Americans' "groveling humility" before European culture. With Bourne and some other American modern artists, Rosenfeld came to see that the intent behind the exhibit was to show Americans the superiority of French

⁸¹ Rosenfeld to Platt, 10 March 1913, Rosenfeld Papers.

modernists. Despite these objections to the Armory Show, it did help circulate more widely certain new ideas about the arts and the emerging culture of modernism that helped prepare the American reading public for the issues Rosenfeld explored with them during the 1920s. For example, the Show exhibited the works of Vassily Kandinsky, a Russian-born artist and theorist who worked in Germany and who was especially close to Arnold Schoenberg and to Stieglitz and the circle that gathered at the 291 gallery. In 1912 Stieglitz's *Camera Work* published parts of Kandinsky's seminal book *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*. Anticipating a theme Rosenfeld probed repeatedly in his criticism, Kandinsky argued that modern artists in their works seek after "the inner spirit of things." There are other resonances between Rosenfeld and Kandinsky. The latter argued that painting ought to aspire to the non-representational and abstract quality of music, a theory that as H. W. Janson has pointed out with direct reference to Kandinsky's writing and painting, "goes back to Plato, and includes Plotinus." The titles of Kandinsky's paintings have musical connotations to aid the viewer's ascent to the realm of spirit. By way of explaining his paintings, he wrote of his attempts to paint the "choir of colors which nature has so painfully thrust into my very soul." *Sketch I for "Composition VII*, for example, which was exhibited at the Armory show, conveyed "an evenly sustained pitch" of prolonged interior exhilaration; *Improvisation No. 30 (on a Warlike Theme)* a shorter burst of "inner uplift."⁸²

Kandinsky's work and the works of others who exhibited at the Armory Show thus, as Henry F. May has pointed out, provoked Americans' interest in the relation of art to the life of

⁸² Martin Green, *New York 1913: The Armory Show and the Paterson Strike Pageant* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1988), 58-60; Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, trans. M.T.H Sadler (New York: Dover Publications, 1977), 14; H.W. Janson, *History of Art* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1964), 519-20; Rosenfeld, "Whistler and Japanese Art," 59.

the spirit. This insight of May's into the meaning of the exhibit remains under-developed and even totally obscured in current writing on the Armory Show. Some popular textbooks in American History still emphasize the hostility of Americans to the Armory exhibit because the presenting artists stood in revolt against literal representation. This generalization ignores that for writers such as Arthur Jerome Eddy, an entrepreneur and aficionado of modern art, the painting displayed at the Armory signaled "the art of the future," which like "the civilization of the future, would become more and more spiritual." But most important, the Armory Show provoked a wide public discussion on art and life among the American bourgeoisie, which was carried on in mainstream and small magazines. Such discussions broke the ground that Rosenfeld would work with unrivaled energy and verve during the 1920s and 1930s.⁸³

But the source of Rosenfeld's zeal for the spiritual value of modernism did not spring up immediately from the visual arts, but from music. The experience of new music that would transform Rosenfeld and inspire his appreciation for modernism occurred almost a year after his graduation from Columbia in May 1913. In between Rosenfeld went off to the *New York Press* and to work in the profession for which Columbia had prepared him. His career as a reporter, as we shall see, was short and unrewarding.

⁸³ Carol Berkin, et al., *Making America: A History of the United States* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1995), 569; May, *The End of American Innocence*, 246-7.

Chapter V

The Grand Transformation: The Education of a Music Critic

A Brief Career on the New York Press

Rosenfeld took the Bachelor of Letters degree from Columbia University in May 1913. Less than two months later he began work on the *New York Press* as a reporter and rewrite editor. The genteel course of study that Rosenfeld followed under Talcott Williams with its emphasis on reflection, and critical discourse on significant artistic and cultural trends apparently left him unprepared for the hard-boiled rigors and slap-dash style of daily reporting. The *Press* job paid fifteen dollars a week and expenses, and in return demanded long hours, often from 2:00 p.m. to beyond midnight. Such demands on his time were most unsavory to Rosenfeld because they prevented him from the regular get togethers with his Yale friends that he had become an important part of his life, and they seriously hampered the progress of a courtship he was carrying on with a young woman he had recently met. These intrusions into his social life led Rosenfeld to eye a position on the *New York Sun*, which, because it had a bigger staff, would probably demand less of his time. But it is not likely that he would have fared much better on the *Sun*; for he seemed generally unfit for reporting, having “made botches of a couple of big stories to which he was assigned.” Nevertheless, Rosenfeld hung on at the *Press* hopeful that the paper would pay his way to Europe, where he would be its European correspondent. His classmate,

Cyril Brown, had a similar arrangement with the *New York Times*. Brown boasted to Rosenfeld that as the assistant London correspondent for the *Times*, he earned \$40 a week and expenses.¹

During Rosenfeld's brief stint on the *Press* he drew two assignments that more or less confirmed his long-held misgivings about Progressive reformism and American electoral politics. It is unclear whether or not Rosenfeld's editors on the *Press* knew of his familial ties to the Liebmann Brewery when they assigned him to cover the four-day national convention of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union in New York City. In any event, he was not at all happy with the assignment. He complained to Philip Platt: he "who like Aphrodite, rose from foam-- except that she rose from sea foam," had been "forced to sit and listen to those misguided hags who have done so much to spread syphilis in the United States Army, and who believe that prohibition makes men temperate." In Rosenfeld's view, Frances E. Willard, like Emmeline Pankhurst, Carrie Chapman Catt and other suffrage activists, had betrayed the intrinsic nature of her womanhood by dedicating themselves to a political cause, something that for him was an inherently masculine undertaking. And even then it was often destructive if pursued with the sort of ideological zeal that he criticized in a figure such as Alexander Berkman. The WCTU meeting provoked him to deny with uncharacteristic nastiness that its members were really women. "I don't include the WCTU as women," he wrote to Platt, "they're harpies who feed on human excrement."²

Rosenfeld's contempt for the WCTU and other women's political movements resonated with the wider modernist attack on women's political activism. According to Ann Douglas,

¹ Rosenfeld to Platt, 15 July, 14 October, and 5 December 1913, Rosenfeld Papers.

² Rosenfeld to Platt,

many “men and women” of the New York literati during the 1920s found common cause in their violent repudiation of the purity, temperance, and suffrage crusades, unfairly and somewhat inaccurately characterizing them as offshoots of Victorian patriarchy. Although Rosenfeld was forthright and bold in his condemnation of woman’s political activism, his criticism of Victorian womanhood was far more muted. He agreed implicitly with many of the modernists Douglas studies in *Terrible Honesty* that women’s hegemony over American culture of the mid- and late Victorian era misserved the arts in America by surrounding them with an air of sentimental piety and preciousness. But his agreement stopped short of their “matrophobia.” His criticism of the Victorian ideal of womanhood had nothing in common with the “symbolic matricide” Douglas sees as central to the culture of modernism in 1920s Manhattan, which once it had discredited patriarchy went on to promote “something like an egalitarian popular and mass culture.” Such a program had little if anything in common with Rosenfeld’s critical project. Although a champion of the democratization of high culture, Rosenfeld had more in common with those modernists who viewed with suspicion the main development in American popular culture. Setting aside Douglas’s extension of matrophobia to the exaltation of popular culture, Rosenfeld took as much delight as any modern writer would have in writing up the proceedings of WCTU convention for the *Press*, part of which was picked up and reproduced in one of the Boston papers. In New York it provoked harsh criticism for the WCTU from the Mayor of New York City. He also gloated when the women of the WCTU “got in dutch with the House of Bishops by telling them that Jesus ordered unfermented wine used at Communion, and that as wine was a poison, it could

not represent the Blood [of Christ].”³

Rosenfeld’s coverage of the WCTU deepened his skepticism about the usefulness of political crusades, just as his extensive coverage of Edward E. McCall’s 1913 campaign for Mayor of New York contributed to his lack of faith in electoral politics as a means for any significant reform of American life. “Night after night” Rosenfeld traveled with the McCall campaign, listening to McCall “denounce the entire press in uncertain and muddled terms.” It seemed to Rosenfeld that McCall’s audience, which included many advocates for women’s suffrage, “understood what he was talking about [only] when he said someone was a liar.” The crowds that came to hear and cheer McCall on, wrote Rosenfeld, would then hail “Sulzer as they hailed Devery and Tweed and Croker and would hail Beelzebub if he were an Irishman and stood for office here in New York.” Rosenfeld’s final words to Platt on this subject —“*So is das Leben*”— more or less sealed his disaffection from American electoral politics, and the progressive reform movements that invested so much of its faith in. Thereafter he limited his involvement in politics to voting, and to safeguarding the arts from the intrusions of political causes.⁴

The Character Question

“Exasperated” with reporting, Rosenfeld resigned his position with the *Press* in December 1913, and decided to rely solely on the income from his Liebmann inheritance for support. Later in his

³ Rosenfeld to Platt, 28 October 1913, Rosenfeld Papers; Douglas, *Terrible Honesty*, 6-8; Mumford, “Lyric Wisdom,” in *Voyager in the Arts*, 50.

⁴ Rosenfeld to Platt, 28 October 1913, Rosenfeld Papers.

life Rosenfeld described his decision to quit the *Press* as an epiphany. "Suddenly, crossing one day amidst the clang and din of Forty-Second Street," he told Jerome Mellquist, "he felt transfixed...by a shaft of complete and instantaneous understanding. Why, he demands of himself, should he do work that was stultifying? Why not quit the job? And have a modest income?"⁵

At the time of his decision he told Platt that the immediate impulse behind his resignation was an overwhelming desire to dedicate himself fully to writing fiction. "While I was on the *Press*," he wrote Platt in early 1914, "the beauty of making something fine, useful, and sincere came over me, and now's my chance." Accordingly, Rosenfeld set to work on completing *The Emperor of Trebizon*, a "high-romantic drama" set in Byzantium during the early Middle Ages. The idea for the story came from his reading of a German book published in the 1840s "which translated the few documents relating to the Caesars of Trebizon still in existence." Delighted in his find, Rosenfeld wrote Platt, "I found everything as if awaiting my plot. I even found one of the Emperors, Andronicus Gygos, who vanquished the Saracens through his religious faith." In the novel Rosenfeld transformed the conquering faith of Christianity into a neo-Platonic idealism which combats evil by the relentless pursuit and communication of noble ideals. In keeping with his prep school interest in the romance of *Tristan und Isolde* and the chivalric ideal, the novel's dramatic interest centered "on the transmutation of physical love to spiritual love, with woman worship to Madonna worship, neatly hidden in it."⁶

⁵ Mellquist, "Seraph from Mount Morris Park," in *Voyager in the Arts*, xviii.

⁶ Platt to Godbout, 1963; Rosenfeld to Platt, 8 May 1913 and 11 January 1914, Rosenfeld Papers.

The Emperor of Trebizon never saw publication. Moreover, Rosenfeld's ambitious plans for a career as a novelist collapsed soon after his resignation from the *Press*. But he remained true to his commitment to living modestly on his inheritance, and resist what his friend Louise Bogan called the "American fetish" of "a steady job." Associated with this decision to live on a reduced income was Rosenfeld's willingness to remain a bachelor. Rosenfeld's choice here affected more than his personal life; according to Lewis Mumford and Edmund Wilson, it hindered his professional life as well. Mumford argued that Rosenfeld's reliance on his inheritance weakened his "life and thought" insofar as they bound him to "the bourgeois world of his youth." Mumford and Wilson agreed that it made him unfit for the rigors of modern publishing. Putatively a move toward "independence," living on his inheritance really made him dependent insofar as it discouraged him from "making sufficient efforts to put his own life on a completely self-maintaining basis." But, according to Mumford, the chief harm to Rosenfeld from living off his trust fund was that he too much "valued the securities and felicities of upper middle-class life," which blinded him to "the basic issues of social justice," and committed him to stand firmly in favor of the economic "status quo." But Mumford was quick to add in Rosenfeld's defense that "there was not a touch or tinge of the snob in Rosenfeld," who had like Henry James, "transcended the meaner limitations of his class." Moreover, the "character and temperament" formed in large by Rosenfeld's upbringing, offset the "damage" that was done to him "by his too comfortable bourgeois inheritance."⁷

To be sure, Rosenfeld's well-formed character owed much to his bourgeois upbringing,

⁷ Bogan, "Spur Against Complacency," and Mumford, "Lyric Wisdom," in *Voyager in the Arts*, 128, 50.

but in his early twenties Rosenfeld invested the idea of character with new importance and purpose, and set it in relation to his literary aspirations. Following John Ruskin, he came to believe that good character was indispensable to the artist's, or more directly in his case, the writer's ability to realize "truthfulness" in his work. As an adult Rosenfeld explicitly rejected the Christian basis that informed the nineteenth-century bourgeois cult of character. He labeled "vicious," the notion "that life is a character-gymnasium, and that God sends men here to try their souls with sin and blot to see whether they can be entrusted to gratify their penchants *ad libitum* in heaven." In contrast to this view of character's importance, Rosenfeld argued for character as a purifying fire that enabled the artist to register and transmit accurately the truths underlying the falsity of appearances. For example, before Rosenfeld abandoned work on *The Emperor of Trebizon* he seemed comparatively unworried about the "talent" he needed to realize the novel successfully. His success, he told Platt, ultimately depended on his "character"-- "hard work, ruthless self-criticism, endless patience." "The book will be worth while only in relation to the amount of truth I get into it, and truth has a certain dignity that all the little shams and attitudes and games we invent to outwit the world, never attain."⁸

Practically speaking, Rosenfeld's ideal of character shared much in common with the nineteenth-century American ideal of character which celebrated work, self-discipline, and self-control, but its accent and its source differed in Rosenfeld's conception of it. Part of this difference lay in his great emphasis on character as a prerequisite for the discovery truth, but another part, following the work of Walter Pater, grounded the ideal of character in relation to

⁸ Platt to Godbout, 1963, and Rosenfeld to Platt, 8 May and 7 August 1913, and 11 January 1914, Rosenfeld Papers.

the actual making of art. Particularly attractive to Rosenfeld was that Pater cast the relation of character and artistic creation in a language suffused with masculine metaphors, which he saw as an antidote to the feminization of the arts that was promulgated knowingly or unknowingly by Victorian women. As Ann Douglas says, to many of Rosenfeld's contemporaries, the arts were a strictly feminine affair. In his lecture "Plato's Aesthetics," Pater pointed out that the virtues of "bravery or manliness and temperance," which were central to "the old pagan world," were also necessary for artistic creation. For Pater "the spirit of control" in art and in life entailed "a deliberate, concentrated attention to what one does, of art itself in the work of art, tenacity of intuition and consequent purpose, the spirit of construction." The artist realizes his idea with a ruthless single-mindedness, a constant presence of mind, and self-possession that has no place for "negligences," a trait that Pater associated with feminine habits of mind.⁹

It was Rosenfeld's constant concern for "truthfulness" in his writing which led him finally to abandon *The Emperor of Trebizond*. Trying too hard to write in the style of James Cabell's fantasies, Rosenfeld adopted "a cloak of light cynicism," which, he confessed to Platt, did not "suit him well at all." Although *The Emperor* project came to nothing, working on it invigorated his "faith in the ultimate superiority of life" against any sort of contemptuous disbelief in human goodness. Nevertheless, facing up to his limitations as a writer was difficult. He continued to write fiction well into the 1930s with only modest success, yet he never became embittered about his disappointing achievement, something that Mumford associated with Rosenfeld's optimism and manliness. "The world of art is full of rejected suitors," Mumford wrote, "who turn with vilification and scandalous gossip upon the mistress who has spurned

⁹ Walter Pater, *Plato and Platonism*, 268, 280-2.

them; but Rosenfeld was not one of these. His attitude toward art was like his attitude toward love: a positive and manly one, springing out of his essential health."¹⁰

By 1920, even as Rosenfeld followed Alfred Stieglitz's advice to write "sixty lines" of fiction a day, "with the regularity of daily exercise," Rosenfeld had pretty much concluded that his vocation was not to creative writing. "I sometimes think," he told Stieglitz, "that I shall turn out to be a sort of person who when someone else does something good, comes to meet it." Rosenfeld did not at all look down on such a role—"the artist's little brother." Rosenfeld believed that if he performed the critical function well, "it too might be a fine life." Rosenfeld was beginning to reconcile himself to the work of what T.S. Eliot in the same year, 1920, called "minds of the second order." Rejecting as "silly" the notion that "the 'Creative' gift is 'higher' than the critical," Eliot assigned the work of criticism to second order--not "second-rate"--minds, who were "difficult to find." Such minds, Eliot argued, are necessary for the "rapid circulation of ideas," and a source of "fresh thought." Whether or not Rosenfeld knew of Eliot's *apologia* for the calling of criticism is unknown. Nevertheless, Rosenfeld became more confident in his vocation to write criticism, in the usefulness of coming out to meet what others create.¹¹

A European Epiphany

Freed from the burden of daily work on the press, Rosenfeld went abroad from early March 1914 until just before the outbreak of the Great War in Europe. Although Rosenfeld had wanted to

¹⁰ Platt to Godbout, 1963 and Rosenfeld to Platt, 11 January 1914, Rosenfeld Papers; Mumford, "Lyric Wisdom," in *Voyager in the Arts*, 54.

¹¹ Rosenfeld to Stieglitz, 30 August 1920, Rosenfeld Papers; T.S. Eliot, *The Sacred Wood* (London: Methuen & Company, 1920), xiv.

tour Europe immediately following his graduation from Yale, he postponed the trip to study at Columbia. His sister Marion's marriage forced Rosenfeld to move from the apartment that he had been renting with her. So he decided that the time was then right for a European visit before he resettled himself in another apartment. During the course of the following five months he traveled to Paris, Marienbad, Munich, Florence, Venice, Rome, Oxford, and London. According to Platt, "Every evening was marked by a play, a concert, an opera--especially in Munich; drives in the country and talks with friends; visits to museums and just soaking up the atmosphere."¹²

Europe's long history alive in its people, places, and things appealed to Rosenfeld's appreciation for historical continuity just as it did for his fellow Young Americans, Randolph Bourne and Van Wyck Brooks; but for him it ran much deeper because of his strong ancestral ties. He rekindled these ties as his first order of business in Europe. As if to steel himself for his new life on his own without his sister, Rosenfeld stayed for a time in Germany with his family, both the Rosenfelds and Liebmanns. He returned to Marienbad, the site of the popular mineral baths which he and his mother had visited when he was a boy. He found Italy, and especially Florence, "the first friendly and delectable environment" he had yet discovered. Rosenfeld spent almost the entire month of April in Florence, which was particularly memorable for his stay with a close friend of Platt's, "a beautiful young woman of keen sensitivity, intelligence and deep spirituality." Their long conversations left him deeply impressed and inspired, even as he had to overcome his own "embarrassment and mortification" to express his thoughts to her, "especially on religion."¹³

¹² Rosenfeld to Platt, 11 February 1914, and Platt to Godbout, 1963, Rosenfeld Papers.

¹³ Platt to Godbout, 1963, Rosenfeld Papers.

The joy that Rosenfeld found in Florence contrasted sharply with the gloominess of his arrival in London during March 1914. Indeed there was nothing to suggest that London's dinginess would be the setting for his "grand transformation scene." Cyril Brown, Rosenfeld's classmate from Yale and now a European correspondent for the *New York Times*, was Rosenfeld's host in London. Rosenfeld accepted unenthusiastically Brown's invitation to accompany him on an assignment to cover a recital in which Alexander Scriabin was performing a series of his own compositions. Rosenfeld's lack of enthusiasm stemmed from the boredom he felt with the contemporary music he had been hearing in America. "Music," he had begun to think "ended with Cesar Frank. None more recent had the power to exalt and satisfy." Hearing Scriabin's music dramatically changed all that.¹⁴

Brown described Scriabin's music beforehand as "crazy." The "more sedate" members of the intimate audience at the Bechstein theater laughed "hysterically" and half-jeeringly when Scriabin played fast and loose with "key signatures" and the relations between major and minor keys. "Bent double, my correspondent-friend shook silently." "I wasn't happy either," wrote Rosenfeld. "Tense," he strove to follow the music's apparently whimsical harmonic progressions. All at once the music made sense to him. "With the suddenness with which whispers and rumbles in a radio just tuned in approach," the music "took on distinctness and musicality." This was music that strove toward "spiritual realms." What also impressed Rosenfeld during this pivotal recital was Scriabin's impersonality. As we saw in the previous chapter, Rosenfeld had probed briefly a certain impersonality in some of Whistler's paintings. Such impersonality there stemmed from "the absolute negation of the painter's own feelings." In

¹⁴ Rosenfeld, "Grand Transformation Scene-1907-1915," 354-7.

the case of Whistler and Scriabin, Rosenfeld's interest in the presence and absence of emotional expression stemmed from his dual loyalties to the classical tradition of restraint and the romantic tradition of individual expressivism. Recalling this important recital from the vantage point of his late fifties, Rosenfeld apparently remained concerned with this tension. Listening to Scriabin perform his piano pieces in the chronological order in which he composed them, Rosenfeld noted with approval the "steady growth in individuality and power." Yet, at the same time Rosenfeld clearly favored Scriabin's efforts to suppress his personality during the performance.

"Theatricalism, disconnection, rigidities of head and torso, arms and hands at no moment called attention to his person, sought to impress the audience, impose the music. Scriabin sat playing...pieces which appeared to be playing themselves from his fingertips." Musical values alone seemed to be his objective. When he took his bows Scriabin smiled politely, "not so much to himself," it seemed to Rosenfeld, "but to some imperceptible idea." The whole effect was "the result of depersonalization."¹⁵

Such deliberate depersonalization for Rosenfeld was necessary in light of the respect that the artist owed to the ultimate importance of the "idea" in his work. While this end differed from T. S. Eliot's doctrine of impersonalism—which is for the sake of realizing purely "significant emotion," Rosenfeld and Eliot both laid great stress on the desirability of the suppression of self-expression and the artist's self-surrender to his work of art. "To divert interest from the poet to the poetry is a laudable aim" Eliot wrote in "Tradition and the Individual Talent." "The emotion of art is impersonal. And the poet cannot reach this impersonality

¹⁵ Rosenfeld, "Whistler and Japanese Art," 57, and "Grand Transformation Scene—1907-1915," 354-7.

without surrendering himself wholly to the work to be done.” It bears repeating that Rosenfeld’s and Eliot’s common emphasis on the impersonality or depersonalization of the artist complicates the received notion of Rosenfeld as an unabashed romantic, whose views on art and criticism stood opposed to Eliot’s and the classical revival he inaugurated in the 1920s.¹⁶

The New York Circles

In mid-1914, when Rosenfeld returned to New York from Europe, he took an apartment at 20 Gramercy Park in Manhattan with Philip Platt. Platt remembered these years from 1914 to 1916 as being filled with “much music, art, and literature and interesting people like Leo Ornstein and Waldo Frank.” Rosenfeld’s experience of Scriabin’s music led Rosenfeld to immerse himself in contemporary compositions. He studied scores by Mousorgsky, Stravinsky, Bartok, and others while he continued to dabble in fiction. He reacquainted himself with Frank, who had also just recently returned to Manhattan after a year’s stay in Europe. Like Rosenfeld, Frank reported for a New York paper, the *New York Times*, after graduating from Yale. It was Frank who introduced Rosenfeld into two circles of artists that moved him decisively toward writing criticism and toward recognizing the importance of the group idea in the modern arts. The first circle was the string quartet sessions at Claire Reis’s rooms in upper Manhattan; the second Alfred Stieglitz’s circle at 291 Fifth Avenue. It was through Reis that Rosenfeld befriended the Russian emigre composer Leo Ornstein, with whom Rosenfeld studied piano. But these studies were not as important to Rosenfeld as the occasion they provided for Rosenfeld to study closely

¹⁶Eliot, *The Sacred Wood*, 59.

the mind of an avant garde composer. Ornstein's thinking on music and his compositions provided an indispensable link between the mainline European musical tradition and the modernism of Scriabin and Stravinsky.¹⁷

As important as Rosenfeld's association with Reis and Ornstein was for his work as a music critic, his membership in the 291 circle and his apprenticeship with Stieglitz was more fundamentally important to his understanding of artistic modernism. What is more, Rosenfeld found Stieglitz's photographs to be near-perfect realizations of the Platonic conception of art that he had been turning over in his mind since his student days at Columbia. At 291 Rosenfeld met most of the fourteen artists whose works he would present to a wider public in his highly influential book, *Port of New York*. And, under Stieglitz's tutelage Rosenfeld saw how the modern impulse he heard in the new European composers related to the works of certain contemporary American painters and writers, especially Albert P. Ryder, Marsden Hartley, John Marin and William Carlos Williams.¹⁸

Claire Raphael Reis and Leo Ornstein

Claire Reis was Claire Raphael before her marriage to Arthur Reis in 1915. In 1910 she had organized the People's Music League as the musical branch of the People's Institute of New York, an adult education program mainly for immigrants to New York City. Later, from 1923 to 1948, she chaired the League of Composers, an organization of central importance to the

¹⁷ Platt to Godbout, 1963, Rosenfeld Papers.

¹⁸ Platt to Godbout, 1963, Rosenfeld Papers; Rosenfeld, "Grand Transformation Scene," 359; Claire R. Reis, *Composer, Conductors, and Critics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955), 21-2.

advancement of new music in America. Rosenfeld met Claire Raphael when Frank invited him as the only "outsider" to hear the trio he had formed to read through some new chamber works. The trio, which consisted of Frank on cello, Reis on piano, and A. Walter Kramer on violin, met regularly at Raphael's mother's apartment on the upper west side of Manhattan. Kramer, a critic for *Musical America*, had access to a range of contemporary pieces, many of them unavailable to the public. Thinking back on these sessions from the mid-1950s, Reis remembered Rosenfeld lying "folded up on the sofa," feeling "like some royal personage, with a private trio playing just for [him]." According to Reis these evenings "marked the beginning of [Rosenfeld's] interest in becoming a music critic." Reis remembered the four of them "chatt[ing] in the late evening over our beer and sandwiches," with "Paul who would make discriminating remarks about such American composers as Horatio Parker and Charles Ives, about whom in those days we knew very little."¹⁹

After a few more sessions Raphael asked Leo Ornstein, a classmate of hers at the Institute of Musical Art in New York, to join Rosenfeld in listening to their readings. Rosenfeld and Ornstein immediately struck up a friendship. Before this meeting Rosenfeld had heard Ornstein perform and explain his music at the Sorbonne in early 1914; Ornstein was then a guest of the renown music critic and historian Mario Calvocoressi. Rosenfeld heard him again later in the same year perform his own music and that of other moderns at the Band Box Theater on East Fifty-Seventh street in Manhattan. Both events were important steps in Rosenfeld's "grand transformation," with Ornstein's interpretation of Debussy holding particular significance for

¹⁹ Platt to Godbout, 1963, Rosenfeld Papers; Claire R. Reis, *Composer, Conductors, and Critics*, 21-2.

Rosenfeld. Whereas some listeners, according to Waldo Frank, “nodded in boredom,” when Ornstein played Debussy, Rosenfeld perked up. Before his enthusiastic turn to modernism Rosenfeld had been unsettled about Debussy’s position among the modern composers; his music sounded like “Wagner volatilized.” In the late 1910s Rosenfeld came to an understanding of Debussy’s importance to the internal history of musical composition, but had only a half-formed sense about whether or not the religious sense that inspired Debussy’s music—a strain of romantic pantheism--was an appropriate response to present realities. Ornstein helped Rosenfeld find his way toward a more settled view of Debussy; for Ornstein, wrote Rosenfeld, felt “Debussy’s delicate pantheism in the inanimate substances of the man-made, scientific world.” After hearing Ornstein’s own aggressive and edgy compositions, which to James Gibbon Huneker’s ears, made Arnold Schonberg’s twelve tone serialism sound “tame,” Rosenfeld nick-named Ornstein “the nitro-glycerin kid,” and defended his music in a May 1916 number of *The New Republic*, Rosenfeld’s first piece of music criticism on a living American composer.²⁰

The son of a rabbi, Ornstein was born in 1895 in Kremench, an important commercial town in southwest Russian. At the age of nine he was accepted at the St. Petersburg Conservatory where he studied piano, and composition with Nicholai Rimsky-Korsakov and Alexander Glazunov—the great Russian nationalist composers. He was also an omnivorous reader; as Frank put it, “This music man [knew] books.” And as one of his biographers said, Ornstein would be “thoroughly unhappy” unless he did “a certain amount of real reading” each day in “modern literature, modern history, and political economy.” Fleeing the persecution of the

²⁰ Reis, *Composer, Conductors, and Critics*, 34-5; Waldo Frank, *Time Exposures* (New York: Boni & Liveright, 1926), 141, 143-4; Rosenfeld, “Grand Transformation Scene,” 358.

Russian Jews unleashed by the Czarist regime, Ornstein and his family settled on the lower east side of Manhattan where he lived until he was nineteen. His prodigious talent caught the attention of Mrs. Bertha Feriing Tapper, perhaps New York's most distinguished teacher of piano. She and her husband, Dr. Thomas Tapper, took him in as one of their own. Under Mrs. Tapper's direction Ornstein perfected his piano playing and broadened his education in literature, painting, and history. He attended reading groups at the Tappers, summered with them during his teens, and accompanied them twice to Europe. At the Tappers' summer home he met and, in some cases spent much time with, major musical figures of the 1910s, including Horatio Parker, who performed most of his opera *Mona* for him and the Tappers on the piano as a work in progress. One wonders how much of Rosenfeld's great fervor for this opera derived from Ornstein's own insights into his hearing of the unfinished *Mona*, for Rosenfeld was not only an associate of Ornstein's but his piano student as well.²¹

Ornstein often spoke to Rosenfeld and others with great reverence and affection for Mrs. Tapper, recognizing her as perhaps the greatest influence on his career. Without denying the Tappers' importance to Ornstein's development, Rosenfeld stressed the significance of the Ornsteins forced migration "during the formative period of [Leo's] life," which transformed him from "the pianist infant-prodigy of Petrograd society [to] the boy of a dense and livid slum." Thus Rosenfeld struck an essential chord which resonated through much of his writing on Americanism: the centrality of composers' early experiences and environment in shaping their music. Although Ornstein's life was ostensibly "limited" by his experience of bourgeois Russian

²¹Frederick H. Martens, *Leo Ornstein* (New York: Arno Press, 195), 9-16, 31; Frank, *Time Exposures*, 142, 146.

life and then the Jewish ghetto on New York's lower east side, Ornstein brought something unexampled to "the art-forms of music," enabling him at nineteen years old "to make his first original contribution to music." Having left behind "the traces of the composers who had most influenced him--Mousorgsky and Debussy, Ornstein began making music out of what he himself had felt, it was the voice of the city proletariat, that pierced, raucous and dissonant, but with a primeval starkness that left no suspicion of the sentimentally sordid, into European music." Notwithstanding the "adolescent" quality in Ornstein's "impulsive surrender to the emotion of the moment," Ornstein's music surpassed even Scriabin's in its ability to express the "world successive to the lyrical" that Rosenfeld sought after, even if it lacked Scriabin's impersonality. Rosenfeld was especially impressed with the operation of Ornstein's literary imagination on his music; his ability to invest the stock symbols of European culture with new meaning. The Dwarves of Ornstein's *Dwarf Suite*, "the six musical moods that comprise his first wholly individual utterance," wrote Rosenfeld, are scarcely the gnomes of Grimm's Fairy Tales. They are rather "the stunted and subterranean lives of those ground by want and ignorance."²²

Such a characterization of the Eastern European Jews huddled into the tenements of lower Manhattan resonated greatly with Rosenfeld, for this was the ghetto to which his father, Julius, retired after his financial decline. But it is also a typically bourgeois view of Jewish ghetto life, which explained why Ornstein's middle class audiences rejected his music. Gustav Mahler, Reis wrote, had to quell an audience on the verge of rioting in reaction to Ornstein's music and the music of some other moderns he played--Stravinsky, Bartok, Albeniz. But Rosenfeld argued that Ornstein had set these audiences on edge not so much because of his

²² Rosenfeld, "Ornstein," *The New Republic*, 27 May 1916, 84.

music's rough sonorities, but because in pieces such as the *Dwarf Suite*, *Dawn*, and *Funeral March* "Ornstein offered the world, not what one could wish the unfortunate and despairing to feel, but what in their sunless existence they do feel." Such is why "concert audiences turn in revulsion" from him. But Rosenfeld's assessment of Ornstein's music did not dwell solely on his difficulties with audiences, or his musical representations of the brute facts of ghetto life. He also recognized that a growing number of listeners had begun to master Ornstein's idiom," and had thereby "come to an understanding of the content of his art and the quality of the human experience there transmuted into sound." To those who listened attentively, "the form is little short of perfect." What is more they will see the object of Ornstein's music: his struggle "to advance the universal sympathy and understanding that for [Ornstein] is the contribution of art to the salvation of the world."²³

Convinced that the success of Ornstein's work required mediation, Rosenfeld set out to reproduce in America the format that Calvocoressi used to present Ornstein's music at the Sorbonne. In 1915 Rosenfeld wrote to Claire Reis from Blue Hill, Maine, where he had been summering with Ornstein, about establishing a series of lecture-recitals for a small group of Manhattan patrons. The series would then be the basis for "a Modern Music Club," a forerunner to the gatherings that Rosenfeld himself organized during the 1920s. Rosenfeld envisioned a series of six Sunday evening recitals as "a comprehensive course in modern piano music," as a way to energize the New York music scene. Reis was sympathetic to Ornstein's difficulties with audience, managers and programs, so she and her new husband Arthur M. Reis arranged for Ornstein to perform the six recital-lectures to small groups of people at their home on 202

²³Ibid., 84-5.

Madison Avenue. They occurred during the first six months of 1916, immediately before Rosenfeld accepted the position of music editor for *The Seven Arts* in the fall. For a series price of \$7, between fifty and sixty people heard Ornstein play a varied program of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century composers, including the piano compositions of Scriabin, Franck, Mousorgsky, Vincent D'Indy, Schoenberg, Maurice Ravel, Cyril Scott, Federico Busoni and Ornstein's own works. By way of performance and discussion Rosenfeld and Ornstein sought to demonstrate concretely the ways in which new piano music diverged from the more familiar romantic piano repertory. Puncturing the argument that modern compositions such as Ornstein's were thoughtless departures from accepted practices, they showed their audience the inner logic of how contemporary composers' music developed from previous styles of composition.²⁴

The Influence of Alfred Stieglitz

Rosenfeld's active participation in the Reis circle of musicians and arts patrons was his first ensemble project since his work on the *Yale Literary Magazine*, but it was not nearly as important in the development of his vocation to write criticism as was his membership in the circle of painters, photographers, writers, poets, and musicians that gathered around Alfred Stieglitz at 291 Fifth Avenue. The father of modern photography and a widely celebrated leader of the American avant garde, Stieglitz worked his whole life to establish photography as a fine art, which for him meant taking photographs that communicated an interior experience of external reality, and connecting it to some perennial and universal value.

²⁴ Rosenfeld to Claire Reis, 6 August 1915, Music Division, The New York Public Library; Reis, *Composer, Conductors, and Critics*, 31-2; Martens, *Leo Ornstein*, 29-30.

Besides Stieglitz's famous and theretofore incomparable photographs of New York such as *The Terminal*, *Winter--Fifth Avenue*, *Five Points*, *South Street*, and *the Flatiron Building*, he organized the New York Camera Club in 1897, founded and edited its journal, *Camera Notes*, and arranged photographic exhibits. In 1902 Stieglitz left the New York Camera Club to start the less conventional Photo-Secessionists, and *Camera Work*, which he founded with the photographer, Edward Steichen. "Perhaps the handsomest and most aesthetically presented of all periodicals," according to Rosenfeld, "*Camera Work* was the organ for the circle of artists and writers that formed around Stieglitz at his gallery on 291 Fifth Avenue."²⁵

The Stieglitz circle was in its heyday in 1915 when Frank brought Rosenfeld into it. Sherwood Anderson, Van Wyck Brooks, Alfred Kreymborg, Lewis Mumford, Albert Ryder, Herbert Seligmann, Paul Strand, and William Carlos Williams were then among the many regular "two-ninety-oners." Most all of them venerated Stieglitz, and, as Edward Dahlberg recalled, Stieglitz delighted in playing the patriarch to these "literature and painting orphans." So many artists, writers, and others flocked to him because they "had no playthings besides their books and canvases, and no one to love." To Marianne Moore, the Stieglitz circle when it convened in its gallery at 291 Fifth Avenue was "an American Acropolis so to speak, with a stove in it, a kind of eagle's perch of selectiveness, and like the ardor of fire in its completeness."²⁶

Stieglitz himself, according to Rosenfeld, "desired to function only as the member of an

²⁵ Abrahams, *The Lyrical Left*, 93-203; Rosenfeld, *Port of New York*, 268.

²⁶ Dahlberg, *Alms for Oblivion*, 15; Marianne Moore, "Stieglitz," in *Stieglitz Memorial Portfolio, 1864-1946*, ed., Dorothy Norman (New York: Twice a Year Press, 1947), 29.

active group. What actually he desired was the functioning of the entire group of which he was a member." Writing during the early 1920s, Rosenfeld attributed Stieglitz's attachment to this group ideal to "some unconscious family feeling; perhaps the strong Jewish family feeling; extending in this case not to individuals related in blood, but related in work and spirit." Just before his death in 1946 Rosenfeld suggested a different motive: that Stieglitz formed his circle out of deep loneliness.²⁷

Whatever Stieglitz's reasons for gathering to him these so-called orphans, there was no doubt that Rosenfeld was Stieglitz's favorite son, and that Rosenfeld was the most staunchly loyal to Stieglitz and his ideas. Rosenfeld was a constant presence at Stieglitz's New York galleries: The Gallery at 291 Fifth Avenue from 1915 to 1917, The Intimate Gallery at 489 Park Avenue from 1925 to 1929, and An American Place at 509 Madison Avenue from 1929 to 1934. He spent parts of his summers with Stieglitz at Lake George from the mid-1910s until the mid-1940s, and the two corresponded heavily from 1915 to 1946. As Stieglitz's "admiring protégée," Rosenfeld, wrote Bram Dijkstra, became by 1916 "the official theoretician of 291," a position of central importance to the Stieglitz group since, as Stieglitz wrote in 1917, 291 was not "devoted entirely to the ultra modern in painting and sculpture," but "to ideas" and their "development." Rosenfeld's first major, systematic effort at promulgating the ideas of the 291 circle was as editor of *Manuscripts*, its underground house organ. By 1920 Rosenfeld was thoroughly convinced that Stieglitz, for his photography, his temperament, and most of all his ideas on art and expression, was "the only great artist [America] had produced since Walt Whitman." Stieglitz, for Rosenfeld, had displaced Henry Adams as America's leading cultural figure of the turn of the

²⁷ Rosenfeld, *Port of New York*, 264, and "Alfred Stieglitz," *Commonweal*, 380.

century. What is more, Rosenfeld came to see his impressionistic style of critical writing, which already bore the influence of Walter Pater, Author Symons, and others, as an imitation of Stieglitz's medium. It was, as he told Stieglitz, an attempt "to 'photograph' musical America." Accordingly, Rosenfeld entitled his first volume of music criticism, *Musical Portraits*.²⁸

Rosenfeld's unflinching devotion to Stieglitz baffled his contemporaries. Immersed in an intellectual culture that had raised personal autonomy to a moral imperative, Rosenfeld's loyalty to Stieglitz stood at odds with this culture's first principle: the search for certain knowledge had to proceed from the foundation of reason alone unhampered by unfounded opinion, prejudice, tradition, or external authority. Edmund Wilson viewed the unique bond between Stieglitz and Rosenfeld as something foreign, which stood in the way of his own full intellectual communion with Rosenfeld. Dahlberg wrote derisively of Rosenfeld as Stieglitz's "acolyte," and Joel Eisinger in a recent book on American criticism of modernist philosophy writes that Rosenfeld's identification with Stieglitz was so close that Rosenfeld's "interesting" reviews of Stieglitz's thought and photography "may be seen as essentially Stieglitz's review of himself." Llewlyn Powys wrote amusingly of Rosenfeld's fidelity to Stieglitz, which, as he saw it, could not even brook understatements about Stieglitz's achievement. "One had only to use such a phrase as 'inspired photographer' in connection with the name of Mr. Alfred Stieglitz, and [Rosenfeld]

²⁸ Dahlberg, *Alms for Oblivion*, 8, 15; Waldo Frank, Lewis Mumford, Dorothy Norman, Paul Rosenfeld, & Harold Rugg, eds., *America and Alfred Stieglitz* (New York: Octagon Books, 1975), 311-6; Rosenfeld to Stieglitz, 30 August 1920, Rosenfeld Papers; Joel Eisinger, *Trace and Transformation: American Criticism of Photography in the Modernist Period* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995), 61; Bram Dijkstra, *The Hieroglyphics of a New Speech*, 108, 110; Stieglitz to Miss Parish, 8 May, 1917, Stieglitz Papers.

would 'go up into the air' as surely and rapidly as the lizard gardener in *Alice in Wonderland* shot up the chimney." It was precisely such extreme characterizations as the foregoing that Lewis Mumford sought to correct in his critical assessment of Rosenfeld for *Voyager in the Arts*. Mumford granted that Rosenfeld was "loyal in his allegiance to the group around Alfred Stieglitz," and "to Stieglitz himself," but Mumford insisted, he was "never uncritically loyal, and not prevented by his loyalty from finding significant work elsewhere." Moreover, Rosenfeld unlike Stieglitz "rarely repeated himself," something Stieglitz did often, and which tried the patience of writers like Dahlberg, who remained aloof from Stieglitz's inner circle, but still acknowledged his "genius."²⁹

The reasons for Rosenfeld's great admiration and allegiance to Stieglitz are varied and complex. Like others who valued Stieglitz's thought and work, Rosenfeld regarded himself not so much as Stieglitz's follower but as his fellow pilgrim headed toward a common end by way of his own unique path. He also admired Stieglitz as a person for his habit of generous self-giving. Intellectually, Stieglitz's blend of idealism and realism, and his sense of reality's openness to the transcendent, powerfully attracted Rosenfeld. Rosenfeld stood in awe of Stieglitz's unexampled ability to use "the dead eye of the camera" to "affirm life." Besides alerting their viewers to "the majesty of the moment," Stieglitz's prints captured with great poignancy certain fundamental paradoxes of human existence that Rosenfeld had been grappling with since his years at Yale: multiplicity and unity, tragedy and wonder, objectivity and subjectivity. Rosenfeld also found in

²⁹ Christopher Shannon, *Conspicuous Criticism* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), xi-xii; Wilson, "Paul Rosenfeld: Three Phases," in *Voyager in the Arts*, 7; Dahlberg, *Alms for Oblivion*, 6; Eisinger, *Trace and Transformation*, 61; Llewlyn Powys, *The Verdict of Bridle goose* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1926), 137; Mumford, "Lyric Wisdom," in *Voyager in the Arts*, 62, 64.

Stieglitz's photographs what he had previously discovered in the music of Ornstein: a concrete expression of art engaged with the conditions of modern American life. Stieglitz's photographs, however, offered a fuller engagement with present realities than did Ornstein's music in that Stieglitz used the camera, a "complex modern mechanism," as his expressive instrument "to affirm the human values which America had so gravely promised to foster" but which industrialism had denied. It was a machine being used to probe a machine culture. In Stieglitz's hands this machine extended the range and depth of human experience and vision, whereas "the folk of the industrial world of America," whether involuntarily or not, tended "to make themselves like the dead mechanism." In the raging debate among American Progressives on the promise and the threat that the machine posed to American life, Stieglitz showed how a machine—the camera—could be used to accent America's democratic values and drive its noblest aspirations. Known as an Americanist, Stieglitz's Americanism consisted of the revival of the democratic promise of America life for the full development of the human person. All of Stieglitz's life and work, Rosenfeld wrote, has been about "the spirit of ideal aspiration and spiritual growth."³⁰

Rosenfeld's "fealty" to Stieglitz also owed much to the close similarities in their upbringing, including their common ties to the Liebmann and Obermeyer families, and their families' devotion to German *Kultur*. Born on New Year's Day 1864 in Hoboken, New Jersey, Stieglitz was twenty-six years older than Rosenfeld, yet they died within eight days of each other in July 1946. No record is extant which reveals the content of their exchange when, in 1915, Frank brought Rosenfeld to the 291 Gallery to see Stieglitz. How curious it must have been for

³⁰ Rosenfeld, *Port of New York*, 240-5.

Rosenfeld in his adulthood to befriend Stieglitz. This man, who would quickly become the most influential figure in his professional and personal life, had till then only hovered on the periphery of his extended family. Stieglitz had roomed with Rosenfeld's great uncle, Joseph Obermeyer, when both of them were studying in Berlin. Later, in 1890 the year Rosenfeld was born, Stieglitz entered the photoengraving business with Obermeyer; three years later Stieglitz married Joseph's sister and Rosenfeld's great aunt, Emmeline Obermeyer. Through this marriage Stieglitz enjoyed an income from the Obermeyer and Liebmann Breweries, which sustained him and his family when he withdrew from business and dedicated himself to artistic enterprises such as the publication of *Camera Notes* (1903-1917), and the 291 Gallery.³¹

The commonalities between Stieglitz and Rosenfeld went beyond their reliance on brewery money for the main part of their material sustenance. Both came from German-Jewish families who had immigrated to the United States in the mid-nineteenth century to escape the upheavals brought on by the revolutions of 1848. The Stieglitzes, like the Rosenfelds, were steeped in the German romanticism and German music, and their family life exemplified the conviviality and intimacy that was the hallmark of the bourgeoisie. His family, Rosenfeld wrote, "loves life and believes in the enjoyment of its gifts and had a genuine, if slightly soft and sentimental, feeling of beauty and great friendliness for the human being." The Stieglitzes imbued Alfred with a profound sense of loyalty to family and place, just as the Rosenfelds had done for Paul. As Stieglitz's niece, Sue Davidson Lowe, writes in her exhaustive memoir and

³¹Rosenfeld, "The Photography of Alfred Stieglitz," *The Nation* 134 (23 March 1932): 350-1; and "Stieglitz," *Dial* (April 1921): 399; Frank et al., eds., *American and Alfred Stieglitz*, 311-2; Sue Davidson Lowe, *Stieglitz: A Memoir/Biography* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1983), 208.

biography of Stieglitz, Stieglitz self-consciously moved in directions that stood opposed to the predominant one of his family, yet he could not be without his family even in his adulthood. Summer after summer Stieglitz gathered his extended family together at the his family's spacious estate on Lake George. "He seems to have needed them," wrote Lowe, "if only to rekindle his rebellion, to fuel his purpose." Later, during the 1920s and 1930s, many of the New York writers and artists who formed his circle joined these family get-togethers. The Lake George estate served as a retreat for these "literature and painting orphans," but for Stieglitz it meant a great deal more. "The place etched itself into his art and being." His attachment to Lake George, according to Lowe, would exceeded his attachment "to New York City, to his camera, and indeed to any woman -- Georgia O' Keefe included."³²

Stieglitz's father, Edward, had had the family house on Lake George built in the early 1870s, as a complement to the "ultramodern" brownstone he built for his family on East 60th Street in Manhattan. An emigre from Hanover-Munden Edward in 1850 began as a manufacturer of mathematical instruments in Manhattan. When the Civil War broke out he enlisted in the army and rose to the rank of first Lieutenant. In 1863 he resigned his commission and married Hedwig Werner, who had also immigrated to the United States from Germany. Edward became a fabulously successful woolen merchant in New York and New Jersey. In "The Boy in the Dark Room," Rosenfeld's contribution to *America and Alfred Stieglitz*, Rosenfeld recorded some of the many anecdotes he had heard directly from Stieglitz, and stories about Stieglitz that had circulated among the Liebmanns and Obermeyers. In this essay Rosenfeld paid careful attention

³² Rosenfeld, "The Boy in the Dark Room," in Frank et al., eds., *America and Alfred Stieglitz*, 60; Lowe, *Stieglitz*, 7.

to the details of Edward Stieglitz's rise to financial fortune in order to show that, despite his great success, the life of commerce did not overly detract Edward from his more important interest in self-cultivation and the cultivation of his family. For Edward Stieglitz, as for Julius Rosenfeld, business was strictly the "means" to support his wife and "brood of six...sundry dependent relatives," his interests: "painting, esthetic study, horseback, billiards, sporting events, and picture auctions, the protection of artists, and the cultivation and embellishment of the extensive grounds of the summer home which he had built himself on the shores of his beloved Lake George."³³

Rosenfeld and Alfred Stieglitz admired their fathers' abilities to run successful commercial ventures while at the same time making sure that running them did not become more important than the cultivation of higher human pursuits. Nevertheless, at times the two pursuits--commerce and culture--did come into conflict, and neither Edward or Julius handled conflicts well. Both were prone to violent, verbal outbursts, which left their families terrorized. Rosenfeld, as noted in an earlier chapter, was deeply affected by his parents' violent verbal battles, which often stemming from financial struggles. Stieglitz too was powerfully affected by such outbursts. "They caused me," he said, "to grow up with a feeling about money as a release but, at the same time a deadly poison." Besides living with the familial tensions arising from money matters, Rosenfeld and Alfred both saw their fathers ruined by business reverses brought on by the Panic of 1907. Edward Stieglitz was not wiped out as completely as Julius was; nor did he lose his sanity following his financial collapse. Consequently, Rosenfeld and Alfred

³³ Rosenfeld, "The Boy in the Dark Room," 60-2; Dorothy Norman, *Alfred Stieglitz: An American Seer* (New York: Random House, 1973), 16-7.

Stieglitz developed a strong antipathy to the world of commerce, and especially the American cult of business for the sake of business. Moreover, the uncompromising pursuit of material comfort derived from standardized consumer goods, savage competition, and extreme rationalization of human effort had pressed themselves into all areas of human existence so much so that they felt compelled to completely dissociate themselves from it. In their thinking, the quest for the life of the spirit through art demanded such a break; neither one could see their way through to a compromise between the two spheres. Wilson, as noted already, upbraided Rosenfeld for his inability to hawk his writing in the marketplace, and Stieglitz foreswore the life of commerce after a bad experience in the photoengraving business.³⁴

Stieglitz was particularly worried about by the debasing influence of the emerging advertising industry on photography, constantly exhorting the photographers in his circle to stay clear of the print media. The limits of his influence became clear to him when his most brilliant protégée among the 291 photographers, Edward Steichen, went to work for *Vanity Fair* and the advertising firm of J. Walter Thompson in the 1920s, and he became an outspoken advocate for the aesthetic integrity of commercial art work. Steichen's defection set off a nasty debate on the relation between "the Artist's relation with the American plutocracy" that set Steichen and Carl Sandburg, another member of Stieglitz's circle, against Stieglitz and Rosenfeld. Each side caricatured the arguments of the other, and ultimately failed to advance toward a more useful understanding of the relation of art and the world of commerce. Characterizing Stieglitz's movement as "the twilight zone of the "art fo art's sake" school," wherein "all things are still

³⁴ Rosenfeld, "The Boy in the Dark Room," 60-2; Wilson, "Paul Rosenfeld: Three Phases," in *Voyager in the Arts*, 16; Alfred Stieglitz, "Why I Got Out of Business," *Twice-A-Year* (Spring-Summer 1942, Fall-Winter 1942), 106.

born,” Steichen asserted that “there never has been a period when the best thing we had was not commercial art.” In defense of Steichen’s position Sandburg, in his introduction to *Steichen the Photographer* (1929), cited the example Michelangelo’s work for the Church, Lorenzo the Magnificent’s numerous commissions to Raphael, Titian, and Botticelli, and the Dutch patricians’ patronage of various Dutch artists. Rosenfeld found this argument “tilted to deny spirit; to make it appear that the great artists did not work because of an impulse stronger than themselves which they dominated in their art,” and which thereby drew them their commissions. What is more, Steichen and Sandburg, said Rosenfeld, failed to appreciate the difference in nature between commissions in the traditional sense, and “the irresponsibility and Jobbery that generate the main enemy of art, modern mercantile advertisement.”³⁵

Although the debate remained inconclusive at the time, Hilton Kramer revisited the debate in the mid-1970s and sided with Steichen and against Rosenfeld, arguing that Steichen’s break was vindicated by subsequent development in American culture. “It proved that Steichen understood something about the nature of the photographic enterprise--about its relation to public experience and the role it was destined to play in modern culture--that eluded Stieglitz’s more sectarian ambitions.” Edward Abrahams in *The Lyrical Left* (1986), also argues that already by 1917 Stieglitz had moved closer to Steichen’s position. With the break up of his marriage to Emmeline Obermeyer, Stieglitz no longer benefitted from the Liebmann and Obermeyer fortune which had sustained his avant garde efforts. With everything collapsing around Stieglitz, Abrahams seems delighted in the irony of Stieglitz’s last ditch effort to sell current and back

³⁵ Douglas, *Terrible Honesty*, 66; Rosenfeld, “Carl Sandburg and Photography,” *The New Republic* (22 January 1930): 251-2; Paul Strand, “Steichen and Commercial Art,” *The New Republic* (19 February 1930): 21.

issues of *Camera Work* to Wanamaker's, the New York Public Library, and the Library of Congress. He assured each institution "that in a very short time *Camera Work* [would] be priceless." Spoiled by his dependency on brewery money, Stieglitz had a distorted view of the relation of art to the commercial interests in an advanced civilization. But, be that as it may, Rosenfeld's unyielding defense of the Stieglitz circle as "among the great American movements with spirit as their source," reflected the degree to which Rosenfeld's commitment to the transcendent power of the arts stubbornly resisted accommodation to commerce and emerging culture of consumption.³⁶

Although Rosenfeld's and Stieglitz's familial backgrounds were quite similar, Stieglitz never cultivated the deep filial affection for his father that Rosenfeld did for his; Stieglitz's affection went mostly to his mother. Hedwig Werner Stieglitz descended from a family of scholars and rabbis; and although the Stieglitzes, like the Rosenfelds set aside Jewish practices, she was responsible for keeping alive in her son Judaism's sense of wonder about the world. Georgia O' Keefe, Hedwig's second daughter-in-law, once described her as "dignified." Rosenfeld described her as "cultured, soft, hospitable, generous." He stood in amazement of her concentration, attentiveness, and her memory, noting that she was "an insatiable devourer of novels," reading as many as "a hundred of them a year," along with a fair amount of literary criticism. Alfred Stieglitz attributed to her his own great love for the German romantic writers, especially Goethe, Schiller and Heine; doubtless she also helped form in him the habit of

³⁶ Hilton Kramer, "The Young Steichen: Painter with a Camera," *New York Times* Section 2, 16 June 1974, 27; Abrahams, *The Lyrical Left*, 202-3; Rosenfeld, "Carl Sandburg and Photography," 252.

attentiveness to his surroundings.³⁷

In 1881 the Stieglitzes moved to Germany to provide their children with “the advantages of a Continental education,” and in particular to allow Alfred the opportunity to study engineering at the Berlin Polytechnic Institute. It was in Europe when he was in his early teens that Alfred developed a love of sport. Quite unlike Rosenfeld, who had an aversion to the strenuous physical life, Stieglitz ran, swam, and played tennis, constantly probing the limits of his physical capabilities. When Stieglitz was thirteen, for example, he ran twenty-five miles around the furnace-heated cellar of his home. He did this feat in three-and-a-half hours, and staged the event in the grand manner of “the record-breaking contests of the period.” Watching him were friends and his younger brothers “holding stop-watches, pails, and sponges, and periodically mopping the athlete’s face.” Later on in his life Stieglitz would often set the energy and concentration required of sport and art against an American culture that fostered living life inattentively. His numerous photographs of horse races combined his adoration of sport and photography. Curiously, Stieglitz’s close attention to horses enabled him to spot accurately the winners, but he recoiled from taking advantage of his expertise because he worried that betting would corrupt his love of sport and art.³⁸

Stieglitz’s interest in sports and the arts intensified as he became less interested in his engineering studies. The policies of the German Universities of the time did not require students to attend the classes they registered for or to sit for examinations until they felt themselves

³⁷ *Georgia O’Keeffe: A Portrait by Alfred Stieglitz*, introduction by Georgia O’Keeffe (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1978), n.p.; Rosenfeld, “The Boy in the Dark Room,” 61-2.

³⁸ Rosenfeld, “The Boy in the Dark Room,” 62; Norman, *Alfred Stieglitz*, 16-7; Alfred Stieglitz to R. Child Bayley, 9 October, 1919, Stieglitz Papers.

prepared to do so. Not faced with any stringent academic requirement he spent “spent most of his time playing billiards, practicing piano, and standing through performances at the opera.” He heard his two favorites operas, *Tristan* and *Carmen*, “over a hundred times apiece.” Rosenfeld was particularly interested in the importance of discovering certain books for oneself; he was therefore attentive to the writers that Stieglitz discovered and read on his own. Chief among these were Lermontov, Gogol, Pushkin, Turgenev, and Tolstoy. Although steeped in German romanticism from his youth, Stieglitz took great delight as an adult in the rediscovery of German romanticism. Like Rosenfeld, he became particularly fascinated with the feminine ideal, which Rosenfeld described as “the singer of the ultimate salvation flowing from unflagging, disinterested endeavor.” At first Stieglitz saw this ideal symbolized in “the figure of a simple girl, later by that of Helen of Troy, and last by the feminine principle in Creation.” In this context, Goethe’s *Faust* gripped him like no other book, containing for him “the curious business of the juxtaposition of Gretchen and the devil.” Stieglitz, said Rosenfeld, “found the intrigue pathetic and mysterious.” Among the nineteenth-century realists, Zola’s writings, especially his *Madeleine Ferat*, “profoundly moved him.” Rosenfeld attributed Stieglitz’s interest to Zola’s experimental use of fiction as a way to uncover “the laws underlying the phenomena of life,” which for Rosenfeld and for Stieglitz is the artist’s reason for being.³⁹

Although Rosenfeld and Stieglitz made similar discoveries in their self-directed studies in the romantic tradition, the democratic motif in romanticism appealed to Stieglitz more immediately than it did to Rosenfeld. To be sure, before Rosenfeld became associated with the Stieglitz circle he had probed the nationalist elements in romanticism, particularly in his Yale

³⁹ Rosenfeld, “The Boy in the Dark Room,” 62, 66.

essays on Yeats and Whistler, but until he met Stieglitz he paid little attention to the explicitly democratic element in romantic thought, or as a salient characteristic of American nationalism. Even as a boy, according to Rosenfeld, Stieglitz manifested an unusual reverence for American democracy, particularly “on the opportunities for human development that its ‘democratic’ institutions seem to provide.” The tentativeness of Rosenfeld’s approval of democracy in America reflects his and Stieglitz’s lifelong belief that America had not realized the full potential of its democracy, that its institutions fostered an unbalanced development of the human person, one which almost completely ignored the spiritual aspect of personhood, and which did not fully respect the person’s freedom.⁴⁰

In keeping with his romantic sensibility, Stieglitz had a mythic sense of the American founding, which he spoke of in the most exalted patriotic language, and which, for Rosenfeld, had a certain Faustian quality to it. The hero at the center of Stieglitz’s epic conception of “the revolutionary birth of this most noble, humane, and free of lands” was General Nathaniel Greene, who Rosenfeld identified with Vicomte de Turenne for “the rapidity of his maneuvers,” and Scipio Africanus for “his successful attack upon the enemy on his own ground.” Although Greene avoided decisive engagements and received no great glory, he wore down Tarleton and Cornwallis by leading them on a hectic chase across the rough countryside of the Carolinas and Virginia, losing few American soldiers along the way, and conserving scarce material. “Like Goethe’s *Faust*, the image of democratic victory,” wrote Rosenfeld, gained by the patient conservation of resources over a long period, and the willingness to let the enemy purchase Pyrrhic triumphs dearly, prov[ed] endlessly gratifying” to Stieglitz. For Rosenfeld, Stieglitz

⁴⁰ Ibid., 62.

himself was a General Nathaniel Greene inasmuch as he conducted “his forty-year-long prodigious...campaigns for democracy,” which benefitted about a half-million patrons, with “subsidies amounting to \$37,000.”⁴¹

Stieglitz’s faith in the power of art to revivify American life animated these “campaigns.” A committed cultural nationalist, Stieglitz, like the Young Americans, argued that if American painters, writers, and composers merely copied European forms and styles, then their work will not adequately express life in America, or help shape that life. To Edward Abrahams, Stieglitz’s championing of an American art seemed paradoxical in view of his strenuous efforts to introduce the work of European modern artists to Americans in the 1910s. But this paradox is readily resolved, for Stieglitz had intended from the start to inspire the creation of an American art by contrasting the work of Cezanne, Matisse, Picasso, and Kandinsky against his own photography. As he wrote Rosenfeld in 1923, he had hoped that from such a comparison would spring “America without the damned French flavor.”⁴²

As many scholars have noted, Stieglitz’s reading of Walt Whitman also informed his Americanism, especially Whitman’s belief that artists’ works ought to be grounded in the place where they lived, and that new forms of artistic expression could indeed transform American democracy, putting it back on track toward the realization of what Rosenfeld called “the high dream of its promise.” In Stieglitz’s words: “My whole life in this country has really been devoted to fighting the terrible poison which has undermined the American nation. As an American, I resented the hypocrisy, the short sightedness, the lack of construction, the actual

⁴¹ Ibid., 62-3, 82.

⁴² Abrahams, *The Lyrical Left*, 169; Stieglitz to Rosenfeld, 8 May 1917, Stieglitz Papers.

stupidity in control everywhere.” For Rosenfeld Stieglitz’s insistence on holding America to its founding principles was a restoration of the original European hope for the democratic promise of America, which had thus far “seemed in truth the greatest of the many great disappointments of humanity.” “Fair play to man and all his faculties, right to his life and to his selfhood, right to experiment, perfect freedom of soul--that, in the marvelous dream of Europe, the new world was to secure for each individual. Beings were to be permitted to expand their natures in ‘numberless and even conflicting directions.’” Rosenfeld attributed Stieglitz’s passion for reanimating these ideals to the experience of Stieglitz’s own family: “folk not long out of Europe,” who had faced the revolutionary upheavals of 1848. Although Rosenfeld never made an explicit and direct link between his own European lineage and his Americanism, it seemed obvious to Allen Tate, for one, that a similar European sense of the unfulfilled promise of America democracy also animated Rosenfeld’s seriousness and consciousness about “America.”⁴³

Reading Rosenfeld’s claims for the liberating power of Stieglitz’s work, and for modern painting, literature and music in general, from the vantage point of the end of the twentieth century, one can easily misinterpret them. The promise of personal freedom that Stieglitz and Rosenfeld revived for Americans was not postmodernism’s insistence on unencumbered self-construction divorced from any objective ideals. Rosenfeld’s exhortation to courageous self-realization and self expression, with “no timid withholding,” must be tempered by his equally emphatic belief in the existence of unchanging truths and objective ideals, and ultimately,

⁴³ Rosenfeld, “Stieglitz,” *Dial* (April 1921): 403; Stieglitz to Fritz Goetz, 23 December 1914, Stieglitz Papers; Tate, “Anomaly in Literary New York,” in *Voyager in the Arts*, 142-3.

following Goethe and the wider Western moral tradition, by his notion of the highest ideal for selfhood: self-donation. As Rosenfeld's biographer Hugh Potter has argued, the ethical presuppositions of German romanticism and the Judeo-Christian tradition provided "a constant moral framework for all of Stieglitz's and Rosenfeld's creative and critical acts. They would endow what they considered as the greatest of American art with discernible moral qualities grounded in Judaic-Christian ethics. Their vision of America was seen through the lens of traditional, historically recognizable Western moral assumptions."⁴⁴

Rosenfeld's complicated sense of the relation of freedom and tradition can be seen in his discussion of how Stieglitz in "liberating the medium" of photography, "liberat[ed] himself." Liberation is the product of creative confrontation of the self, steeled by memory and experience, and the broader traditions external to one's self, which for Rosenfeld included especially the craft traditions and the Western moral tradition. Accordingly, Rosenfeld wrote for the *Dial* in 1921, each of Stieglitz's photographs "is an experiment," with nothing of "past experience repeated in them." Yet, "they contain, of course, restatements of much that had already been stated by men. But they each of them are the result of a complete summoning of all the strength and science gained through past experience, for the sake of solving the problem immediately before the photographer. They are the results of complete re-considerations of what exposure, developing, paper can do to solve a problem." The product of numerous tries at "printing satisfactorily," each photograph is "a daring cast into the future; a daring attempt to discover new land for the human soul. Each one, is the attempt to further sensitize the medium; to make it include more and more

⁴⁴ Peter Minuit, "291 Fifth Avenue," *The Seven Arts* (November 1916): 65; Potter, *False Dawn*, 38.

life in its scope.” A “human force,” concluded Rosenfeld, played easily within received limits, with the result that “a man has been fully registered by a new art.”⁴⁵

Chief among Stieglitz’s achievements, according to Rosenfeld, was his use of the machine to excite mental alertness and to open up reality to the transcendent. His work dissented from the century-long trend in America of delimiting men and women by forcing them adopt to the tempo and rhythms of the machine on the human person. While Rosenfeld had no quarrel with the use of machines in the intelligent production of necessary and unpretentious goods, he resented that mass production, driven by machine power, had stifled thought and debased human labor. “The machine,” he argued, “should have rendered more subtle, more conscious and powerful the human brain; it succeeded, during the nineteenth century, in rendering it more inert than ever. Instead of making free, it had reduced the greater part of the community to doing work fit for morons.” Rosenfeld extended the antimodernist critique of the machine age by pointing out how the routinization it brought with it exacerbated the perennial habit of human inattentiveness. Nearly always on the lookout “for some method of saving the fatigue of brainwork,” Rosenfeld wrote, human beings in modern society had capitulated to live by prescribed routines, foregoing experience for the sake of repeating incessantly a few gestures; it forced them to repeat their old experiences over and over; to numb their desire for improving themselves through improving their craft;...it caused them to seek to regard objects only with the eyes of commerce and industry.” Men and women have always found it easy to shut themselves off from the whole of truth almost with a clear conscience, Rosenfeld argued; but the conditions of modern life informed by a rationalized reductionist mode of understanding reality and

⁴⁵ Rosenfeld, “Stieglitz,” *Dial* (April 1921): 405-6.

existence nearly compels inattention to deeper their deeper meanings. Rosenfeld, who in his letters to Stieglitz would occasionally quote Pascal, would doubtless have agreed with an aphorism from Pascal's *Pensees*: "If you do not take the trouble to know the truth, there is enough truth at hand so that you can live in peace. But if you crave it with all your heart, then it is not enough to know it."⁴⁶

The Judeo-Greco-Christian moral tradition that Stieglitz and Rosenfeld drew on—with its basis in the metaphysical notion that the human person is ontologically open to the transcendent—formed the basis of Stieglitz's renowned idealism, which in turn informed his photography and his cultural criticism. Stieglitz found the ideas of Henri Bergson and Wassily Kandinsky the most compelling contemporary articulations of this received tradition. Stieglitz published in *Camera Work* excerpts from Bergson's *Laughter* (1900) and *Creative Evolution* (1911), and Kandinsky's *On the Spiritual in Art*. According to Susan Lowe, Bergsonianism was perhaps "the strongest philosophical thread" running through Stieglitz's work. Stieglitz was particularly fond of the excerpt from *Laughter* in which Bergson asserted that he "object of art" is "to brush aside...everything that veils reality from us." The second piece, from *Creative Evolution*, introduced a distinction between the "modes" of instinct and intelligence. Instinct, said Bergson, directs itself to "life" and animates itself in art; intelligence, on the other hand, directs itself to inert matter and finds its outlet in science. Instinct, when it is "disinterested, self-conscious, [and] capable of reflecting its object and of enlarging it indefinitely," becomes intuition, which in turn leads to the "very inwardness of life." The intuitive act transports one "into the interior of

⁴⁶ Rosenfeld, *Port of New York*, 258-9.

an object in order to coincide with what there is unique and consequently inexpressible about it.” With Walter Pater, Rosenfeld’s great intellectual mentor, Kandinsky believed that all art should approach the condition of music. For Kandinsky the plastic arts, like music, bypassed the intellect and affected the soul directly. As he wrote in *On the Spiritual in Art*, “Color is the keyboard, the eyes are the hammers, the soul is the piano with many strings. The artist is the hand that plays, touching one key or another purposively, to cause vibrations in the soul.”⁴⁷

Based on the ideas of Bergson and Kandinsky, Stieglitz argued that the visible aspects of the material world reflect a deeper and truer reality accessible only to human feeling. He used photographs as the means of connecting the material world and his experience of the deeper intuited level of reality. It was the associative power of the formal relations among the elements in his prints that led Stieglitz to his famous reference to them as “equivalents,” inasmuch as they were something very much like his “most profound life experience,” and his “basic philosophy of life.” His function as an artist was to communicate these profound experiences to others, but of far greater importance was his hope that in doing so he could contact a plane of absolute experience.⁴⁸

Although Talcott Williams taught Rosenfeld to be more critical in his reading of Bergson’s philosophy, Rosenfeld found it more convincing, and its trendiness less problematic when Stieglitz mediated it for him. Indeed, as Lowe puts it, Rosenfeld found Stieglitz’s

⁴⁷ Henri Bergson, “An Extract from Bergson,” *Camera Work* 36 (October 1911): 20, and “What is the Object of Art,” *Camera Work* 37 (January 1912): 22-36; Wassily Kandinsky, “Extracts from ‘The Spiritual in Art,’” *Camera Work* 39 (July 1912): 34.

⁴⁸ Norman, *Alfred Stieglitz: An American Seer*, 144.

interpretation of Bergson's idealism and his application of it to American culture, "not only congenial but inspiring." For Rosenfeld Stieglitz near perfectly embodied all the values and purposes he had associated with the arts. Writing in late 1916 under the pseudonym Peter Minuit for the inaugural issue of *The Seven Arts*, Rosenfeld used one of Francis Picabia's designs displayed at the 291 Gallery, one which was formed around a Kodak camera, to signal the importance of Stieglitz's idealism. Suggesting the ideal of medieval craftsmanship, the lens of the camera focused on Gothic characters that formed the word "Ideal." Beside the drawing, as Rosenfeld observed, was the legend "Ici, c'est ici Stieglitz--foi et amour." The motto summed up for Rosenfeld the meaning of Stieglitz for America. "Faith and love, love for art, faith in its divine power to renew life, to spur action, to excite the creative impulse." Echoing the sort of Americanism advanced by Emerson, Whitman, and Orestes, Rosenfeld said that the purpose of the 291 gallery was "to procure America what she most need--self-consciousness." The abstractionism that permeated the exhibits at 291 to Rosenfeld revealed the "rhythm" of real life. "This, and not that other blind brute life without, is reality." Thus Rosenfeld and Stieglitz stood opposed to the purpose of the sort of "terrible honesty" that, as Ann Douglas says, demanded to see and hear precisely the brute facts of earthly existence. This opposition was not all an evasion of material reality of reality, a "*divertissement*, or refuge from the world," but rather it was "a bridge to consciousness of self, to life, and through that, to new life and new creation again."⁴⁹

Joel Eisinger in his critical survey of criticism on photography, found Rosenfeld's

⁴⁹ Lowe, *Stieglitz*, 209; Peter Minuit, "291 Fifth Avenue," *The Seven Arts* (November 1916): 61, 63-4.

criticism of Stieglitz “the most interesting” of those critics who were sympathetic to what Stieglitz was trying to achieve. Rosenfeld, says Eisinger, was especially helpful in explaining the central dilemma posed by Stieglitz’s work: the relation of the interior life of the subject and objective reality. F. Richard Thomas in *The Literary Admirers of Alfred Stieglitz* also turned to Rosenfeld’s criticism for its explanatory power of this relation, which lies at the heart of Stieglitz’s idea of Equivalents. Thomas, in his analysis of Equivalents, draws heavily on Rosenfeld’s insights into the unique capabilities of the camera “to evoke the tangible presence of reality.” Whereas the painter emphasizes synthesis in his process, the photographer’s emphasizes selection. The painter can create anything he wants on a canvas, he sets-up relations, whereas the photographer “finds relations in the world.” In finding these relations Stieglitz had to pick out a shot with the details that would contribute to his theme and reveal “emotional experience.” Stieglitz, said Rosenfeld, used the word “Equivalent” to express the subjective “actualities” present in a shot. Stieglitz said, “All my photographs are equivalents of my basic philosophy of life. All art is but a picture of certain basic relationships; an equivalent of the artist’s most profound experience of life.” So what did Stieglitz mean when he called his many photographs of sky cloud forms, Equivalents, and not cloud pictures? Paraphrasing Rosenfeld, Thomas writes: Stieglitz “meant that in the abstract relations of these shapes, tones and lines, he was expressing equivalents of human relationships and feelings.”⁵⁰

Rosenfeld’s and Mumford’s separate reactions to a photograph of clouds and a portrait of

⁵⁰F. Richard Thomas in *The Literary Admirers of Alfred Stieglitz* (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1983), 45; Quoted in Dorothy Norman, *Alfred Stieglitz: Introduction to an American Seer* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1960), 37; Quoted in Carl Siembab, “Alfred Stieglitz,” *Photography Annual* (1969), 14.

Georgia O' Keefe exemplifies the subjective, symbolic representation of Stieglitz's equivalents. For Rosenfeld Stieglitz's clouds "have the released energy of hillsides dynamited." On the O' Keefe portrait Mumford said: "In a part by part revelation of a woman's body, in the isolated presentation of a hand, a breast, a neck, a thigh, a leg, Stieglitz achieved the exact visual equivalent of the report of the hand or the face as it travels over the body of the beloved."⁵¹

Stieglitz's Equivalents are in effect non-linguistic metaphors that in Rosenfeld's words fuse "the objective and subjective world." Stieglitz's search for the right object in the world to stand for "feelings of grandeur, of conflict, of struggle and release. of ecstasy, and despair, life and blotting out of life" was never careless. Stieglitz would stand at length in miserable weather waiting for the precise moment when the objective equivalent to a subjective experience presented itself in reality.⁵²

Rosenfeld's careful discussion of Equivalents reflects Stieglitz's own attempts to have his photography and his group artistic enterprises forced into ready-made categories. Rosenfeld was equally diligent in distinguishing Stieglitz's efforts to transform American life from the prevailing reformism of the period; the former exemplified moral passion, the latter moral uplift. Stieglitz rejected the "activist" art of the progressive era, which to him amounted to sloganeering for a political cause; at the same time he continued the tradition established by William Morris and John Ruskin which insisted that art engage current realities, and challenge and refresh its

⁵¹ Thomas, *Literary Admirers*, 10; Rosenfeld, *Port of New York*, 237-47; Lewis Mumford. "The Metropolitan Milieu." in *America and Alfred Stieglitz*, 17, 57.

⁵² Rosenfeld, "The Boy in the Dark Room," 87.

audience's responses to the world. For Stieglitz as for Rosenfeld, art was inseparable from the conscience of the artist; art had to emerge from its maker's moral sense. Rosenfeld saw this belief exemplified in Stieglitz's belief in the dignity of labor, and his high standards of craftsmanship, which if pursued with integrity led to a regenerative self-transcendence. In Stieglitz's words, "Whether it be scrubbing a floor or painting a picture, only doing the best job of which one is capable finally can fulfill. And then one must aim to surpass even that: to hit not only the target but the center of the center of the target, and then the point beyond that....If we cannot lose ourselves to something beyond, we are bound to be disappointed." Stieglitz's loathing for whatever was shoddy or skimpy explains why he was so hard on those painters, writers, and musicians who gathered around him. His bruising criticisms often destroyed friendships, like Stieglitz's friendship with the painter Max Weber, but he was also quick to encourage and praise meritorious work. Whereas some withered before Stieglitz's demanding expectations, Rosenfeld thrived.⁵³

In a letter Stieglitz wrote to Rosenfeld in November 1920 he admitted to Rosenfeld that working the way he did was "a frightful strain." He rarely achieved the degree of perfection in his negative that he got decades before in Europe. "At that time I discarded any negatives that were not perfect. Now I am not that critical—yet more critical than anyone else. But when it comes to printing I have become more and more exacting, perhaps too exacting for my health."⁵⁴

"The Boy in the Darkroom" contains a story reflective of Rosenfeld's deep regard for Stieglitz's intense work ethic and high standards of craftsmanship. While studying for his

⁵³ Abrahams, *The Lyrical Left*, 181.

⁵⁴ Stieglitz to Rosenfeld, 5 November 1920, Stieglitz Papers.

engineering degree at the Polytechnikum, Stieglitz discovered and then immersed himself in Wilhelm Vogel's classes in photochemistry. Long after his classmates had finished their day's work, he remained in the lab chemically washing plates to remove all impurities in the glass. Only when Vogel told him that total purity was not possible did Stieglitz abandon this effort. But Stieglitz resisted other limitations that Vogel had placed on the camera. When Vogel said that "natural light" was necessary for "a successful photograph," Stieglitz made "a twenty-four-hour exposure of an old dynamo lit dimly by a single distant bulb." To Stieglitz such declared limits to the camera were opportunities to extend its field; he defended "the instrument's capabilities as if it were an extension of himself." When Vogel showed Stieglitz's work to painters in Germany, they encouraged him to paint; while he never gave any serious thought to this suggestion, it strengthened his conviction "that the camera, though mechanical, was as much a tool of the photographer as were the paints and brushes of the painter." Although his media and its processes differed from the painter's, photography, he came to see, was no less an "art." For he too "saw," selected, and afterward "intensified or reduced elements in developing and printing" and thus "gave the ultimate picture its unique characteristic."⁵⁵

During the course of his life Rosenfeld published seven critical essays on Stieglitz and his work, and he co-edited *America and Alfred Stieglitz*. In this first essay for the Seven Arts, Rosenfeld stressed the fundamental theme of Stieglitz's self-giving as a cultural ideal worth imitating. He described Stieglitz's 291 project as an "unselfish activity," that sought no reward but its own existence. "The gallery exists "not for the sake of Picasso and Marin and Nadelman," but "for your sake that you [the viewer] may live your life." A model of the critic as mediator,

⁵⁵ Rosenfeld, "The Boy in the Darkroom," 86-8.

Stieglitz, he said, remains on the gallery floor or in its back rooms ever ready to talk. The ideal democrat, “Stieglitz talks to everybody.” At times “he helps you to your own convictions; other times you help him to his.” His ideas are less important, said Rosenfeld, than the spirit motivating his conversations, “that splendid desire to give himself to whosoever needs him--to America.” Never embittered by the limits of his work’s effect, or self-congratulatory when he is effective, “he is one of those fortunate men whose activity is in itself sufficient reward. That giving of himself in ‘291’ is his life.” Stieglitz himself said at one point: “I cannot look upon anything as mine unless it is available for all.” Rosenfeld asked his readers to celebrate such a “generous spirit that has given itself to us.”⁵⁶

Stieglitz himself thought of his galleries as a privileged sort of meeting space for the public and the artist. Related to this idea was his insistence that the public understand and feel the importance of the artist's work for them. This was the precondition not only for the artist’s claim to cultural leadership, but indeed for his participation in civic life. If his exhibits could not stand up against what lay beyond the walls of his gallery, then in his mind it had “no right to exist.” And “if what is out there can stand up against what is in here, then what is in here does not need to exist.” Stieglitz saw no contradiction between this insistence on the interdependence of the artist and the wider culture and the artist’s duty to authentic self-expression and to sustain and even raise the standard of his craft. Indeed the artist’s responsibility to civic life depends on a certain independence and guarded solitude lest he or she fall prey to social and political fads—and worst of all for Stieglitz (and Rosenfeld), propagandizing.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Ibid., 62, 64-5.

⁵⁷ Dorothy Norman, “An American Place,” in *America and Alfred Stieglitz*,” 127.

European Influences

With good reason Allan Tate characterized Rosenfeld's Americanism as a particularly European understanding of America and its promise. Certainly Rosenfeld's German-American roots informed this sort of Americanism, but it was strengthened by European contemporary European writers such as Romain Rolland. Rolland's *Jean Christophe* as already noted had a powerful effect on Rosenfeld's conception of friendship which had in it echoes of a mystic nationalism reminiscent of such nineteenth-century romantic nationalists such as Giuseppe Manzini. In 1915, the year of Rosenfeld's introduction to the Stieglitz circle, Rolland's *Some Musicians of Former Days*, came out in America. Waldo Frank's close friendship with Rolland enlivened Rosenfeld's interest in this book. One of its chapters, "The Place of Music in General History," probably had a great influence on Rosenfeld's idea of music criticism, and moved him to consider more serious the vocation to write about music. The chapter laments the difficulty the arts have had "in obtaining recognition in general history." The reason lay in good part in that writers, historians, and the wider reading public refused to see that works of the creative imagination are vital reflections and indicators of the well-being of nation's culture. The resonance between Rolland's writing and the working ideals of the Stieglitz group is uncanny. Stieglitz or Rosenfeld could have written the following from Rolland's essay.

The political life of a nation is only a superficial part of its being; in order to learn its inner life--the source of its actions--we must penetrate to its very soul by way of its literature, its philosophy, and its art, where the ideas, the passions, and the dreams of its people are reflected.⁵⁸

⁵⁸Romain Rolland, *Some Musicians of Former Days* (New York: Henry Holt, 1915), 1.

Indeed in 1929 in one of Rosenfeld's most widely circulated books, *An Hour With American Music*, he wrote something very similar to the foregoing passage:

The psyche of the artist is an integral part of the battlefield of life; perhaps the battlefield made apparent. Its conflicts, its defeats and victories are those of the community essentialized, objectified. It is the cross section. To know what is going on in the life of a civilization, to measure its force and direction, you have but to examine its art.⁵⁹

Doubtless Rolland's stress on music as most reflective of the underlying realities that shaped the nation's identity powerfully impressed Rosenfeld. Rolland:

The essence of the great interest of art lies in the way it reveals the true feeling of the soul, the secrets of its inner life, and the world of passion that has long accumulated and fermented there before surging up to the surface. Very often music is the first indication of tendencies which translate them selves into words, and afterwards into deeds.⁶⁰

For example, wrote Rolland, Beethoven's Eroica Symphony "anticipated by more than ten years the awakening of the German nation," and Wagner's *Die Meistersinger* and *Siegfried* "proclaimed years beforehand the imperial triumph of Germany. There are even cases where music is the only witness of a whole inner life which never reaches the surface." Rosenfeld must have taken this last sentence to heart inasmuch as it helps explain a main theme of Rosenfeld's criticism, which is a sort of criticism of anticipation through which he saw, particularly in the 1920s, American music, literature and painting as a foreshadowing of an American culture in its full flowering. It is perhaps the case that Rolland's writing played a unique part in Rosenfeld's turn to music criticism as a way to counterbalance the gloomy view of American culture that had

⁵⁹ Rosenfeld, *An Hour With American Music* (Philadelphia: J.P. Lippincott Co., 1929), 141.

⁶⁰ Rolland, *Some Musicians of Former Days*, 5-6.

been set out by Harold Stearns and more widely by the literati associated with the Lost Generation. Rolland wrote: "Music shows us the continuity of life in apparent death, the flowering of an eternal spirit amidst the ruin."⁶¹

While Rolland gave pride of place to music among the arts, he also advanced the most compelling argument for the interdependence of the arts and the necessity of a critical mind that ranges freely across their boundaries.

It constantly happens that the arts influence one another, that they intermingle, or that, as a result of their natural evolution, they overflow their boundaries and invade the domains of neighboring arts . . . arts may extend and find their consummation in other arts; when the mind has exhausted one form, it seeks and finds a more complete expression in another . . . if there are interruptions in its life, a cessation of heartbeats. On the other hand, if you look at art as a whole, you will feel the stream of its eternal life.

That is why I believe that for the foundation of all general history we need a sort of comparative history of all forms of art; the omission of a single form risks the blurring of the whole picture. History should have the living unity of the spirit of humanity for its object and should maintain the cohesion of all its thought.⁶²

Finally, Rolland inspired the members of the Stieglitz in their resistance to the spread of Dadaism in America. As a leading figure in European intellectual life, Rolland supplied the drive for a humanist movement of meaning that opposed the influence of Dadaism's scepticism. The French word for a child's hobby horse, dada was supposedly chosen at random from a dictionary and used as a label by a group of artists and writers who were refugees from the First World War in Switzerland. Dadaism was a nihilistic precursor of Surrealism which lasted from about 1916 to 1922 and spread from Zurich to Paris, Cologne and New York. It was self-

⁶¹ Ibid., 9.

⁶² Ibid., 10.

consciously anti-art, anti-sense, and anti-politics. Its intention was to shock and outrage. Duchamp and Picabia, painters who both benefitted from Stieglitz's exhibits of their works in America, were closely associated with the movement. But its impulse was always literary; purportedly its originator was the Tristan Tzara.

Dadaism was partly a revolt against what it held to be the hypocrisy, rigidity, and decadence of what passed for rationality, unity and order, and progress in Western political and religious institutions. For instance, in "The Renaissance of the Irrational," Benjamin de Cessares celebrated the irrational as the essential principal of existence. In an apocalyptic tone de Cessares said that, together with chance and danger, the irrational constituted the "new Trinity." De Cessares invoked the spirit of Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman, who were also the cultural icons of the Stieglitz circle--as the exemplars of the irrational. Indeed, de Cessares hailed them as the fathers of Cubism and Futurism for their "lawless" intuition.⁶³

Strictly speaking since Dada emerged during World War I, the movement that Rosenfeld and others in the Stieglitz circle faced in the mid-1910s was a sort of "proto-Dadaism--a mix of elements drawn from Cubism, Futurism, and post-Cubist abstractionism. These movements were nearly spent in Europe at the outbreak of the Great War, but in various forms they sustained a certain momentum in New York City before and after the War. Waldo Frank was perhaps the first from the Stieglitz circle to criticize the Dadaists. Frank conceded that Dadaism was an understandable reaction against the decadence and overrefinement of early twentieth-century Euro-American culture. But he insisted that America had no need of Dadaism because America was Dada insofar as it embodied chaos and irrationality. What America needed was

⁶³Benjamin de Cessares, "The Renaissance of the Irrational," *Camera Work* (June 1913): 23.

“seriousness,” “mature action,” and, most importantly, a religious sense.

The debate between the members of the Stieglitz circle and the Dadaists went beyond theorizing about order and chaos, and seriousness and frivolity. It helped shape Rosenfeld’s thinking about the machine and in general the mechanization of American life. Recall that central to Rosenfeld’s “grand transformation” was the discovery of a music that reflected these modern realities in a meaningful way. Dadaists drew a parallel between the irrationality of the machine and the irrationality and unpredictability of the human mind. The omnipresence of the machine in modern life ought therefore force us to think freshly about the human being. Traditional concepts about creativity and cultural continuity, they argued, must be jettisoned. In fact, the Dadaists regarded the comparative absence of high culture in America as a positive good insofar as what is new and significant is what throws over the past. In effect, both the Cubists and the Dadaists of this period wanted to establish a tradition that was self-consciously “contradictive.” On the other hand, Stieglitz’s followers understood the machine not as a negation of the classical, aesthetic tradition but an extension of it. Moreover, in the mid-1910s the Stieglitz group disagreed vehemently with Duchamp and his followers on the purpose of criticism. Stieglitz, Frank, and later Rosenfeld put tremendous faith in the power of criticism to influence events in rational, predictable, and ultimately useful ways. Against them the Dadaists argued that in our “‘no-world’s-land’ Chance is king.” Drawing on David Hume, they insisted that the law of causation is a myth, “a working lie”; no one thing can be said to directly precede another thing in the order of time. The idea of a rational, well-ordered future, an idea that lay at the root of the Stieglitz project was completely foreign to them.⁶⁴

⁶⁴de Cessares, “The Renaissance of the Irrational, 23-6.

The interregnum between Rosenfeld's graduation from Columbia and the beginning of his professional career with the *Seven Arts* was a period of reflection and apprenticeship that prepared him well to participate in perhaps the most famous and ambitious literary project on behalf of American arts and letter of the early twentieth-century.

Chapter VI

Method and Judgment in Criticism: The Aura of *The Seven Arts*

During Spring 1916 Paul Rosenfeld joined with James Oppenheim and Waldo Frank to establish *The Seven Arts*. Oppenheim, a poet and the leading force behind *The Seven Arts* project, saw in the success of such new magazines as *Poetry*, *The Little Review*, *The New Republic*, and *The Masses*, “a renaissance” in American art and politics which he wanted to consolidate and carry forward on the pages of a new journal. His idea crystalized during a dinner party conversation he had with Waldo Frank in 1915. Soon after this conversation Frank introduced Oppenheim to Rosenfeld. Rosenfeld “pounced” on Oppenheim's idea for the new magazine, he assumed responsibility for music criticism, and during its twelve issues of 1916 and 1917 contributed 10 articles on music and literature under his real name and the pseudonym, Peter Minuit, which he assumed in order not to overburden the magazine with his name.

Oppenheim lined up financial support, and with Frank as his Associate Editor he assembled a distinguished editorial board which included Van Wyck Brooks (later raised to Associate Editor along with Frank) Robert Frost, Randolph Bourne, Kahlil Gibran, Louis Untermeyer, David Mannes and Robert Edmond Jones. The magazine's manifesto, which appeared in the inaugural issue's editorial--September 1916--heavily reflected Oppenheim's reading of recent events. The arrival on the American scene of new literary movements like Amy

Lowells's Imagism and works like Edgar Lee Master's *Spoon River Anthology* and Robert Frost's *North of Boston*, signaled the dawning of "that national self-consciousness which is the beginning of greatness." At such moments in history, according to the manifesto, "the arts cease to be private matters; they become not only the expression of the national life but a means to its enhancement."¹

The thrust of *The Seven Arts* was not to establish a "little magazine" refuge for retiring artists a la *Poetry* and *The Little Magazine*, or something for "an ivory tower." (The tower in its sites, Oppenheim later recalled, "was more like the Woolworth.") It was most emphatically "not a magazine for artists," but rather as its manifesto concluded, but "an expression of artists for the community." Although Stieglitz could have written this Manifesto, he in fact had little, if any, direct contact with the publication of *The Seven Arts*, although he continued to influence Frank and Rosenfeld. Down to *The Seven Arts*'s office decor, Oppenheim ruthlessly rooted out anything that spoke of the artists' work as retiring and fragile. Oppenheim remembered his professionally-decorated offices filled with "the artiest feeble and fragile furniture" in the fashion of a "tea-room." He went out directly and brought in some "'man-stuff'--sofas and chairs" to hide the decorator's work. Rosenfeld's famous characterization of the artist squared well with Oppenheim's revolt against delicacy and overrefinement. The artist, wrote Rosenfeld in the early 1920s, is no "lily-leaning wistful willowy whining sentimentalist," but "a man of stomach."²

An examination of several issues of the magazine reveals its single-minded devotion to

¹ *The Seven Arts* (November 1916): 53.

² James Oppenheim, "The Story of the Seven Arts," *American Mercury* XX (1930), 156-7; Mellquist and Wiese, ed., *Voyager in the Arts*, 38.

its founding manifesto: the establishment of a genuinely organic culture in which artist and community would nourish one another through sympathetic contact and mutual understanding. Naturally, there were many variations on this theme as each contributor focused on his own area of interest. But the magazine's dominant note was hostility toward an older generation that they considered to have been nursed on principles inherent in Calvinist individualism, a generation they regarded as fundamentally opposed to the ideals of community that were the foundation of the magazine's mission. "The older generation can never understand that superb loyalty which is loyalty to a community." This assertion made by Randolph Bourne provided a mixture of moral indignation and dogmatic insistence that set *The Seven Arts* on a moral crusade reminiscent of the very evangelical tradition they so despised.³

This reading of the American Protestant tradition, which owed so much to Van Wyck Brooks's attack on the Puritan tradition in the *America's Coming of Age*, was the stock-in-trade of Progressive historical writing and literary criticism. It was elaborated by Randolph Bourne in his famous essay of 1917, "The Puritan's Will to Power" and, after the collapse of the *Seven Arts*, by Waldo Frank in *Our America* (1919). As Christopher Lasch wrote in 1991, "It is too bad that critics such as Bourne, Brooks, and Frank who were sensitive to the importance of tradition "should have turned away from the traditions with which they had most in common." Searching for what Brooks's called a "usable past," they "ignored the past that lay close at hand and rummaged through all sorts of out-of-the-way places." Their search led Frank and Rosenfeld to the "buried cultures" of the American southwest, just as it had led Rosenfeld in his teens to the world of medieval Europe, and to expend so much energy in writing his exotic tale,

³Bourne, *Radical Will*, 56.

The Emperor of Trebizond. As Lasch points out these writers never thought of “rescuing the Puritan tradition from its genteel captives.” Indeed, because they dismissed it so thoroughly and contemptuously, the rehabilitation of the communitarian elements in Puritanism had to wait for Perry Miller among other historians of the 1930s and 1940s. More’s the pity, since these historians did not have the wide readership that those associated with the *Seven Arts* had during the late 1910s and the 1920s.⁴

But the unity of the *Seven Arts* group went beyond their common opposition to what they conceived of as a repressive Puritan tradition to their hope for an authentic cultural resurgence in which the artist would emerge as a legitimate cultural leader and thereby reestablish what Frank called the “roots of American democracy.” In part the artist’s leadership would spring from real public service which had nearly disappeared with industrialization. The arts in industrial America had become ornamental and the object of consumption for the wealthy. Ordinarily this meant a slavish dependence on European tastes and arts. The leaders of *The Seven Arts* group, men such as Thorstein Veblen, Frank Lloyd Wright, Lewis Mumford, and John Dewey, wanted to put the arts at the disposal of the whole community. They called for the United States to develop arts of its own, civic arts especially that surrounded workaday life with order, beauty and dignity. As Bourne put it, Americans were more interested in ransacking Europe for its cultural treasures than in fulfilling their obligation to construct a pleasant and convivial environment in their cities.

Curiously, this call for a cultural nationalism based upon the close connection of the artist with the community took on a prophetic and mystical tone reminiscent of the very Puritan culture

⁴ Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven*, 351, 353.

the writers of *The Seven Arts* attacked so ruthlessly. Both identified the life of the spirit as the true ground of national unity and both associated spiritual progress with the divine destiny of America. Just as the idea of providential destiny pervaded all early Puritan writings, the new cultural nationalists often stressed the inevitability of America's spiritual fulfillment.⁵

The *Seven Arts* group's mystical vision of America, which proceeded from the conviction that America was guided by a transcendent spirit, was intolerable to many outside of *The Seven Arts* group; these regarded the concept of American exceptionalism as a sort of tribalism. The ethos of the late 1910s was scientific inasmuch as it was primarily technological, increasingly anti-Romantic, and anti-religious. The social sciences, not the arts, were in the ascendency among educated Americans. The influential movements were progressivism, pragmatism, and naturalism--all of which held that science had systematically defeated the romantic notion that there was a mystic, or ideal, purpose in any culture. In addition, the strict Darwinians had stressed that nature was purposeless and, like the Dadaists in arts and letters, chance, rather than divine design, ruled.⁶

Such opposition and its foundations were ever present to those in *The Seven Arts* circle, and its members directed much of their criticism toward the progressive social science movements, which they dismissed as an outgrowth of the Puritan tradition. For Brooks the movement "had been born middle-aged, so earnest, so anxious, so conscientious, so troubled, so maternal and paternal were the forces of these young men and women who marched forth with so

⁵Olaf Hansen, *The Radical Will*, 275; Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven*, 345-8.

⁶Robert Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), 148.

puzzled an intrepidity; there were no transfigurations, no ecstasies . . . only a warm simmer of evangelical sentiment.”⁷

In specifying the defects of scientific progressivism with its cult of the expert, *The Seven Arts* group made fairly cutting criticisms of progressivism: the progressives were ignorant about contemporary developments in other countries; they accepted uncritically such clichés as “the melting pot” that undervalued questions of social justice; they attacked big business without seeing that the spirit of business enterprise was itself the root of much that impoverished American culture. Brooks believed that the progressives lacked the critical equipment necessary to probe deeply into the American cultural malaise. *The Seven Arts* would fight for new ideals, and it would put literary criticism in the service of them: “If our literary criticism is always impelled sooner or later to become social criticism, it is certainly because the future of our literature and art depends upon the wholesale reconstruction of social life.” Thus, by deliberately linking the social with the aesthetic in *The Seven Arts*, Brooks brought forward the call of his *America's Coming-of-Age* and set the magazine in pursuit of an organic society that he, like Rosenfeld, drew mostly from an idealized view of the European Middle Ages. At the same time, Brooks suggested that one must fight not so much for art as against what is hostile to its development.⁸

Progressive reformism was also the target of Bourne’s writing, especially what he considered to be its superficial understanding of “personal virtue” and “service,” both of which

⁷Randolph Bourne, *The History of a Literary Radical*, ed. Van Wyck Brooks (New York: B.W. Huebsch, 1920), xi.

⁸ Van Wyck Brooks, *America's Coming of Age*, 18, “Enterprise,” *The Seven Arts* (November 1916), 57-60, and “The Culture of Industrialism,” *The Seven Arts* (April 1917), 655-6.

for him were suffused with the sense of *noblesse oblige*. “I sacrifice myself for you” and “I serve you” call attention to the beneficent doer instead of working toward the communal emphasis of the *Seven Arts*: “we cooperate in working ceaselessly toward an ideal where all may be free and none may be served or serve.” Given Rosenfeld’s deep affection for Bourne and his ideas, it is important to note that Rosenfeld took new hope in his long-held idea of self-giving as the basis of culture. Although the seeds of this idea were present in Rosenfeld’s college writing, it did not flower until the early 1920s by which time Bourne was dead.⁹

But for Bourne it was the pragmatic wing of American progressivism that was the greatest threat to the communitarianism of *The Seven Arts*. Even though he had been a disciple of John Dewey, Bourne by 1916 had seen that Dewey’s “creative intelligence” did not function in wartime; it failed to take into consideration the inexorable nature of war, which cannot be shaped either by idealism or the creative intelligence. During peace time, Bourne did see a place for ideals. The only trouble was that even here pragmatism’s putative tolerance for individual values was submerged beneath its stress on an instrumentalism that was long on means and technique but short on goals, ideals, and common values. Bourne emphasized that our visions must read beyond what can be immediately and practically attained, since we always get less than we had planned for. Here Bourne may have uncovered an unspoken motive for *The Seven Arts*’s hypercritical style and tendencies to exaggerate. If this be so, then, perhaps unknowingly and despite its idealism, there was something pragmatic about the magazine’s editorial policy.

Notwithstanding Brooks’s and Bourne’s attacks, certain tendencies in progressivism, pragmatism, and Darwinism were clearly in evidence in *The Seven Arts*. In fact, some of the

⁹ Bourne, *The History of a Literary Radical*, 299-300.

Seven Arts group may have been directly influenced by the progressives' faith in man's capacity to direct his environment toward realizing certain human and social values. Many social Darwinists had transformed the idea of biological evolution into the belief that human intelligence, which was itself the product of evolution, could further social progress and humanize the conditions for human existence. William James challenged the religious skepticism of such early pragmatists as Charles Pierce, by positing the existence of "truths," even mystical truths, which allowed the human person "to get along." Such mystical ideas associated with the New Science often emerged as dominant traits in the work of *The Seven Arts* group. At the same time, the philosophical skepticism of its critics never dampened the programmatic hopefulness and the spirit of expectancy that permeated the inner circle of *The Seven Arts*. Ebullient optimism falls short of describing its editorial position.¹⁰

The tendency of Van Wyck Brooks toward a grim environmental determinism--a tendency which forced Rosenfeld at times to overstress the power of the individual artist to overcome his surroundings--was already apparent in his writing for *The Seven Arts*. In these writings Brooks often noted the marginal position of the artist in American life, such was the source of his anxious concern for American culture expressed in *America's Coming-of-Age*, which was published just before the first issue of *The Seven Arts*. Its now famous division between "highbrow" and "lowbrow" in American life became an important theme in many of his *Seven Arts* essays. Brooks described a bleak picture of a past and present America devitalized by a gap between the artist and the community. Even though Brooks at times looked forward to a new and more spiritual America unified by a great "brotherhood of talents," the fundamental tone

¹⁰ Wiebe, *The Search for Order*, 151.

of his essays is one of disillusionment. It is difficult to see at first glance how Brooks's contemporaries could have considered him a coalescing force for the cultural nationalism and providential optimism of *The Seven Arts*. His prose is often most vivid when he is attacking the philistine enemy or describing the ill effects of an unsympathetic environment on creativity--the negative aspects of American life. Yet in identifying the enemy and castigating him in tract-like prose, Brooks brought zeal and excitement to *The Seven Arts* which seemed to thrive on controversy and bravado.

Curiously, although the idea of the *Seven Arts* excited Rosenfeld when he first discussed with it Frank and Oppenheim, he too had reservations about the possibility of discovering and calling forth an authentic American art. But his reservations differed in kind from Brooks's. Rosenfeld's first assignment for *The Seven Arts* was to "describe" what an American music would sound like, which he had failed to do properly. Accordingly, Frank rejected his first piece of writing for the magazine. The exact content of the rejected article remains unknown; Rosenfeld in a letter to Frank of 21 August 1916 referred to it only as a "critique of critiques." In this letter Rosenfeld apologized to Frank for not delivering on the assignment, "but," he went on, "how can you expect me to describe American music when it is my firm conviction that the commodity is non-existent." Rosenfeld offered to try again on another subject, and remained insistent that his "judgment of American music in reference to a national music is the correct one." For Rosenfeld it was not that conditions were inhospitable to the American composer--Brooks's argument--but rather that America, unlike Europe, did not have a long enough tradition to generate an authentically American music.¹¹

¹¹Rosenfeld to Frank, 21 August 1916, Waldo Frank Papers, University of Pennsylvania.

As it turned out exaggerated promises and hostile criticism were not fatal early on to *The Seven Arts* project; the Great War was. The members of the inner circle of the *Seven Arts*—Bourne, Brooks, Frank, Oppenheim, and Rosenfeld, were close to one mind in their opposition to United States entry in the European War. But they appeared to be selective, rather than philosophical, pacifists; their case against American entry rested primarily upon their conviction that it would be a fatal blow to the very spiritual unity that *The Seven Arts* sought for America. Bourne's essays, for instance, highlighted the destructive tendencies inherent in a nation committed to war: the inevitable suspension of civil liberties; the steady erosion of a nation's moral make up.

Oppenheim prepared the way for Bourne's thoughtful and detailed analysis of the American position in the Great War. Oppenheim's first editorial not only announced the purpose of the magazine but immediately asserted that the nation's development through art was necessary in order to avoid the threat of war and other destructive tendencies. But once America entered the war Oppenheim's editorials became increasingly fatalistic about America's future. He even joined others on the political left in looking for spiritual leadership from Russia, then in the throes of a civil revolution. This new allegiance by its editor was in opposition to the whole nationalist position of *The Seven Arts*. In the same apocalyptic vein that he had used previously to predict the birth of a new America, Oppenheim wrote a poem of great solemnity: "To thee [Russia] the leadership has passed. From America to thee has been handed the touch of freedom, Thou art the hope of the world, the asylum of the oppressed, the manger of the Future."¹²

Oppenheim began to see America's entry into the great conflict in Europe as an epic trial,

¹² Editorial, *The Seven Arts* (November 1917): 491.

not unlike an Iliad. America's maturity would come only after it passed through the "great fires" of the War. He began to discuss the war in terms of "birth throes of the Age of Great Change" when through destruction we shall meet our true selves. Beyond lies the great revolution preparing the way for a "new Humanity." It is at this point that Oppenheim wrote hymns in praise of Russia as the "Courier of Revolution" in verse that obviously derived from the poetry of Walt Whitman.¹³

It seems evident that Oppenheim's emotional and eccentric editorial excesses did not upset the rest of *The Seven Arts* staff. Many years later he admitted that in those days he had a reputation for being a tyrant and that he had felt culturally alienated from men like Brooks, Bourne, Frank, and Rosenfeld. Rosenfeld himself, in *Men Seen*, praised Oppenheim for his alertness to world issues but noted his eccentric "rationalizing habits: propaganda, self-reference, false generalization and the others which invariably accompany uncertain feelings, have consistently bound him."¹⁴

A good part of the pressing issue, then, was that Oppenheim, apparently resolved to follow his own instincts on his development as a writer. He thereby failed to take advantage of a main benefit of the ensemble ideal: fraternal criticism and correction to keep the artist moving in line properly with his own intentions. Desiring passionately to bring on an American renaissance he had no clear direction or strategy about how to do so. Indeed, in the last issue of *The Seven Arts*, he underscored his inconsistency by publicly dissociating his previously held positions on the significance of the magazine's idea of "central rejuvenation." What he meant

¹³ Ibid., 625.

¹⁴ Rosenfeld, *Men Seen* (New York: The Dial Press, 1925), 204.

was that by establishing a new compact between the writer and the public, ideas from one might serve to regenerate the other. In the magazine's last number Oppenheim repudiated the concept by accusing himself of earlier seeking power and approbation by pandering to the masses. He declared that he would now seek the "will-to-inner-power" by cultivating his inner self. In some sense this inward turn was for Oppenheim a compensation for the magazine's failure.¹⁵

The rest of *The Seven Arts* inner circle, however, was more stable than Oppenheim was. After Rosenfeld's initial misgivings about the possibility of an American art, he remained steadfastly loyal to *The Seven Arts* ideal. In fact, the magazine's ideals and its ensemble character gave clearer direction to the critical course he followed, with minor corrections, until his death in 1946. He learned more about the wider cultural and political issues from such figures as Frank, Brooks, Bourne, and Lewis Mumford who were far more deft at combing social and cultural criticism than he was. *The Seven Arts* high-spiritedness also had the regrettable effect of encouraging Rosenfeld's own ebullience and his tendency toward emotional excess.

Although many writers and friends of Rosenfeld continued to identify Rosenfeld with *The Seven Arts* movement, he sought to distance himself from what he came to see as its wrong-headed practice of forcing the arts to serve social ends. Looking back from the mid 1920s on his years with *The Seven Arts*, Rosenfeld believed that he had freed himself from his and some others' "incertitude" and "weakness" in the face of America's artistic "paralysis." His and their mistake was having pressed the arts into the cause of "rectifying American life," and "overrationaliz[ing] the process of artistic creation." Too often "the summons to youth" came with "moral exhortations and appeals to conscious will." The worst features that Rosenfeld came

¹⁵ Editorial, *The Seven Arts* (October 1917): 760.

to see in *The Seven Arts* were carried forward by James Oppenheim, who “remained pretty consistently on that mentally circumscribed plane from which the entire [*Seven Arts*] group commenced functioning.” Oppenheim's poetry collected in the 1924 volume, *The Sea*, reflected his inability to move beyond “rationalizing attitudes of mind.” Although he wrote “magnificent phrases,” *The Sea*, wrote Rosenfeld, made him “predominantly a kind of exalted, dithyrambic Felix Adler,” “a little ‘father of ethics.’”¹⁶

Rosenfeld's *Seven Arts* Criticism: Community and The Origins of Cultural Nationalism

Fresh from his apprenticeship in the Stieglitz circle, Rosenfeld's first essay for *The Seven Arts* was a piece in praise of the Stieglitz Gallery at 291 Fifth Avenue. This seemed highly appropriate for Rosenfeld to do because in many ways *The Seven Arts* group was a successor to the declining influence of Stieglitz's circle and Stieglitz's magazine, *Camera Work*.

Rosenfeld's decision to write on Stieglitz under the pseudonym, “Peter Minuit,” was supposedly an attempt to absolve *The Seven Arts* from any special pleading by a writer who was so closely allied with Stieglitz. But of greater significance was that the article's message fit perfectly with the tone of the magazine, thus establishing for it a set of first principles from which Rosenfeld could build on in the future. Rosenfeld's central purpose in “291 Fifth Avenue” was to bring his readers to see 291 as a means to a further end: American self-consciousness and cultural renewal. The gallery, he argued, had conceived of art as a bridge “to consciousness of self, to life, and through that, to new life and creation again.” The article thereby fit well with *The Seven Arts* program for national reinvigoration, especially in its stress upon the social and

¹⁶ Rosenfeld, “James Oppenheim,” *The New Republic* (10 December 1924): 13.

ethical implications of art which led finally to the recapturing of a “religious sense.”

Accordingly, in “291 Fifth Avenue,” Rosenfeld focused immediately on art in its relation to religion, just as Stieglitz had done in his numerous talks in the 291 gallery. Rosenfeld was determined to establish and to communicate this idea clearly in the minds of his first readers. To him, “291” answered a religious need; it was a place where one goes at the moment when “the individual staying power is near collapse, when energy subsides and faith crumbles and vanishes.” Loyal to the communitarianism of *The Seven Arts* circle, Rosenfeld underscored the power of art to rejuvenate; 291 existed, in fact, to save the viewer's life by dramatizing the artists ability to draw us in closer to the deeper questions of life, by getting something of life's “naked rhythm onto their canvases and into their marble.” “291 Fifth Avenue” also introduced to the public Rosenfeld's comparatively recent interest in modernism: the art in 291, he wrote, “has in its power to give you what only a thing made in your time, under the conditions imposed by your own time, out of the fabric of your own time, can give you.”¹⁷

Rosenfeld's essay on Scriabin for the penultimate issue of *The Seven Arts* drew together directly this modernism and the religious sense. Unlike other modern composers who thought deeply about religious and philosophy, Scriabin's “very modern religion” did not force itself artificially into his music. The *Poeme Divine* and the *Poeme d'extase* move the listener upward to some “paradise of divine pleasure and divine activity.” This music, inspired by “a bizarre mixture of theosophy and neo-Platonism and Bergsonian philosophy,” signifies Scriabin's attempts to formulate all life as the effort to attain certain planes of ecstasy, and

¹⁷ Peter Minuit, “291 Fifth Avenue,” *The Seven Arts* (November 1916): 62-3.

through ecstasy, godhead.”¹⁸

In other numbers of *The Seven Arts* Rosenfeld probed the transformative power of modernism in media other than music. In poetry, for instance Rosenfeld turned to the work of the Danish poet and novelist, Johannes Jensen. Rosenfeld’s discussion of Jensen does not deal directly with religious transformation, but rather with the classical elements in Jensen’s modern expressions. Appropriately entitled “Our Day,” this essay viewed Jensen’s work in the tradition of the 291 gallery exhibits. Less obvious to the readers of *The Seven Arts* was that Rosenfeld also saw in Jensen an artistic sensibility that had gone through a grand transformation similar to his own in 1914. Rosenfeld was struck by Jensen’s change from a state of moroseness about the state of contemporary culture--what Rosenfeld called “the victim of unbridled imagination”--to a point where, like Walt Whitman, he could “reveal to his day its grand proportions.” Rosenfeld wrote of Jensen as if he too, like himself, had been awaiting a language of modernity successive to the lyrical, one that would reveal the “beauty of our time” and thus allow him to “create life anew.” But consistent with the pattern he established in his Yale essays and in his letter to Philip Platt, Rosenfeld described the virtues of modern artistic expressions in relation to classicism. He lavished praise on Jensen for depicting the true classic beauty in machines, the “essential architectural style of grain elevators and skyscrapers,” all of which, Rosenfeld said, were more lovely than the Egyptian Memphis or the Parthenon. Jensen, in short, dramatized for Rosenfeld the sort of modernism that would revivify American life and culture.¹⁹

¹⁸ Rosenfeld, “Scriabine,” *The Seven Arts* (September 1917): 642-3.

¹⁹ Rosenfeld, “Our Day (Aspects of Johannes V. Jensen),” *The Seven Arts* (January 1917): 282-4.

Unlike the other members of *The Seven Arts* group, Rosenfeld mostly stood aloof from political events. As we saw in the previous chapter, Rosenfeld's experience covering American politics soured him on the promise of a reform of American life directly through politics. The practical lesson in the limits of politics was reinforced by Stieglitz's insistence on the apolitical nature of art. Although Rosenfeld insisted that art had social and ethical relevance, he always argued that political commitment compromised the integrity and usefulness of both artist and critic. Their functions were to be regarded, ultimately, as spiritual ones and not to be distracted by temporal concerns. It is easy to misrepresent this position as excessively pious, unreal, and purist; but when it is considered in the context of *The Seven Arts* concept of "central rejuvenation," his position becomes a logical extension of this policy.

Illustrative of Rosenfeld's aversion to subordinating art to political ends, was an essay Rosenfeld wrote soon after America's direct military entry into the European war. In it Rosenfeld condemned the recruiting speeches that became common during concert intermissions. He took aim at Otto Kahn, a man who would become a patron of Hart Crane and but who was during the first World War the treasurer of the Civil Orchestral Society which sponsored what were called "patriotic concerts." Rosenfeld did not take issue with the speeches on political grounds; rather, he opposed them as an unwarranted intrusion into the near-sacred relation between audience and music, and an assault on one's interiority, the special province of the musical experience. The recruiting speeches struck at the very citadel of all men's essential self; they "assaulted the spirit as spirit. There can be no life at all and no men where there is no right of man to the privacy of his own inner chamber. There can be nothing but machines where there is no right of man to the inviolacy of his relationship with himself." Nothing, in fact, should come between the listener

and the music that inspires his very personal interior movements.

Rosenfeld's aversion to politics and the high value he placed on the individual experience of art did not weaken his sense of the importance of art for the public good. In Rosenfeld's 291 essay on Stieglitz, for example, he argued that the gallery existed not for the artists who exhibited there but for those who came to see its works. Several issues later, Rosenfeld's essay on Scriabin, the composer who three years before turned Rosenfeld to modernism focused on the capacity of the artist to transform not just the individual—as it was in his case— but also the community. Earlier we emphasized the religious aspects of Rosenfeld's analysis of Scriabin's music, but Rosenfeld also gave great weight to the relation of music to the community of its hearers. For those who have heard Scriabin perform, they know that “there is little music that throws into sharper relief the miracle of communication through material form. Such music as one hears in Scriabin's tone poems impress the hearer with “the eternal miracle of art.” The consequence of such wonder is a profound experience of solidarity. “It is as if the auditors themselves are transformed into more sensitive instruments. It is as if their apprehensions are refined, and prepare them for less ungracious participation in the common experience. It is as if much that has hitherto been shy and lonely experience undergoes a sudden change into something clarified and significant and universal.”²⁰

In subsequent essays Rosenfeld never shifted his focus away from the importance of the arts for their audiences even as he at times questioned people's capacity to attend properly to what they saw, read, and heard. This was one of the many tensions working within Rosenfeld's mind; his capacity for hope was balanced by discouragement at the course of American life as it

²⁰ Rosenfeld, “Scriabin,” 640-1.

unfolded day by day. But *The Seven Arts* was not launched out of pessimism. The possibility of a cultural renaissance seemed real to *The Seven Arts* group, at times unbelievably so in light of the escalation of the War in Europe. Such hope relied on a receptive and dynamic public and a theory of democratic participation in high culture. Rosenfeld's essay on Ravel and Debussy for *The Seven Arts*, for example, underlined these composers' capacity to lure the audience into "energetic participation." It is in this essay that Rosenfeld first laid out his theory of cocreation mentioned in the previous chapter. He noted how the art of Haydn and Mozart "restores a creative role to the auditor. It seeks to enlist their activity. It relies upon their contribution to its significance. The music itself carries only a portion of the composer's intention. It carries enough of it only to ignite the imagination of the audience. To that body it reserves the joy of fathoming the intension of completing the idea the composer adumbrated." Rosenfeld meant to hold up such European composers as examples of *The Seven Arts* ideal for aspiring American artists. The classical composers Haydn and Mozart, wrote Rosenfeld, "did not wish the audience to assume a passive attitude" as they did in the nineteenth century. They had "a great love for their fellows. And therefore they were eager for their collaboration, had confidence that they could comprehend all that the music intimated, regarded them as equals in the business of creation."²¹

For Rosenfeld the great progressive ideal of democratizing culture meant transforming the audience from a "passive receiver into an artist." Such hopes sprang from the composer's or the artist's generous and charitable view of the public. The romantic notion of the artist at war with his society would not do at all. In one of his first essays for *The Seven Arts*, "The American Composer," Rosenfeld characterized the American concert audience not as lazy and materialistic

²¹Rosenfeld, "Ravel and Debussy," *The Seven Arts* (October 1917): 798.

but as wholly expectant and eager for an art integrally related to their lives. Like Brooks he castigated the artist who holds himself aloof from his society and from the run of humanity. Emphatically, “the ineffectuality of the American composer cannot be laid to the absence of desire for an American music.” What is more the American composer, writer, and visual artist would do well to recall that the very material from which his art is molded is nothing but the life that the artist has in common with his or her community.²²

Rosenfeld went so far as to suggest that the entire creative process began with the public, which he conceived as a sort of American *volk*, although he did not use that term. Rosenfeld in part believed that the *volk* contained the raw essence of a nation's spirit, even if this spirit was to be found in the most mundane objects of its technological products. For the artist to turn his back on the source of his creativity would be fatal not only to the artist but to the needs of the community and nation which, in turn, depends upon its artists to articulate its identity and suggest the outlines of its future course. Rosenfeld invested the artist with a grave responsibility for the commonweal. The artist's standing as a cultural leader—the *raison d'être* of *The Seven Arts* project--depended on the artist's enthusiastic and cheerful acceptance of this responsibility.

Rosenfeld's cultural nationalism naturally forced him to consider the question of ethnicity in America, which he did in *The Seven Arts* through an essay on the Swiss-born, Jewish-American composer, Ernest Bloch. As we saw in an earlier chapter Rosenfeld had since his teens been concerned with how to accept his German-Jewish heritage and incorporate it into a larger framework of American nationalism. After a long period of incubation, this concern

²²Rosenfeld, “The American Composer,” 90.

developed into the novel *A Boy in the Sun*, Rosenfeld's final statement on his ethnicity. The Bloch essay is Rosenfeld's first serious public expression of his reflections on being a Jew in America, and the whole experience of difference it entailed. Rosenfeld heard Bloch's most recent compositions as Jewish in impulse and "in materialization." In effect, Bloch, who had emigrated from Switzerland had "opened himself up to the genius of his race." Focusing all his attention on these so-called racial aspects of Bloch's music, Rosenfeld wrote that the earlier composers of Jewish origin, such as Meyerbeer, Mendelssohn, and Goldmark, had inhibited their Jewishness. Bloch was different. Rosenfeld observed with personal conviction: "In the light of Bloch's music, I begin to understand their [earlier Jewish composers'] aridity. After all, it had its root in the spiritual war that divided each one against himself. There was operative in each of them a secret desire to escape his race. They were wilfully deaf to the promptings of their being, so firmly planted in the racial soil."²³

Rosenfeld was perhaps the first American critic to advance a sustained case for the worth of Bloch's music. It is evident that his enthusiasm was partly derived from an intense racial identification and an intimate knowledge of what earlier Jewish musicians had to struggle with:

They had but to acknowledge, and to accept. They had but to face themselves. They had but to say: "We are what we have ever been," and the way to freedom, and certitude, and self-possession would have been theirs. A mighty ore lay buried within them. They could have refined it. But they turned shamedly away, and donned their flimsy masquerades to hide it further. They wanted courage and humility. And so they arrived at nothing. The lordly gold that lay within the race was not for them. It was for men of different temper.²⁴

²³Rosenfeld, "The Music of Ernest Bloch," *The Seven Arts* (February 1917): 416-7.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 418.

Clearly, Bloch was a man of this different temperament. Bloch is among the new men “in whom the ancient spirit had attained rebirth. It was for men in whom the staunch, stiff-necked will was alive once more. It was for men like Ernest Bloch, afire with a great loyal love. To such, it yields itself.”

Besides its obvious ethnic interest, Rosenfeld’s celebration of the “new generation” of Jewish composers stems from their ability to bring forward something of “the ancient spirit.” One here is reminded of Rosenfeld’s *Yale Lit.* essay on Yeats, whose work drew liberally on the ancient Celtic traditions. The cue here is for modern artists, not to separate themselves from the past, but to draw on it and extend it meaningfully into the present. Read in the light of the Yeats essay, Rosenfeld’s celebration of the old in Bloch rests precisely on Bloch’s ability to see his Jewish past as a living tradition, not as an atavistic retrieval ignorant of modern realities.

Rosenfeld’s essay on Bloch also contained a larger message that Rosenfeld never tired of repeating: the composer, writer, or visual artist who repressed his or her ethnic origins would be a “fugitive from the national consciousness.” Bloch’s music reflected his willingness to draw deeply on his ethnicity. Accordingly, he expressed the “whole man” inasmuch as it included the particulars of his racial and cultural identity. Rosenfeld’s complaint with Mahler, as we will see in the next chapter, goes directly to Mahler’s unsuccessful handling of his Jewishness.

Rosenfeld’s bold call for racial assertiveness complicates Rosenfeld’s notion of the American folk. It has nothing to do with the progressives’ “melting pot” solution to ethnic relations in America. It has more in common with Bourne’s notion of the hyphenated American, one who sustains his or her ethnic background in tension with the mainstream WASP culture of America.

Rosenfeld’s *Seven Arts* experience confirmed for him the value of the ensemble ideal, as

it allowed him an outlet for ideas on modernism, the ethical aspects of art, and cultural nationalism that he had been thinking about seriously since his high school years. Having found his vocation as a critic highly satisfying and useful to the public good, what lay ahead next for him was the perfection of a method proper for writing about music and for coming to a deeper understanding of the American essence.

Rosenfeld and Critical Method: Toward a Community of Temperament

The Seven Arts collapsed in 1917 when its principal financier pulled out over Randolph Bourne's vehement anti-war writing. Soon after the magazine's collapse the United States army drafted Rosenfeld into a company of engineers stationed at Camp Humphreys, Virginia. His skill on a typewriter earned him a position in the camp's insurance office, and saved him from too much "drilling and digging stumps and ditches." When the office work let up though he had to drill in the hot August sun with the rest of the camp. It was not uncommon for "two or three men to faint at each formation"; on days of inoculations, "many more go over." Rosenfeld fainted once during a drill bringing the exercise to an early end; the office men, he said, were grateful to him.²⁵

Rosenfeld thought that his command of French and German would be more valuable to the army than his typing. Hearing of Walter Lippmann's assignment to Europe as an interpreter, Rosenfeld applied for a transfer to the Interpreter's Corps. He wrote Major Joel E. Spingarn for his advice and help on the transfer, but Rosenfeld, hadn't supported his application with evidence

²⁵ Rosenfeld to Waldo and Margy Frank, 14 August, 1918, The Waldo Frank Papers.

of his qualifications so the transfer never came.²⁶

Military life, Rosenfeld thought, was stupefying and “beastly” boring; it had “a certain air of unreality,” for everyone, “from the day-laborers to the relatively intellectual.” The boredom weighed more heavily on the former for “they are absolutely without resource and simply live along in a dull helpless sort of way.” His company included lots of “Tenth Avenue boys” from Hell's Kitchen -- those who “you would suppose would thrive on this sort of ‘virile’ life”-- yet they were as “dispirited and vexed and tired” as any. The only way to live in the army was “to permit each day to take care of its own troubles”; thinking about one's prospects raised dangerous expectations. Many soldiers “get themselves killed in the unknowing hope of breaking the spell and going home to their friends and work once more.”²⁷

Rosenfeld received an honorable discharge from the service and immediately picked up writing music criticism once more. In 1920 with the publication of *Musical Portraits*, Rosenfeld was celebrated a fresh and exciting interpreter of music. But he also had his detractors. In large part because the men of letters who came of age with Rosenfeld viewed criticism as a personal art, Rosenfeld's criticism came under fire more often for its style and method than for its judgments. And, although Rosenfeld valued impersonality, it was never at the expense of a personal account of his contact with the object before him. Even critics friendly to his project conceded that his sometimes effusively emotive prose distracted the reader from his many important insights and evaluations. Sensitive to the centrality of method and style in discussions

²⁶ Rosenfeld to Major Spingarn, 13 August, 1918. The Joel Spingarn Collection, Box 10, Folder 4. New York Public Library.

²⁷ Rosenfeld to Waldo and Margy Frank, 14 August, 1918, Frank Papers.

on Rosenfeld's life's work, Kenneth Burke, who in 1928 succeeded Rosenfeld as music critic for the *Dial*, felt compelled to explain and justify Rosenfeld's critical ways and means. In his essay for *Paul Rosenfeld: Voyager in the Arts*, Burke stressed Rosenfeld's singular ability to make his readers "feel the *urgency* of art." He used the method most suited to this end, "sometimes impressionistic, sometimes analytic, sometimes historical." But whatever one Rosenfeld used, his purpose remained the same: to lead his readers "into the world of vibrant temperament." Although such a purpose, with its great emphasis on temperament and feeling is obviously romantic, it owed more to the classicist's interest in form. Typically, wrote Burke, Rosenfeld's method began with the examination of a particular form through the study of "the emotional nature of some characteristic work written in that form, and seeing beyond this into the emotional nature of the author." Rosenfeld often chose authors, composers, and visual artists who contributed significantly to the "establishment, development, or perfection" of a certain form. He then revealed to his readers the benefits attained in this way, and discussed them along with kindred works and artists." "When the method is most successful," said Burke, "the reader gets a sense of placement in ever-widening circles, ranging from individual, through the 'community of temperament,' to the connections with artistic expression considered universally."²⁸

By the 1920s Rosenfeld had worked out a way to order the classical and romantic influences that had shaped his outlook on the arts and on the world from boyhood. In this new ordering, form, which was also central to early twentieth-century neo-classicism, became subordinate to romanticism's concern for feeling and community. A variant of Rosenfeld's

²⁸ Kenneth Burke, "Kinds of Sensibility" in *Voyager in the Arts*, 100-2.

interest in community, or a "community of temperament," as Rosenfeld most often spoke of it, was his sustained attention to the idea of an American consciousness and character. In line with early nineteenth-century German cultural nationalists, Rosenfeld held that every nation had a personality, an analyzable identity--even a collective unconscious. Moreover, certain artists, in their works, reflect, represent, or express these attributes most vividly and become representative of a stage in a nation's history. Accordingly, Rosenfeld spent much time and energy looking for artists whose work foreshadowed a new and higher stage of American national development.

But Rosenfeld also attended to artists who represented serious flaws in the national character. These artists commended themselves, not only because they too represented America, but also because an analysis of their work revealed much about more subtle and elusive elements in the national character. In a certain sense, Rosenfeld's criticism can be read as a history of America's consciousness and even unconsciousness. But Rosenfeld's principal purpose for probing into what he regarded as the nation's collective mind was to search for evidence of some unifying principle which would both help explain the meaning of the American experience and in some sense prophesy about its future. These critical explorations were paralleled by his actual travels to remote areas of America in search of some more concrete symptom which had perhaps eluded him in his customary concentration upon American art forms, and by his New York upbringing. These searches, both geographical and psychological, often resulted in the most penetrating, and demanding of Rosenfeld's critical efforts.

Three essays in particular exemplify vividly Rosenfeld's examinations of the national unconscious and may be said to represent the highpoint of his efforts to discover some evidence of an American essence. In these essays, Rosenfeld probed the contours and interstices of

America's geography and unconscious in search of the outline of some unifying principle underlying American life. The first two, "Wagner" (1920) and "Albert Ryder" (1924), prepare the way for the third, "Indian Corn Dance" (1926). Both focus, in good part, on some important part of the American mind that fascinated Rosenfeld.

Rosenfeld saw--and would continue to see--the most significant part of American history, as that which had immediately preceded the so-called second American renaissance of the early twentieth century which came to be identified with *The Seven Arts*. To him this pre-renaissance stage was a sort of history of the American mind moving toward self-annihilation, a sinking "into oblivion" not unlike the desire of Tristan and Isolde for self-dissolution. It drifted toward something that had no earthly manifestation; it was a dream detached from earthly realities and therefore doomed. The chief symptom of this condition for Rosenfeld was a persistent dissatisfaction with the "here and now"--two words that permeate Rosenfeld's body of writing. For Rosenfeld America's pioneering restlessness and desire for continual activity sprang from a deep, unmet need for spiritual fulfillment. The yearning became a gadfly propelling Americans onward, as with the legendary Flying Dutchman who was doomed to voyage endlessly in pursuit of what could never be achieved. It is therefore not surprising that the composer of the musical drama *The Flying Dutchman*, Richard Wagner, and the painter of the canvas of the same name, Albert Ryder, were the very artists who evoked this strange, other-worldly characteristic which best sums up, in Rosenfeld's mind, an essential part of the America psyche, and that which he called "the romantic inhuman lure." Rosenfeld's drew attention to the importance of this common theme by leading with essays on Wagner and Ryder in *Musical Portraits* and in *Port of*

*New York.*²⁹

Rosenfeld's interest in Wagner was primarily psychological and historical rather than aesthetic. As mentioned in an earlier chapter, Rosenfeld heard Wagner's music as the sign and symbol of the nineteenth-century, western industrial age which was characterized by "the victory of man over the energies of fire and sea and earth, the lordship of creation, the suddenly begotten railways and shipping and mines, the cataclysm of wealth and comfort." The men of this age, Rosenfeld wrote, immersed themselves in this music and responded to it as their *lingua franca*. For it was a first principle of Rosenfeld's criticism that men and women respond to certain artistic forms when they resonate with some fundamental belief or practice of theirs, after which it became an expression for all time. The most common of humanity, he thought, instinctively seek immortality in this way.³⁰

It seemed only natural to Rosenfeld that America--the "essentialization" of the entire age of industrialism--would be most affected by Wagner's musical dramas. Indeed, he argued that if America during the nineteenth century had the capacity to produce a genuine, indigenous art it would have produced something like the works of Richard Wagner. Rosenfeld's found support for this argument in Walt Whitman's remark that Wagner's scores were "the music of the 'Leaves.'" In a figurative sense, the very masonry and concrete underpinnings of industrial America were reaching out toward some assenting figure, like Wagner, that would affirm (or in Whitmanesque terms, "tally with") the positiveness of their existence: "American life seemed to be calling for [Wagner's] music in order that its vastness, its madly affluent wealth and multiform

²⁹ Rosenfeld, *Port of New York*, 7- 9, and *Musical Portraits*, 8.

³⁰ Rosenfeld, *Musical Portraits*, 4.

power and transcontinental span, its loud, grandiose promise might attain something like eternal being."³¹

We have already established Rosenfeld's firm belief in the power of art, and particularly music, to satisfy some positive spiritual need not only in individuals but also in whole cultures and peoples. Rosenfeld's conviction that Wagner's music was symptomatic of a vague, unfulfilled yearning in American life is part of well-developed tradition of American cultural criticism. It is a hallmark of this tradition that the artists is perhaps best positioned to express and probe the nature of America's restlessness. For example, such striving as Edgar Allen Poe experienced among his countrymen reminded him of the human person's "immortal instinct," a desire for the "Beautiful." In Poe's "The Poetic Principle (1850)," in which among other things he gives pride of place to music among the arts, we read:

There is still a something in the distance which he [man] has been unable to attain. We have still a thirst unquenchable, to allay which he has not shown us the crystal springs. This thirst belongs to the immortality of Man. It is at once a consequence and an indication of his perennial existence. It is the desire of the moth for the star. It is no mere appreciation of the Beauty before *us--but a wild effort to reach the Beauty above*. Inspired by an ecstatic prescience of the glories beyond the grave, we struggle by multiform combinations among the things and thoughts of Time to attain a portion of that Loveliness whose very elements, perhaps, appertain to eternity alone. And thus when by Poetry--or when by Music, the most entrancing of the Poetic moods--we find ourselves melted into tears, we weep then not through excess of plea sure, but through a certain, petulant, impatient sorrow at our inability to grasp *now*, wholly, here on earth, at once and forever, those divine and rapturous joys, of which *through* the poem or *through* the music, we attain to but brief and indeterminate glimpses.³²

³¹ Ibid., 6.

³² Edgar Allan Poe, *Literary Theory and Criticism*, Leonard Cassuto, ed., (New York: Dover Publications, 1999), 179-80.

It is exactly this longing and the frustration attendant on an ever-elusive joy that Rosenfeld heard in Wagner's musical dramas. The "cry of material triumph" in Wagner fell far short of the mark in its ability to satisfy the deepest longing of the human heart. Rosenfeld thus probed more deeply into Wagner's work until he heard the "terrible cry of homesickness" in it. "Just as his music is brave with a sense of outward power, so, too, it is sick with a sense of inner unfulfillment. There is no longing more consuming, no homesickness more terrible, no straining after the laving, immersing floods of unconsciousness more burning than that which utters itself through [Wagner's] music." And, to Rosenfeld, such homesickness, a disorientation in time and in space—is the subject of much important, American music, painting, and literature. At times Rosenfeld implies that it accounts for one pole in the series of oppositions that permeated American life: its pragmatism and idealism; its hyper activity and its listlessness; its secularity and its intense evangelical piety.³³

Influenced by Van Wyck Brooks, Rosenfeld thought that the advance of American culture depended in large part on the resolution of these often paralyzing contradictions. Accordingly, he argued that the duality represented by Wagner (and his age)—"the cry of material triumph" and "the desire for the void"—would give way to the emerging American Renaissance and the general rebirth of Western civilization that would flow from it. The greater part of Rosenfeld's chapter on Wagner for *Musical Portraits* is, in effect, a declaration of independence from Wagner and his dominance over European culture and much of American high culture. Indeed, this section sets the tone for Rosenfeld's most optimistic and positive work in the 1920s. It

³³ Rosenfeld, *Musical Portraits*, 7.

shows the persistence of his identification with *The Seven Arts* movement after its collapse, and particularly its belief in the possibility of a cultural resurgence, which would in turn stimulate all areas of American life to a vital creativity:

For each generation the works of art produced by its members have a distinct importance. Out of them, during their time, there sparks the creative impulse. For every generation is something of a unit....and so, for the men of a single period the work produced during their time is powerful encouragement to self-realization, to the espousal of their destiny, to the fulfillment of their life. For the motion of one part of a machine stirs all the others. And there is a part of every man of a generation in the work done by the other members of it.³⁴

Such was solid, *Seven Arts* orthodoxy. Nevertheless, one cannot help focusing finally on the earlier parts of the Wagner article. Even though the essay, at its end, becomes a kind of testimonial and obituary for Wagner, its most eloquent sections discuss the relevance of Wagner to the 1920s. Rosenfeld writes with so much imaginative force here, and with such inner conviction, that the chief impression on the reader is that Wagner's double significance--"the material triumph" and the "inner unfulfillment"--is still applicable to Rosenfeld's generation. In fact, in a letter to Alfred Stieglitz written in 1920 immediately following the publication of *Musical Portraits*, Rosenfeld revealed his undying fascination with Wagner's *Ring*. "I have been playing *Der Ring des Niebelungen* on my miserable piano all summer," wrote Rosenfeld. Some day I must write an answer to the question that has been posing in my mind. 'What is this queer thing D.R.d.N., after all'? I think one could come nearer the roots of musical expression through Wagner than through any other composer, because of the double expression in music and literature that his dramas are. The words associated with the music ought to give one the extra

³⁴ Ibid., 14-5.

boost.”³⁵

Despite Rosenfeld’s celebration of the American Renaissance as an antidote to the deep-seated, and unconscious listlessness in American life, he returned to this theme again four years after the publication of *Musical Portraits*, in an essay on Albert Ryder published in *Port of New York*. This essay, perhaps the finest he wrote during the 1920s, is a penetrating study of a painter whose work seemed to evoke that same yearning quality that is expressed in the first part of the Wagner essay. Furthermore, a comprehension of this quality of mood is essential to an understanding of *Port of New York*--Rosenfeld's most influential collection of essays. The Ryder essay, the first in the volume, sets the tone and establishes the theme for the volume. As Rosenfeld wrote Stieglitz in August 1923 during his writing of the book, “The Ryder is a crucial chapter having the duty of launching the entire machine forward.”³⁶

A dualism pervades this essay from its start. Rosenfeld argues that Ryder's paintings fail to make direct contact with physical existence; instead, they almost consciously evade it. Nevertheless, for Rosenfeld, “the Ryders are the first deep expression of American life in the medium of paint . . . their tender mysterious tones and sensitive forms, their shades of sundown and midnight harmonies of argent and indigo, speak what we as Americans have lived in the society of the red, white, and blue.” As he did in the Wagner article, Rosenfeld strains to point out that as an American artist, Ryder has the power to set off a deep response in us; his paintings “start a sudden music; bring a sense of something in life from which all of us stem.” Under the spell of this mystical impulse, we are transported back to the first beginnings of American life as

³⁵ Rosenfeld to Stieglitz, 30 August 1920, Rosenfeld Papers.

³⁶ Rosenfeld to Stieglitz, 5 August 1923, Rosenfeld Papers.

we are put in the footsteps of a mythical national prototypical figure. "The Ryders make us sail with Columbus on his final voyage; not any of the four trips made by him for the crown of Castile; but the fifth, the trip which commenced only when he had died, and the new world lay open to Europeans." In this interesting variation of the myth, Rosenfeld expresses an idea similar to one expressed in *Our America*, in which Waldo Frank sees European immigration in terms of a cultural reflex, a response to the idyllic dream defined and realized by the Columbian voyages. Columbus is, in fact, the physical prototype of the legendary Flying Dutchman whose spirit speaks to us so eloquently.³⁷

At a crucial moment in the Ryder essay, Rosenfeld expresses Columbus's purpose in terms of a memory of some idyllic repose, one that pervades Ryder's paintings and which draws us into them, and which is also reminiscent of Poe's "Poetic Principle."

Passage to India had never been the major objective of the admiral. There had been another. It is probable passage to India had never been more than the rationalization of the purpose of an irrational desire. It was in search of the Earthly Paradise that Columbus had fared out into the ocean. The wind that had blown him forward was man's immemorial dream of a divine land somewhere upon the globe, a golden-aired, apple-laden place where life was effortless sovereign beauty, slow perfect gesture and breath drawn in everlasting unchanging fulfillment. If the eyes of the Genoese had peered through mists and into horizon gray, it was for sight of the promontories of the ineffable land for which all mankind yearned. Columbus had imagined the sacred mountain somewhere in the region where the Guiana shore lands lie, and when at sea he felt the soft tropic waters of the Orinoco, he knew he was nearing the estuary of one of the streams that descend the blessed slopes.³⁸

America, however, had come between the promise and its fulfillment, between the longing of an

³⁷ Rosenfeld, *Port of New York*, 5-6.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 6-7

entire civilization for an idyll and the achievement of its desires. During the 1920s, as human dreams and earthly reality were held in unavoidable conflict and in a state of seemingly everlasting and unresolvable tension, America's unconscious was released on an interminable quest for some sort of fulfillment: "It was then the Flying Dutchman set sail, damned to pursue, his vessel freighted with the desire of human kind, a termless voyage across the sea of the heart. If the consciousness in men had to resign the dream, unconsciousness had not let go of it. The goal was gone. The yearning continued. The distances were strangely musical. The modern malady, the pathos of farness, was upon the world"³⁹

In Rosenfeld's understanding of the early history of America, the ceaseless longing pervaded the first settlers and explained their immense energy. "The voyage persisted nowhere more wildly than among the settlers of the American continent. Restlessness, maladjustment, remained in their blood." And so, the nervous energy is expended, its source not even available to the conscious mind. The yearning had become an essential part of the collective American mind. Rosenfeld:

Even in men who were not forever pushing on from new border to new border, did the wandering mood obtain. It held people who sought to take root, to make a home and a community. Something of them was always in a prairie-schooner, always refusing an allegiance to their small space of ground. Generation transmitted restlessness to generation till it became a national characteristic. It is always the distant that is musical for the American...his psyche looks always into the "otherwheres."⁴⁰

Ryder reveals this tone and mood to his viewers in rather dark and mysterious canvases.

³⁹ Ibid., 7-8.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 8-9.

Therefore, American life continues, "Life glides emptily by; the demoniac moon draws the accursed craft."⁴¹

Rosenfeld's constant concern for the artist's close identification with his subject emerges powerfully in this essay on Ryder. He wrote that Ryder himself epitomizes the very quality that his paintings express so vividly. "Albert P. Ryder was not merely a man who painted The Flying Dutchman, he was himself the Flying Dutchman." But, Rosenfeld seldom let his natural interest in the mind and the emotional state of an artist blind him to the primacy of his work, and his created forms. One of his great strengths as a critic is that his analysis leads not just to a greater understanding of the artist, his work, and his "community of temperament," but to a greater awareness of their aesthetical value. Accordingly, in this essay Rosenfeld turned quickly from the brooding figure of Ryder himself to specific paintings like *Death on the Racetrack*, *Jonah*, *Macbeth*, and *Siegfried*. He was aware, nevertheless, that there was a significant connection between Ryder's haunting inwardness and the paralysis of will that intrudes at critical moments on the painter's canvases. Rosenfeld believed that the Flying Dutchman was always in Ryder's mind as he painted, the very symbol of his inclination for the void. "Like fanfares, the sense of the romantic inhuman lure comes through the many somber and argent masses . . . groundplan of the soul that cannot become earthfast, and has to express itself in outer restlessness and motion."⁴²

For Rosenfeld, it was this "dark side" of Ryder that was responsible for the formal defects of his paintings, which are characterized by a curious deficiency in the foreground material and in

⁴¹ Ibid., 9.

⁴² Ibid., 11,13.

the bottom areas of the paintings. Such defects, argued Rosenfeld, indicated a genuine sexual fear in Ryder, still another aspect of the larger sense of unfulfillment inherent in the American psyche. "Sexual fear in particular speaks from the forms. It was the sexual expression of the mechanism of resistance to the present moment that kept the foregrounds comparatively empty, and gave interest preponderantly to the middle and upper-reaches of the canvases." Despite their compositional shortcomings, or perhaps because of them, Rosenfeld continued, Ryder's paintings are curiously germane to the very elements of American experience that had eluded most of Ryder's contemporaries, who were more faithful recorders of the American fact. Painters like Winslow Homer, Thomas Eakins, and George Fuller were too representational, "weak in imagination, dependent on the material facts."⁴³

At last, Rosenfeld arrived at Ryder's chief contribution to American life: "The art of Ryder brings the voyage to a close." No longer are we destined to ride with the Flying Dutchman on a "termless voyage," for Ryder has brought unconscious reality to the surface for the first time. He expressed what America *is*, and what America *is* is a great deal more than concrete fact. We recognize some salient unacknowledged part of ourselves in these sensitive, dark paintings.

We know these wild romantic sweeps, the cold and dreamy lights. Out of a picture-frame there comes an intimate address to the American in us; there comes something full of what lies between us and American life. Feelings, hitherto heavy and confused in us are suddenly lifted out of us and off of us and placed outside us massively; and to be an American and to have shared in the painful Western adventure becomes a wonderful thing.⁴⁴

⁴³ Ibid., 14, 16.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 16-7.

Thus, by way of art the “baleful wandering spell” has come to a close for us. The spell no longer works once it becomes conscious and understood.

This Ryder essay, which is foundational to Rosenfeld’s corpus, probed deeply into Ryder’s interior world. To Rosenfeld, this is the area of reality which lies between the artist and the objective world. The artist’s responsibility is to “make something” of this reality and, by a “quick movement,” convert it into something his audience can recognize and acknowledge. If this happens, both artist and audience “have been moved” closer to the core of our national existence. Such is precisely what Ryder had achieved.

With the painter of the night we stand upon one of those faint lines where one world comes to an end, and another, newer, thrusts mysterious coasts up on the horizon. Today, perhaps, still the oceanic waste, and flight under the inhuman, sorcerer’s moon. Tomorrow, the inhabited solid earth and the faces of men. It is we that have been moved.⁴⁵

In this view, Rosenfeld stressed an ideal for Americans, and it was up to them to move toward it. The real America is a place of *being*, not of *becoming* or of mere *having*. This is the conception of our nation that dominates another major essay, “Indian Corn Dance,” published in *The Dial* two years following the Ryder essay.

The Search for Another America

Like many of the New York and European literati of the 1920s, Rosenfeld traveled to New Mexico in search of something authentically American. This fascination among men and women of the progressive era, as we said earlier in this chapter, signified a search for exotic

⁴⁵ Ibid., 17.

alternatives to what they considered the moribund genteel traditions of the East. More broadly, it is also representative of the primitivism and exoticism that, as Jacques Barzun has recently shown, recur often in the history of the West. The literary product of Rosenfeld's trip to the southwest was "Indian Corn Dance." It continues the search for an American essence, or some elusive trait that characterized an essential part of America and the American character that Rosenfeld had begun in the Wagner and Ryder pieces. "Indian Corn Dance" leaned heavily on the impressionistic method, and is a good example of the aspect of Rosenfeld's critical technique that set his critics on edge. The method depended upon the general cooperation of the reader and his or her willingness to accept the critic's account of his engagement with the work of art as a legitimate method of achieving "truth." The method also assumed the critic's right to in some sense take on the role of an artist and to make an appeal primarily to the imagination of his audience.⁴⁶

Rosenfeld's "Indian Corn Dance" is reminiscent of Walt Whitman's work in its attempt to present a sweeping, panoramic view of the vast heartland of America. Like Whitman's *A Passage to India*, it described the process of the narrator's growth into an awareness of his nation's identity and eventual destination. As part of the technique, the narrator must face and resolve all the bewildering paradoxes and conflicting trains of thought presented to him as he travels over the immensely varied terrain of America. The "knowledge" gained is not acquired through the exercise of intellect, nor does the narrator gradually build a focused awareness from a systematic interpretation of events as they occur. Instead, the narrator, somewhat like a religious

⁴⁶ Jacques Barzun, *From Dawn to Decadence* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2000), xiii-xviii.

mystic, passively exposes himself to an array of disparate impressions and experiences before an informed "vision" begins to take shape. The total effect for some readers was electrifying as they were bombarded with a series of brilliant sense impressions.

Rosenfeld's story began outside of Kansas City on a train bound for New Mexico. There Rosenfeld immersed himself in "terrifying stretches," the monotonous and barren lands of mid-America. Even though he had never crossed the Missouri River before, he "nonetheless knew this country. It was past Julys. It was perennial heat, termless platitude; pain of old summers in corn-patches of New Jersey; emptiness on Long Island, New England, Virginia downs." Responding to what he sees as common to all America, Rosenfeld described it as "all the ancient bareness homeliness, flatness which impotently burdened spirit through the land." It is this apparent wasteland that he described as at "the commonest and the most wondrous of American stuffs." Following Whitman, Rosenfeld found the ordinary details of American life full of richness to the spirit as he confronted with shame a veritable montage of raw, industrial, and agricultural motifs. And interestingly, each ingredient of the montage, while mundane in itself, became as vivid and colorful as Whitman's "immense multiplicity" when viewed as part of a mass. Rosenfeld relished piecing together the details of the immediate present.

Prospects without accent and roads without events, dirt of tilled field detailless greenery and shadeless crops, raw telegraph files, sidings of cars in Indian war-paint, cheerfully, glamorously, gloriously. Concentrated, homericly swollen and voluminous, hot fertile soil, hot bearded grains, hot shining varnish, all that had weighed, opposed and baffled.⁴⁷

But beyond their aesthetic richness, these are the "doorposts and entryways of home." In

⁴⁷Rosenfeld, "Turning to America: The Corn Dance," in *By Way of Art*, 217-9.

essence, the narrator has begun his journey by traveling back to a ground reality--a necessary step before he can be an eventual witness to a greater, transcendent reality. But for now he is able to strip away the layer of illusions and false expectations and see "the ventral land, the pagan unbroken now." He sees his native land without the trappings of old legends, outmoded political justifications, and threadbare philosophical rationalizations. He sees, in effect, a land in a vacuum of tirelessness and spacelessness. "One principle only existed in this slow oven of fleckless insistent sky, limitless plain and golden bread between: a perpetual mindless here, a single baking station amid wire fences, beneath the steeples plastered with tarpaper." This environment seemed to mock such things as ideals, art, and dreaming. Instead, it was but an arena of raw, emerging life: "solid begetting, pure survival, procreant earth and urgent sky, the vedic poem of America." Even while he acknowledged that this real America "had been boring" and "was monstrously still," Rosenfeld inserts an apparently enigmatic, but crucial, qualifying phrase: "but it was good for below, the little stubborn region of the self where the individual will set entrenched." The phrase suggests that America's final identity has, as yet, not revealed itself but only awaits the sensitive visionary who will be able to see beyond the overwhelming present.⁴⁸

At sundown, Rosenfeld's train had "gained the arid zone," moving into the southwest out of the "bread-plains." In this unfamiliar region, Rosenfeld's imagination soared, becoming "wider, more comprehensive, and more robustly affirmative." These are the first stirrings of Rosenfeld's mystical synthesis. Following a highly evocative passage describing the high

⁴⁸ Ibid.

plateau country of New Mexico, Rosenfeld concluded that “the whole world, the petrified past and vague future, was present, or visible, from this eagles' eyrie.” At the same time, he saw that his experience on the Kansas plain, even though it enlarged his sense of reality, was by contrast to the now, unaware of the past and less suggestive of the future. “There, the whole world had been provincially contained in happy functionality of animals; and Europe had been unthinkable.” But here amidst the grandeur of the mountains, Rosenfeld felt, oddly, a peculiar intimacy--as if the region was in fact connected, to the great traditions of Western civilization with which he felt most at home. Not only did the area evoke a sense of continuity with the past, but, much more significantly, it very dimly suggested the presence of an American essence or “the mysterious projection of a long dormant idea.” Gradually, Rosenfeld felt the first shadowy impulses of an informing vision that would be central to the yearning for an expressible American destiny.

I kept repeating, “The most American place,” knowing nothing precisely through the words and yet finding expression in them. Vaguely, uncertainly, a concept born of the stark drought [a reference to the “enigmatic” statement about the individual will lying within the confines of the Kansas “present”]; made to assemble a sprawling geographical dimension and a formless human throng in a single shape . . . the feeling of orientation, the intimation that this half mediaeval, half primitive place facilitated a grasp and definition of the chaotic thing America, hovered.⁴⁹

In line with Rosenfeld's antimodernist sympathies for Roman Catholicism, he found his orientation in the otherwise strange land of New Mexico by way of Catholic symbols--the “pious chromos of the Virgin of Guadeloupe in a mother-hubbard, Saint Nino de Atocha with glebes of

⁴⁹ Ibid., 222.

corn, and sundry bleeding heads and hearts of Jesus.”⁵⁰

The reality of America had no relation to the gimmickery of the city of Santa Fe as a tourist center, nor did it have anything to do with the contemporary habits of Americans. The superficial components of a merely surface identity had to be burned away like so much excess fat before the clarity of vision could be achieved. Thus, Rosenfeld described the almost overwhelming heat of the New Mexico noon, on the day of the corn dance, as a mystical cleansing agent before a baptismal font. As “the crumbling treeless plaza of the pueblo swam gaseous with heat,” the ultimate effect was to obliterate all national and racial distinctions in the heterogeneous crowd. The dance itself, as Rosenfeld described it, took on all the qualities of a primitive religious ceremony as the Indian dancers act out the process of “plant, animal and human growth.” The slow, relentless movement of their ranks and files form patterns that recalled John Marin's watercolor of the same dance.⁵¹

Toward the end of this essay, Rosenfeld disclosed to his readers something for which the earlier essays on Wagner and Ryder seemed but a preparation. In this revelation, time is interrupted and Rosenfeld saw all of America--past, present, and future--standing before him, “a monumental mobility.” The moment infused his being, and he recognized America as “no place of becoming.... Being, not becoming; pure timeless being, was the secret unifying principle of this continent as of all other dry and classic soils.” Here, in this arid, motionless land, was the core of the American continent, whose traits are derived from this “zone of statuesque station, of

⁵⁰ Ibid., 222-3.

⁵¹ Ibid., 225-7.

fixed forms and immutable types.”⁵²

Sensitive as he was, Rosenfeld was overwhelmed by the shattering vividness of the ceremony he attended. In any case, he believed that he had experienced the fertile stillness of revealed truth. He had also discovered the “unifying principle” of America. The idea that America's destiny was present in the here and now meant that her essential spirituality was an accomplished fact and not an uncertain future event. For him it was the religion of Platonism, with unchanging eternal forms, and celebration of pure being. It also gave renewed strength of purpose and a sense of immediacy to Rosenfeld's searches for new artistic talents that would express and “tally” this America of *being*.

But the article did not end with this religious and philosophical discovery. Even though Rosenfeld believed he had discovered the unifying principle which held together the immense multiplicity of America. He knew that he had still to account for elements in contemporary America that seemed to resist being assimilated by his Platonic, mystical synthesis. What of the machine, for example? What of the city?

It took the oldest indigenous peoples in America—its so-called Indians—to remind the second-generation German Jew, Rosenfeld, of his birth right. The corn dance communicated to this “wandering” American a “cognition of basal forces” which underlay and generated the “real” America. This much was plainly communicated to Rosenfeld: “timeless station and rejection of the lonestar, self-feeling individual.” Yet as he gazed eastward toward that center of urban-industrial technocracy, New York, there began in him a whole series of arguments and

⁵² Ibid., 229.

counter-arguments which defined in just a few paragraphs, complex qualities of twentieth-century America that would be both a source of joy and profound disappointment to him all his life. Having neither the tranquil conviction of a true Eastern mystic nor the anarchist leanings of a programmatic Dadaist. Rosenfeld could not accept the seething forces of modern life without attempting, almost feverishly, to organize them under the umbrella of his traditional ethical and philosophical beliefs: his Judaic-Christian ethics and his Romantic-Idealist philosophy. Stripped of these convictions, and his love of Western European civilization, he would not be able to weather the claims of modern life.⁵³

So it is not strange that on the heels of his revelation there came a wave of doubts which he aired in the article. And, as in the Wagner and Ryder articles, Rosenfeld is at his most vivid when describing these dark specters.

To the east across the plains the tall New Yorks shot up, turbid flames of self-assertion, towering ambition, ceaseless becoming; for an instant offering to give the lie to the Indian. There, as never before, was change, ceaselessly mounting and melting sky lines, frantic competition between building and between individuals each of them it. But from this southwestern perspective, the restless becoming seemed hollow, the mere accelerated spinning of unapplied wheels on a derailed locomotive. The motion was external, broken, nervous. There were no individuals; and the frenzy of the tall New Yorks seemed merely the resistance of the inherited racial rhythms to the spirit of the new world. Born of the perpetual modulation, the inevitable individualism of the Faustian north of Europe, and rooted in neither old or new continent, what had once been cosmic yearning now expressed itself in senseless motion; and what had been the assertive romantic ego now lived on in the degenerate form of insatiable personal wishes. Ryder was more plainly than ever the poet of this phase; his ghostly *Flying Dutchman*, *Death on the Racetrack*, *Jonah in the Flood*, the form of dynamic longing only nebulously connected with earth.⁵⁴

⁵³ Ibid., 230.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 230-1.

As we saw in Rosenfeld's essays on Wagner and Ryder, he has conveyed to his readers the decay of the old active spirit of "cosmic yearning." This form of legitimate self-assertion has simply become a vague longing unconnected to the earth. Ironically, Rosenfeld observed "the puritan had ever striven to rise above the soil and escape it; and industrialism had finally fulfilled his wish."⁵⁵

Just as Rosenfeld described these dehumanizing developments in American life--the machine, the city, the frantic acceleration--he saw a counter vision. "Still in those jumbles of granite fire-works and virtuosic spiritual display, the great American cities, what curious adumbration of the logical norm, the type! What suggestions of embryonic order in their architectures! The Shelton, the Telephone Building and the other organic piles!" Even though Rosenfeld anticipated the closing lines of his essay with this kind of hopeful speculation, he must have thought again of what he had written to his friend Philip Platt a decade earlier. "The great pitfall in my own belief has been the thought that all is really good, if we could but see it, and that there is really justice in the things that have seemed most useless and cruel to me. The attempt to see life through that idea has cost me much unhappiness." A knowledge of these words of self-criticism lends a certain poignancy to a passage which, perhaps, can be best described as a cry of protest against a life which would present him with such an impossible critical task. Significantly, this passage follows the burst of optimistic speculation just quoted:

Still, by what feat of fancy could standardization and industrial regimentation indifferent to quality in life, to the value and purpose of existence neither

⁵⁵ Ibid., 233.

releasing human forces nor realizing the possibilities of the marvelous land herself, be considered anything but a miserably inadequate response to what in the soil called for social imagination and a communal culture? Could anyone prove that rootless individualism and the American earth were commencing to collaborate? A few buildings, a few artists?...And what was to produce the organization of the elements of life in the form of culture? Certainly not a lot of unpractical people like the Indians and ourselves, the handfuls alive to wonder. Over such, America loved to glide like a steam-roller. Were we really more than discards now?⁵⁶

At mid-course, as he was just rising to the height of his critical prestige and influence, Rosenfeld would ask such questions. The problem of self-doubt was still pursuing him and made the closing lines of "Indian Corn Dance" appear somewhat forced and contrived and, at best, a straining toward affirmation.

Were they too not bound together, men and earth and machines, by the desire of men to live, by the desire of machines to live, perhaps by earth's desire of fluorescence? None could exist independently. They *were bound* to come together and harmonize.... What the new communism would resemble, whether it would be a new feudalism or a new bolshevism, and whether the great corporations were initiating it, could not be prophesied. But it was inevitable and welcome.... Yes, when the soil and man and the machines were in relation; and style pervaded all the manifestations of life art would top man's day like a temple-dome; receiving his excess and renewing it once more. (Italics added.)⁵⁷

One supposes that Rosenfeld came home from New Mexico with a renewed sense of purpose but continually vulnerable to the agonizing doubts that were so vividly expressed in the Corn Dance article. Neither the doubts nor the hopes he raised in the article were especially new to him, but the revelation that accompanied the dramatic Indian Corn Dance added a new dimension to his conception of reality. And so, the stakes were raised a little higher. If America

⁵⁶ Ibid., 232.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 234-5.

was a place of "being," and if it was connected with the vital forces in life, it would be all the more incumbent upon Rosenfeld as critic to discover the real America for his audience.

Rosenfeld felt compelled to make even more extraordinary attempts to explore geographical and artistic America to discover symbols and signs of her being. He strained to make available to his readers the hidden areas of being which the most talented artists had always attempted to illuminate. What better method for a critic of this sort to use, he thought, than that which gives force to the epiphanic revelations—beauty—in the arts, a technique that recognized the limitations of systematic critical analysis and ordinary language. Rosenfeld's wider use of the impressionistic method of writing coincided with this objective. In the 1930s he modified his method principally by streamlining his style. By then he had little choice for wordier and lush writing fell out of favor quite quickly with the New York literary establishment.

Chapter VII

Among the Young Americans: Friendship and Criticism

Critics by the nature of their vocation have adversaries, and some of whom mingle their intellectual disagreements and personal vindictiveness. Paul Rosenfeld had his share of such adversaries, but given the intensity of the critical spirit that reigns in American arts and letters, they were surprisingly few. Hart Crane, B. H. Haggin, Gorham Munson, and Jane Heap were among the most acerbic of Rosenfeld's detractors. The remarkable thing about Rosenfeld's career as a critic is the degree to which so many artists and critics of various points of view and perspectives thought well of him and his work. And among his fellow Young Americans-- Sherwood Anderson, Randolph Bourne, Van Wyck Brooks, Waldo Frank, Lewis Mumford, James Oppenheim--Rosenfeld was regarded as a quiet coalescing force. Against this background of congeniality, Rosenfeld's sometimes bitter controversies with Waldo Frank stand out and invite, indeed they almost demand, investigation.

Rosenfeld's displeasure with Frank had been simmering for some time before it came to a head in the early 1920s; its intensity flowed in part from Rosenfeld's reliance on Frank for intellectual stimulation and for contacts in the New York arts world between the period of Rosenfeld's graduation from Columbia's School of Journalism and the founding of *The Seven Arts*. Rosenfeld was also indebted to Frank for his skill in traversing widely varying artistic and social circles. As noted in an earlier chapter, Frank and Rosenfeld met at Yale, and, as

upper-middle class Jews who both lived in the upper West Side in New York, Frank and Rosenfeld were formed in the same German-Jewish milieu. Frank had always been the one to put Rosenfeld on to new acquaintances who would be influential in determining the course of his early professional career. It was Frank who, on separate occasions, introduced Rosenfeld to Stieglitz, Leo Ornstein, and Claire Reis. He also introduced him to James Oppenheim and was instrumental in obtaining for Rosenfeld his job on *The Seven Arts*.

There was sometimes an intense competition between Rosenfeld and Frank for Stieglitz's favor. Rosenfeld, for instance, made Stieglitz bear the brunt of repeated written assaults upon Frank in his frequent letters to Stieglitz. Stieglitz always maintained a positive neutrality in the feud, even though it must have been difficult to resist taking sides when faced with the ardor of these highly emotional young men. To a considerable extent, Rosenfeld was indebted to Frank as a contemporary whose intellectual development and experience continued to be two or three years in advance of Rosenfeld's. So Frank was the person who exposed Rosenfeld to many new ideas, and, in a manner of speaking, maintained an edge over him. Apparently, Frank was the sort of man who enjoyed having this type of advantage. But as Rosenfeld gained confidence in the quality and power of his own intellect he increasingly responded with some measure of hostility to Frank. It was the kind of hostility that is often found between two people who held similar intellectual groundings. Let it be said though that, as Casey Blake has pointed out, Frank had a history of alienating his friends. He could be insufferable. Nevertheless, the bad blood between Rosenfeld and Frank was particularly serious.¹

Rosenfeld's rejection of Frank's ideas depended in part on how closely Rosenfeld

¹Casey Blake, *Beloved Community*, 175-6.

identified his own selfhood with Frank's assertion of the same or similar ideas. This commonality between Frank's and Rosenfeld's thinking seemed at times to threaten Rosenfeld's sense of personal autonomy and to challenge the "purity" of his hard-won identity. One must always keep in mind both the astonishing ideological similarities of Rosenfeld and Frank--especially their view of history, and their expectations for the future--and their temperamental resemblances.

Unlike Frank, Rosenfeld would always be either constitutionally unable, or else unwilling, to cast his ideas within a fully developed and articulated conceptual framework. The fact that he did not publicly perform this crucial process of making clear hidden intellectual assumptions meant that, ultimately a great part of his audience would be forced to regard his individual essays out of context. Much of what he wrote was based upon highly contested first principles that contained a whole series of question-begging terms such as "soul," "divine," "Nature," and "the Whole." Although Rosenfeld would not concede as much, Frank did at least make an effort to systematize his thought and define terms that were crucial to his way of thinking.

The first eruption of jealousy between Rosenfeld and Frank came just after Frank published *Our America* in 1919. Rosenfeld's reading of history during the 1920s was heavily influenced by Frank's *Our America*. The book articulated Rosenfeld's most deeply held, though unexpressed, convictions about the past--convictions that had been handed down to him by his romantic heritage in the form of emotionally felt but vaguely conceived tendencies. Frank's characteristic style of prophecy and generalization had the effect of synthesizing and making systematic Rosenfeld's own historical sense. In fact, the whole outlook of *Our America*

represented a continuing concern of both Rosenfeld's and Frank's cultural criticism: an attempt to understand the past and its relation to the American present so that one may be better able to see through to America's future. Therefore, a brief examination of the ideas central to *Our America* is necessary if Rosenfeld's crucially important conception of American history is to be made clear. Of particular importance is the way this historical view relates to Rosenfeld's nationalism and becomes a graphic illustration of it.

Frank began: "You and I were discovering America together." *Our America* was for Frank a "voyage of discovery," in much the same way that Rosenfeld, five years later, would regard his *Port of New York*. The sense of looking for a deeper, hidden level of reality in America—one that already existed—is central to the creative efforts of many figures of the twentieth-century American Renaissance, especially for those who gathered around Alfred Stieglitz and *The Seven Arts*. More broadly, the excitement of probing the depths of some hidden spiritual resource in America was pervasive during the American progressive period, especially among artists and critics, who as a class felt that they had not shared in the fruits and bounties of the so-called American Dream. The rewards associated with this dream had seemed to be all in the area of technological advancement and material prosperity instead of spiritual growth and artistic creativity. In short, one feels that not a few of the aesthetically-oriented pioneers of this American Renaissance were looking for their own kind of power in which the arts would have a say, indeed, a significant influence on the direction of American life. To these men and women of the early twentieth century, the future assumed a degree of importance in direct proportion to the relative horror with which they viewed the past. Frank describes just this past in *Our America*.

Curiously, *Our America* bears on its frontispiece this passage from Walt Whitman:

I say that the real and permanent grandeur of These States must be
their Religion;
Otherwise there is no real and permanent grandeur:
(Nor character nor life worthy the name, without Religion;
Nor land, nor man or woman without Religion.)

The self-conscious choice of this section by underlines his belief that the discovery of the “real” America will be a spiritual reality. And like his friend and spiritual brother, Paul Rosenfeld, he conceived of art and aesthetic matters primarily in terms of their contribution to this exploration: the spiritual rediscovery of America. In this view, art will always have this mystic and essentially religious dimension. In fact, the entire drift of human history is often seen in Frank’s and Rosenfeld’s writings as a response to, or a deliberate stifling of, the religious-spiritual impulse in the human person, that which what made men and women truly human.

Our America’s opening depicts the America of the past and present as a country without religion and without even an awareness or consciousness of the nation’s spiritual underpinnings. In fact, Frank uses the metaphor of a paralyzed giant to describe a nation helpless to articulate its own identity. “America is a turmoiled giant who cannot speak,” wrote Frank. “The problem is to lift America into self-knowledge so she may be articulate”²

Frank understood his function much like Whitman saw his; that is as a mouth piece for the great body of inarticulate men and women. But whereas Whitman expressed this ambition through the impersonal device of a fictionalized speaker in a conventional literary way, Frank cast himself (rather clumsily at times) in the role of a kind of religious prophet who would represent the mute aspirations of his generation. Recalling his earlier conversations about

² Waldo Frank, *Our America* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1919), 4.

America with Jacques Copeau and Gaston Gallimard—two leaders of the Young France movement who requested that Frank write *Our America*, Frank observed, “I was in a casual way rehearsing in my talks with you the solemn role of all my generation.” Indeed, like Whitman, Frank did not hesitate to identify himself with all America. The seemingly personal “I” was nothing more nor nothing less than the entirety of America: “My words will have meaning only in so far as they express a multiplied experience: the gesture of self-knowledge in a generation that shall, one day, become America.”³

The penchant for such grand proclamations on Frank’s part was a source of discomfort for even his most sympathetic friends--particularly, as we shall see shortly, Rosenfeld and Sherwood Anderson. Nevertheless, Frank’s reading of history, and his hopes for the future, were consonant with the aspirations of the Stieglitz circle, and especially with those of Rosenfeld. Frank’s analysis starts with a reflection on the roots of the American experience. No land has ever sprung so nakedly as ours from a direct and conscious material impulse, argued Frank. “The history of the colonization of the Americas is the reflex result of economic movements in the Mother countries.” Even the apparently religious and spiritual communities of Massachusetts Bay sprang from agrarian and industrial unrest in England. Thus, from the very early colonial days to the present, Frank emphasized, “America has had no tradition, no articulation outside of the industrial revolution which threw it into being.”⁴

Frank’s view of the American Founders of the late eighteenth century is not much different

³ Ibid., 5.

⁴Ibid., 13-4.

from his view of the Puritan; both were principally about pursuing their own selfish interests in the absence of English control. To protect these interests, both groups chose to band together to insure their power. The American idea of Union sprang from this central intention of preserving material interests. The tragedy was that the centrifugal energy imparted by the desire for material acquisition “was wide enough and deep, to engulf much of the idealistic forces of the individual whose capacity for dream and for creation turned into materialistic channels.” The upshot of all this was that the reformer, poet, and priest “had to keep step or be blotted out.”⁵

Moreover, there was the fatal attack derived from the “melting pot” ideal. The immigrant from the Old World, in order to conform to the demands of the materialistic New World, had to repress “whole departments of his psychic life.” Indeed, entire “reaches of consciousness must be lopped off.” Thus, the European was thrust into a new homogeneous primitive life dominated by acquisition and self-preservation. The distinctive unity and order of the American life as Frank described it demanded the sacrifice of genuine pleasure and leisure. The sacrifice won its own comfort in “a rationale of strict asceticism.” Also, unity and order were maintained by the centrifugal effect of sheer motion. The continual outpouring of energy produced its own rationale and logic; movement justified itself. Even though the pioneer became a man “innerly locked up,” he was “outwardly released. He was articulate in locomotion.”⁶

Because in Frank’s thinking, energy was material and spiritual, it was logical that the pioneering American should feel a need for the spiritual. Therefore, he translated his latent spiritual energy into the ethics of utilitarianism. Anything that advances the interests of the

⁵Ibid., 16-7.

⁶ Ibid., 17-8, 20-2.

machine and frontier expansion is morally desirable and ethically sound. Therefore, if desire, for example, should stifle material progress, it must be stifled in the name of spiritual progress. This rather dreary course of American history reached its climax for Frank in the Civil War, when an important transition led by Abraham Lincoln occurred. Lincoln was "the first of the prophets of a more vivid religious American world." Frank's description of this movement is an important indication of his and also Rosenfeld's immense investment in the welfare of America's artists, who they saw as providing the best expression of a religious sense in "Our America."

From the time of Lincoln, the drama of American life has shifted: has become the struggle for the assertion of life itself. And the utterance of life is art. Quite as naturally as the leaders of a yesterday given up to physical discovery and exploitation were politicians, the leaders of a tomorrow forced to spiritual discovery are men of letters. These men needed to break with the restricted reality of their fathers. They created a tentative reality of their own--the reality of spirit--and upon it our to-morrow must rest.⁷

Already in his senior year at the Riverview Academy, Rosenfeld had been exposed to the new century's concern for the spiritual over the material. He came to it, as we saw in an earlier chapter, from a different route than Frank: by way of the music criticism of Lawrence Gilman.

Frank was, of course not alone, in casting his concern for the rejuvenation of American culture in terms of a generational revolt. Van Wyck Brooks and especially Randolph Bourne were doing the same thing. But Frank in particular saw himself as part of a generation unique in American history-- a militant group in rebellion against the stale, older consciousness and in tune with the realities of a mystic tradition:

⁷Ibid., 6-7.

We are in revolt against the academies and institutions which would whittle America down to a few stale realities.... But we are in revolt against that organized anarchy today expressed in Industrialism which would deny to America any life--hence any unity at all--beyond the ties of traffic and the arteries of trade. We believe we are the true realists; we who insist that in the essence of all reality lies the Ideal.⁸

Frank's claims were, in 1919, dramatic, particularly after the trauma and disillusionment brought on by the Great War; still it served to restart the momentum of *The Seven Arts* group. It gave many of its members--who by 1919 had dispersed into other projects--a renewed sense of mission, and the book's emphasis on "spiritual pioneering" was especially congenial to Rosenfeld's belief in the Divine which for him was the Ideal or Idea in art. Moreover, Frank's insistence on the idea of a new consciousness was central to Rosenfeld's belief that before a valid American cultural resurgence could spring up, its people had to rediscover the value of a rich interior life.

In line with Rosenfeld's emerging philosophy of art and his understanding of the artist's role in the formation of culture, he saw that the critic in the modern world could have an important role to play in establishing the conditions for a broad cultural renewal. When *The Dial* had announced in 1917 that "criticism can share almost equally with creative writing the privilege of revealing us to ourselves," it struck one of the principal themes beliefs of the American Renaissance: criticism should be communal in nature. It thereby became axiomatic that before an American Renaissance could occur, a new consciousness must begin to emerge. In part under Frank's inspiration, Rosenfeld saw that the critic's task should be to develop new words and new methods commensurate with bring about this "new consciousness." Frank used this term often. In his famous essay, "For a Declaration of War," he asserted that conventionalized language and

⁸Ibid., 9.

logic were not able to penetrate and express new forms of life. Assuming, wrote Frank, that conventional criticism is “an intellectual adoption from previously created forms and words,” it must be clear that a radically new critical method is called for--one that can analyze successfully the new spirit.⁹

Reading this essay of Frank's, Rosenfeld's critical thinking took a new direction and helped him to define more clearly what the crucial issues in American cultural renewal. Frank had dramatized and made intensely exciting the role the artist and the critic must have in the crucial “war” that was taking place within Western civilization, a war “whose lines criticism has yet to discover and announce. It is a great war: wider than America and deeper than the issue of our generation: a war vastly more important than any clash of states or social orders. It is the war of a new consciousness, against the forms and language of a dying culture.” In this kind of psychological and cultural war the responsible artist and critic must always be in the front lines.

Frank also put this war in a historical context that appealed to Rosenfeld's well-developed historical sense and his appreciation for the transcendent. “There has been for the entire term of History in the Western world,” according to Frank, “a common culture: a common Whole. The matrix of the whole was a group of spiritual and intellectual convictions. In this matrix, the man of religion and the artist worked, and from it the peoples looked out upon the world.” But, Frank asserted, these convictions and first principles had broken up.¹⁰

The process of decay had been at work for some time, said Frank, and was accelerated in

⁹ Editor, *The Dial* (May 1917): 245; Waldo Frank, “For a Declaration of War,” in *Salvos* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1924), 14.

¹⁰ Frank, *Our America*, 14, 17.

the nineteenth century by the theories of Darwin, non-Euclidian mathematics, Kant, and Freud. But all this took place on the intellectual plane. The war of which Frank spoke was not this intellectual process of destruction. That war, he said, was “restricted largely to the scientific and philosophical planes and it is mostly over. The great war is one of the whole man . . . of his spiritual and emotional life: it is the world's resistance to giving up the comfort of its old cultural whole: it is the emotional refusal to admit the new truths as experience.”¹¹

With great economy of language Frank expressed a similar feeling of dislocation that Rosenfeld had experienced during his “grand transformation scene,” when he struggled with the conflicting claims of the old neo-romantic lyricism and the new atonality and, in general new techniques of composition. Rosenfeld worked through this dilemma and formed a new kind of unity. Frank's analysis of this situation, in his essay, must have struck a responsive chord in Rosenfeld, who had only recently gone through the fires himself and achieved a kind of rebirth. According to Frank, the reason for our present chaos and misery is that “we have lost the control which comes with the experience of unity and wholeness. “We have lost the power to support a crucial first assumption: unity is truth. This conviction is “the categorical imperative of any culture, the expression of the social will to survive,” like the instinct of the atom to adhere in the major organism.¹²

According to Frank, “the form of our life is decomposing. And that means death. Ere we can be whole and hale again, we must create a new spiritual body. And that means birth. The war of which I speak is therefore the eternal war between a death and a birth, between a cultural

¹¹ Ibid., 20.

¹²Ibid., 21.

break-up and a cultural synthesis.” Frank defined the enemy for his readers and for himself as the “apologists of inertia.” These are precisely the sort of people whom Rosenfeld will constantly provoke through his criticism during the 1920s; these were the people Frank described as fearful of “the explosive menace of new forms, new words for the new experience of man.” Instead, they insist that art must subserve “the *status quo* spiritual, intellectual and ethical, in which man finds himself at the moment of encountering it [and] must remain within the stated boundaries of the consciousness of man.”¹³

Frank wrote in the form of the manifesto which was common to this period, and which, in general, gains popularity during eras of crisis and when issues are constantly expressed in heightened language and even hyperbole. Such manifestoes were usually accompanied by a series of concluding proposals which often had the appearance of natural laws. “For a Declaration of War” was no exception to this pattern. Frank’s series of concluding statements were made in the form of an ascending and ever-widening scale of connected propositions. But, more important, these propositions established a coherent frame of reference for Rosenfeld to operate from during the 1920s and tended to make Rosenfeld even more keenly aware of what he owed to Frank.

Intellect is three dimensional, but intellect is as capable of change and transfiguration as all phases of living organism.

Intellect has had increasing intimations of values and dimensions of life beyond the scope of intellect's fixed symbols (language).

Life is vastly dimensional beyond intellect. Intellect has, by a juncture with the supra-conscious forces of life, erected an instrument for the apperception of life in its full dimensions.

This instrument is Art. Art, by the elements of its creation, brings *into* the

¹³ Ibid., 21-2, 25.

consciousness of mind quantities and values of life which mind alone is unable to perceive or control.

The noblest function of Art is, then, not to subserve the intellectually accepted forms of life: but *to conquer new forms of life and to bring them within the reach of the intellect.* (Italics in the original.) Art is the language which expresses vision of being that has not yet been conventionalized into simple words and concepts . . .

Art conquers truth for the mind which automatically can conquer only fact....

The art that will articulate man's widening and deepening participation in life, and make this participation the base of human experience, must come in the guise of forms and words for which the conventional criticism has no measure by the very definition of that criticism as an intellectual adoption from previously created forms and words.¹⁴

As Frank turned his attention to the role of art in expressing a “new consciousness,” Rosenfeld for his part attended to finding a place for the critic in bringing the new cultural experience to life. But the main point is that Frank's essay helped shape Rosenfeld's interest in the possibility of the critic and artist bringing to life a renewed interiority in American culture. With this expectation, then, Rosenfeld brought to American art in the early 1920s a hope and a belief that there existed some artists whose work would anticipate that new reflectiveness and interiority. And from this hope, stimulated by the work of Frank, arose a corresponding curiosity in Rosenfeld about the existence of a national mind and character which could be more attentive to spiritual realities.

Immediately following the publication of *Our America*, Frank went back to work on a novel he had been writing. Like Rosenfeld, Frank had an intensely personal interest in his own efforts toward writing fiction, even though he was known primarily as a cultural critic. But,

¹⁴ Ibid., 27.

unlike Rosenfeld, Frank's attempts in the novel form received wider public recognition, especially as experimental attempts to revolutionize the form of the novel itself. For this reason, soon after the publication of Frank's novel, *The Dark Mother* (1920), the editors of *The Dial* asked Rosenfeld to review all of Frank's novels. The invitation placed Rosenfeld in a severe quandary and forced him into a state of extreme agitation and anxiety for several months. Even though he was able to complete his review in time for the January 1921 number of *The Dial*, the consequence in terms of bruised feelings in his friendship with Frank persisted for several years after the article went to print. Rosenfeld's unsettledness over the whole Frank affair reveals a great deal about his personality during this period, when he was just undertaking the most important official position of his life as the regular music critic of *The Dial*. Even as some of their mutual friends, such as Jean Toomer, pointed out that Rosenfeld's obsession with Frank's shortcomings as a writer sprang in some part from plain jealousy, others, particularly Alfred Stieglitz, understood that Rosenfeld also looked to Frank with respect, admiration, and affection. The tie between Frank and Rosenfeld was complex and intense. An essentially gracious man, Rosenfeld never forgot the debt he owed to Frank. But, Rosenfeld, who abandoned fiction writing because of crippling sense of disingenuousness, was particularly sensitive and harsh with Frank for what Rosenfeld suspected was Frank's own lack of sincerity.

Rosenfeld accepted *The Dial's* invitation to review Frank's fiction with a mixture of eager anticipation and gnawing guilt. He wrote Stieglitz on the day of the invitation: "I had an exciting day of it today. For I received a letter from *The Dial* asking me to review Waldo's new novel for them. You know what that means, I am sure. It means that I shall present myself to all eyes either a loyal friend or a disloyal one, and I am both, at times. It means I shall have to bring much of

myself out into the open, for everyone, including Waldo, to see.” Rosenfeld, then added, somewhat ruefully, “I am beginning to see the uses of art. It gives one the chances of a lifetime, does it not?”¹⁵

Thus Rosenfeld was fully aware that his forthcoming article would signal his break with one of his formative influences. Not that he had rejected the basic philosophical assumptions of Frank, but it was now necessary that he preserve his intellectual autonomy and integrity by making these ideas in some unique his own. For the sake of maintaining a semblance of objectivity, it would be necessary to find suitable grounds for calling into question the whole Frankian image. Stieglitz was Rosenfeld’s constant conversation partner during this period of anguish, as challenged Frank in public. “My mind is still chaotic with Waldo,” he wrote Stieglitz in the midst of writing his review, “I haven’t found my way out yet, although I am beginning to hope. I am very fond of him, and want very much to see him. It is very bitter that I have to speak my mind. And yet, anything else would be intolerable.” One is reminded here of Allen Tate’s appraisal of Rosenfeld’s devotion to the integrity of his craft even if it meant doing something as distasteful as harshly criticizing a friend. “No considerations of kindness or personal loyalty,” wrote Tate, “would have him defend a book, a picture, a score that he thought bad.”¹⁶

Rosenfeld agreed to write on Frank’s novels for the sake of the integrity of literature. To strengthen his resolve though, he wrote Stieglitz again, this time after he had completed a draft of the review. In this letter he mentioned to Stieglitz that he continued to worry about the Frank

¹⁵ Rosenfeld to Stieglitz, 4 October 1920, Rosenfeld Papers.

¹⁶ Rosenfeld to Stieglitz, 29 October 1920, Rosenfeld Papers; Allen Tate, “Anomaly in Literary New York,” in *Voyager in the Arts*, 140.

piece. "I feel that the sphere of art embraces the sphere of friendship; one cannot be untrue if one works truly. Of course, criticism is oftentimes a cowardly cloak." After bearing his divided mind to Stieglitz Rosenfeld added almost plaintively, "But there must be a criticism that is life-giving, and that is what I should like to learn to make." To be sure such was what Rosenfeld strove for in his study of Frank, but when he sent another draft of the article to his close friend Sherwood Anderson for comment, he discovered the difficulties of achieving his goal of "life-giving" criticism, especially when that the motives driving the effort are tangled.¹⁷

Straight out Anderson disapproved of the piece's tone, noting its excessively personal qualities. "Do you really feel it essential to write it at all"? Anderson asked. "After reading the article, I have quite sharply the feeling that you are a little close to the man and his problem to write of it." Then, Anderson added an observation that probably never occurred to Rosenfeld in his preoccupation with his personal friendship to Frank: "After all, we must realize that the outside world of readers of *The Dial* have no special interest.... From all I can gather, Waldo's book [*The Dark Mother*] has made little or no impression, at least out here. I hear no one speak of it." Then, Anderson went to the heart of the issue. "I know, Paul, that much of your article was fine, but in spite of myself I felt a little too much elaboration of the man's weakness. There was revenge in it. I am sure the article defeats its own ends."¹⁸

Frank's self-centeredness was well known to both Anderson and Rosenfeld; they had discussed it in their many letters from 1920 to 1946. Nevertheless, Anderson was repulsed by the

¹⁷ Rosenfeld to Stieglitz, 28 November 1920, Rosenfeld Papers.

¹⁸ Sherwood Anderson to Rosenfeld, 29 November 1920, in Howard Mumford Jones et al., eds., *Letters of Sherwood Anderson* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1953), 66.

idea of such personal observations as Rosenfeld's being set to print. But there is no indication that Rosenfeld made any changes in the manuscript after receiving Anderson's letter. It appears that Rosenfeld was convinced that the article was written in a spirit of comparative objectivity and should be published for the purpose of guiding readers toward worthy new works. This article was supposed to be a review of Frank's first two novels, *The Unwelcome Man* (1917) and *The Dark Mother*. But, in actuality, Rosenfeld spent little time focusing on the novels themselves. Instead, he concentrated upon the motive behind Frank's writing, especially what he said was Frank's quest for personal aggrandizement and power. Naturally, this was a part of Frank that Rosenfeld would be most conscious of, since he felt the sometimes heavy hand of Frank's influence. By suggesting that Frank needed to be admired, worshiped, even idolized, Rosenfeld was taking the first steps toward shaking off any kind of personal dependency. Rosenfeld began the article by asserting that Frank's fictional characters were nothing more than a projection of Frank's own unresolved emotional conflicts. His characters were not at all individuated: they felt and observed intensely, but their resultant actions were inconsistent with their thoughts. Rosenfeld believed that "behind the person who could feel as Frank's protagonists are said to feel, there must have been lying an experience entirely other than that presumed by the author." The characters, in effect, are but projections of Frank himself. Perhaps unknowingly, Frank's conception of them does not square with what they actually are. His novels, then, become more like confessions.¹⁹

Rosenfeld argued that Frank's problem lay in the fact that there was a reality within him

¹⁹ Anderson to Rosenfeld, 29 November 1920, in *Letters of Sherwood Anderson*, 66; Rosenfeld, "The Novels of Waldo Frank," *The Dial* (1921), 99.

that resisted understanding and control. This submerged reality was partly associated with the events of Frank's early life of frustration. Rosenfeld's description of the traumatic quality of Frank's childhood and adolescence is vivid, and is reminiscent of Rosenfeld's own early sense of anguish and the experience of difference. Indeed, Rosenfeld's personal knowledge of the consequences of such dislocations enabled him to describe their effect upon Frank's writing with great insight.

There were [sic], stored in his flesh, the memory of a thousand bitter and sweet experiences, which would never quite consent to be captured, came close and vanished into distance again. There were wounds that would not heal. Life we know, is cruel to everyone, and Frank, nervously and mentally highly endowed, indubitably suffered intensely. Childhood had indubitably been filled with dark and ignorant pain, left gashes that kept bleeding. Adolescence had left others, equally deep; early manhood had added to their number. They would not close, and kept draining his best energies.²⁰

There was in this analysis something insightful on Rosenfeld's part. He recognized that emotional wounds of childhood are enduring and they have real consequences. Doubtless Rosenfeld saw clearly in Frank what he only partially saw in himself as the source of his failure in creative self-expression. Perhaps Rosenfeld's craving to offer a reason for his own inadequacy as a creative writer found a partial outlet in the Frank article. Irrespective of the possible autobiographical elements in Rosenfeld's "accusations" against Frank, Anderson's warning that there was "too much elaboration of the man's weakness" seems justified. At some point, such psychological penetration and assigning of motives is more destructive than revealing. Certainly, it would seem that from Frank's viewpoint Rosenfeld reached this point in his article. Therefore, Anderson's comment that "there was revenge in it" is on the mark. Still, the main body of the

²⁰ Ibid., 100.

essay contains what can be partly described as a brilliantly conceived analysis of Frank's failure. In the presence of this otherwise destructive analysis, Rosenfeld makes extremely sensitive and perceptive observations about the nature of human relations and the interior aspects of creative self-expression. As Rosenfeld proceeded in his analysis, one can observe how the very force of his prose reveals his intense concern with the deep, interior sources of art.

Thus, here as in other Rosenfeld's writings, there is close attention to the interior disposition of the subject, and at the same time the brilliant insights themselves. Often the two responses could be in conflict, as in the Frank essay, when one is either not entirely sure whether or not the insights are applicable or the insights spring primarily from Rosenfeld's personal obsessions. Knowing about Rosenfeld's growing fear of being dominated by Frank, we can understand the personal source of his concern in the following passage, but we also can see the passage as an intelligent and sensitive account of the way the humanitarian instinct struggles with one's selfish instincts.

But, though Frank wanted to make confession, and be cured of his wounds, (for the man who can see himself in his true relations to others is healed of the great sting of pain) he could not succeed. For, that the confessions be true, that the confessor perceive himself in his relations to others, it is necessary that he possess the ability to experience the reality of another being, and through that discovery, to emerge into the region of personality that is detached from self, and at peace with all men.²¹

Rosenfeld, however, observed something in Frank which forbade this kind of self-detachment; this was the overbearing self, "the little black animal" which is not interested in the reality of other persons or in the truth of relations but is in love with itself. A person suffering from this self-absorption, like Frank did, cannot perform the act of creativity or communicate because he has not

²¹ Ibid., 100-1.

entered into the community of Man, let alone a community of temperament, but instead stands outside of it, judging it. Thus, in one paragraph, Rosenfeld could covertly define the negative aspects of his relation with the self-absorbed Frank and overtly reveal the source of Frank's literary failure. The former could justify his break with Frank; the latter could justify the writing of the article. In another sense, Rosenfeld was in a position to cast the first stone in the direction of Frank because, whatever his personal vices, Rosenfeld had the knack of empathizing with other people, of maintaining a selfless, undemanding relation with a variety of people. No one had ever accused Frank of similar generosity.²²

But here, Rosenfeld's artistic integrity seemed to be on the line. On the one hand, Rosenfeld knew that Frank's novels were vulnerable to even the most generous literary criticism. On the other hand Rosenfeld understood that his own position as a distinct and unique critical voice was at stake; he felt he must attack Frank at the very center of his being. Only after seeing Rosenfeld's interpretation of his own situation can one begin to understand the *ad hominem* criticism that comprised the greater portion of the Frank essay. Rosenfeld's treatment, brilliant in conception, was almost brutal in execution. The extent that Rosenfeld went to in his dissection of Frank's mind and motivation indicates the degree to which he felt burdened by Frank. By the middle of the essay, Rosenfeld was deep into an analysis of Frank's "ego-love." To Rosenfeld, Frank's ego had a strong tendency to martyrdom. Although these feelings existed only semi-consciously, the ego-love believed that it "had been singled out and elected by Life" but "that it had been done, out of sheer malice, a great wrong." Thus, in Frank, there was "an inverted pride which took pleasure in the thought of a painful election." But, continued Rosenfeld, this pride, or

²² Ibid., 101.

unrelenting “ego-love”

would not permit him to confess, for confession, in establishing the truth of the relation between his ego and the ego of others, would have disproved its claim of hateful distinction. Of course, it could not express its convictions directly, for its conclusions were probably repugnant to Frank's conscious mind, which was quite aware that the facts of his existence did not all justify his feelings about himself. But pride demanded justification and down in the subcellar of the unconscious, planned its strategy.²³

This way of thinking inspired the two novels that were the subject of Rosenfeld's review. For Rosenfeld, the ingeniousness of Frank's “ego-love” permitted a certain amount of confession in the novels. “But, in place of the scheme of relationships relevant to the confessions, it substituted one in no wise relevant to it, a fantasy which tended toward proof that the author was justified in his sense of painful election.” and that all forces in the world were conspiring against him. Moreover, the ego's strategy “permitted the author, situated in the very dungeon of himself, the air of perfect detachment; it permitted him to prove his thesis through what seemed general and unpointed remarks.”²⁴

All of these observations were highly significant; to the degree that they were correct, Frank's penchant for using his novels to solve personal problems had its corollary in Rosenfeld's tendency to do the same thing. Curiously, in this matter Rosenfeld was still following in Frank's path. Indeed, the essay itself was an example of assumed detachment in which Rosenfeld, under the cover of so-called objective literary criticism, was trying to purge an intellectual debt and strengthen his own autonomy. With this in mind, Rosenfeld's concluding statements about Frank

²³ Ibid., 101.

²⁴ Ibid., 101-2.

could very well apply, indirectly, to his own case. Rosenfeld argued that Frank believed he was registering general experience in his novels when, actually, he was the prisoner of his ego and unable to speak “in the name of the race and for the life of the race, to the race.” In short, Frank's ego prevented him from fulfilling the very literary goal which he had set out to attain: the rejuvenation of the “race.” Of course, Rosenfeld had the same goal as the object of his writing. Could it be that Rosenfeld's own restless ego prevented him at times from achieving true rapport with the public? The same things he was accusing Frank of could well apply to himself. Indeed, Frank himself suggested this in a letter to Stieglitz, written just after the piece was published: “[Rosenfeld's essay] is a ricochet, almost literally, of things I have out of my deep friendship and in deep intimacy told to Paul about himself and his work.” What is more, Frank accused Rosenfeld, in the same letter, of seeing only “Waldo Frank” in his own novels, as if such a practice violated a standard of human behavior. “I must not obtrude my personality upon him anymore than he himself not desires, but can stand.”²⁵

Perhaps it was the case that Rosenfeld wrote this essay on Frank in order to dissolve certain personal inner tensions, but at the same time he revealed involuntarily a potential weakness in his criticism: a certain inability to communicate to a large audience whenever his critical concerns were significantly informed by personal concerns. As Rosenfeld said of Frank, this confusing of his own preoccupations with those of “larger entities” is nothing more than a soul sickness which pervades the world: “the saying You, They, with the intention ‘I’.”²⁶ As Anderson had reminded Rosenfeld earlier, it would be hard to imagine that many people would be interested in Frank's

²⁵ Waldo Frank to Stieglitz, 3 January 1921, Stieglitz Papers, Yale University.

²⁶ Rosenfeld, “The Novels of Waldo Frank,” 105.

psyche no matter how accurate the analysis. Furthermore, there is no indication that the essay solved the problem for Rosenfeld. Many months later, his mind was still “chaotic with Waldo.”

And, the forbearing Stieglitz was again the recipient of Rosenfeld's complaints:

Frank is fundamentally dishonest.... The desire for “greatness” is always forcing him to do things that are insincere. He arrives at certain conceptions through feeling, and then begins to try to build out mechanically his conception.... In his eagerness for praise, he builds up defenses in his critics, and almost by force prevents them from seeing the thing.²⁷

From reading one side of the correspondence between Rosenfeld and Stieglitz, Stieglitz's answer to Rosenfeld seems to have lacked the usual tact he showed in dealing with the tensions between Rosenfeld and Frank. “I am aware,” Rosenfeld wrote Stieglitz, “that there is something very fine in Waldo that escapes me at present, and would very much like to see the thing in its bigness. I suppose it is true that I am standing in my own light in this matter.”²⁸

Americanism Redux: Europe 1921

Immediately following the appearance of the Frank essay in *The Dial*, Rosenfeld set out for Europe. Going back to his boyhood, a trip to Europe often followed upon a personally unsettling experience. Writing the Frank essay clearly had upset Rosenfeld; it was amplified by his displeasure with New York City. We have seen early indications of the importance he had attached to the conception of New York as the emerging cultural capital of the New World. While Rosenfeld was composing the Frank essay, his disturbed mood was intensified by a feeling of alienation toward

²⁷ Rosenfeld to Stieglitz, 19 September 1921, Rosenfeld Papers.

²⁸ Rosenfeld to Stieglitz, 27 September 1921, Rosenfeld Papers.

his birthplace and home. New York he wrote to Stieglitz, "seems a great scab, a great pile of refuse, and I would like to take out of my heart everything that holds me to the place and stamp on it. What has happened? Have I, the Jew, in the new freedom of leisure, ceased being a city dweller? Or is life really departing from New York?"²⁹

Anderson expressed the same sense of disaffection and a feeling of malaise to Rosenfeld in a letter written in 1921.

It will be very hard for the men of this generation to escape [spiritual] weariness . . . weariness has a thousand hands that can be laid upon one's shoulder. Sometimes you express it. I know I often do. Someday, with me, it will take the form of having to escape out of these Middle-Western towns for good. In the back of my mind I am always vaguely planning on that. In some way one must remain alive, working toward life, not death.³⁰

Anderson's sense of alienation from his surroundings struck a responsive chord in Rosenfeld.

Shortly afterward, he wired Anderson to invite him and his wife, Tennessee Mitchell, to be his guests on a tour of Europe.

Doubtless, Rosenfeld thought that a few months in Europe would revitalize both him and Anderson and help them to "remain alive, working toward life," as Anderson had put it. Another reason for the invitation to Anderson had to do with the latter's emotionally direct nature.

Rosenfeld was in agreement with Anderson, in direct contrast with all the ambivalent feelings and uncertainties he felt toward Frank. Anderson's companionship on the trip would come as a distinct relief after the Frank affair. In fact, soon after his return from Europe, Rosenfeld wrote an article on Anderson stressing a highly appreciative estimate of the man which would be the very reverse

²⁹ Rosenfeld to Stieglitz, 29 October 1920, Rosenfeld Papers.

³⁰ Anderson to Rosenfeld, 23 January 1921, in *Voyager in the Arts*, 197-8.

of his recent portrait of Frank. One begins to see how much Frank lacked the essential traits that Rosenfeld felt were necessary for a writer-artist. The Anderson article describes an artist who was unselfishly attuned to humanity, without ever saying so, Rosenfeld saw traits in Anderson that Rosenfeld himself possessed. Anderson's joy and gratefulness at being invited were unbounded. He replied to Rosenfeld's invitation: "You know how happy your wire made me. Of all the men I know in America, it is you I should have picked to go with to Europe.... O Paul, I can't tell you what this chance and the opportunity it offers for companionship with you means to me." Later, in Rosenfeld's presence, Anderson would burst into tears at the very sight of the Louvre. This account of Anderson's emotional response before Chartres became a minor American literary myth. To an extent Anderson encouraged its growth in his fictional autobiography, *A Story Teller's Story*, by describing that moment he shared in common with Rosenfeld.

I sat that day before Chartres Cathedral beside a man I had come to love and in the presence of that cathedral that had made me more deeply happy than any other work of art I had ever seen. It was one of the best moments of my own life. I felt free and glad. Did the friend who was with me love me? It was sure I loved him. How good his silent presence.³¹

Interestingly, as we saw in an early chapter, in Rosenfeld's autobiographical novel, *The Boy in the Sun*, Rosenfeld has his stand-in, David Bauer, experience an epiphany—a return to belief in God—before a picture of Chartres.

But in Anderson's book, he reports his complete reaction as more complicated than unqualified ecstasy. This is significant, for Anderson's full description locates the trip to Chartres, and to Europe, in a perspective that Rosenfeld would assent to. Anderson describes the scene in which he and Rosenfeld are sitting before Chartres, which to them is an object of true

³¹ Sherwood Anderson, *A Story Teller's Story* (New York: B.W. Huebsch, 1924), 407.

craftsmanship--an edifice built by men, with faith and humility, to the glory of God. But, notes Anderson, if the craftsmen of the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries understood the meaning of what they were creating, present-day Frenchmen do not. Anderson then describes the ugliness and indifference surrounding the Chartres Cathedral, one of France's favorite tourist attractions: "the cathedral before me was faced on one side by ugly sheds, such as some railroad company might have put up on the shores of a lake facing a city of mid-America." Anderson wonders if this is not proof that Europe is dead, dead not only to seeing the possibility of her own materials, but dead culturally.³²

In Anderson's version of the story, he and Rosenfeld became unsettled and eager to return to America, presumably in response to what they saw as the decadence of the old world.

We wanted to go, wanted to take our chances of getting what we could out of our own lives in our own places. We did not want to spend our lives living in the past, dreaming ever the dead past of a Europe from which we were separated by a wide ocean.... We were young with that America of which we both at that moment felt ourselves very much a part, and of which we were glad in our hearts to be a part.³³

Rosenfeld was of one mind with Anderson in his assessment of European decadence and American promise. In a letter to Stieglitz Rosenfeld described the trip with Anderson. The reader of this letter gets a sense of boredom and lassitude from Rosenfeld's rendering of the journey. Even while Rosenfeld had shown as intense interest in the European moderns during the early 1920s he was experiencing a disillusionment with European culture. More and more, a certain weariness came over him on his frequent trips to Europe. What had once been sustenance--a means of generating intellectual excitement, a stimulant to his imagination, a refuge from ugliness--

³² Ibid., 399.

³³ Ibid., 407, 410.

-was now stale and repetitious. In effect, Rosenfeld was going through the letdown of the tourist who soon tires of looking at a cultural tradition from the outside. Of course, Rosenfeld's personal involvement in Western European culture was far greater than that of most tourists. But during the trip of 1921, he found himself "living like any ordinary sightseeing American. I have seen the streets, the opera, the concerts, the Louvre . . . eaten and drunken well. But I haven't done a stroke of work since I arrived. My brain seems absolutely empty. Not a musical surge even mounts through me. I have periods of depression and others of a sort of happy go lucky lethargy." What should have inspired him, now only drained him, reminding him of the true source of his creativity and identity.

I suppose one has to learn to get one's stimulus out of oneself. Traveling of this sort, then, I suppose is of a very little value. How to do it? That's a great question for me. I wonder whether there is any country or place that does the work for you? Certainly, Paris doesn't. What Paris gives you, it seems to me, is mostly the beauty of the past. The present is as weak and evasive here as in New York. Perhaps even weaker, for it appears to me that some of the things starting in America are as interesting as any thing I have seen. Perhaps, you will say, because I am an American born. . . . I am beginning to wonder whether one learns from anything except work, and whether my trip wasn't unnecessary. Pascal says somewhere that all our unhappiness comes from our inability to live in a single chamber.... I am afraid I am an incurable person, who cannot learn from experience, and never move.³⁴

Rosenfeld understated and misjudged his ability to learn from experience. Immediately before he returned to New York in August 1921 he made a declaration of allegiance to America. The form of it, which he made to Stieglitz, contributed to the Americanism of his criticism during the 1920s, and seemed to renew his Seven Arts faith in an American art, music, and literature.

[I am] bound to New York city, because there at least I was half a person, but in

³⁴ Rosenfeld to Stieglitz, 13 June 1921, Rosenfeld Papers.

France a zero. You found this out long since, and 291 resulted but for me it is pretty new. I imagined I was remaining in New York out of bounty toward the American benighted. Now I see, I need them a good deal more than they need me, that without this group and this life and this gamble here there is nothing in me.³⁵

With this proclamation, Rosenfeld renewed his loyalty to New York city as an authentic center of artistic creativity—even though its promise had yet to be realized. In Rosenfeld's mind, there was always the idealized image of Rome, Florence, Athens, Paris, and London as the great centers of culture. Each had been the nucleus of great outpourings of art in the past. In the analysis of *Port of New York* soon to follow this chapter, we will see that his search for the city that would spawn and signal the revival of Western civilization had ended. He had put his feet on dry land, as he put it, and announced his discovery of New York City. Nevertheless, it seems, Rosenfeld had to continuously justify the validity of this sort of discovery, not only to his readers but to himself.

The Painters of America

Following Rosenfeld's return to New York City from Europe in late 1921, he reviewed the year and saw it as a period for regrouping his critical forces in preparation for a burst of activity in 1922. This year would include the major article on Sherwood Anderson and a series of articles for *Vanity Fair* on individual members of the Stieglitz circle—John Marin, Georgia O'Keeffe, and Marsden Hartley. He was also working on a complicated critical analysis of *The Seven Arts* period, which would not make an official appearance until the publication of *Port of New York*. In a way Rosenfeld's works of 1922 and 1923 were preliminary judgments which he developed and refined for publication in *Port of New York*—his masterpiece of criticism. Rosenfeld's faith in the artistic

³⁵ Rosenfeld to Stieglitz, 23 August 1921, Rosenfeld Papers.

future of America had been reinforced by his disillusionment with Europe. This optimism was now the generating force behind his work on the Stieglitz circle.

Heretofore, Rosenfeld had written very little on painting, except for an article in 1921 on the Pennsylvania Academy Show. The article's was prompted in part because the Pennsylvania Academy departed from its own tradition and exhibited the work of 80 American artists. In the early 1920s Rosenfeld had been seeing much of the painter Kenneth Hayes Miller. According to Miller on one of Rosenfeld's and Sherwood Anderson's visits to his studio, Rosenfeld exclaimed, "I have been thinking of you all summer working here in your room every day. When did you learn that this is the great thing to do?" Immediately following this visit, Rosenfeld informed Miller that he [Rosenfeld] had decided to try art criticism. According to Miller's biographer, Lincoln Rothschild, Rosenfeld then "asked Miller for lessons in painting and drawing to develop some depth of technical understanding."³⁶

In response to Rosenfeld's new interest in painting, the editors of *The Dial* asked Rosenfeld to write on the state of American painting as it was in December 1921. The assignment finally gave Rosenfeld an opportunity to synthesize his varied responses to the visual arts and place the work of contemporary painters in some kind of historical perspective. *The Dial* article, in addition, paved the way for his more specialized treatments in *Vanity Fair*.

In a tone similar to his writing on American music, Rosenfeld thought of American painters as being on the verge of true critical self expression. The main obstacle to the fullness of their cultural achievement was the divided state of the American mind. We have already discussed

³⁶ Miller's remembrances are in a personal correspondence with Hugh Potter, who mentions it in *False Dawn*, 251-2.

the nature of this problem disease, as it presented itself in Rosenfeld's articles on Richard Wagner and Albert Ryder. It was a yearning and a straining for the unobtainable. Even while the contemporary generation of such American painters as A. B. Davies, Kenneth Hayes Miller, and Marsden Hartley had been clearly influenced by the vital presence of Cezanne and Picasso, their essential maladjustment is shown by their persistent clinging to this nostalgic desire for the distant. So, for Rosenfeld, the chief characteristic of American painting in 1921 was the split between a sensitivity to modern forces and a temperamental kinship for "otherwheres."

Discussing the current generation of painters, Rosenfeld observed that "Power and doubt of self, energy and fear of life, courage and want of faith in their own craft . . . are strangely balanced in so many of them." Therefore one gets a feeling that these artists are on the edge of some kind of resolution: "It is in the antechamber, in a sort of purgatory twilight, in a zone of hesitation and rigidity. that so many are to be found hesitating. Over them flames the sign of the new birth of things in the new country as yet, the procession that is to follow the star, the procession which we are waiting, has set forth no more vigorously in painting than in any of the other arts."³⁷

Rosenfeld asserted that no "hot fecund powerful surge of life" can assert itself in America's painters until they learn to integrate body and spirit. The problem has been that American artists had been moving in the direction of one or the other in a frenzy of overcompensation:

It would seem, therefore, as though the artist were one who, like Davies and Hartley, had the transcendental strain in his blood, always felt the distance more beautiful than the near: and that, in order to overcome the yearning tendency left in him by Puritan and pioneer forebears, sacrificed much of his fantasy, his dream, in the hope of first achieving the immediate contact with life, and then, later, of

³⁷ Rosenfeld, "American Painting," *The Dial* (1921), 656.

reuniting dream and reality.³⁸

In truth, even such “ultra-moderns” as Max Weber, Man Ray, Charles Demuth, and Stanton MacDonald-Wright showed this division between certainty and timidity by their self-conscious theorizing and intellectual immersion in the styles of Cezanne, Picasso, and Matisse. In this typically American situation, Rosenfeld complained, little is embraced naturally and with gusto. Even the American Dada movement, best represented by Man Ray, is no more daring than its earlier European counterpart.³⁹

In his analysis Rosenfeld conditions everything he says by introducing his primary requirement for significant American art, and asserting that three of the charter members of the Stieglitz circle—Marin, Dove, and O’Keeffe—are upon the brink of getting it. It is namely, “achieving the unification of their personalities, and bringing the entire man, *dream interpenetrated with reality, and reality dream*, to the composition of their works.”[Italics added.] This ideal unification, for Rosenfeld, would be the standard measurement for American art during the 1920s. In fact, the integration of dream and reality would be seen in his writing as the source of the organic conception of life that had been inherited from the nineteenth romantic thinkers. In Rosenfeld’s view contemporary painters and writers such as Marin, O’Keeffe, Dove, and Sherwood Anderson lent a sense of immediate relevance and credibility to this organic idea.⁴⁰

Rosenfeld understood clearly that, by conventional historical standards, the rise of Marin,

³⁸ Ibid., 659-60.

³⁹ Ibid., 662.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 663.

O’Keeffe and Dove as influential cultural leaders was long overdue if one had taken seriously the predictions of Stieglitz, himself, and other members of the “291” group. They had written about their great successes well before World War I; also, *The Seven Arts* had promoted these three painters in 1916 and 1917. Now, in the early twenties, little in the way of significant public recognition had come their way. Had not their talent and importance already been vindicated?

Rosenfeld anticipated the questions of the more cynical among his readers, for he offered the explanation that when “291” was most active between 1908 and 1916, America “was unready for the orientation.” Therefore, neither Marin nor O’Keeffe nor Dove could be expected to have their anticipated cultural impact. And furthermore, Rosenfeld hastened to add, none of them were “created” by “291” but rather were profoundly “affected” by it. That is, all three painters had something of 291 in them before they had ever heard of it. Was this a public disclaimer by Rosenfeld of 291’s vital role in the emergence of modern American art? No, rather Rosenfeld’s point was merely a subtle reminder to his audience that the primary cause of great art lay in its indigenous culture and not in any one institution, no matter how sympathetic it is to new cultural movements.⁴¹

Once he addressed the stalled influence of Marin, O’Keeffe and Dove, Rosenfeld once again put himself on the line. He made the kind of tentative prophecy which would soon become an obligatory conclusion--a Rosenfeld trademark--for many of his essays written during the 1920s. “A second corner in the history of American culture may have been turned; the present has the look of a transition; we may all see during the next decades, the period commenced by Ryder draw to a close, transform itself into one of the fullest life, change from grey to white.” With such

⁴¹ Ibid., 669.

expectations did Rosenfeld face the 1920s. After the Frank affair and the trip to Europe, in 1921 he was ready to turn toward America once again.⁴²

Sherwood Anderson's America

From painters Rosenfeld turned his attention to the writings of Sherwood Anderson. Writing in *The Dial* he applied many of the principles he advanced for judging American painting to Anderson's fiction. The journey to Europe with Anderson and Tennessee Mitchell in 1921 had underlined for both Rosenfeld and Anderson the strengths and weaknesses of Western European civilization. Upon his return to the United States in late summer 1921, Rosenfeld began to see again the promise of America in terms of the capacity of such artists as Sherwood Anderson to achieve genuine integration in their public and private lives. Moreover, because of Rosenfeld's new friendship with Anderson, he saw clearly for the first time in his life a way to link private friendship and the wider common good.

With the great deal of time spent together during the trip to Europe, Rosenfeld's friendship with Anderson deepened. Rosenfeld observed Anderson's relation to his wife, and how he was in a variety of circumstances. Although there is little extant on the details of their trip, Edmund Wilson recorded a tableau of the three in an Italian restaurant in Paris. At that point, in 1921, Wilson had not met any of the three. As Wilson sat in the restaurant eating his ravioli and drinking Asti Spumonti, Rosenfeld, Anderson and Anderson's wife took a table just across from him. "Although I had never seen any of them before," wrote Wilson, "I recognized them soon as Paul Rosenfeld, Sherwood Anderson and Anderson's wife, the sculptress, Tennessee Mitchell." Wilson

⁴² Ibid.

watched the party with great interest, picking up pieces of their conversations. "Tennessee Mitchell had the aspect and the manner of a raw-boned prairie women, and I was touched by Paul's obvious effort to approximate for her benefit to a modestly folksy manner."⁴³

What is certain about the effects of this trip is that whatever Rosenfeld learned of Anderson during their time together in Europe it inspired in Rosenfeld feelings of deep respect for Anderson as a man who had effortlessly achieved a unity of life which fused with his interior world and the outer world. Such a unity had long been a goal of Rosenfeld's. For Rosenfeld such unity of life began with Anderson's legendary rejection of a successful career in advertising for the work of writing fiction. This act of sincerity and risk stood against what he thought was the disingenuous posturing of Waldo Frank. It was, indeed, the key to understanding Anderson's success as a writer. Anderson's sincere heart and mind enabled him to "touch" people and enter sympathetically into their lives. Anderson's relation with mid-America, as Rosenfeld saw it, was one of almost complete congruence in which nothing was demanded of others except that they be themselves. "The business of seeing people without romanticizing them, of drawing them without putting himself below or above them, but merely by feeling their lives, is to Anderson what it is to all men, an act of love.... It is not love of one's image in the partner for its motive is the preservation in another of an intact soul." Here was a man who was not going to use a relationship to feed and strengthen his own ego. Here too we get the first direct statement of Rosenfeld for what he meant by the importance of love for the artist, and, by extension, for the critic. It is a position of being with and for the other, and not possessing him or her for one's own motives, no matter how noble such

⁴³ Edmund Wilson, "Paul Rosenfeld: Three Phases," in *Voyager in the Arts*, 5.

motives were made out to be.⁴⁴

Anderson provided sustenance and stability for Rosenfeld, helping him toward reestablishing contact with the American reality. Coming after his disillusionment with New York City and the failure of Europe to provide an anodyne, Anderson was part of Rosenfeld's new identification with the American Folk. Ever since days of *The Seven Arts*, both Frank and Rosenfeld had viewed Anderson as the embodiment of the American people. At that time (the Second American Renaissance), when so many people were envisioning an American art with native roots, Anderson's work came to have great significance for Frank and Rosenfeld, as well as for Alfred Stieglitz. Here was a man out of the Midwest, untutored, lacking in intellectual background, but gifted with a fine, raw intelligence that was able to discern and articulate the needs of a great land. His roots were in the soil he was a true indigenous talent. Frank recalled that Anderson stood for "the fecund sap of what he loved to call Mid-America. . . . To me, the young New Yorker who knew his Europe well had scarce seen his own land beyond the Eastern seaboard, Sherwood Anderson was America; the discovery of his was an exhilarating part of my discovery of my own country." Such a view fit in with his and Rosenfeld's New York-centered Americanism and their particular sense of community during the late 1910s and early 1920s. In the years following *The Seven Arts*, there came to the maturing Rosenfeld a growing conviction that the lifeblood of his criticism emanated from some element in the American people typified in the fiction of Sherwood Anderson. The power to create and write became associated in his mind with the recognition of what is common to all men. Anderson dramatized for Rosenfeld the existence of such a common element. But to Rosenfeld, in 1922, the conscious recognition of its existence

⁴⁴ Rosenfeld, "Sherwood Anderson," *The Dial* (1922), 40.

constituted the “new feeling that is in America, it is only an infant.... Still it is there, born. You have but to read Anderson, to know it well.” “Something is different in us,” concluded Rosenfeld, after reading Anderson’s stories and novels.⁴⁵

Such an appraisal from Rosenfeld was particularly important. Anderson, the “man cut loose from Europe,” was a successful projection of that rootless feeling that Rosenfeld had endured so often. Now these feelings of alienation had found a home in a writer who had discovered his own home in the people of America, in the soil of the continent. In emphasizing Anderson's native, homing instinct, Rosenfeld in some sense allayed his own doubts about his hard-won nationality and thereby bring himself into some closer relation to his fellow Americans. It is clear that Rosenfeld's natural warmth and generosity, so easily given to individuals, did not naturally and spontaneously extend to people in general. He would always have to make special efforts to achieve rapport with the “masses,” although he rarely used this word, preferring instead, common folk. His persistent effort toward achieving a sense of community was a holdover from the social-democratic spirit of *The Seven Arts*. Still, as a critic of the arts in America whose work was gaining a national audience, Rosenfeld was convinced that new forces in the nation were rising up and demanding entrance into his own artistic sensibility. He acknowledged this vital fact in the most effective way he knew; that is in writing an essay on Anderson, whose very life was testimony to the immediacy of this fact.

Throughout the Anderson essay Rosenfeld emphasizes Anderson’s importance as a writer who is finally giving expression to what had been a hidden aspect of American life. Anderson

⁴⁵ Waldo Frank, “Sherwood Anderson,” *The Newberry Bulletin*, 2nd ser., no.2 (December 1948), 41; Rosenfeld, “Sherwood Anderson,” 41-2.

does this because he sees his most inner self in all those lonely, gray, and resigned American folk. "What he is beholding, what he holds in his hands before him in the shape of a scene, a gesture, a history, is the very life in him self." And the creative act, for Rosenfeld, gained intensity by virtue of the fact that both People and Artist needed one another in order to live. Indeed, this multitude of American faces, as a part of Anderson himself, demanded recognition.⁴⁶

Therefore, says Rosenfeld, Anderson provides a voice for this mute *volk* by forming his artistic language from the raw materials of the common tongue. He has taken the words of the American folk and "has set them firmly end to end, and underneath his hand there has come to be a surface as clean and fragrant as that of joyously made things in a fresh young country . . . a surface as hard as that of pungent fresh planed boards of pine and oak." His words carry themselves proudly and erect, compelled into patterns that are orderly and solid. In Anderson's work, verbal images have risen to meet the disembodied heads of native America. So, Rosenfeld concludes, Anderson pours life into the people by making them, finally, articulate.⁴⁷

The Anderson essay is reflective of a type of Rosenfeld's criticism which is the product of some long-considered personal reflections on a certain question—in this case Rosenfeld's ethnicity, that finds a corollary in another's artistic works. Accordingly, the last line of this essay on Anderson is not only a tribute to Anderson's national significance but also as a personal expression of Rosenfeld's renewed identification with the American people. Rosenfeld attributed to Anderson the power "to create through his prose style protagonists in whom every American can feel him self." The organic method that Anderson uses to formulate his literary language means that,

⁴⁶Rosenfeld, "Sherwood Anderson," 41-2.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 29.

inevitably, his words reveal the inner consciousness of the American people. Therefore, Rosenfeld concluded, Anderson's protagonists speak directly to what is latently American in all of us. "They are flesh of our flesh and bone of our bone; and through them, we know ourselves in the roots of us, in the darkest chambers of the being." Anderson gave expression to a spiritual America, one that united dream and reality, theory and practice. It is what all Americans held in common, and it is what Rosenfeld desperately hoped would connect him to "the American fact." In 1922, Sherwood Anderson's work became the root and symbol of Rosenfeld's romantic cultural nationalism. "It seems as though the mysterious Third Person, the being who comes into existence at the moments walls fall between men and women, and dies when they rebuild themselves once more, had been give another chance."⁴⁸

⁴⁸Ibid., 42.

Chapter VIII

Chanting the Progress of the Arts in 1920s America

To be sure, it was Rosenfeld's friendship with the mid-Western writer, Sherwood Anderson, and his intimate knowledge of Anderson's art that reinvigorated and helped to re-shape Rosenfeld's Americanism. Nevertheless, Rosenfeld's conception of America was always filtered through Rosenfeld's experience of New York City. Allen Tate who first met Rosenfeld in 1924 the year *Port of New York* appeared, was perplexed with Rosenfeld's seriousness about "America." Tate, a Southerner, attributed Rosenfeld's enthusiasm to a particularly New York perspective, a city that Tate thought had "very little connection with the United States."

I felt later that I, too, as he saw me was "not enough in love." He was serious and conscious about "America," which I no doubt took too much for granted because I didn't know any other country. Paul was so serious about America in those days that I sometimes thought he looked upon me as a wild piece of Americana which it was his duty to collect. But if Paul had not collected us I do not know who would; and there is no doubt that the movement he stood for had made it possible for people all over the country, who perhaps had never heard of it, to feel more confident of their immediate lives as the subjects of literature.¹

Of course, Tate's position is part of a long-standing debate on whether or not New York City is a city apart from America, a city more European than American. Recently, the historians Edward

¹Allen Tate, "An Anomaly in Literary New York" in *Voyager in the Arts*, 142-143.

G. Burrows and Michael Wallace revisited this debate in their book *Gotham* arguing forcefully that New York is very much part of the warp and woof of American life and culture.²

Port of New York, Rosenfeld's most influential book, was written against the Brahminic New England view of New York, as a "railway station," a view made popular by John Jay Chapman, whose career as an essayist (1890-1930) overlapped Rosenfeld's. Chapman compared New York highly unfavorably to the Boston-Cambridge culture because the former lacked the "coherence" to call it "a civilization." But Rosenfeld, at least implicitly, acknowledged the debate on New York and its relation to the rest of America by way of the ambiguity of the very, *The Port of New York*. For the words "port" and "portal" are favorites of Rosenfeld's, and as his correspondences reveal a writer who chose his words carefully and defended them almost to the knife. Rosenfeld's use of the word, "port," suggests a place of arrival and continued movement. For the word "port" can mean both arrival at a concrete place, such as a harbor, or a portal or gateway, something that one passes through. In the "Foreword" Rosenfeld describes the port of New York as a place of definitive arrival after a long trip. He writes, "And, imaginary or real, this group (the fourteen moderns) has determined the constitution of my book of journey's end and land's beginning." Elsewhere, as in the book's essay on William Carlos Williams, we are assured that it's safe to abandon our uncertainty about "whether the shore before us is indeed solid earth which one can walk and nourish oneself." In the end the reader is led to firm ground through the penetrating and coherent vision—*contra* Chapman-- of the fourteen artists who are the subjects of *Port of New York*. He chose these fourteen "for one reason only: the reason that

² Edward G. Burrows and Michael Wallace, *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 1389-95.

during the last eight or seven years, the works of fourteen men and women at different times gave me the happy sense of a new spirit dawning in American life.”³

The fourteen include: six painters, Albert Ryder, Marsden Hartley, Kenneth Miller, John Marin, Arthur Dove, and Georgia O’Keeffe; three writers, Van Wyck Brooks, Sherwood Anderson, and Randolph Bourne; two poets, William Carlos Williams and Carl Sandburg; the composer, Roger Sessions; photographer, Alfred Stieglitz, and early childhood educator, Margaret Naumburg. The inclusion of Margaret Naumburg, a Montessori teacher and ex-wife of Waldo Frank, in *Port of New York* and the omission of Frank from it, is a consequence of the conflict that Rosenfeld had had with Frank. One would have thought that Frank’s *Our America* by itself qualified Frank for a place among the those responsible for the new spirit dawn in American culture. But even as late as 1939 Rosenfeld spoke of Frank as “cold, uninterested in his object, without feeling for it.”⁴

Port of New York contains the clearest and most representative expressions of Rosenfeld’s attitude toward the role of artist in society. In it he continually attempts to describe the dramatic and vital connection that binds the artist and his public: the ideal artist’s creations mirror the deepest fears and hopes of the public’s soul and elicit a national response. Ryder’s work, for example, resulted in just such sympathetic vibrations: “Out of a picture-frame there comes an intimate address to the American in us; there comes something full of what lies between us and American life. Feelings hitherto heavy and confused in us are suddenly lifted out of us and off of

³ Paul Rosenfeld, *Port of New York*, vi.

⁴ Rosenfeld, “Waldo Frank’s Dream,” *The Nation*, 20 May 1939, 590.

us and placed outside us massively.” The artist's audience undergoes a type of national catharsis and the common experience draws artist and audience together. Thus, the ideal artist not only satisfies our social need to share a common inner experience, but, by so doing, promotes unity and harmony among people in much the same that the office of the king had done in the pre-industrial societies. In addition, the artist strengthens the tie between himself and his culture.⁵

For Rosenfeld the model artist bridges the divide between social and intellectual groups that Brooks complained about in *America's Coming-of-Age*. The artist can do this, Rosenfeld believed, only if, he accepts with affect or artificiality all aspects of life without denying anything that would place him outside the common experience of some part of his audience. In *Port of New York*, Arthur Dove, for instance, is a successful artist because he “brings the beginnings of a whole man to his art. He brings a spirit which does not separate any one function of life from the others.” If an artist like Dove makes all of life his theater of observation, his work will reflect the tempo of the times. Rosenfeld notes that John Marin's landscapes and seascapes not only reflect the timeless physical qualities of his subjects, but subtly reveal the pace of the industrial age: “There pulses in every one of Marin's spurts the tempo of the modern world. In each, through notations of rapid movement there beats the frantically accelerated.”⁶

But Rosenfeld advances the close affinity between the artist and his surroundings. The temper and emotional constitution of the ideal artist has a parallel in his geographical background, in his work, and in his personality. Marin, for example, is a Yankee whose

⁵ Rosenfeld, *Port of New York*, 16.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 162-3, 169.

“excitability is essentially that of a people submitted to violent and sudden thermal changes,” while in Roger Sessions' music we find the “repression, the over withdrawal of the New Englander exposed to a winter which is too raw and long, and a summer which is too intense and abandoned.... And we feel strangely at home with it, strangely rich and released.” The last sentence suggests the social role of such an artist. He offers his audience a means by which its members can identify and understand themselves. The artist only makes more intense and lucid the common heritage and experiences he or she and his audience share.⁷

Port of New York concludes with lavish praise for Alfred Stieglitz, who as we saw earlier was Rosenfeld's ideal cultural leader. Like Van Wyck Brooks in his heyday, Stieglitz performs the task of a prophet insofar as he reveals the most minute and elusive aspects of the American identity to his audience. In so doing, Rosenfeld believed that Stieglitz was registering the entire range of America's unconscious reactions. Stieglitz was capable of doing this because of his sensitivity to a wide range of subject matter. No artists in the past “have landed a greater catch of untried subject matter, nor seen as related portions of designs so many common immediate stuffs.” As a photographer, Stieglitz exploited the same ability to register “the truths of moments.” According to Rosenfeld, the painter or sculptor is at a disadvantage here because “the mind cannot retain the unmutated truth of a moment sufficiently long to permit the slow fingers to notate large masses of related detail.” Moreover, Stieglitz's camera revealed an immensely broad scale of black and white tonal variations. As a result, the national viewer is subjected to a most subtle reflection of the innermost ranges of his soul.

⁷ Ibid., 151, 162.

One gets new eyes, new nerves in receiving these gleams, points, breaths of the silvery scale. The noble prints, so clear, precise, charged with unimaginably subtle detail and vibrantly given textures, are like the writings of a needle sensitive to the gravity of man, the state of his spirit, the movement of his blood, the faintest tingling of his cortexes, as the seismograph is sensitive to the minutest vibrations of the crust of the earth.⁸

With perhaps greater effect than the any of the other artists treated in *Port of New York*, Stieglitz photographs with an eye to a national audience needful of a national-spiritual identity. And, to a great extent, "291," as we said in an earlier chapter, fulfilled this purpose. Rosenfeld emphasized Stieglitz's role as a creative artist in his own right and as an organizer, promoter, and exhibitor of other significant talents too. Within the walls of "291" the search for a spiritual American went on--an interior voyage, Rosenfeld might have added, not unlike his own searches for a national identity. For, like Stieglitz, Rosenfeld found himself looking directly to the empyrean for signs of a national Renaissance. As Stieglitz increasingly turned to his famous studies of clouds, Rosenfeld was immediately drawn to the transcendent in Stieglitz's new subject matter. Indeed, this probe into Stieglitz's work concludes with a mass of spiritual assertions which insist on the presence of an grand unity: "above the universal decay and personal extinction the heaven-sweeping, heaven-storming gestures of the clouds declare that all which man has called spirit exists, a portion of some eternally abiding principle."⁹

⁸ Ibid., 238, 244, 260.

⁹Ibid., 279.

Music, History, and Culture

Often during the interwar years Rosenfeld would take stock of developments in new music by rehearsing their place in the wider history of music and of European and American culture. This periodic historical analysis provided him with the chance to reflect, consolidate, and speculate openly on the enduring importance of his first reactions to contemporary composers and their works. In an earlier chapter we saw the beginnings of this habit in Rosenfeld of revisiting his first impressions in an exchange of letters with Philip Platt on the Mahler Fifth Symphony. This exchange years before Rosenfeld embarked on his career as a professional critic of music. As a professional the reappraisals in the light of history became necessary for him to establish his bearings because writing the monthly Musical Chronicle for *The Dial* required listening to a great deal of new music and writing on it with comparative immediacy. Historical context was essential to Rosenfeld, who was intent on seeing a recognizable tendency, or apparent direction, in Western musical expression since the late nineteenth century.

Although Rosenfeld was an avowed champion of American music, he did not accept uncritically the usual reading of history that celebrated American vigor and freshness rising from the decay of European culture. In reality, Rosenfeld's theory of the history of music was complicated, although at times still somewhat formulaic. With small modifications Rosenfeld's theory of the progress of music remained fairly consistent throughout his career, notwithstanding the changes in musical and critical fashions that marked the interwar years. Rosenfeld would remain true to his stated aims that the object of his critical technique was to fuse the aesthetic and the social. But there were periods in which he tended to stress one over the other. For instance, during *The Seven Arts* period, his focus was on the social, or communal aspects of art. Here Rosenfeld developed his interest in the cultural background of musical compositions and how the

prevailing spirit of a nation expressed itself through representative artists. This concern was a natural corollary to Rosenfeld's conviction that people of a given culture become aware of their common identity and, hence, unify through their conscious response to truly national works of art. Thus, *The Seven Arts* essays tended to evaluate composers according to their importance as conveyors of a national spirit in music.

With his appointment as music critic for *The Dial* in 1920, Rosenfeld shifted the accent somewhat from the social to the aesthetic. But, emphatically this shift was a matter of degree, for he still retained interest in the total significance of a work of art—esthetic, ethical, and social.. Nevertheless his interest in esthetic questions and issues involving technique and form was quite in line with the tendencies of musical and literary criticism during the 1920s. An historical article, written for a 1925 number of *The Dial* illustrates a great deal about Rosenfeld's position with respect to certain tendencies in the history of European and American concert music. It was his first attempt to offer both a summary of these broad tendencies and a prediction about the directions they would follow.

Perhaps the object of Rosenfeld's greatest concern was composers' new emphasis on formalism, which he equated with excessive rigidity. In a certain sense the new formalism prompted Rosenfeld to rethink his own interest in form in art, music, and literature, and to find something of value in the music of Richard Wagner for the modern era. In his attempt to trace the main currents of musical influence on the flow of modern music, Rosenfeld describes the two once-vital sources found in Wagner and Moussorgsky; he heard the music of both as predominantly anti-formalist. Rosenfeld traced one important element of modern music as derived in part from Wagner: a sense of affirmation, a positive desire, a certain intensity of will

communicated in some of his musical drams, and, habitually, a characteristic of some modern compositions. These composers give one a sense of affirmation and a feeling of the “active avidity of life,” celebrating existence and man's capacity to assert himself. But, like many tendencies, this one became partially decadent through excessive stylizations. In order to express dynamism and will, Rosenfeld argues, composers such as Richard Strauss began to use formulas that were meant to evoke the sense of affirmation automatically. Thus, what was once expressed in natural and fresh terms began to be expressed by way of musical cliches that unintentionally mocked the aim of the compositions. Typically, Strauss began to lean on certain devices whenever he wanted to achieve a particular effect. He was too dependent, Rosenfeld asserted, on literary associations and other extra-musical features to achieve the emotional aims of his work. The work of Strauss and Gustav Mahler became associated in Rosenfeld's mind with caricatures of what was natural and essential in Wagner and with the historical conflict and degeneration of the active impulse in Western music and the civilization that called it into being.¹⁰

Concomitant with the decline and stagnation of “musical activism” was the emerging influence in Western music of an Eastern-like passivity and resignation before the inscrutable mysteries of life. This tendency is best seen, Rosenfeld believed, in the music of Scriabin, Borodin, and Rimsky-Korsakoff, all of whom derived this characteristic emotion--associated with a sort of submission to fate--from Moussorgsky. The music of Claude Debussy became the vital center of this “feminine, passive, and oriental” musical movement. And, from the vantage point of 1925, Rosenfeld heard most of the music written since The Great War as representing the

¹⁰ Rosenfeld, “A View of Modern Music,” *The Dial* (1925), 376.

concluding stage of this line.¹¹

Rosenfeld wrote with mixed feelings on the contemporary reaction to the impulse inherited from Moussorgsky. Rosenfeld pointed to another Russian, Igor Stravinsky, as the leading figure of a heterogeneous group of artists who appeared to be united in their opposition to the primary emotionalism inherent in the two currents derived from Wagner and Mussourgsky. While Rosenfeld heard the music of Stravinsky, Schoenberg, Ravel, and Ernest Bloch as bearing a much more mechanistic and deterministic view of life than earlier figures, he observed a feeling of power and protest in it. This paradox, this appearance of two conflicting attitudes became for Rosenfeld a primary characteristic of modern music. It appeared (although Rosenfeld does not make it explicit) that these two attitudes--determinism and protest--are a modern version of the resignation and willful assertion found in the seminal works of Moussorgsky and Wagner respectively.

Again and again, in Rosenfeld's "View of Modern Music," he criticizes the modern tendencies to stylization, mannerism, and formula. He hears Stravinsky's *Sacre du Printemps* giving way to a Stravinsky who is now too dependent on certain classical forms. Even though Stravinsky's work has a certain cohesiveness and sharpness, it is less emotional in the sense that it seems not to spring from an internal musical necessity so much as a pre-established musical form. According to Rosenfeld's reading of the history of music, this movement toward formalism was headed for near-certain disaster. Such formalism was an unfortunate consequence of a composer's

¹¹ Ibid. 381-2.

interest in an entirely alien tradition that was threatening to strangle contemporary art; in effect, it is “seeking to narrow and restrict the interests of the artist, to keep him from using the totality of his resources by cutting him off from the source of power in personality and feeling, to impose as absolutes upon him the material limits of other times and other conditions.”¹²

In Rosenfeld’s view two tendencies in contemporary American life have encouraged the development of formalism. One is the constant sense of cultural inferiority that continues to plague American artists and sends them scurrying to Europe for alien modes of expression. The other is the lassitude and life-weariness that characterizes artists who are weak in feeling and divorced from the essential sources of life. It may even be a signal of a culture or age in decline. The precept of impersonality, however, associated with the lack of emotionalism inherent in formalism, “works very dissimilarly in a discouraged and exhausted age than in an abundant one. Where the feelings are strong and decided, broad to timelessness and spaciousness, the counsel of impersonality brings an incentive to freedom, calm, and maturity”¹³

Constantly aware of the relation between art and the vitality of culture, Rosenfeld saw the musical epoch immediately following the First World War as close to being emotionally “discouraged and exhausted” and therefore dependent on artificial (rather than organic) forms to hold up its lean musical ideas. “Where the feelings are weak, [formalism] makes timid and binds. It sets up absolutes, and thereby relates art not to the totality of human resources, but to a kind of

¹² Ibid., 387.

¹³ Ibid., 388.

enfeebled intellectuality.”¹⁴

But in the mid-1920s Rosenfeld saw grounds for hope for the prospects of modern American music. Despite the decline of the once-promising Stravinsky onto the planes of classical formalism, certain Jewish composers had taken up Stravinsky's earlier feeling of power and protest. Almost determinedly racial in his orientation, Rosenfeld did not hesitate to equate the virtues of a potential modern artistic orientation with the most salient characteristics of the Jewish temperament, which he described as “stubborn, aggressive, affirmative.” As Rosenfeld saw them, these traits were neither centrifugal nor atomistic; they sought to integrate their own vitality with some existing cultural tradition. This had been seen in the Jews' ability to integrate with Western Europe and, earlier, in the Mediterranean. Consequently, it is no wonder to Rosenfeld that Jewish composers like Ernest Bloch, Leo Ornstein, and Arnold Schoenberg constitute the threshold of a vital, modern musical tradition in which the Jewish temperament integrated with the “ultra-Western orientation of the future.”¹⁵

Rosenfeld's celebration in the 1920s of both Bloch and Ornstein has been regarded by musicians and historians alike as premature and misguided. It can also be regarded as an illustration of his eagerness to embrace any artistic work which appeared to corroborate prior convictions about the function and direction of modern music. But it is important that, even in 1925, soon after his first unpublished reactions to Bloch and Ornstein, Rosenfeld's praise was highly tentative. In his *Dial* article, in fact, he qualifies his praise of Bloch by noting that his most

¹⁴Ibid., 386.

¹⁵ Ibid.

recent work was inclined toward bombast and shrillness, and that he was dissipating his creative energy on popular pieces. Ornstein, furthermore, displayed an occasional "sugary orientation" and tends to lack a wide range of ideas.¹⁶

Such objections notwithstanding, Rosenfeld remained hopeful, hearing in Bloch and Ornstein reassuring signs that they were part of an 'unconsciously motivated pilgrimage towards a new genuinely Western attitude.' This in effect was how he described the new modern orientation. And by keeping "the shape of gigantic foetus of the age of steel," a composer like Ornstein was beginning to define a truly relevant and positive musical direction. In 1925 it was difficult for Rosenfeld to go much beyond hinting and suggesting what constituted the new age of post-Stravinsky composition. Yet, as a critic and musical historian he was nearly alone among American writers on music in even recognizing the possibility of such new trends, let alone perceiving the emergence of promising contemporary composers. Also in this same *Dial* article he speaks of one essential ingredient of the new music, and that is the new tonality. Quite characteristically he relates this technical musical term to cultural characteristics. The new tonality, as he saw it, adumbrated a new vigor and dynamism in Western civilization. Rosenfeld's view of history included the belief that European civilization was in a state of decay, partially seen in its dependence on formalism. America, in this view, was where the great Western activist tradition was to be reborn, and the new tonality was "the new diatonic feeling, equivalent to the old, filled with the Western genius, but inclusive of the great experience of orientalizing." In short, it was a fusion of the Moussorgskian and Wagnerian musical traditions. This was to be a

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 393.

resurgence of the pre-war period of confidence and enthusiasm and a reaction against the current slackening of musical innovation and experiment, which Rosenfeld associated with the shrinking of "the great world feeling."¹⁷

Rosenfeld concluded this 1925 *Dial* article with high praise for the music of Edgard Varese. In so doing he unknowingly set a standard for years to come for his own assessments of American compositions. Just one year following this article, Varese composed his first great works, *Ionization* and *Octandre*. Rosenfeld accordingly placed Varese, with the Hungarian composer Bela Bartok, at the very forefront of the new music--even ahead of Bloch and Ornstein. Indeed, for Rosenfeld, Varese's work was the initial embodiment of the new tonality and sonority. Rosenfeld sums up his ideas on Varese by connecting it with cultural and historical tides like Futurism and Cubism.

Rosenfeld compared Varese's music with the best qualities of the Wagnerian line of composition. Rosenfeld argued that the twentieth-century composer is faced with immense disintegrative forces sprung from the very nature of modern industrial society. The city, gigantic and violent, becomes in Rosenfeld's criticism a symbol of both the destructive and the potentially creative forces in modern life. The turmoil of contemporary existence lies in the suspension of these powerful, unresolved forces. It follows, thus, as Rosenfeld pointed out in many essays, that the job of the modern creative artist is to constantly seek integration with this essential chaos. Certainly, the successful artists cannot hide from the ever-looming and ominous monuments that modern technological society presents. He or she must plunge into its discordant and dissident

¹⁷Ibid., 389.

elements, accept them, and control them.

Such assertions were bold, and Rosenfeld often sought reassurance through them by trying to understand those things in modern life that threatened the order and unity of his mythic organic world. Predictably, he discovered some measure of reassurance in the dissonance of Varese. For his music addressed directly the cacophony of urban sounds and, through form, evoked the whole range of its unalloyed vitality--a strikingly original mix of cubism and futurism:

With Varese music becomes a thrilling opposition of volumes of sound, piercing, highly-keyed, sharp as edges of brass and steel, a series of blunt, stubborn, stuttering masses rigidly held, even in moments of climax and stress, in a cubical shape. If the music of Varese so extraordinarily retains the character of mass, it is undoubtedly largely because of his use of brief intervals of silence between the pronouncements of his blaring orchestras of woodwind and brass supported by fantastic arrays of percussion, sirens, and rattles.¹⁸

By way of comparison to the works of Picasso and Matisse, Rosenfeld came to see and appreciate the profound emotional tension in Varese's music. Even more importantly, he recognized a sense of "overwhelming pressure overcome, of human feeling taking the shape of the ponderous architectural piles of New York."¹⁹

The appearance of incipient unity was of crucial importance to Rosenfeld, who had such an emotional and philosophical investment in the future of America as a beacon for Western civilization. As we have already seen, his reading of American history and his hope for its future is classically "American" in its Puritan-like salvific expectation. Even the thesis of the *Dial* article which we have been analyzing is based on the baldly stated assumption that "America is

¹⁸ Ibid., 394.

¹⁹ Ibid.

the crucial point; it is in America that the decision rests, whether or not the most noble elements of ancient European and Western culture will reassert themselves or perish, and with them the classical musical art.” With the dramatic rendering of historical possibilities, the apocalyptic-sounding Rosenfeld placed a great weight upon the shoulders of various artists. Chief among these, in 1925, was Varese; the tone that had dominated Rosenfeld's essays on Varese was one of great urgency.²⁰

This sense of elevated expectations was characteristic of a least one major aspect of Rosenfeld's criticism, and a natural outcome of his cultural-historical orientation. Artists were carriers of cultural tendencies and their work was symptomatic of historical direction; therefore, the artist tended to be regarded as a harbinger of either a dark, catastrophic future or a bright, heavenly one. In either case, the language and diction of prophecy became appropriate to Rosenfeld's brand of criticism. Typically, he would close an article on a broad historical note, outlining the ingredients of the historical past--those currents that would eventually culminate in some possible but unknown future. Whatever its nature, the future was sure to be quite different from the present. Especially in certain of his seminal articles which attempted to summarize and synthesize matter probed in his earlier articles, Rosenfeld evoked a sense of a looming judgment on the future of all Western civilization.

This air of crisis provided the context in which Rosenfeld viewed Varese; music, which was so “pulsant with the beat and the excitement of the present hour.” It is highly significant that Rosenfeld refused to separate art from its cultural-historical import. Varese's music was heard by

²⁰ Ibid., 395.

Rosenfeld in 1925 as a promising reemergence of the positive feeling that so strongly characterized the most salient elements of the Wagnerian and the Moussorgsky styles and was so germane to the American: "fullness of desire and intensity of will and their inseparable companions, faith, scepticism free of pessimism and mysticism devoid of resignation." But this positive characteristic of Americanness has been submerged under layer after layer of contemporary European and American history, which has been characterized by anti-life forces. Rosenfeld's description of this opposition puts into focus the historical basis of his criticism during the twenties. In addition, it reveals the complexity of his highly conditioned nationalism. The aforementioned salient qualities of American life "helped build his land, and in fragmentary and in disconnected form they wander through his outwardly vibrant, inwardly motionless world." Rosenfeld continues:

Only, pioneering and puritanism and the republic for business only have buried them and have kept them buried and continue to bury them every day. What obtains is the very opposite of positive feeling. It is a feeling uncertain, impatient, fickle, a weakest consciousness of what exists outside and is called nature and an hundred other names, and owned by no man, and is the life of all men insensibility that America helped nourish in the old world, and continues to feed. In 1917 the United States became an integral portion of the old continent, adding to Europe's condition of doubt a new dissolvent, and corroborating the "no" of the formalistic spirit. Perhaps simultaneously an older European spark was passed across to it. Some belief in life actually stirring several years before vividly intensified its struggle for establishment.²¹

America for Rosenfeld then is a manifestation of Europe's unrealized potential. But what impresses the reader is the passage's many qualifications and paradoxes. Rosenfeld's hopefulness is always countered by a kind of grim insistence that the very opposite may obtain. The highly

²¹ Ibid.

qualified optimism conveys a certain indeterminateness. The “no” or “yes” of America may predominate; the positive aspect of Europe may have been passed on to America; and so on. Thus, the hopefulfulness of the concluding lines of the *Dial* article read against the vagueness of the historical situation, appears somewhat vain. Here he returns to the present work of America's most promising composers--Varese, Aaron Copland, and Roger Sessions. “Their appear is gigantic proof of the rebirth of veritable feeling in America. Even when it is not yet positive, feeling contains the potential of positiveness.”²²

The consequences for Rosenfeld were serious; nothing less than the spiritual vitality of America was involved in the artistic effectiveness of her composers. In *The Dial* article, as in most of his historical analyses written in the 1920, 1930s and 1940s, a mood of moral melodrama is prevails. The forces of anti-life are pitted against the truly creative forces of the spirit. In between we sense the ever-present Rosenfeld watching intensely for signs of spiritual ascendancy. This made criticism exciting; it reminded Rosenfeld's audience that art truly mattered. America's composers were an organic part of her culture and inextricably a part of her spiritual destiny. “It is doubtful whether musical life can attain its objective identity of American artistic, spiritual life. In watching either of them, or both of them, we are actually watching one thing, for love of ‘music’ and of ‘life.’”²³

²² Ibid., 396.

²³ Ibid.

A Plea for Varese

Rosenfeld heard in the music of Edgard Varese the ambiguities of urban, industrial life. On the one side, Rosenfeld sympathized and celebrated contemporary artistic movements and tendencies. Mostly, he wanted to be conversant about them in order to recognize the new forms of "world feeling" he anticipated. Still, Rosenfeld was at the same time repulsed, and even threatened, by the prevailing forces of modern life, even though the experiments of the Cubists, Futurists, and Surrealists offered new conceptions of space and time, and helped to establish the context for the transvaluation of values he and the other Young Americans welcomed. These movements in the arts required that the keen observer and listener suspend at least momentarily his or her usual conceptions of reality and be ready to set aside outmoded ones.

To many educated Americans living and writing during the interwar years, Darwinism had challenged both the idea of man as a fixed species and the possibility of absolute truths. Since the men and women and their environment are continuously in a state of change, relations between the two are also bound to change. And if truths are meant to describe the relation between Man and the reality around him, it must follow that truths are as fluid as this relation. Certainly, Rosenfeld was sensitive to the implications of Darwinism, just as he understood that pragmatism was in the air with its emphasis upon the relativity of truths. Even the changing emphases of the general artistic movement known as Cubism revolved around a new conception of what had long been regarded as having fixed laws--perspective. In fact, the basic elements of Cubism seemed to challenge the most basic concepts of the old unitary reality. Now visual reality consisted of sliding planes, shifting volumes, and continuously changing perspectives which were analogous to the erratic movements of modern life and its fragmentation of experience.

For a man such as Rosenfeld who was grounded in Judaic-Christian ethics, attached to

romantic conceptions of history and the value of individual emotions, and enamored with the impressionism and mystic effusiveness of the Victorian critics, the futuristic world of Varese was, to say the least, unsettling. Nevertheless, from the moment of his “grand transformation scene” in 1914 Rosenfeld rarely showed in public how unsettling such music really was.

In March 1924 Rosenfeld published his first sustained analysis of Varese's music, establishing a buoyant hope that permeated all his later articles on Varese. Centrally important to Rosenfeld, then and afterward, was to emphasize Varese's treatment of the chaotic and discordant elements of modern, industrial and urban society, and his ability to unify and order them in a way that, at once, ignores neither their most abrasive characteristics nor their legitimate place in the grand scheme of a changing world. Like many cultural critics, philosophers, and historically sensitive thinkers before him, Rosenfeld attempted to gouge out a place for a repellent, but unavoidable, reality in his already-formed scheme of things.

As an “involved” and “responsible” music critic—terms that Aaron Copland applied approvingly to Rosenfeld, Rosenfeld was bound by the rigors of his profession to make room for such obviously talented, dynamic, and expressive composers as Varese. Therefore, in the first article, he wasted no time in asserting Varese's contemporary relevance. Through the medium of tone and sounds, Varese had not only expressed the new mechanistic reality, but, more important, he had elevated them into the moving stream of history. In reviewing the performance of Varese's *Octandre*, at the Vandert Theatre in New York, Rosenfeld recalls how he walked the streets of the city after the performance, hearing the sounds of taxi horn sirens, steam drills, and police whistles in an entirely different light for the first time. Varese's piece had transformed the cacophony of city sounds into rhythms and vibrations redolent of the human spirit and the demands of a new

reality that was usurping the old. To Rosenfeld, the received sounds of the teeming metropolitan streets were lifted by the composer from their natural setting and “made integral portions of a homogenous organism of tone.”²⁴

It was an exhilarating moment for Rosenfeld. He had always been conscious of a tension between the artistic leanings of Europe and those straining for articulation in the New World. The differences could be summed up in the words, “individualism” and “communism.” Rosenfeld was fond of contrasting the two terms especially as they seem to have been embodied and given varying degrees of prominence in Western music. Each age had different ways of expressing the demands of these two opposing human tendencies: the lyrical “I” and the impersonal “It”; the worldly and the unworldly; the spiritual and the material; sentiment and power; the private and the public. Neither was to be preferred over the other; they simply defined the boundaries of human reality. And they have been expressed by composers, in western culture, who have heard them primarily as rhythms and vibrations which were to be realized in musical sound, or, as Rosenfeld preferred to put it, “the mere equivalent in sonority.” This apparently cavalier phrase indicates the enormous stress Rosenfeld put on the universal “beat of life” and its expression in various art forms. It is these fundamental vibrations that “surge” and “leap” through the sensibilities of composers, as powers “greater than themselves dilated their finite beings.” Here then is Rosenfeld's familiar transcendent picture of the word expressing itself through the almost passive and possessed artist. Hence, the significance of Varese, the man who is “destined to lead the art of music onward from Stravinsky's into fresh virgin realms of sound,” as Rosenfeld concludes his

²⁴ Rosenfeld, “Musical Chronicle,” *The Dial* (1924), 298.

review of *Octandre*.²⁵

New York's 1924 concert season for Rosenfeld ended on an apparently hopeful and positive note. But travel to Europe the following summer aroused old moods and longings. He had not been abroad more than a few weeks when he wrote a letter to Stieglitz which was full of undisguised nostalgia for the Old World. From a small country inn in Wales, he describes the beauties of the countryside with its mountains, its "delicious greens," and the primitive life so close to the earth. Here, he felt, was a timeless, organic culture with its "little singing festivals and bards and local folk expressions." For the yearning Rosenfeld, this was a long way from the furious pace and accelerated life of industrial America. But immediately he seems to catch himself and defensively assert that American culture has something to offer that is even "more modern than industry and science"--a new, emerging way of life that runs counter to the old way of life. It follows for Rosenfeld that

art will have to be produced out of some new impulse, for the individualistic impulse as it existed before the age of coal is I am afraid on the decline. Everything is being concentrated I am sure, and art must express the unrealized in the very terms of this concentration and massiveness. I know this is not a new idea these fifty years; but it is new to me, for I feel in some way I have had too much nostalgia for that separate, private, protestant sort of life that existed before our time, and life does not move through that God and man conversation any more.²⁶

The sense of this passage, a combination of nostalgia and grim hopefulness, is characteristic of Rosenfeld's ambivalence toward so many trends in modern American art. His public enthusiasm was balanced by his private, and almost instinctive, reservations. Perhaps it

²⁵Ibid., 300.

²⁶ Rosenfeld to Stieglitz, 1 July 1924, Rosenfeld Papers.

was this feeling of awe and fear of the futuristic present which made Rosenfeld evoke its spirit so effectively--that is, from the perspective of a stimulated spectator. The sheer bulk, massiveness, material power, and impersonality of modern technological society is always contrasted with the individualism and privateness of pre-industrial culture.

What Rosenfeld failed to reveal in public was a deep-seated loyalty to traditional Western ethical and conceptual principles. He was a man whose consciousness was formed by the nineteenth-century philosophical and aesthetic tendencies, and yet he was acutely aware that the most dynamic artistic forces of his time had the potential to undermine the ideas of unity and harmony which were so basic to his mystic romanticism, and Judeo-Christian ethic. In fact, the whole thrust of the contemporary isms--Cubism Futurism, Dadaism, Surrealism--was toward an expression of the fragmentation, violence, and disequilibrium of sensory experience, and the absence of a harmonizing moral force. Thus with some relief Rosenfeld pointed out that Varese moved out of, and beyond the determinism and mechanism of the early Stravinsky, Schonberg, and Bloch--the emerging avant garde in music. Yet, as Rosenfeld had observed, there were still feelings of power and protest in the work of these three composers. In this sense, they were seen as having anticipated that quality in Varese which Rosenfeld was so ardent about: his affirmativeness and live-giving force. But this was a positive element which, to be sure, never appeared without reference to the unavoidable by-products of industrial culture: mechanization, harshness, and shrillness.

In a 1925 *Dial* article on modern musical history Rosenfeld argued that Varese represented part of "a new genuinely Western attitude," which was part of the modern orientation. For Rosenfeld, the movement began in 1914 when he first heard both Alexander Scriabin and Leo

Ornstein. It is significant that he attempted to connect this “pilgrimage” to the evolutionary forces of history and thereby assuage his doubts about the relevance of his Romantic conception of history as a progressive and linear movement. Thus the new tonality of music, “the new diatonic feeling,” was seen as nothing less than a sign of the rebirth of the great Western activist tradition, of which Wagner was the most salient example. Wagner, the composer whose music had epitomized all the possibilities of the individual will, was in the same musical tradition as Varese, whose music seemed to be in opposition to the old heroic grandeur and mystical vision of nineteenth-century Romanticism.

Set against Rosenfeld's attempts to find for Varese a place in his cosmology was his simultaneous belief that Varese's music represented a significant departure from Old World conceptions of space, time, and the human person. In other words, the Europe that Rosenfeld felt instinctively attached to--the place where the individual spirit could flourish and be honored--was being replaced by a force no less honorable but as yet only partially tamed. The Wales letter to Stieglitz indicated that Rosenfeld had somewhat hesitantly acknowledged something vaguely described as the new “concentration and massiveness.” But by the concert season of 1925, he was able to articulate the distinctiveness of the post-Stravinsky music epitomized by Varese's work. An International Guild concert, given in May 1925, offered Rosenfeld his chance. The presentation of Schoenberg's *Serenade* and Varese's *Integrales* offered him an opportunity to juxtapose two musical traditions; one hiding and the other emerging. Now, the piece by Schoenberg was seen as the “latest ghostly flowering of the romantic period,” with its “thinking introverted solitary.” Schoenberg still revealed that old Brahmsian feeling. And even though his music had been compressed into minute spaces, it still showed the European in touch with his

background. So, for Rosenfeld, moving from the *Serenade* to *Integrales* was “like passing from the I-ness to the It-ness of things, from a hypersensitive unworldly feeling to a sense of strident material power.”²⁷

The analogy with Cubism was for Rosenfeld, the most effective and natural way to describe the “harshness of edge and impersonality of material” inherent in modern life and in Varese's music:

[*Integrales*] resembles nothing more than shining cubes of freshest brass and steel set into abrupt pulsating swing. The cubism is actually in the construction. Varese's polyphony is very different from the fundamentally linear polyphony of Stravinsky. This music is built more vertically, moves more in solid masses of sound, and is held very rigorously in them. Even the climaxes do not break the cubism of the form. The most powerful pronouncements merely force sound with sudden violence into the air, thrust it upward like the masses of two impenetrable bodies in collision.²⁸

Here Rosenfeld openly invites a comparison and contrast with the works of the Cubists. The difficulty for the critic, of course, was to translate the quality of sound into visual terms traditionally associated Cubist painting. But if we recall the basic characteristics of major movements in painting, we can more easily see what qualities Rosenfeld was trying to evoke as he described Varese's music. As a critic of painting too, Rosenfeld was knowledgeable and sensitive to the elements of the Cubist technique.

The aim of Cubist painting was to express the “real” nature of an object by showing many different aspects of it at the same time. The object is reduced to a series of planes then painted (or

²⁷ Rosenfeld, “Musical Chronicle,” *The Dial* (1925), 437.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 439.

“constructed”) as a collection of fragments interlocking and overlapping forms. When all these perspectives or views, are presented as one composition, the effect is the realization of the whole surface in terms of interpenetrating or interacting planes. In the end, the viewer sees a kind of collection of plane geometric forms, lines, and angles flattened into overlapping transparent planes. Cubists typically reduced surfaces to prisms that reflected light, and a sense of movement was achieved by having the planes appear to slip about. Despite all this visual spatial movement, the typical Cubist composition is anchored in a basic geometricality. That is, the Cubists were struck by the underlying geometry in nature. It is this geometricality that strengthens the object rendered and gives it solidity.

Similarly, Rosenfeld argued, a composition such as *Integrales* gave both a sense of simultaneousness and a new unity based on a new kind of scientifically verifiable musical perspective. Indeed, Rosenfeld made much of the fact that Varese's engineering background allowed him to be responsive to new musical patterns. Again an example from the world of painting may be helpful. In much of the Western tradition of painting, distinctions were made between ground, middle ground, and background. Many modern painters even before Rosenfeld's time, regarded this as a “tyranny of separation,” as if we had been made prisoners of this conception of perspective. The Cubists destroyed the convention and forced the viewer to reorganize the elements of nature according to different spacial criteria.

Varese's Cubist-like music demanded that the listener alter his or her conception of musical sound. But, even more important for a cultural critic like Rosenfeld, the quality of Varese's sound invited an analogy to the social conditions that provoked the sound in the first place. “The whole brought an amazing feeling of weighty power, much as though the

overwhelming bulks of the over-organization, institutionalism, herd-repression, *unkultur* which crush the American individual beneath them suddenly started swinging in obedience to a strength greater than theirs, and began glowing with wonderful new life.” From here it was only a short step to a rekindling of Rosenfeld’s *Seven Arts* sensibilities. With *Integrales* we “resume once again the coming-of-age which composes our best days.”²⁹

Varese’s status as the great innovator in American musical composition was strengthened by ability to use the International Composers Guild—which he helped to establish—among the most important organizations in the United States for encouraging the work of young composers. In fact, it is not too much to say that Varese was responsible for setting into motion a crucial organizational movement in modern American music, signaled by the appearance of musical salons, guilds, societies, and leagues, designed to either commission, perform, or promote works by contemporary modern composers. These were congenial settings for Rosenfeld himself insofar as they advanced his ensemble idea.

Aaron Copland, in an interview he gave in 1968, said that “it was Varese who sparked the organization of our modern music-performing societies with the formation of the International Composers’ Guild.” Although Varese had little business talent, he had a zest and single-minded devotion for contemporary music that carried people along in the wake of his enthusiasm. Moreover, he knew the right people on the boards of the right musical organizations and was able

²⁹ Ibid.

to give them that sense of mission and excitement essential to beginning any new activity.³⁰

Varese emigrated from Paris to New York in 1916 as part of a wave of Futurists who expected that America would realize that art of the future--“musique concrete.” He was most eager to begin a dynamic avant garde movement in New York as soon as possible in order to confirm his greatest expectations. Apparently his promotional activity knew few bounds. Rosenfeld, who in turn was to be the great promoter of Varese's music, was not at all impressed by Varese's initial attempts to push for the recognition of his own and his contemporaries' works. At first glance this seemed strange, since one would think that, given Rosenfeld's interest in community music organizations, he would have been immediately sympathetic to a man with Varese's background. In Paris in 1909 Varese had organized the chorus of the *Université Populaire* and the concerts of the “*Chateau de Peuple*,” both intended to bring music to ordinary people. But the truth was that Varese came on a little too strong for Rosenfeld. He also committed, at first, that most unpardonable of sins: artistic ineptitude. In short, Varese had overreached himself in 1919 when he accepted the position of conductor for the newly founded New Symphony Orchestra which he had helped form.

The New York Symphony Orchestra was initially founded to supplement the established repertory of the main New York orchestras--the Philharmonic Orchestra of New York and the Symphony Society. These two orchestras had been the target of regular attacks by Rosenfeld for their unimaginative programming and tepid execution. Their performances, he wrote, had been too often “dull, vulgar and often frankly incorrect”; their repertory “narrow in range and uneven in

³⁰ Edward T. Cone, “Conversation with Aaron Copland, *Perspectives of New Music* 6 (1968), 63.

value.” Such comments did not leave much to resurrect, so Rosenfeld had looked eagerly to the New Symphony of Varese for signs of vital activity. He was disappointed, though; apparently Varese’s brief tenure as conductor was so disastrous technically that he almost immediately resigned the post to Alexander Bodansky. Some have suggested Varese resigned because the board of directors thought his program too modern. Whatever the reason, Bodansky proved to be worse. Even though he was a competent musician, he offered a steady diet of Mendelssohn and Schubert. Thus, to Rosenfeld, The New Symphony in its first year was “poor, far duller and coarser” than either the Philharmonic or the Symphony Society.³¹

According to Rosenfeld, the disappointing season of the New Symphony followed from the founders’ poor management. They had been intimidated by Varese’s strong personality, misreading his effectiveness and competence as a conductor and banking on the fashionableness of producing an avant-garde organization. Rosenfeld saw these early activities of Varese as a play for publicity, a form of self-promotion and a desire to advertise flamboyantly the cause of advanced music. In 1920, Rosenfeld alluded repeatedly to the “glamour” and “personality” of Varese and his eagerness “to make propaganda for the newer composers, and considered himself of their number.” It is interesting that Rosenfeld would later be a willing victim of Varese’s forceful personality in much the manner that he was attracted to another charismatic figure: Alfred Stieglitz. But in 1920 Rosenfeld was not taken in by all organized attempts to promote the cause of contemporary music. The important thing was not the mere exposure of these works, but the effectiveness of their performance and artistic execution. Rosenfeld had no complaints about

³¹Rosenfeld, “The New, or National Symphony Orchestra,” *The Dial* (1920), 668.

Varese's selection of programs, but he was such an inept conductor that he could neither control the orchestra nor interpret the new compositions with sensitivity and imagination. Ultimately, Rosenfeld was always concerned for the "integrity" of an artistic work--that it not be violated by overzealous promotion or shoddy performance.³²

Varese's way of living differed greatly from that of Rosenfeld's. Predictably, the external movements of Varese's life appeared offensive to the more meditative and unostentatious Rosenfeld. There was something futuristic about Varese's general immersion in the hustle of New York's often frantic artistic life of the 1920s, and he would take an obvious delight in assuming dogmatic positions with regard to musical controversies. Here was all the cacophony and frenetic activity that Varese, earlier in Paris, had envisioned New York would be. Although Rosenfeld would try to understand the philosophical justifications that underlay the Cubist-Dadaist-Futuristic positions, clearly Varese and he operated from entirely different philosophical assumptions. As we shall see, Rosenfeld's idealistic world of order and unity, based on Judaic-Christian conceptions of ethics and morality was a long way from the Futurist's world.

Rosenfeld's initial aversion to Varese is more significant than his later, nearly uncritical promotion of Varese's music, for Rosenfeld would never be able to accept wholly the ideological tenets out of which much of Varese's music sprang. At the same time, there was a part of Rosenfeld that envied Varese's unabashed acceptance of the turbulence of modern urban-industrial life. And Rosenfeld would soon try to incorporate this acceptance, this receptivity to new sights and sounds into his own concept of an organic culture.

³² Ibid., 669.

Rosenfeld's published commentary on Varese's ill-fated tenure with the New Symphony appeared in one of his first articles for *The Dial*, where he had just been made music editor. The timing of the essay, although fortuitous, was significant because many of Rosenfeld's early essays for *The Dial* were concerned both with the development of a discriminating audience that would be hospitable to fine music and with the organization of group activities, or ensemble ideas, that would bring such music to this audience and, at the same time, offer people an opportunity for self-expression through amateur musical groups. These themes were also central concerns of Rosenfeld's *Seven Arts* essays. Thus, Rosenfeld's *Seven Arts* emphasis on audience involvement and the communal function of art developed into essays for *The Dial* that focused special attention on the Friends of Music, the People's Concerts, the League of Composers, the International Composers' Guild, the Community Chorus movement, and the Bethlehem (Pennsylvania) Festival. Later on, in the mid-1920s, as individual talent began to emerge in a dramatic way, Rosenfeld's *Dial* essays began to shift their attention to examining this talent.

These ensemble professional and amateur activities were seen not only as possible forerunners of a genuinely organic American culture but also as necessary for the spawning of individual artistic talent. In fact, Rosenfeld would continue to advance the group or ensemble idea as an essential prelude to successful individual expression. At the same time, he was concerned with developing leaders who would offer a locus for group activity and help define their goals by the example of the leaders' lives. This is why Rosenfeld was so concerned about Varese's initial fumbblings as a public figure. He did not fit, at this time, into Rosenfeld's image of an ideal artist-leader.

Rosenfeld's 1920 *Dial* essay on Varese's disappointing work with the New Symphony was

not just a somber study of the failure of a potential artist-leader; it was a critique on the almost impossible chore of creating a responsive, dynamic, and innovative orchestral group in a business civilization which forever regarded music as “a lightly social expression.” For Rosenfeld a primary symptom of this is how the American male relinquishes the position of patron to the ‘patronness.’” In a manner typical of the anti-matriarchy position associated with the party of “terrible honesty” discussed much earlier in this dissertation, Rosenfeld said that as long as the American woman dominates the organization, promotion, and financial support of American art, it will only mean that art is a peripheral matter for American culture. For no matter how genuine her intention, the woman will regard art as “an outer and secondary or even tertiary activity.” The last statement will be in dramatic contrast with his experience of women like Claire Raphael Reis, one of the founders of the League of Composers in 1924, and Minna Lederman, the editor of *Modern Music* from 1924 to 1947. In just a few years, such ardent and unquestioned supporters of music will force Rosenfeld to qualify his statement, in the New Symphony article, that “the woman who goes to art as her primary, her directest, activity, is a thing for wonder, even today.”³³

It was not just the Victorian image of the preciousity of the Victorian matriarch that disturbed Rosenfeld: in 1920, he was also bothered by the cult of personality in music (personified by the case of Varese and the New Symphony) as a distortion of his concept of the ideal cultural leader. He was also concerned by the apparent susceptibility of women to the canny approaches of knowing musicians who have a gift of personal charm and social manner. Undoubtedly, Rosenfeld was thinking of Varese when he wrote that “the apples fall into the hands

³³ Ibid., 670.

of those who know how to place themselves to advantage underneath the apple tree more often than they do into the hands of those who deserve them."³⁴

But it is important to point out that Rosenfeld's criticisms were directed at Varese the conductor, not Varese the composer. Rosenfeld had not yet responded to the music that he would compose over the course of the 1920s; Rosenfeld would heap praise on these. Moreover, the exploitative talent of Varese could hardly be regarded in an exclusively skeptical light. He was responsible, during the 1920s for initiating a series of musical enterprises that gave an immense boost to the cause of contemporary American and international music. Chief among these was the International Composers' Guild founded by Varese and Carlos Salzedo in 1921.

Following his resignation in 1928 as music editor for *The Dial*, Rosenfeld looked back on the early 1920s with some nostalgia. Among the happier memories, now that much of the smoke had cleared, was his recollections of the International Composers Guild. Its arrival on the contemporary music scene was likened to the impact that another experimental station--291 Fifth Avenue--had made a decade earlier. Rosenfeld's description of the Guild's musical legacies was analogous to his view of "291"'s effect on the visual arts. In both cases he stressed their contributions to aesthetics and social life--the two areas of reality that had become separated thereby doing violence to the unity of American culture. The Guild, wrote Rosenfeld, had "established new musical values; and [was] cardinal in producing in New York an audience capable of receiving a fresh musical expression at a crucially important moment in the history of American culture." What excited Rosenfeld the most was the Guild's work toward sealing the

³⁴Ibid., 671.

connection between composers and their audiences. The Guild was not only “obedient to the promptings of the law felt by artists,” but its policies were directed toward fulfilling what Rosenfeld regarded as the primary function of art: “the representation and the social acceptance of the thing which the artist has ‘seen’”³⁵

Rosenfeld's had not always been so sanguine about the Guild. Varese's establishment of the organization in 1921 seemed very necessary at that time; still Rosenfeld harbored suspicions about the intentions behind the founding. Indeed, it was not until the Guild announced its second series of concerts that Rosenfeld felt compelled to recognize its existence in his “Musical Chronicle” column for *The Dial*. Even then he did nothing more than perfunctorily print the Guild's official announcement without comment. Obviously, Rosenfeld was reserving judgment until after the concerts were over and their success had been established, and the motives and objectives for producing them clarified. He had been bruised too many times by premature opinions. Besides, was Varese to be completely trusted? Still, he would print the announcement, at least; and probably he could not help noting that the nature and style of the Guild's explanation of its musical philosophy significantly resembled the approach of “291” toward its painters, photographers, and sculptors.

The International Composers' Guild was organized primarily last season to liberate the composer from the existing conditions, which generally hamper his work being presented at all or in an ideal manner.... It is the aim of the International Composers' Guild to give the living composer the greatest degree of independence and opportunity.... It has no fixed program in its devotion to contemporary composition, regardless of school.... The International Composers' Guild is in close alliance with similar organizations recently formed at its instigation in different

³⁵ Rosenfeld, *By Way of Art*, 12-3.

cities of Europe.³⁶

This was the same mood of liberation and the same militant allegiance to current art forms, no matter how unconventional, that had been shown by "291." Rosenfeld was struck by the spirit of the Guild; otherwise why would he have reprinted its announcement in full and take up valuable space in his column? Perhaps Varese and the Guild showed signs of promise. We can also assume that Rosenfeld must have looked forward with great pleasure to the American premier of Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire*. The premiere was to be the second concert in the Guild's second series. A few issues of *The Dial* later, in fact, the performance of *Pierrot* confirmed all the latent expectations Rosenfeld had for the Guild. But even before the Schoenberg concert, Rosenfeld had given tentative (some might call it grudging) praise to the first of the second series of concerts sponsored by the Guild. Following the performance of pieces by Honegger, Ruggles, and Busoni, Rosenfeld wrote, "New life appears to be circulating in the International Composers' Guild. Last year, the organization to some degree retained the air of being one of these groups formed for the purpose of gilding the faces of grooms, that it may seem they're gilt. This year it commences to justify its existence. The program....was the shapeliest it has yet given."³⁷

In January 1923, following the second concert, Rosenfeld's praise was effusive, not only for *Pierrot* as a piece of music, but for its brilliant performance led by Louis Gruenberg.

The Guild deserves heartiest thanks for the thrilling event. Without it the season, one of the dullest we have ever experienced, would have been almost lifeless. It is upon organizations of its kind that we are coming upon more and more to depend

³⁶ Rosenfeld, "Musical Chronicle," *The Dial* (1922), 695.

³⁷ Rosenfeld, "Musical Chronicle," *The Dial* (1923), 222.

for nourishment. The musical institutions of New York are dead. If the Guild continues in the path it seems to be cutting for itself; and moves even nearer the most daring and hourly expressions, never again letting a revolutionary work come to us ten years late, it will in a very brief time become the most important instrumentality in the entire field.³⁸

Here at last was a musical organization that might spark the growth of New York into the cultural center that Rosenfeld had been looking for. After all, America needed the example of imaginative ensemble activity that could generate the composition and performance of innovative works of art. "291" had done precisely this for the visual arts; why not the Guild for music?

The Guild was run by musicians; it was not guided by an efficiency expert. It was, in a word, organic. Its aims and impulses were in harmony with the creative talents who ran it. By definition, the management would have had personal experience with the special expectations, concerns, and anxieties of their clients. The Guild represented, in fact, some of the most admirable qualities of the art world of the 1920s: a group consciousness, intimacy, and a personalized sense of mission. These were the qualities of the period's literature, painting, and musical salons too. The salon atmosphere pervades the time. It connoted a certain generosity of spirit, a tolerance for individual mannerisms, and a high-minded humor that allowed many disparate personalities to share artistic experiences in an intimate milieu. At least in Rosenfeld's case this group activity sprang from an ideal of friendship and its relation to the life of the mind and the formation of a vital human culture. Many new friendships and artistically fruitful projects emerged from these get togethers; but, alas, many enmities as well. To the men and women who

³⁸ Rosenfeld, "Musical Chronicle," *The Dial* (1923, 432).

came of age with Rosenfeld in the 1920s, art really mattered and to have participated somehow in its creation was to have contributed in one's own way to the aims of whatever group one attached his or her loyalty to. The personalization of artistic issues gave these men and women a intensity, a seriousness, and a sense that much was at stake. But at the same time, the degree of individual commitment inevitably meant that differences of opinion were greatly heightened. And this led to the hostilities and feuds which make interesting spectator sport, but which, at the time, drained a great deal of emotional energy from the participants.

The International Guild's organization and management of the 1920s exemplified the strengths and weaknesses of the ensemble idea. In 1928, Rosenfeld tended to recall only the more favorable characteristics of the Guild (although he did mention that some of its programs "had a sterile curiosity, a purely speculative interest"). But this was partly because, as we shall see, he had taken sides in a controversy that embroiled the staff of the organization. In *By Way of Art*, Rosenfeld saw the Guild's activities as examples of what was gained when artists take into their own hands the promotion and presentation of their work.

Again the advantage of permitting creative spirits to conduct artistic organizations stands evident. In the hands of the artist, the institution becomes a means of expression second only to his own work: another instrument for the affirmation of his day; the instrumentality of the work of his fellows producing in the director something of the disinterestedness and serious approach characterizing high scientific spheres.³⁹

Rosenfeld's assertion reminds the reader at once of the work of the contemporary, little expatriate magazines and presses in Europe, which were run by artists of all descriptions and nationalities.

Involvement of artists in the often mechanical details of promotion and publication on such a

³⁹Rosenfeld, *By Way of Art*, 12-3.

wide-scale could be attributed to the fact that few commercial enterprises were willing to plunge into the uncertain arena of avant-garde art and take a chance on sponsoring a flash in the pan. From a purely business point of view this was understandable, for the artistic fashions of the time were often distinctly mercurial. Although the 1920s was an exciting time for experiment and innovation, many well-intentioned frauds were foisted on the public. There were scarcely any critical guidelines. Only very few critics, like Rosenfeld, were able with some confidence to maintain a consistent critical position toward all the new works which were beginning to surface. And the demands upon a music critic were great at this time. A bewildering variety of composers was emerging at the same time, all seeking an outlet for their compositions and a critic to champion them. Here was where both the Guild and Rosenfeld fit into the picture.

Like Rosenfeld, many composers looked to the Guild as an agency for the advancement of all aspects of contemporary music. Accordingly, the list of composers supporting its activities was impressive: Bela Bartok, Igor Stravinsky, Carlos Salzedo, Varese, Anton Webern, Arthur Honegger, Erik Satie, Darius Milhaud, Charles Ruggles, Louis Gruenberg, Lazare Saminsky, among others. There is no denying that the Guild's performances of compositions by many of these innovative composers, especially Berg, Webern, Stravinsky, and Schoenberg, helped prepare the general audience and the professional musical establishment for the works of Roy Harris and Aaron Copland later in the 1920s. Relatively speaking, an atmosphere of receptivity and cordiality surrounded the premieres of such contemporary Americans because of the Guild's groundwork and Rosenfeld's discerning ear and responsiveness. It is no exaggeration to say that in the early 1920s, no American critic could approach the importance of Rosenfeld as a midwife for the birth of modern American concert music. Committed to the *maieutic* art, no wonder that

countless American composers would continue to regard him with an almost proprietary air of affection and gratitude. The Guild, in the meantime, acting as a kind of composers' cooperative, sponsored public performances of works no established orchestra would dare take chances on.

The Ensemble Idea in Music: The International Composers Guild and The League of Composers

The close-knit character of the International Guild of composers and the strong personalities involved in its internal operations led predictably to intense conflicts among its members. A group of musicians led by Louis Gruenberg and Lazare Saminsky, began to chafe under the leadership of Varese. A clash of personalities had developed. The ensuing revolt led many Guild members to resign publicly. The announced reason was that Varese, as a matter of policy, had refused to repeat performances of successful musical premieres. The rebelling group apparently felt that this was too rigid a policy and that Varese was too eager to inject into the musical mainstream a continuous barrage of brand-new compositions. Whatever the reasons, temperamental or technical, the Guild was a bit too avant-garde for men like Gruenberg and Saminsky, who resigned to form the League of Composers with Claire Raphael Reis in 1923.

The emergence of the new League put Rosenfeld in a difficult position. He had many friends on the League's executive board, particularly Clare Reis, with whom he had worked to offer the private recitals and lectures of Leo Ornstein in the Reis's apartment on West 77th street. In fact, many of the musicians, now members of the League, were friends of Rosenfeld whom he had met through their association with the Guild. The relation between the League and the Guild

was volatile enough so that it would be difficult to maintain cordial relations with both.

According to Aaron Copland, Rosenfeld managed to do just that!

In 1968 Copland remembered that Rosenfeld “was in neither camp; he was a friend of both camps.” How he managed to avoid being caught in the crossfire is at least partly attributable to his reputation for artistic integrity, his personal lack of pettiness, and his magnanimity. Somehow, he was able to give the impression not of neutrality but of impersonal objectivity. Eventually he was able to criticize the League's activities and, at the same time, assure its members he was not in opposition to their musical mission. For, after all, the League was concerned with promoting musical talent too. Minna Lederman, who was closely associated with the League of Composers as editor of its literary outlet, *Modern Music*, was struck by Rosenfeld's “great heart.”

[A great heart] is an attribute which is often used about thoroughbreds and rather ambiguously; implying perhaps endurance and relentless competitive bravery. Of course that's not the way it can be applied to Paul and yet in a certain limited way I do think he was a thoroughbred. His instincts were pure and generous, his gestures for others large. And on the whole he was without malice—I can't recall a single even slight witticism at the expense of anyone. Beneath all that bluster there was a very gentle, very human creature. And his faith in America, deep, abiding unshakable. A little touch of cynicism might have helped him—but he had none of it.⁴⁰

Rosenfeld's lack of bitterness and partisanship vindictiveness is crucially important to taking seriously Rosenfeld's criticisms of the early work of the League of Composers. Rosenfeld was still capable of harsh words when it came to condemning organizations which he felt were not

⁴⁰ Cone, “Conversation with Aaron Copland,” 64; Minna Lederman to Hugh Potter, 24 July 1970, Rosenfeld Papers.

operating in the best interests of contemporary music. He saved some of his sharpest barbs for the League of Composers not because of its programming but because the League was late in bringing new music out. It was always behind the International Composers' Guild in its musical offerings even while it tried to give the impression that it was a musical pacesetter. It was the pretense to modernity that irritated Rosenfeld and caused him often to downgrade the League's programs as hesitant, timid, and unimaginative. Considering the League's access to exciting material, he said that its contributions were not as innovative as they might be.

Throughout the middle years of the 1920s, Rosenfeld's "Musical Chronicle" column for *The Dial* contained a series of prickly estimates of the League's efforts--just a bit more prickly than perhaps was necessary. Rosenfeld, it seems, was too eager to find fault with the League. It must be remembered that this was the organization that had commissioned new works by American composers (110 compositions in all--European and American) at a time when commissions were almost unknown. Still, Rosenfeld was not regarding the League from any historical perspective when he responded to the first series of its concerts. Now a Varese fan, he was struck by the daring and excitement generated by the Composers' Guild. The Guild's activities set the standard for musical organizations; he seemed unwilling to tolerate anything else.

Therefore, when the League offered its first program in 1924, Rosenfeld's praised two of its pieces: Bloch's piano quintette and Stravinsky's *Three 3 Pieces for Clarinet*. But the rest, including a piece by Arthur Bliss that Rosenfeld pointedly noted had been give two years ago by the Guild, left him with "the most horrid of sensations; that which accompanies the shaving down of an impulse pricked freshly up from life." In fact, the very presence of the exciting pieces by Bloch and Stravinsky only aggravated "the sense of an impulse compromised." This review of

the League's first concert set the tone of undisguised disappointment which would dominate Rosenfeld's attitude toward the League in his widely read *Musical Chronicle*. The League may have had the noblest of intentions (but even here Rosenfeld would sometimes question its motives), its executions, however, were inadequate.⁴¹

The following month Rosenfeld reviewed in *The Dial* a concert sponsored by the Composers' Guild, in which a performance of Stravinsky's *Renard* was hailed by Rosenfeld as a significant breakthrough. The wild applause accorded this piece by the Vanderbilt Theatre audience meant, for Rosenfeld, that a composer once so loudly scorned had finally become part of our "inherited experience." Rosenfeld's unusual (for a critic) interest in audience behavior and attitudes resulted in his focusing not so much upon the distinctiveness and worth of *Renard* as musical composition, as upon the Guild's offering of it at a particularly advantageous moment. Was the Guild's timing simply fortuitous, or was it based on the organization's sensitive awareness of community needs? Rosenfeld never makes this entirely clear, although the implication was that this was still another example of the Guild's relevance to contemporary music and its capacity to stimulate informed community response.⁴²

But it is difficult to see from Rosenfeld's writings precisely how the quality of the two concerts really differed musically. Both were marked by two important works (the Guild also offered Schoenberg's *Herzgewaechse*) and a variety of lesser pieces (Rosenfeld simply listed, without comment, the other Guild works by Paul Hindemith, and Arthur Lourié). Yet he panned

⁴¹ Rosenfeld, "Musical Chronicle," *The Dial* (1924), 103-5.

⁴² Rosenfeld, "Musical Chronicle," *The Dial*, (1924) 212.

the League's concert and highly praised the Guild's. Apparently, for some unknown reason when it concerned the League of Composers, Rosenfeld was too eager to condemn and not quite quick enough to recognize its accomplishments.

Rosenfeld was not so blinded by the Guild and Varese that he could not praise Copland's outburst of activity in the mid-1920s. In *Dial* reviews of January 1925, March 1925, February 1926, and April 1927, he wrote enthusiastically on Copland's *Symphony for Organ and Orchestra*, *Music for the Theatre*, and the *Concerto for Piano and Orchestra*. Even though the works were presented under League auspices he made hardly any reference to the League--only the most perfunctory of comments. And yet, next to Varese, Copland was the object of Rosenfeld's most zealous praise during the 1920s.

The nadir of Rosenfeld's relations with the League probably occurred just after the appearance of an article published in *The Dial* of January 1925. The article was only incidentally concerned with the first Sunday afternoon concert of the League, although Rosenfeld noted that the Aaron Copland premieres (his *Passacaglia* and *Cat and Mouse* were performed) saved the afternoon at the Anderson Galleries. It is curious that Rosenfeld's first public recognition of Copland, who was to become such a favorite of his, would be followed by a thinly veiled attack on the very organization responsible for Copland's initial American appearance. Although at first Rosenfeld mentioned no names in the article, he emphasized that the real peril to modern music at that time was not the general inhospitality to new forms but "the absence of discrimination among patrons and directors; and the new peril is perhaps the more to be dreaded." Such people, however well intentioned, end up by promoting the "clever fake who arrives in the train of genuine experimentation." Therefore, by promoting the second-rate innovator who is destined to

fail, his supporters and backers give a bad name to all innovators and the entire avant garde movement. "The poetry movement has been successfully discredited by these gentlemen, and we perceive they are now at work preparing a similar fate for the new music." Apparently forgetting his faith in the Guild, Rosenfeld adds, "and there exists no group sufficiently discriminating to stop them doing it."⁴³

Rosenfeld blamed the League of Composers, for next there is a bitterly satirical passage about one of its directors:

In the year 1593, Lazare Saminsky, of the good ship, *The Lament of Rachel*, returned to Europe and announced that he had discovered the existence of two new continents lying approximately halfway between the old world and India, and that the virgin lands of the new hemisphere were sparsely inhabited by aborigines with red skins. The news was later published in the November issue of the *League of Composers' Review* [its literary outlet] under the title "The Downfall of Strauss," and created quite a sensation. Shortly afterward, Einstein announced his celebrated theory contradicting our belief that there exists a single all-embracing time in which the events of the universe have their place, thus explaining how it comes that certain clocks are so perpetually behind.⁴⁴

With uncharacteristic snottiness, Rosenfeld criticized what he saw as the League's late acknowledgment of new musical trends that had already been set in motion by other ensembles.

Rosenfeld's position on the Advisory Board of the League did not prevent from characterizing the League's work as serving mainly "a social function," whereby the performance of music served the ambition of socialites, "handsomely dressed people" who carried on conversation to "music preluded to an apotheosis of personal projections and chicken salad in

⁴³ Rosenfeld, "Musical Chronicle," *The Dial* (1924), 87.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 87-8.

close quarters.” This passage appeared in Rosenfeld’s *By Way of Art* (1928). Part of the book is devoted to a kind of extended tribute to the International Composers’ Guild, a series of essays (most of which had appeared earlier in *The Dial*) treating composers and performers whose works and performances had appeared under its sponsorship. This section, entitled “Thanks to the International Guild: A Musical Chronicle,” recalled the many contributions of the Guild, which had folded a year earlier in 1927.⁴⁵

As one would expect, Varese took center stage, even though Rosenfeld also aimed to convey his reactions to another seminal musical figure, Igor Stravinsky. In this spirit, then, it is not surprising that the League would come off rather badly in comparison to Varese’s Guild. In the closing passages of this principal section Rosenfeld salutes the Guild by identifying it with the black singer, Florence Mills.

Mills’s appearances were few, but the Guild had sponsored her one New York appearance: a recital of black dialect songs, written for her by William Grant Still. Rosenfeld, like his fellow Young Americans, Waldo Frank, Sherwood Anderson, and Alfred Stieglitz, celebrated what they thought to be the “naturalness” of blacks, who therefore seemed much closer to the elemental forces of life. In holding to this view and making it a dominant theme in many of their works, the Stieglitz circle was in tune with one of the central themes of the “Harlem Renaissance” of the 1920s. The idea of a mystical identification with Nature was shared many black writers of the period, too, especially Rosenfeld’s close friend, Jean Toomer.

This discussion of the Guild in relation to Florence Mills was inspired by Rosenfeld’s

⁴⁵ Rosenfeld, *By Way of Art*, 14.

principled conviction that the closer one attunes oneself to the rhythms and life forces of nature, the more likely it is that he or she will be the instrument of the divine. "So, as she stands there, in our memories, Florence Mills is the Guild. Nature at the moment declared itself through her, for an instant the genius; and that was the Guild, obedient to the promptings of the law felt by artists."⁴⁶

In line with his "religious sense" and his belief in the special historical mission of America the, Rosenfeld saw both Mills and the Guild as subject to mysterious forces underlying the course of human history. In his reflective moments, Rosenfeld underscored the ephemeral nature of even the most dynamic art and the most significant aesthetic movements. Did not the Romantic-Idealistic conception of the historical process envision the necessity of death as a prelude to change? The International Composers' Guild had "died" in 1927, as had Florence Mills a short time later. What better reminder, wrote Rosenfeld, that the most creative of us "remain like human bodies the play of elemental forces"? "They, too, are under the laws of necessity, fated to perish by the force that brings them to a birth. Related to a single station of the world, part of a gigantic, still invisible economy, they give way to a necessity no more without than within them."⁴⁷

Behind this assertion there lies a dualistic view of nature. No matter how much one identifies with a greater, creative force, death always comes as a blow. Rosenfeld's essay, "Thanks to the International Guild," recalls a first principle central to his critical project: the

⁴⁶Ibid., 96.

⁴⁷Ibid., 97-8.

creative forces of life remind us of the inevitability of death and the loss of things most cherished. In the recesses of his thinking Rosenfeld was conscious that the vital art of today was a necessary prelude to new art forms of tomorrow. The critic's challenge was to be ready to respond to the very things that will overshadow the concerns of the present. The Guild perished, just as many of the vital elements of the 1920s would soon perish. But what remained important, Rosenfeld argued, was that the Guild was "a force. Life moved through it; and to live is to touch others with the antithesis at the heart of the world, with sorrow as well as joy." Nothing he wrote reflects so well the personal commitment and the sense of vulnerability that lay at the heart of his criticism. To live with the intensity and attentiveness that Rosenfeld encouraged is to expose yourself unavoidably, to the exigencies of life. Such realism served as the ground bass to what a *New York Times* writer described as Rosenfeld's great delight in "chanting the progress of art in America."⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Ibid., 98; Rose Lee, "Chanting the Progress of Art in America," *The New York Times* (20 April 1924), Section 3, p. 12.

Chapter IX

Ranging Across the Arts: Rosenfeld's Mature Americanism

Men Seen

By the middle to latter part of the 1920s Rosenfeld's Americanism had reached its full stride. He had more or less committed himself and the future of American music to the direction that Varese had taken it; to him Varese's music was evidence of America's "coming-of-age." This phrase, which he borrowed from Van Wyck Brooks, is obviously continuous with the cultural nationalism of *The Seven Arts*. For even though Rosenfeld wrestled violently with the methods and the tone of the *Seven Arts* Americanism, he never betrayed its essential ideal of forming an American culture that allowed for the fullest development of the human person. In some sense then Rosenfeld's entire critical output of the late 1910s and early 1920s had anticipated this moment in 1925 of energetic approbation of Varese, a composer whose music signaled the arrival of this new, more hospitable American culture.

Not surprisingly, an article that he wrote for the June 1925 number of *The Dial*, one which immediately followed the article on *Integrales* analyzed in the previous chapter, bore the title "American Art Comes of Age." The article marked an apogee for Rosenfeld's hope for the future of American music, literature, and the visual arts. The moment finally had arrived when he could openly announce, in a brief statement, America's coming of age. Eight years after the

collapse of *The Seven Arts*, its prophecy seemed to have been fulfilled. "Of course," wrote Rosenfeld, "one knew it bound to happen, that one day what came from Europe would no longer reward, and what was produced by American hands would interest chiefly. But the date always had futurity. Twenty five years hence; fifty years hence."¹

Curiously, despite Rosenfeld's celebration of Varese as the American artist par excellence, Rosenfeld mentioned no musical names in "American Art Comes of Age." He wrote only of writers and painters: predictably, Arthur Dove, Georgia O'Keeffe, and Sherwood Anderson; he said nothing on Varese.. But this article is significant because Rosenfeld implies that he will renounce all use of such categorical and "Europeanized" artistic terms as Cubism and Futurism. Coming so soon after his previous article on *Integrales* in which he frequently resorted to Cubist analogies, this new resolution of his seemed an abrupt change of heart. It may have come to him that the nativism suggested by America's coming of age was not compatible with terminology originating in European art circles. To suggest that Varese's music was cubist implied that it resembled European art forms.

Rosenfeld preempted any possible misunderstanding in his June 1925 *Dial* article. In it he argued that contemporary European artists, in their "exhaustion," have taken to dogmas like Cubism which they needed in order to define and guide themselves. But American artists have begun to be far more organic and less formalistic; they can no longer be classified by European categories. "The efforts to graft European conceptions onto the American workers--mysticism, intellectualism, aestheticism--and to give the American effort a conscious tendency, has proven so abortive." We Americans have no use for a word like Cubism for the reason that our

¹Rosenfeld, "Musical Chronicle," *The Dial* (1925), 530.

abstractions and our representations are identical; we begin with the truth and subordinate all else to it. American artists create life, not “art.”²

Such a dismissal of an accepted artistic term seems unnecessary on Rosenfeld's part, especially when he was so vague about the so-called distinctiveness of American art. But, in truth, he was reacting against what he conceived of as the cult of “Europeanism,” and in particular the art of the French. Quite simply, he tried to liberate American art from its age-old dependence on European conceptions of great art. In fact, from 1925 on, in his “Musical Chronicle” column for *The Dial*, he began to ignore openly the works of many European modernists, and to criticize their inclusion in the concerts of the League of Composers and the International Composers Guild.

Rosenfeld here departed from the great attention he had paid to Darius Milhaud, Cesar Franck, Arnold Schoenberg, and Igor Stravinsky for *The Dial* in the early 1920s. Now, in the middle of the decade, he dismissed The League's presentation of works by Arthur Honegger, Maurice Ravel, and Sergei Prokofiev as “not new to New York.” And even as he welcomed Aaron Copland's *Music for the Theatre*, in 1926, he condemned the League for including “ultra-modern” European composers on the same program with the Copland piece. At this stage Rosenfeld's advocacy began to take on a tinge of chauvinism. Even as he disagreed with his colleagues on *The Seven Arts* in the methods they used to bring about a new Americanism in the arts, during this period of the middle 1920s his own Americanism, which had been formed in *The Seven Arts* circle intensified.

Moreover, following the publication of *Port of New York* in 1924, the variety and range

²Ibid, 531.

of Rosenfeld's interests expanded greatly. To be sure music, and especially American music, remained central to his critical writing, but his writing on literature did not have the insistence on Americanism that marked his musical criticism. *Men Seen*, another collection of his criticism, came out in 1925, and in many ways can be read profitably as a complement to *Port of New York*. Whereas *Port of New York* was unified by a single idea—the emergence of an American art that could stand up well against European art, *Men Seen* has no such unifying idea. Running through *Men Seen*'s essays on James Joyce, Guillaume Apollinaire, and D.H. Lawrence is an intense interest in literature and the life of the creative imagination. But—and this is what sets *Men Seen* apart from *Port of New York*—Rosenfeld examines each artist on his own merits, often expressing critical judgments that are subtle, carefully qualified, and full of passion and enthusiasm. Absent is an overarching and constraining thesis.

Rosenfeld's essay on James Joyce for *Men Seen* is among the finest Rosenfeld ever wrote, and is unusual in that its praise of a contemporary European writer is almost boundless. Rosenfeld may not have been the first to recognize Joyce's genius, but few early critics of Joyce have ever placed him so aptly or described the nature of his contributions to world literature so imaginatively. In this essay, Rosenfeld writes with conviction and security about his critical judgments. The result is a beautifully modulated and controlled essay, that sparkles with original ideas.

It is most probably the case that such control and insight followed from the very fact that Joyce was not an American writer; therefore Rosenfeld felt unburdened by his Americanist cause. Rosenfeld had been used to reserving his greatest praise for American artists who seemed to anticipate the dawn of a new age. Given Rosenfeld's essentially optimistic temperament, the

historian looking back on Rosenfeld's writing on Joyce is struck by Rosenfeld's unbounded praise of Joyce, even though few authors writing during the 1920s had a less optimistic view of mankind than Joyce did. As if sensitive to the implications of such a question, Rosenfeld seemed to be offering proof in his Joyce essay that his critical outlook was hardly limited to authors whose writing proceeded from a basically sanguine view of the human condition and the prospects for the future of humankind.

Rosenfeld's main point in this essay was on Joyce's depiction of the modern mind, a subject which always engaged Rosenfeld's interest--especially since he was always looking for signs of a "new consciousness." When Rosenfeld wrote as a cultural nationalist he expected to find in America evidence of an emerging modern consciousness on a new and higher level of integration and perception. Given Rosenfeld's romantic temperament, such expectations seemed natural.

But Rosenfeld would not set aside Joyce's remarkable talent, which had so brilliantly evoked salient aspects of the modern mind in *Ulysses*, even though the solipsism of Stephen Daedalus, Leopold Bloom, and Molly Bloom did not square with Rosenfeld's tentative belief that the new consciousness (like Varese's music) was more collective, impersonal, objective, and analytical than before. It must have been with some reluctance that Rosenfeld acknowledged Joyce's power to express one of the central ironies of his novel: the contrast between "the mind whose form the *Odyssey* was" and the consciousness of twentieth-century Dublin. This was the difference between the harmony of pre-Christian Greece in tune with eternal things and the modern sensibility "out of tune with the eternities as with itself." Rosenfeld:

We exist it seems in a crisis of its carbuncular adolescence. Destined it seems one

day to be a god and harmonize a mighty universe, it stands utterly balked viciously autistic, sluggish, disorientated, unable either to return into the dark warm unconscious out of which it came or to coordinate its faculties in advance; and quite as great a handicap to human life as an advantage.³

For Rosenfeld, Joyce's *Ulysses* is the definition of such a mind.

In the final section, which has important implications for a critic with his perspective orientation, Rosenfeld notes that we, being human, place such a view of humanity and life as *Ulysses* expresses below the level of achievements that portray man as heroic. For "we want what life does not wish to give [and] we accept conscience of frustration only for the purpose of rejecting it for the human race." Here Rosenfeld appears to recognize the source of his own romantic optimism and its "natural" desire to devalue what appears to contradict its ideal constructs.⁴

An effect of the Joyce essay then is to lend a kind of temporary fatalism to Rosenfeld's quest for a new more promising human reality. The essay also reveals that Rosenfeld was often most persuasive and most eloquent when he acknowledged the limits and the reality of the human condition. This then established a creative tension between his hopes for the future and present and even perennial realities.

Rosenfeld's over-all mood in 1925 might have been basically optimistic about the nation's (and, consequently, the world's) future; but the essay on Joyce was an eloquent testimonial to the fact that Rosenfeld's philosophical optimism was never isolated from a pervasive and counterbalancing realism about the human condition. When he was working effectively, this

³ Rosenfeld, "James Joyce," in *Men Seen*, 40-1.

⁴Ibid., 42.

tension helped define and shape his critical estimates. But the same tension could also operate to dissolve his ideas and inner life into a mass of contradictions. Fortunately, Rosenfeld was “working well” in the mid-1920s, and the Joyce article indicated that he could include present realities in a larger assessment of a great writer.

It is also significant that in 1925 Rosenfeld was able to acknowledge the talents of only the best American writers. He had a genius for recognizing at an early stage in their careers the promise of such figures as Marianne Moore, e. e. cummings, Wallace Stevens, Jean Toomer, and F. Scott Fitzgerald--all of whom he treated in *Men Seen*. Very few of these critical judgments seem dated at the turn of the twenty-first century; Rosenfeld was able to note their strengths and their weaknesses and put them in perspective.

Another great strength of *Men Seen* is its prophetic quality. Rosenfeld wrote about many authors who had not achieved complete acceptance. A good example is his essay on Jean Toomer's *Cane*, which turned out to be the first and last significant study of one of America's premiere black novelists until 1958, when Robert Bone published his *Negro Novel in America*. *Cane*, written in 1923, is now recognized as one of the consummate achievements of American black writers. Rosenfeld publicly recognized his talent in 1925. And, as we shall see, Toomer and Rosenfeld were to form a close and important friendship.

Rosenfeld also wrote a penetrating essay on the pre-*Great Gatsby* F. Scott Fitzgerald, in which he registers Fitzgerald's potential as well as his tendency to overplay the general attractiveness of his characters and their milieu more than the detail warranted. Rosenfeld noted that his world, “subject matter, is still too much with Fitzgerald him self for him to see it sustainedly against the universe.” And putting his finger precisely on the weakness that *The*

Great Gatsby would correct that very year, Rosenfeld asserted that Fitzgerald “has seen his material from its own point of view, and he has seen it completely from without. But he had never done what the artist does: seen it simultaneously from within and without; and loved it and judged it too.” Of course, this is what Fitzgerald was able finally to do through the fictional narrator Nick Caraway and what he accomplished by manipulating point of view in *Tender is the Night*. Thus, just a few months before the publication of *The Great Gatsby*, Rosenfeld could say that if Fitzgerald should break his mold, “it will be a pathetic story he will have to tell, the legend of a moon which never rose.”⁵

If Rosenfeld had withheld *Men Seen* for a few months, he would undoubtedly have included an essay he wrote in response to the publication of Hemingway's first book, *In Our Time*. As the literary critic Frederick Hoffman has noted, Rosenfeld's article was the first fairly extended interpretation of Hemingway ever written.⁶

In the essay, Rosenfeld could not help using a term that he managed to avoid in an earlier article because of its European connotations: Cubism. Rosenfeld's natural interest in all art forms led him to observe an important characteristic of Hemingway's prose that literary critics of the 1970s and 1980s concentrated on. This was the writer's technique of immediately juxtaposing collusive elements, setting them off against one another in a highly visual way. As a wide-ranging critic of the arts, Rosenfeld's awareness of Cubism as a dynamic force in modern painting

⁵ Rosenfeld, “F. Scott Fitzgerald,” in *Men Seen*, 223-4.

⁶ Frederick J. Hoffman, *The Twenties: American Writing in the Postwar Decade* (New York: The Viking Press, 1947), 91.

allowed him to see its elements in prose, especially in Hemingway's manner of presenting a rapid succession of contrasting images to illustrate an association of ideas.

Thus, Rosenfeld was able to note immediately some of the more subtle aspects of Hemingway's prose, particularly the function of the interchapters *In Our Time* and the way they seemed to intersect other planes of reality a la Cubist painting and music influence by Cubism.

Hemingway's short stories belong with cubist painting, *Le Sacre du Printemps*, and other recent work bringing a feeling of positive forces through primitive idiom.... [The inter-chapters] bring the reader dangerously close in instantaneous pictures of the war, of the bull-ring and the police world, the excitement of combat, the cold ferocity of the mob, the insensibility of soldiering, the relief of nerves in alcoholic stupor, the naked, the mean, the comic brute in the human frame. Against these principles set invariably in crude, simple, passionate opposition, the author plays the more constructive elements.⁷

Rosenfeld recognized that much of the power of Hemingway's art came from this dramatic opposition between the destructive and the creative forces of life.

Yet while recognizing Hemingway's great craftsmanship, Rosenfeld quarreled with his world view. In so doing, Rosenfeld in a rare slip violated Henry James's maxim that the reader-critic must allow the artist his *donnée*. Yet, it is predictable that a critic such as Rosenfeld, imbued as he was with a romantic hopefulness, would be automatically offended by an artist with a crudely naturalistic view of life. Here again, as in the Joyce essay, a tension is set up between what Rosenfeld recognized as Hemingway's absolute faithfulness to brute reality—"terrible honesty" and his own need to believe in a larger, more generous one. Rosenfeld acknowledged Hemingway's strong connection to the present, that is, his "epoch's feeling of a harsh impersonal force in the universe, permanent, not to be changed, taking both destruction and

⁷Rosenfeld, "Tough Earth," *The New Republic* 45 (1925, 22).

construction up into itself and set in motion by their dialectic.”⁸

Rosenfeld could not deny the validity of this philosophical perspective nor its social and cultural roots, but he chose to see it as an expression of what he calls “primitive America,” in contrast to the “Our America” of Waldo Frank. “This bald feeling is the condition of an adjustment to life begun in men before the War, but demanded even more intensely of them by its ghastlier train, and natural at all times to the products of primitive America.” Quite obviously, Hemingway's godless world is markedly different from Rosenfeld's more religious sense of the existence, accordingly Rosenfeld argued this essay on Hemingway with an admonition that Hemingway's “adjustment” to the condition of things “is not the sole possible one,” even as he acknowledged that it “has its reality.”⁹

One is left with a certain ambiguity after reading Rosenfeld's criticism of Hemingway in 1925. Was there supposed to be any necessary connection between the quality of Hemingway's craft and the legitimacy of his world view? Rosenfeld's study of the deeper philosophical questions raised by Hemingway's work, is disconnected from the essay's highly sensitive treatment of Hemingway's artistry. Nevertheless, the essay reveals how the didactic element in Rosenfeld's criticism--so muted in *Men Seen*--could dilute the effectiveness of his more purely aesthetic observations.

Curiously, eight years following *Men Seen* Rosenfeld was still wrestling with the Hemingway “problem,” as he continued to confuse two issues: the validity of a writer's apparent philosophical position and his artistic merit. In 1933, he was preparing a course in American

⁸Ibid., 23.

⁹Ibid.

literature, painting, and music for the New School for Social Research in New York. As he wrote Stieglitz, he had to come to terms with several American literary figures, particularly Waldo Frank and Ernest Hemingway, both of whom he had shown ambivalent feelings about in the past. Now he had brought the two writers into a more satisfy relation. In the first part of a lengthy letter to Stieglitz, written several days before the last section, Rosenfeld thought he saw Hemingway's work as

a throw-back to a dead religion, the religion of the dead past in the present and the religion of a world which even if it remains for aeons will be dead; the religion of a god removed from creation whose removal from it makes instinct bear death, while Frank is part of the germ of life contained in the dead thing, the potentiality of a live world where instinct bears eternal life even though a badly confused one. Hemingway is all battle, murder sudden death, groans and heart ache, in his world men are damned to death to kill and die and have to make their joy out of it; but in this other world there would be only awareness of unfailing love.¹⁰

Clearly, Rosenfeld was defining the difference between the naturalistic world and a world with a distinct moral center; the difference between a world whose reality was constantly being affirmed by the deepest longings of the human heart, and a world he hoped for—a new Jerusalem. Since Rosenfeld believed strongly that a spiritually coherent world was the ultimate reality, Hemingway's world view and his growing national popularity troubled Rosenfeld. On the other hand, while he had earlier rejected Frank's "art," Frank's world was finally the more satisfying. Here was a case in which Rosenfeld was still judging a writer's work on the efficacy of his philosophical position.

But later in the same letter to Stieglitz, in a section written several days later, Rosenfeld almost completely reversed his critical posture. Now he believed that despite Frank's dedication

¹⁰ Rosenfeld to Stieglitz 18 September 1933. Rosenfeld Papers.

to the “potentiality of a live world,” he seemed

cold, uninterested in his object, without feeling for it [while] I find Hemingway warm, and sympathetic because of his simple interest in his subject and direct way of getting into it and expressing it, his workman like pleasure in doing a plain good job. I guess Hemingway is very compassionate, perhaps too compassionate. particularly with men: his philosophy of death being perhaps a method of steeling himself against too great a pity.¹¹

The difference in critical emphasis which the letter reflects the creative paradox that animated Rosenfeld’s writing: the struggle between questions of aesthetics and craft and the philosophical, social, cultural and religious ends of the work.

The American Caravan

While Rosenfeld may have been heartened by the new dynamism American music in the mid-twenties and encouraged by the work of the American painters and writers he treated in *Port of New York* and *Men Seen*, he was not at all sanguine about broader movements in American culture. Exacerbating the problem in 1926 was the decline of *The Dial* as a literary influence, along with the demise of *The Freeman* and such free-wheeling little magazines as Margaret Anderson’s *Little Review*. The “little magazine” movement in Europe was proceeding well, but Rosenfeld, with his ardent Americanism, was concerned about establishing a cultural base in the United States. If he had visions of New York as a world cultural capital, he would see also the necessity of creating an audience for an emerging American art and a need for a publication to carry this art to the audience. Rosenfeld had not forgotten *The Seven Arts* concept of “central rejuvenation.” But how were the American people to be assured of a hearing? Obviously, an

¹¹ Ibid.

American-based publication, appearing on a regular basis, was required. Rosenfeld answered the need with *The American Caravan*.

Alfred Kreymborg, poet and friend of Rosenfeld, describes the birth of *The American Caravan* series of annuals as proceeding from a week-end meeting he had had with Alfred Stieglitz and Rosenfeld in 1926 at Stieglitz's Lake George summer home. The discussion centered on the decline of American literary magazines and such distressingly familiar topics as the regressive editorial policies of *Scribner's*, *Harper's*, *The Atlantic*, and others, and the inhospitable American social climate for native writers.

According to Kreymborg, the urgent desire for a new magazine sprang primarily from Rosenfeld, and "it was soon determined that a yearbook . . . would allow ample time for editors to gather, select, and issue a collection representative of contemporary American literature." Kreymborg and Rosenfeld agreed to edit the annuals and immediately send out invitations to Lewis Mumford and Van Wyck Brooks to join them on the editorial board as equal partners. Both accepted, but Brooks was undergoing a series of mental breakdowns which would prevent him from taking part. Yet, obviously referring to Brooks's dynamic leadership during *The Seven Arts* days, Kreymborg added, "we carried his name on the opening Caravan because of the inspiration his impassioned nature had provided on many occasions."¹²

Kreymborg's friendship with Samuel Ornitz, literary editor of the Macaulay Company, led to Ornitz's suggestion that Macaulay sponsor and publish the new venture. Macaulay had a rather sleazy reputation as a publisher of potboilers, mysteries, and lurid biographies, and Ornitz had been hired specifically to upgrade Macaulay's literary standards. Contracts were signed with

¹²Alfred Kreymborg, "The Caravan Venture," in *Voyager in the Arts*, 28.

L. S. Freeman, Macaulay's president. then Rosenfeld thought up the title "American Caravan" and composed the general announcement inviting authors to send in their manuscripts.

As it turned out, much of the work was done by Rosenfeld, who had both the means and the time for such tasks as soliciting manuscripts and negotiating with the publishers on printing costs and deadlines. Apparently, the three editors agreed to give freely of their time with only minimal royalties, although there were some difficulties with Kreymborg over this matter. Both Mumford and Rosenfeld believed that Kreymborg demanded more money than he had a right to expect. Finally, Rosenfeld offered to work for nothing and let Mumford and Kreymborg split the difference. But, in general, Rosenfeld wisely deferred to Mumford's judgment on financial matters and noted ruefully in one letter to Mumford that the publishers trusted Mumford's financial acumen more than his.

The whole Caravan project reflects Rosenfeld's absolute and unselfish devotion to the cause of encouraging young writers. His letters to Mumford during this period reveal the feeling of urgency that he associated with the entire process of getting the best American writers to submit manuscripts. The consciousness of going it alone, without other publications to supplement it, intensified *The Caravan* staff's sense of mission. The "caravan" metaphor was taken quite seriously by the editors, with its suggestion of a slow, deliberate pilgrimage through the vast expanse of continental America, clearing the way for many others to follow and thrive. The poet-editor Kreymborg even prepared a verse for the frontispiece of the first number that expressed this idea:

And now another unwinding caravan
Moves foot by foot across the continent.
Superhuman vistas dwarf each dogged man,

Digging the earth for enduring nutriment....
The heroic speck dig on, move on clear
Roads for deep Beauty to grow American.¹³

The editors of *The Caravan* canvassed the geographical expanse of America for material that reflected its inherent diversity. The Preface of the opening number asserted that “for some time past, the editors had been conscious that the passive and recessive attitudes of the leading magazines toward new fields of reality and fresh racy attacks were depriving a great variety of national developments of their outlets.” *The Caravan* was “eager to create a medium able to accommodate a progressively broader expression of American life.” Despite this announcement, many of the critical reviews of the first *Caravan*, ironically, accused it of soliciting a particular style of writing and restricted thematic emphasis. This reaction must have been particularly discouraging to Rosenfeld, who had written Stieglitz that one of the prime purposes of the venture was “to reverse editorial opinion on American writing of today.” But the fact was that, with a few exceptions, the general critical reception was, in Rosenfeld's words, “poisonous.”¹⁴

In retrospect, it is difficult to account for the hostile reception, particularly since the volume contained rather good examples of work by an extraordinary group of American writers, some of whom either made their initial public appearance in the issue or were close to the beginning of their careers: Ernest Hemingway, William Carlos Williams, John Dos Passos, Archibald MacLeish, Yvor Winters, Allen Tate, Gertrude Stein, Robert Penn Warren, Hart Crane, Edmund Wilson, and Eugene O'Neill. Perhaps the inclusion of such works as

¹³ Alfred Kreyborg, “For Van Wyck, Lewis, Paul & Co.,” *The American Caravan* (New York: The Literary Guild of America, 1927), vii.

¹⁴ *The American Caravan*, ix; Rosenfeld to Stieglitz, 18 September 1927. Rosenfeld Papers.

Hemingway's "An Alpine Idyll" and O'Neill's *Lazarus Laughed* caused critics to see a certain morbid and gloomy quality to the selections. As it turned out, no other *Caravan* number included so many illustrious writers and poets. Moreover, the first volume was accepted by the Literary Guild, whose members at the time were nearing 30,000.

Nevertheless, the poor critical reception weighed heavily on Rosenfeld, prompting him to write Stieglitz a letter in which he buried the hopes they had shared in common at the project's conception only a year earlier at Lake George. But it also signaled the beginning of what one might call a "positive philosophical resignation" or acceptance of certain inevitable realities which forced him to scale back his expectations. Referring to the first *Caravan* and its public reception, Rosenfeld wrote Stieglitz:

Things which are made in joy and carry a little song with them are funny. They are so good and beneficent inside the room in which they are made but then, when they are set into the world, for one is restlessly impelled by them to set them there, they bring a lot of pain and mortification in return, and sometimes the thing which elemented them is killed through their adventures; but then again they may fecundate three persons waiting somewhere for them, and there is joy in heaven. I suppose it will be so with the *Caravan*, and I must learn to get my joy out of the three persons, perhaps four, who may suddenly go a little bigger into life through it. I suppose the old people who spoke about the worth of God of a single human soul got their joys out of such contacts; but it is hard for us, I don't know whether we like what masses do to us, or whether because we are in love with the whole race. Probably the former.¹⁵

This was a fairly realistic assessment by a man who had set great store by the prospect that art might reach and influence a significant part of the American population. This, in fact, had been the dream of *The Seven Arts*. The first *Caravan* experience reminded Rosenfeld of a truth that he

¹⁵ Rosenfeld to Stieglitz, 18 September 1927, Rosenfeld Papers.

himself had dramatized at the conclusion of the Joyce essay--that we often want what life does not wish to give. So despite his idealism Rosenfeld always had a healthy regard for facts and was attentive to them. This inner gyroscope enabled him to stay on course and continue with the *Caravan* venture.

The reviews of the first *Caravan* had come out in the summer of 1927. A few months earlier he had decided to leave *The Dial* as its regular music critic. Now, he was especially glad to be relieved from having to "beam rays into everyone's eyes like the sun." Part of his reason for leaving *The Dial* was directly attributable to general fatigue from meeting deadlines over the past eight years and to the restrictions he felt at being a music critic exclusively.

In the Spring of 1927, Rosenfeld had suggested to the editors of *The Dial* that they find a new music writer. After engaging Lawrence Gilman briefly as his replacement, they tried to hire Rosenfeld back. He enjoyed a measure of revenge by refusing the post: "I had a good laugh at the dirty *Dial's* expense . . . they tried to get me back; but after due consideration I again dodged them, taking pleasure of sending them a list of young writers who I felt were creatively interested in modern music." Fortunately, Rosenfeld had more positive things to think about than petty matters of revenge.¹⁶

Always a man of introspection, Rosenfeld in the late 1920s was even more so because he was just completing his autobiographical novel, *The Boy in the Sun*. What is more, in 1927 things everywhere around him appeared to be in a state of change. *The Dial* was near its end, and the International Guild of Composers had disbanded. He had given up writing essays for the time being and had scaled down his expectations for art. As his obituary for the Guild of

¹⁶ Ibid.

Composers had asserted, all things must die in time, even the most vital of creative forces; all one can do is to make sure that what one creates has its own kind of immortality.

The sense of life's passing by him while he continued to grind out his regular column for *The Dial* was instrumental in Rosenfeld's decision to turn to books as a more permanent way of recording and preserving his views. *The Boy in the Sun* was a step in this direction. In addition, *By Way of Art*--a volume of essay on music, literature, and the visual arts--and the second *American Caravan* were published in the same year, 1928. In 1929, Rosenfeld published *An Hour With American Music* and the third *American Caravan*, and began work on another novel, *Concert in Rome*. All of this publishing activity signified a new direction for Rosenfeld as the 1930s approached. He wrote Stieglitz, "I believe I personally may be running a fine chance of spending the rest of my life 'blushing unseen' and 'wasting my fragrance on the desert air'; and still I believe in the impulse that has pushed me out towards taking my chances with books."¹⁷

An Hour With American Music

It is a testimony to the accelerated pace of artistic life in the 1920s, that by the end of the decade American music had reached a point where Rosenfeld could devote a large part of a volume on American music to an examination of a vital contemporary, indigenous movement. Between 1925 and 1929, enough had happened on the American musical scene to strengthen Rosenfeld's hope about the direction that native modern music was taking; a wide-ranging study of American music seemed a justifiable under taking. Also, nearing the age of forty, Rosenfeld was aware that the time was propitious to prove that his creative powers had not ebbed and that

¹⁷ Ibid.

his vision was clear and sound. In line with the resolve he expressed to Stieglitz about taking his chances with books, Rosenfeld marshaled his forces in 1929 for a sustained effort to describe and analyze the movement of an American musical tradition.

Although by the late 1920s the promise of Leo Ornstein and Ernest Bloch had continued to recede in Rosenfeld's estimation, Varese's repertory, strengthened by his most recent composition, *Arcanes*, remained preeminent among those of American composers. In his last article for *The Dial* in June 1927, Rosenfeld had written about Varese in a way that anticipated one of the central concerns of *An Hour with American Music*: how American composers had learned gradually to accept and integrate the apparently conflicting forces in American life. Varese, with his engineering background and his alertness to the evocative power of sensual sounds, seemed a perfect example of the positive fusion of the scientific-social and the aesthetic-private worlds.

Accordingly, Rosenfeld played up these elements in his last *Dial* article, which was a review of Varese's *Arcanes*. The new tone structure of this piece, wrote Rosenfeld, brings the audience "close to the bourne of the feeling moving both the contemporary scientific and the contemporary sensuous man; and while instantaneously exposing the unity in our world.... adumbrates the role of the artwork of the future." Thus, it is this future art which will unify the aesthetic and scientific in Man; and Varese, the Renaissance man, is the ideal one to bring together what has formerly divided in our world. Coincidentally, "a passion for discovery in Varese appears to be referred to the technique of art, and the exacting scientific perspectives of the day related to his new emotional and auditory experiences."¹⁸

¹⁸ Rosenfeld, "Musical Chronicle," *The Dial* (1927), 537.

To Rosenfeld's ears *Arcanes* is significant if only because it gathers together so many emotional strands of modern man and "showed them single": violence and brutality mixed with thought and the cerebral processes; nervous, erotic tension and expectation. These mixtures mark the "emotional aesthetic man" as well as the "scientific technical one." Varese has expressed their common desire "to break through the hopelessly dirtied crust of life into new clear regions," as symbolized by the city skyscrapers, and made them one again.¹⁹

Through Varese's music Rosenfeld was able to see how the artistic sensibility could maintain itself, and survive, only by first seizing the monstrous and the elemental. He admired this kind of courage in Varese as he admired it later on in an American writer, Henry Miller. He would always find it difficult, however, to adopt this posture as way of life for himself, even though he began to see the artistic benefit in this kind of immersion in the massive texture of modern life.

An Hour With American Music (1929) is probably the first attempt by a critic of American music to weave together the separate strands of American concert music into a recognizable synthesis. The stamp of Rosenfeld's orientation gives the book a crucial unity despite its initial "miscellany" appearance. And the treatment of individual composers is occasionally sketchy: obviously the publisher, J. P. Lippincott, imposed severe space limitations on Rosenfeld by the handbook nature of its "Hour" series on American culture. The unity is there, however, as Rosenfeld describes the gradual emergence of a truly native American music--a music that turns out to be both sophisticated and culturally meaningful. Rosenfeld sketches an American musical tradition within which composers are less and less prone to lean on eclecticism and uncritical

¹⁹ Ibid., 539.

traditionalism and increasingly willing to work through the materials of their environment; or, they may simply allow the environment to express itself through their music.

Repeatedly, Rosenfeld stresses the unselfconscious nature of the American composer's creative act. Whether he describes the Bostonian condition of Charles Loeffler, the southwestern background of Roy Harris's music, or the work of Brooklyn-born Aaron Copland, he continually points out that our significant artists do not imitate or describe their environment as a conscious end. Instead, the environment works through the artist as he unselfconsciously absorbs certain cultural characteristics. The composers that Rosenfeld placed in the evolving American musical tradition "never begin with a theory, or a literary idea of representation and expression; rather these influences seek the artist out." Therefore, despite Rosenfeld's characteristic emphasis upon a strong cultural reflex as a prerequisite for a successful artist, he strained at times to point out that a relevant cultural style cannot be attained by external means. This is one of the central themes of *An Hour With American Music*.²⁰

The book is, in effect, more than a warning against indiscriminating formalism and eclecticism in music; it is a warning against programmatic and self-conscious nativism too. The aspiring American composer, Rosenfeld cautions, must not simply immerse himself in the habits and life of the people, for it is impossible to acquire deliberately the characteristics of a class of people, region, or nation. "We can spontaneously give form to what we experience; and what we experience is relative to the conditions of our life"--and the more elemental these conditions, the more valuable and influential the music.²¹

²⁰ Rosenfeld, *An Hour With American Music*, 162.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 115.

Using the Oklahoma-born Roy Harris as one example, Rosenfeld suggests that even though Harris's music originates from the Scottish-Irish folk song as transplanted to the United States, Harris creates from this tradition rather than simply repeating or rearranging it. As does his contemporary Aaron Copland with the use of jazz motifs, Harris drives his folk-song material far beyond its current use and interprets it in a large way. As Rosenfeld describes them in *An Hour With American Music*, both Copland and Harris, though responsive to certain regional and nativist elements like jazz and folk songs, avoided being absorbed by them. In respect to the growth of Harris's talent, then, Rosenfeld observed that "the ubiquity of the Scottish-Irish melodies doubtless merely speeded the inevitable process, helping to a rapid orientation the budding power."²²

In this way, much of *An Hour With American Music* reflects the thoughts and ideas of Ralph Waldo Emerson. When Rosenfeld describes the American composer "possessed" by his native material and "allowing" it expression, one thinks of the philosophical passivity of Emerson's "transparent Eye-Ball" and how the currents of the universal being are allowed passage through the receptive artist in the state of nature. At the beginning of the book Rosenfeld conceives of music a force for self-transcendence:

Music is expressive, carrying us out of ourselves and beyond ourselves, into impersonal regions, into the stream of things; permitting us to feel the conditions under which objects exist, the forces playing upon human life....For to live, to merge with the stream, and become part of forces larger than ourselves, is to feel, to know something about the entire world; and the music lets us share in a great man's absorption: at least to the degree to which we are capable of being lost to ourselves.²³

²² Ibid., 120-1.

²³ Ibid., 21.

Rosenfeld's belief in the self-transcendent power of music was a crucial first principle with him. When this assumption was joined with his conviction that the artist has the capacity both to release this power and to represent accurately the dynamics of a national community, the keystone of Rosenfeld's cultural criticism had been laid. It is this keystone that informs *An Hour With American Music*, a book on American music that was written for the purpose of illuminating American life. The whole structure of the book, as well as Rosenfeld's entire critical corpus, rests upon this crucial hypothesis:

The psyche of the artist is an integral part of the battlefield of life, perhaps the battlefield made apparent. Its conflicts, its defeats and victories are those of the community essentialized, objectified. It is the cross-section. To know what is going on in the life of a civilization, to measure its force and direction, you have but to examine its art.²⁴

Holding to these assertions, Rosenfeld began a series of attempts to trace the growth of "Americanism," some peculiar element or national binding characteristic, in American music. This end is what he specifically aimed at in several important works, of which *An Hour With American Music* was the first. Later, in the 1930s and early 1940s, several of his major essays concerned themselves with a similar aim. From the standpoint of musicology and cultural history, these essays (together with *An Hour With American Music*) constitute a pioneering effort to see early and contemporary American music both against the backdrop as well as an expression of our cultural history.

One of the driving forces behind Rosenfeld's later essays on music and culture is his

²⁴ Ibid., 142-3.

conviction that the value of genuine art lies in the fact that it is “the communication of feelings important to the full life of the community and therefore of the highest utility.” Rosenfeld identified a community, or culture, by way of its expressed style, a style that manifests itself in all phases of the culture's collective life. Therefore, every culture has its own style, or “characteristic phraseology,” which varies according to the stage of growth a culture has attained. Seeing this style as a kind of cultural reflex, Rosenfeld defined it as a “method of expressing thought and feeling by selection and collocation of plastic elements and one determined by nationality, period, form and individuality.” Since the artist's style may be formed by certain cultural conditions, it would follow, Rosenfeld argued, that only if and when American art achieves the style of American life will this art become truly “cultural”; that is valuable as a means to community and pointing the way toward the true fulfillment of the human person.²⁵

Thus, when Rosenfeld comes to the concluding pages of *An Hour With American Music*, he treats Varese's music as the fullest expression of the style of contemporary American life. He describes this music in terms of city sounds, as corresponding to them, and as a distillation of them into musical terms: “[Varese] has formed his style on [city sounds]. Or, rather, they have transformed musical style in him by their effect on his ears and imagination.”²⁶

Throughout *An Hour With American Music*, Rosenfeld points out that truly American composers neither imitate nor describe their milieu; the environment works through the artist quite naturally, as if he or she unconsciously absorbs cultural characteristics. Rosenfeld underscores the degree to which the unconscious element plays a major role in the creative

²⁵ Rosenfeld, “Variations of a Grass-Roots Theme,” *Modern Music* (1939), 214.

²⁶ Rosenfeld, *An Hour With American Music*, 161-2.

process as he describes the method and function of post-romantic composers. Their entire mode of composition is directed toward encompassing the reality of our “swift prodigious world” in its terms. Unlike the European and American composers of the nineteenth century, Varese is not so much interested in creating “beautiful objects as in the penetration and registration of the extant...a sort of revelation, made through the manipulation of the musical medium.”²⁷

Here again the artist is shown as an almost passive instrument in the power of an informing vision. And what he “makes” is a direct presentation of what already exists in the industrial world. Therefore, Rosenfeld insists, the modern composer's works are simply a “declaration of things as they are; not the mere illustration of a system; they think in terms of their medium.” In this sense, Rosenfeld was struck by the significance of Varese's latest work, *Arcanes*: “the first piece of music that harmonizes with the *weltanschauung* of modern mathematical physics, and corresponding with science's newest sensations about matter.”²⁸

At the conclusion of his book, Rosenfeld's prose rises to new heights of ecstasy and intense expectation as he attempts to describe the driving force and spirit of western life which has always sought unity and wholeness. The last paragraph, in fact, not only praises Edgard Varese, it evokes a certain positive, assertive force that generates all life. The paragraph must also be read as an attempt by Rosenfeld to give meaning to his entire critical output up to 1929. For what good were his efforts if the Western world, and America especially, did not contain within it the seeds of future growth? The investment he had in Varese's music, as a synthesis of all the divergent forces in America and as an adumbration of a more wholesome culture was immense:

²⁷ Ibid., 165.

²⁸ Ibid., 176.

The impulse of Varese's music is one of unity, or perfection, borne of a wholeness in the psyche and moving toward a condition satisfactory to the entire man. The large, smoky, and metallic sonorities; the gorgeous explosive violence, its brutal surges so singularly mixed with the feeling of thought and cerebral processes; the dry nervous vibration of the Chinese blocks; the high erotic tension controlled with a rare sensitivity, embody the spirit of many experimental groups, artistic, scientific, moral, and plumb their common bourne. Deep within, one feels the force which thrusts up towers of steel and stone to scrape the clouds, and creates new instruments and combinations, and forms new field-theories, seeking, on many fronts, here, there, again and again, to break through the hopelessly dirty crust of life into new clean regions. Balked, it persistently returns to the breach; till at last a new light, a new constellation, a new god, answers its wild penetrations from afar. That is the emotional aesthetic man of today no less than the technical scientific one; that is every Columbus directed to every American; that is the spirit of the new Western impulse will find us, here in the new world and its century, in the middle of our way again.²⁹

Thus with the invocation of the Columbian expedition, Rosenfeld's last piece of writing of the 1920s returned to a theme he began with at the decade's beginning in *Musical Portraits*: the impulse to discovery and its roots in the West's irrepressible urge to explore and to synthesize into a systematic and coherent whole what it learns from its explorations. Rosenfeld rested his hopes for the renewal of American culture on these characteristics of the Western mind.

²⁹ Ibid., 178-9.

Chapter X Music and Culture in Depression America

Formalism, Nationalism, and Utility in the Arts

Rosenfeld held fast to his decision to focus mainly on publishing books instead of writing magazine articles for about three years. In fact, between 1927, when he wrote his last article for *The Dial*, and 1930, he published nothing in any magazine. But the comparative silence that greeted *The Boy in the Sun*, and the fact that *An Hour With American music*--despite its narrative thread--was still a collection of essays, must have made Rosenfeld question whether he could sustain a progressively developed idea for more than the length of an article. Intensifying the problem Rosenfeld faced in 1930 was the increasing indifference of magazines and journals to his latest contributions. Whether or not Rosenfeld was, as he said, "frozen out" by the fine arts publishing establishment during the 1930s for his resistance to the general leftward tilt among American writers, painters, and musicians is not entirely clear. His main outlet from 1932 to 1938 was *The New Republic*, which accepted his writing on music and on literature and painting.

A study of his musical criticism, especially for *The New Republic*. during the early 1930s reveals that Rosenfeld was still a regular figure at contemporary music concerts. He was still concerned about the creative vitality of American culture, and still debating old enemies. In his

first essay since *The Dial* period, he renewed his reservations about strict formalism, a theme he had first struck in his articles for *The Seven Arts*. In the 1930s he wrote disapprovingly about “a growing tendency to take the works of former composers as points of departure; to sit, as it were, before these compositions analyzing them, and then construct the findings into edifices satisfactory to his own state of mind.” Emphatically, Rosenfeld objected to a slavish reliance on form; he never repudiated the emphasis he placed on form during the 1910s, the period in which he formed many of his critical principles. To Rosenfeld, the new formalism inspired by T. S. Eliot’s *The Sacred Wood* and the musical compositions of Igor Stravinsky was too cold, and not hospitable enough to the passionate warmth of Rosenfeld’s Romantic side. As Rosenfeld derided formalism’s ascension to the throne of artistic fashion, he emphasized its less lyrical, harder, dryer, and more disabused feeling, “whose accents, brusquer rhythms and forms are more architectural than pictorial.” In 1930 then, Rosenfeld gained a renewed appreciation for the lyricism that in 1914, immediately before his “grand transformation,” he found suffocating.¹

Rosenfeld’s objections to the new formalism in music proceeded from his long-held philosophical premises. For example in his 1930 *New Republic* essay, “A Case for Solomon,” he defended what he called the libertarian point of view, which was a new term for an old position which held that art was a reflection of Truth which communicated itself differently to each human epoch. Musical libertarianism, Rosenfeld wrote, insists that the older, established works must take their chances with contemporary pieces in a world where “everything, including the conception of art and beauty, moves. Indeed, libertarianism expects music to evolve in unpredictable ways, since it is in the nature of living things to enter novel phases, obliging those

¹ Rosenfeld, “Maurice Ravel,” *The New Republic* 61 (1929), 69.

in contact with them to make new adjustments, to get new understandings, perhaps to adopt or develop points of view which will make them strange to the persons they once were.”

Formalism, with its preoccupation with old forms, violated Rosenfeld's libertarianism.²

Rosenfeld's willingness to assign a name to his philosophy of music was an indication of his gradually emerging interest in musical styles as a subject for study. In the 1920s he had associated a musical style with individual composers; now he became more and more interested in style as a historical and cultural phenomenon. It seems Rosenfeld became convinced that the history of music and literature reveals the continual seeking out and discovery of new forms and language which express expanding areas of consciousness and changing cultural conditions. He had emphasized this in his work on Edgar Varese. But in the 1930s he began to approach the subject of comparative musical styles from a more detached and scholarly position. He was still eager to discover a relevant musical, and cultural, tradition for the prevailing technocratic culture of the twentieth century, but he cultivated the techniques of musicology in an effort to achieve a significant breakthrough. Gradually his essays assumed a more studied air as he strained for objectivity; he deliberately diminished the polemics that marked his earlier writing.

For instance, in an essay on the German composer, Paul Hindemith, Rosenfeld makes a great effort to describe the most formalistic of modern musical trends in objective and almost scholarly terms. He discusses modern neoclassicism as the best defined and most influential movement in music since the First World War. Since its proponents, composers such Igor Stravinsky and Hindemith, were so influential, Rosenfeld was obviously aware that neoclassicism was the dominant mode of the moment. Still, even as an old advocate of

² Rosenfeld, "A Case for Solomon," *The New Republic* 61 (1930), 302.

nationalistic music, he could calmly describe neoclassicism as an anti-nationalistic music which has superceded “the older, zealous movements” (a curious reference to the musical nationalism of the late nineteenth century) and affirmed the “ideal of a music catholic in style and expression in place of one encouraging a music based on folk song and the idiom of individual lands.”³

The new formalism challenged Rosenfeld's natural mystic nationalism, and, in line with his resolve to attain to a new kind of objectivity he accepted the reality of musical nationalism as a diminishing tradition. Still, his romanticism emerged later in the article when, even as he acknowledges that neoclassicism has a certain power, he finds that the movement closes the door to expressing “the deep-seated, the rootfast, the irrational elements of personality so close to tribal instincts.” The implication then was that neoclassicism denied or subdued the very elements of American music which are necessary to cultural growth, clarification of feeling, and national self expression. In fact, the entire spiritual and even emotional foundation for an authentically American music is undermined by an antithetical tradition.⁴

Although such implications remain only implications, Rosenfeld closes his article on a typically partisan note. He openly denies the efficacy of neo-classic music on typically romantic grounds: it lacks the authority of a “large spirit.” Moreover, it seems so “episodic, transitional. One waits with a certain impatience for the resumption of another tradition.” Thus, Rosenfeld moves from a tone of historic objectivity and scholarly detachment to a older mood of providential expectation. Preoccupation with discovering a spiritual reality of national proportions still remained. Evidently in 1930 Rosenfeld believed that the “Varese” tradition had

³ Rosenfeld, “Neo-Classicism and Paul Hindemith,” *The New Republic* 62 (1930), 193.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 194.

not yet stamped itself sufficiently on the American consciousness to qualify as the significant national tradition he had been looking for.⁵

The influence of the new formalism, in part, also prompted a new focus in Rosenfeld's criticism of the 1930s. Instead of concentrating on individual artists, as he did in the 1920s, he focused instead on aesthetic traditions and, especially in the early 1930s, on musical styles. With the onset of the Great Depression, individual composers were not as active as they were in the 1920s. Therefore, an examination of individual composers was no longer a fruitful way of searching for evidence of a new spiritual America.

An air of crisis pervaded America during the Depression. A musical slump was to be expected as the impetus of experimentation lagged. Rosenfeld was not alone, for example, in pointing out that most concerts of the period lacked interesting new work by the major musical moderns. Despite the arrival of Igor Stravinsky, Arnold Schoenberg, and Bela Bartok from Europe, American composers seemed intent on cultivating a kind of musical populism. Eric Salzman, an historian of music, described this movement as "the great retreat into social usefulness and tonal comprehensibility, the search for national musical identity, and the brave attempt to reintegrate the creative artist into his society." For Salzman the 1930s was a decade of irony in American music, for at the moment when the United States of America was forced to take on the burden of the world's contemporary musical life, "its composers were looking inward and backward trying to find a peculiarly American musical identity." Whatever the aesthetic merits of the so-called *Gebrauchsmusik* movement that emerged from this ironic condition, it is clear that it made America's composers sensitive to the social question, and also preoccupied

⁵ Ibid.

with their relations with the American public. The music of Kurt Weill, George Gershwin, Marc Blitzstein, Virgil Thomson, George Antheil, and Aaron Copland signaled the birth of a new grassroots American musical theater. This was also a period when it seemed every composer felt compelled to compose the great American symphony.⁶

For Rosenfeld such efforts represented a kind of narrow nationalism, despite the colorful regional expression that often characterized this music, this movement, he argued, would soon fade before “the growing uniformity of life,” that was rapidly “whirling us away from all dissimilarities and uniqueness.” The new catholic composer of the immediate future will find limited utility in “local peculiarities.” Rosenfeld was probably thinking of Varese when he wrote: “It seems that to survive in this world, music will once more have to become universal, and composers embrace not mere individuals and groups, but humanity and a whole earth.” Therefore in 1930 Rosenfeld suggested that both neoclassicism and nationalistic-regional music had failed to become universal because they embraced unnatural opposites through either archaic forms or their fading regionalisms.⁷

Especially apparent to Rosenfeld was the degree to which the music of neo-classical failed to their listeners emotionally. Accordingly, in his essay entitled, “Romantic Emotion,” Rosenfeld argued that art and cultural critics must recognize that there are many historical precedents for the idea that new states of feeling and emotion need new forms to express them. “The competent producing causes of new styles and forms have probably ever been the

⁶ Eric Salzman, *Twentieth-Century Music: An Introduction* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1967), 97.

⁷ Rosenfeld, “Taylor, Carpenter, and Loeffler,” *The New Republic* 66 (1931), 128.

appearance of new complexities of ways of feeling.” A particular group of artists and their “emotive” characteristics will often deviate from their predecessors “in the direction of intricacy and refinement.” Thus we must connect to many emerging artistic movements, feelings that are “complex, premeditated, and subtle.” For example, in the case of the early nineteenth-century romantic composers, it was incumbent upon the critics of that time to assemble a special vocabulary in order to analyze the spirit of romantic compositions, using adjectives that denote the “inordinate, the singular, the complicated.” And, as new stimuli and environmental conditions emerge and create new complexities and subtleties of emotion, the critic must find a suitable vocabulary to express the spirit of new works of art that embody these new emotions and which indicate “special nuances and variations.”⁸

Developing a suitable vocabulary proved to be an immensely difficult task for Rosenfeld. He believed fully a new language must be developed before a correspondingly new consciousness could spring to life. An essay he wrote later, in 1944, explored society's ultimate dependence upon new modes of language and fresh literary forms: “Such is the genius of societies that no fundamental change can occur in their antique organizations unless an analogous movement operate in their means of speech. It is in forming new phenomena that art meets the many spiritual demands of society “ Rosenfeld must have felt that the nuances of his highly controversial impressionistic prose were more responsive to the demands of an innovative speech than to the modes of traditional critical writing.⁹

Soon after the essay on romantic emotion appeared in 1932, Rosenfeld applied its

⁸ Rosenfeld, “Romantic Emotion,” *The New Republic* 72 (1932), 126-7.

⁹ Rosenfeld, “Nodier After A Century,” *The Nation* 159 (1944), 19.

hypothesis to a specific example by identifying a musical stream that exemplified the most positive traits in artistic innovation. In an essay on Monteverdi and Varese, Rosenfeld's new emphasis upon musical traditions surfaced again. This time he was intent on showing that Monteverdi operated in the grand tradition of which Varese was the latest representative--the tradition of great innovators who expressed and anticipated a new vision of things through their ability to communicate emotional states more complex than preceding musicians had. These were the composers who expressed the whole inner life of man, or what Rosenfeld called "the burning human core as life unconsciously revealed it."¹⁰

The significance of a composer such as Varese could only be understood by a critic who was attuned to "the religious feeling." It was becoming increasingly evident to him that the old regional-national music could no longer keep up with the acceleration of world events. Varese's music expressed a new interior orientation born of new discoveries in the "physio-chemical fields." Characteristically, he does not elaborate upon this puzzling reference. Yet the allusion to science recalls the same uncritical admiration of the mysterious side of technology that revealed itself at times in the writing he did for *The Seven Arts* and for *The Dial* during the early 1920s. Now, in the early 1930s, he heard Varese's music of outer space as evoking the life of the inanimate universe inaccessible to the senses "but not to the penetrating organs of science." The movement of Western culture, Rosenfeld seemed to imply, denied the relevance of mere national and regional boundaries. Modern music would seek to capture and express, through sound, the massive network of an electronic world that superceded the artificial boundaries of nation-

¹⁰ Rosenfeld, "Varese and Monteverdi," *The New Republic* 74 (1933), 311.

states.¹¹

Such reflections as these led Rosenfeld to rethink his position on jazz and other forms of semi-popular music that were redolent of the accelerated movements of the industrial-technological age. He also noted that the rise of music for percussion, and, in general, the greater role that composers assigned to the percussion section of the orchestra, followed from the influence of the jazz-bands that flourished in America after World War I. The new prominence of percussion, Rosenfeld thought, reflected “a certain unlyrical disposition characteristic of our time . . . some feeling of the homogeneity of mind and matter, which would grasp at the brute, indeterminate, material sonorities as its proper medium of expression.”¹²

The highly percussive character of Varese's music was not the only evidence of a more meaningful modern American music in the 1930s. In his essays on Aaron Copland, Charles Ives, and Roy Harris, Rosenfeld avoided references to the latest discoveries of the physical sciences. But, as with Varese, he still heard these composers as embodying the most positive elements in American culture, particularly the ability to absorb, accept, and integrate the most seemingly disparate elements in American life. Between 1931 and 1935 Rosenfeld consistently celebrated the new works of Copland and Harris, together with the entire corpus of Ives's work, as authentic reflections of America's “underground reality.” In two essays for *The New Republic*, he once again acclaimed Harris's work as significantly American. A few years earlier, in *An Hour With American Music*, he had been the first critic to recognize the importance of Harris, even though Arthur Farwell's essay on Harris of 1931 is generally cited as the first favorable

¹¹ Ibid., 310.

¹² Ibid.

review of Harris's music. In "Harris Before the World," written in 1934, Rosenfeld spoke of the grandeur of Harris's music and noted that his quartets and sextets were "full of the musical objectifications of heroic feelings of life," including the sense of the tragic.¹³

For Rosenfeld, Harris was the "singer of tragic pioneer existences." His music evoked "the American plains and the lives of the millions who hoped, struggled and suffered on them." But more than recalling the tragic grandeur of pioneer life on the open plains, Harris's music had a "lavishness" associated with warmth and full-bodiedness, that particularly impressed Rosenfeld and which seemed to recall a distinctive national consciousness. To Rosenfeld, the dynamism of Harris's music came from its faithful expression of the American soul, "the fresh reconstitution of musical elements in accordance with personal and American ways of feeling." In specific terms, this meant Harris's intuitive responsiveness to those "musical elements" of his immediate regional and cultural back ground: "the jogging, loose-jointed, irregular cowboy and wild country-fiddler rhythms"; the "Scottish-Irish frontier folksong"; and "the Moody and Sankey hymnody." Harris allowed the basic materials of American life to speak through the genius of his craft. Like Sherwood Anderson, he had given voice to the American folk.¹⁴

Immediately following his article, "Harris Before the World," Rosenfeld reviewed Harris's *Symphony, 1933*, and wrote of its "tragic vision" through its tracing of the movement of our national experience, from the initial celebration of the pioneer spirit, through the

¹³ Rosenfeld, *An Hour With American Music*, 120-1; "Aaron Copland's Growth," *The New Republic* 67 (1931), 46-7; "New American Music," *Scribner's* 89 (1931), 624-32; "A Musical Tournament," *The New Republic* 71 (1932), 119-21; "Charles E. Ives," *The New Republic* 71 (1932), 262-4; "The Assault on the Battery," *The New Republic* 77 (1934), 309-10; "Harris Before the World," *The New Republic* 78 (1934), 364-5.

¹⁴ Rosenfeld, "Harris Before the World," 365.

characteristic Ryder-like moods of “baffled spiritual aspiration” and the “feeling of limitless distance,” to the “young, new sense of the far end of human aspiration and endeavor.” Even though Harris himself said that his work embodied “the pathos which seems to underlie all human existence,” Rosenfeld stressed what he heard as its positive, and tragic, dimension. Rosenfeld wrote that *Symphony, 1933* combined the spirit of national adventure and physical exuberance with tragic self-knowledge. The result was a work of art that pictured the possibilities of a new American, sober and matured by his “own disappointment and grief.”¹⁵

Whereas Rosenfeld heard Harris’s music as representative of life in rural America with its background of folk songs, Protestant hymns, and pioneer aspirations, he heard Copland as a composer who put his audience in contact with the undercurrent of modern, urban life. Both Harris and Copland, then, covered a wide spectrum of the American experience in their music.

In the early 1930s Rosenfeld was particularly attentive to Copland's *Piano Variations*, an austere and difficult work that followed closely after compositions that had been obviously influenced by Copland's response to jazz. The American music critics writing for the daily press received the *Piano Variations* unenthusiastically, but Rosenfeld saw its significance as containing the essence of modernism. Many years later in fact Copland would cite Rosenfeld's “bravery” for taking a lone stand in support of the *Variations*. But Rosenfeld had more than Copland’s reputation in mind; within the spare framework of the *Variations* he heard the fragmented, solitary cells of modern life portrayed. To him, Copland expressed the subliminal reality of American urban life. And, more important, the entire work suggested to him a

¹⁵ Rosenfeld, “Tragic and American,” *The New Republic* 81 (1934), 47.

harmonizing and unifying influence with things as they are.¹⁶

Two things here were important to Rosenfeld. One was to accept all the apparently discordant elements of modern urban life—the bare, metallic sounds and the impersonality of massed human existence; the other was to integrate them into a transcendent unity. This was the resolution Rosenfeld sought for American life. Thus, when in 1932 he wrote a lengthy essay on the neglected works of Charles Ives, he stressed the many areas of American experience that Ives incorporated into his compositions: American hymn tunes, dance tunes, Negro chants, ragtime, band music, as well as programmatic references to the Shaw Monument in Boston Common, the Housatonic River at Stockbridge, Massachusetts (both from *Three Places in New England*), and works inspired by the ideas of Thoreau and Emerson (the Concord Sonata). Rosenfeld admired Ives's unabashed willingness to use music for its extra-musical associations. Here was a composer who not only recognized the variety and richness of American Culture, but unhesitatingly expressed its complexity in a new musical form. This complexity of American life, Rosenfeld argued, was most effectively represented by Ives's very personal use of atonality and polytonality: the American heritage, psychologically and historically, was so dense and thickly textured that all its components had to be expressed simultaneously before its true effect could be imaginatively felt. This was why the technique of polytonality, which Ives had supposedly discovered and used before Anton Webern and Arnold Schoenberg used it, was such an appropriate one for his purposes. As Rosenfeld put it in his first essay on Ives, "Ives had to give an integration of many hitherto disparate layers of American experience, through the medium of tone." Polytonality, like Cubism, could produce many areas of experience

¹⁶Rosenfeld, "Aaron Copland's Growth," 47.

simultaneously.¹⁷

The year following his essay on Ives, Rosenfeld again stressed the unity-in-variety idea that characterized Ives's music (as well as that of Harris and Copland). In a review of a concert which featured some of Ives's 114 songs, Rosenfeld noted the rich variety of these songs and wrote that the very miscellaneousness of his output embodied an idea: "the old national belief that all things possessing breath of their own, no matter how dissimilar, are ultimately compatible."¹⁸

Accordingly, Rosenfeld quickly acknowledged the importance of Ives's music for the kind of American music that Rosenfeld sought. Through polytonality, Ives was able to provide an integration of various American experiences and, at the same time, express the national heritage in all its complexity. This was the kind of music that most truly expressed a unique Americanism. Rosenfeld heard Ives's music as an ultra sensitive register of past and present national experiences.

Perhaps Rosenfeld's clearest expression of Americanism lies in a passage from Rosenfeld's analysis of Ives's *Concord Sonata*. It shows not only Rosenfeld's critical and philosophical stance but shows how, for Rosenfeld, an artist could reflect and express the complex texture of American life.

The *Concord Sonata* is possibly the most intense and sensitive musical experience achieved by an American . . . it could be said that the work had transmitted its composer's experience, the comprehension of the forces and values of the Concord transcendentalist band. It was a nationalistic one, this experience: an American instance of the one vocal in all nationalistic music: that of the

¹⁷ Rosenfeld, "Charles E. Ives," 264.

¹⁸ Rosenfeld, "Two Native Groups," *The New Republic* 75 (1933), 310.

individual at the stage when, possibly in consequence of some activation of his inmost self, he comprehends his relationship not only to the present life of his group, race or nation, but to its very past. Imaginatively he grasps the forces and the values of the individual who existed on his soil before him, the forces and values of the group, race or nation incarnate in them; recognizing their survival in the best of himself.¹⁹

But the music of Ives, Copland, and Harris that Rosenfeld wrote on during the early 1930s was not wholly satisfying to Rosenfeld. Consequently, between late 1935 and 1938, he wrote very little musical criticism for any publication, including *The New Republic*. *The Discoveries of a Music Critic*, which he brought out in 1936, offered more evidence of Rosenfeld's feeling of unsettledness about American life. Rosenfeld's letter to Stieglitz during summer 1935 explained why he temporarily turned away from writing musical criticism:

The contemporary stuff no longer has my love, and I do not know whether I have anything really to say about the rest. I will of course still try to follow it, if for no other reason than my own education and I have confidence in this and that composer: but the people who have gone on in the great idealistic and optimistic tradition, and have affirmed life not only as it is but have also believed in the perfectability of man and expressed that faith, are not the musicians.²⁰

Some of the essays Rosenfeld wrote for *The New Republic*, only a few months before this letter to Stieglitz, indicate how dependent he was upon music that seconded his romantic expectations. In the 1930s Rosenfeld criticized pieces such as Virgil Thomson's *Four Saints in Three Acts*, Howard Hanson's *Merry Mount*, Robert Russell Bennett's *Maria Malibran*, and George Antheil's *Helen Retires* for squandering opportunities to create "a mythical home for the American spirit." During this period between 1934 and 1935, Rosenfeld listened for music that

¹⁹ Rosenfeld, "Ives Concord Sonata," *Modern Music* 16 (1939), 111-2.

²⁰ Rosenfeld to Stieglitz, 22 August 1935, Rosenfeld Papers.

fulfilled his philosophical and nationalistic longings--music that was expansive, noble, and passionate. Instead, he was continually struck by the petty scale of most works. Moreover, the steady decline of a once-admired composer, Ernest Bloch, added to Rosenfeld's pessimistic mood. In a review of Bloch's *Avodath Hakodesh* in 1934, Rosenfeld focused on the composer's loss of passion and inability to generate sufficient feeling; therefore Rosenfeld finally, but gently, buried his old friend while quietly reminding the reader that many composers deteriorate before they die.²¹

During the early 1930s Rosenfeld, like all writers, felt compelled to address the dispiriting conditions brought on by the widespread financial collapse of the West. Although Rosenfeld was a political liberal, his liberalism was informed by a strain of economic conservatism that had its roots in his German-Jewish background. To some degree his dependence on the income of his private inheritance did not dispose him to suffer Communism or Socialism lightly. But more important, Rosenfeld's conception of art's spiritual dimension made him automatically suspicious of any artist who placed his talent in the service of "earthly" ideologies. Accordingly, he remained aloof from the central ideological struggles of the 1930s, except for attending a few political rallies.

What appeared to many as Rosenfeld's political indifference drew fire from other writers, and his friends. In part to respond to these attacks, in 1933 he wrote a now famous essay for *Scribner's*, "Authors and Politics." In it Rosenfeld expressed in some detail his position on the long-standing debate on the proper relation between art and politics. Rosenfeld was primarily

²¹ Rosenfeld, "Prepare for the Saints," "Preachment Against Puritans," "The Last Helen," and "The Bloch Sacred Service," *The New Republic* 78 (1934), 48, 75, 132, 310.

concerned with correcting leftist artists and critics for overlooking, or refusing to recognize, the essential purpose of the artist.

The artist has a prophetic role to play in society . . . the forces of life have entrusted him with the sponsorship of certain attitudes toward the world important to the race....It never has been, and it will never be the function of the artist to espouse the cause of "the world" and to defend its special interests. These special interests have everlastingly been those of power and booty....What he naturally champions is something the world is not interested in: the use and administration of material possessions in sympathy with "vision."²²

Rosenfeld underscored the communal aspect of this "vision," which is a revelation of the mysterious, divine forces of truth. The stress here is upon the vision of these forces bringing the artist into close contact with other men and the whole world. The effect, ultimately, is to nullify the artist's ego. To have the vision of these universal forces is to subordinate oneself to the need to represent them and to inform the people of the vision. "Vision of [the mysterious forces] brings the visionary into touch not only with the immediate instruments of his revelation, but with other men and the whole world. Where they appear and are felt and known there is no longer an 'I' and a 'thou.' There is only something wonderful working itself out in all men and things. There is only a 'we': perhaps an 'It.'"²³

In contrast to the ascendant Marxism of many New York artists and intellectuals during the 1930s, Rosenfeld offered a spiritual communitarianism in which the divine is revealed to the artist through "free contact with other individuals." Such contact inspires the artist to represent the divine forces through artistic creation. The creativity allows the artist not only to understand

²² Rosenfeld, "Authors and Politics," *Scribner's* 93 (1933), 318.

²³ *Ibid.*

fully at last what has been revealed to him, but also to make men see and recognize the truth. The result is true social unity, an social organicism, and idea that Rosenfeld brought forward from *The Seven Arts* group. "To move people toward [the artist] in the spirit in which he himself has been moved toward them." Such was what Rosenfeld proposed as the primary function of art. The artist's struggle directs itself at, and ends with, the "representation and the social acceptance of the thing which he has 'seen.'"²⁴

Rosenfeld did not object to music with a "social message" so long as the message was not in opposition to his philosophical idealism. Much of the social protest in the 1930s, whether from the left or the right, irritated him greatly because it proceeded from the assumption of what he called social victimization. From the beginning of his career as a critic, Rosenfeld had always railed against any philosophy or aesthetic doctrine that involved the slightest resignation before putatively blind historical forces. For him, the Communists' emphasis on economic determinism as the principal force in history, and their picture of man-as-victim, was utterly repugnant; it seemed to denigrate the divinely inspired will of man. At the same time, Rosenfeld was in favor of culturally relevant art; he did not want to downgrade any work that contributed to social cohesiveness.

Although Rosenfeld's central convictions about the relation of art and politics remained unchanged, he refined them in a series of essays on various topics that followed "Authors and Politics." For instance, in an article on Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex*, in 1931, Rosenfeld attacked the opera's pessimistic thesis in which man's dreary position in the universe was blamed on an unfavorable environment. This view, according to Rosenfeld, was nothing more than

²⁴ Ibid., 320.

rationalization for one's lack of nerve; it expressed a "timid and inhibited responsiveness."²⁵

Rosenfeld also had to confront a new version of the debate on art and social utility prompted by the rise of the *Gebrauchsmusik* movement. This so-called experiment in musical democracy attempted to make art for the people by making it accessible to a grassroots audience. For Rosenfeld such music rested its wide appeal on "the conventionality of its means" but "it simultaneously bent [the conventional forms] to communicate a new content or feeling." By arguing in this way Rosenfeld established the aesthetic integrity of *Gebrauchsmusik*. He believed that operas like Kurt Weill's *Down in the Valley*, for instance, quite legitimately served ends beyond musical ones and were in harmony with recent trends that sought a genuinely "socially purposeful" art. Indeed, Rosenfeld thought that such an art had an important future, especially in the works of Dimitri Shostakovich. Rosenfeld's discovery of Shostakovich rekindled his interest in Russian composers, who he celebrated from the start of his career as a music critic (especially in *Musical Portraits*) as most successful in articulating the sort of uncontrived nationalism he listened for in the music of American composers.²⁶

But just three months following Rosenfeld's favorable article on *Gebrauchsmusik* and Shostakovich as its most promising practitioner. Rosenfeld began to worry about the implications of Shostakovich's emphasis on the social question. In Shostakovich's opera *Lady Macbeth of Mzensk*, Rosenfeld discovered a political message that was not at all easy for him to accept. "The conception of 'social victimization'" Rosenfeld argued, "is repellant to decidedly individualistic existences and the feeling born of them, since it is a rationalization impelled by the wish to

²⁵ Rosenfeld, "Oedipus Rex, Cocteau and Stravinsky," *The New Republic* 66 (1931), 357.

²⁶ Rosenfeld, "Gebrauchsmusik," *The New Republic* 80 (1934), 214-5.

remove from the individual's shoulders the individual's greatest pride, his self-responsibility.”

In the debate on art and society that raged during the 1930s in America, Rosenfeld was caught in the familiar bind between the public demand for a socially responsive art and the dangers that would attend upon an art that expressed a morally deficient social message. Therefore, he praised Aaron Copland's opera for high schools, *The Second Hurricane*, for teaching an acceptable doctrine, the value of social unity. “For out of what vortex does music come,” he wrote, “if not out of a feeling of sociality, a sense of a common experience and a human solidarity?” Yet Rosenfeld condemned other works for stressing unacceptable social and political doctrines.²⁷

Towards a Theory of Improvisation and Culture

Rosenfeld had always celebrated innovation and development in artistic expressions and regarded spontaneity and instinct as important elements in the making of art. It seemed to him that the integrity of contemporary art, and particularly music, was constantly being threatened by the tendency to neglect the impromptu and the spontaneous in favor of excessive reliance on an uncritical traditionalism and uniformity. Rosenfeld's almost feverish attempts to keep up with the latest in literary and musical fashions can be partly explained by his philosophical conviction that the world is characterized chiefly by continuously changing expressions of eternal verities. Not only was it appropriate for the forms and styles of art to evolve and vary, but the performance of the canon of musical compositions ought to be subject to “the suggestions of the moment.” Indeed, Rosenfeld's lifelong interest in such creative spontaneity led him to a late

²⁷ Rosenfeld, “In the Adolescent's World,” *The New Republic* 91 (1937), 48.

interest in improvisation as a means to artistic freshness and relevance.

As noted earlier Rosenfeld's later essays lacked the sense of urgency that marked his earlier works of the late 1910s and 1920s. His writing of the 1930s and 1940s contained greater sustained analysis, and a dispassionate objectivity, that served to clarify their sometimes obtuse, metaphysical content. Indeed, the disciplined restraint and more limited focus of his later writing allowed him to isolate and to concentrate on a particular element—in this case the practice of improvisation—and to recognize its importance to his critical project. In the 1930s, Rosenfeld became more friendly to jazz and blues, precisely for the value they set on improvisation. Like Rosenfeld, many contemporary critics of jazz and blues spoke not only about the musical necessity of improvisation but also about its importance for sustaining one's sense of selfhood, and by extension the identity of a community and a national culture. In this context, the jazz artist is a heroic figure fighting for himself but also for his audience; the destiny of both, so the argument went, were inextricably dependent upon the relative "success" of the improvisation.

James Baldwin dramatized this understanding of improvisation in his short story, "Sonny's Blues"; its theme resembles closely Rosenfeld's ideas about improvisation. The musician-protagonist of the story is participating in an important jam session. His survival, his search for freedom, is connected with his capacity to keep the music "new, at the risk of ruin, destruction, madness, and death, in order to find new ways to make us listen." The narrator, the musician's brother, begins to understand while witnessing the session that while the blues are universal, they have different "aspects in every country, and a new depth in every generation." Such is the significance of "keeping it new"; our survival as distinct selves is bound up with our ability to find personally significant ways to manipulate basic material. And in the story, Sonny

plays his blues as he first goes “all the way back” and begins with a central motif and gradually “makes it his.” As part of the audience, the narrator participates in a kind of communal revelation. As Sonny works in perfect obedience to his own spirit and self, he succeeds in enveloping others in his expression and helps them toward their own identity. But Sonny's “success” is involved with his audience's capacity to listen. “Freedom lurked around us and I understood, at last, that he could help us to be free if we would listen, that he would never be free until we did.”²⁸

Perhaps Rosenfeld's clearest explication of the value he placed in improvisation appeared in a 1941 article for *Modern Music*, “A Plea for Improvisation.” In it Rosenfeld explained the process by which the need to change form in art is dictated by human, cultural, and national needs. As usual, in this essay Rosenfeld was intent upon revealing the interrelation of the aesthetic and the cultural. He asserted that the practice of improvisation is in harmony with “a profound inner necessity”—a natural human desire to express, by performing or witnessing art, certain latent but immediate needs. “The entire pertinence, relevance, usefulness of music flows from its capacity to satisfy, along with the more consistent needs of soul of the performer and the audience, their more actual needs.” These actual, but continually varying and momentary, needs engaged Rosenfeld's attention throughout this essay. Music, he argued, is so beautifully equipped to respond to and express those vagaries of our emotions; indeed, music is amenable “to subtle variations of tempi and dynamics and fresh modelings of phrases and periods. With these variations the performer accommodates the form and the substance to the suggestions of

²⁸James Baldwin, “Sonny's Blues,” in *Going to Meet the Man* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1968), 121.

the moment, the immediate, unprepared, unpremeditated impulses which, after all, possess an equal right with the logic which links together as one our continually diverse impulsions." This momentary applicability of music, Rosenfeld emphasized, allows the conductor or performer to express what a given work means to him at the moment he is playing it, "the sense that every real artist is supposed to give." The problem comes when the artist suppresses these momentary suggestions, "born of his own present state and that of his audience," out of a false loyalty to the composer, and dilutes the work by ignoring its capacity to relate to our changing experience. As Rosenfeld suggests in this article, improvisation can satisfy the needs of both the performer and the audience, thus bringing them together in an important way. The very process has both a communal dimension and great cultural relevance. Music which reflects the individual needs of both the performer and the audience is peculiarly indigenous to their common culture; it is music whose form evolved from this culture's characteristics.²⁹

In "Americanism in American Music" (1940) also published in *Modern Music*, Rosenfeld had examined the near-mystical relation between the form of American music and its surroundings. The thesis of this article was that the form, or technical "grammar," of a culture's music (the relation of tonic and dominant, major-minor systems, and so on) must be "peculiarly adjustable to the expression of feeling" under that culture's conditions of life and favorable to expressing this feeling; otherwise its composers, not to mention its performers and audience, will be deprived of "originality and perfect truthfulness to their own feeling." To Rosenfeld, the beauty of improvisation was that its very existence allowed for the peculiar adjustment he refers

²⁹ Rosenfeld, "Plea for Improvisation," *Modern Music* 19 (1941), 12.

to, that flexibility in music which is forever bending to the demands of its particular culture.³⁰

In a 1926 article on Gertrude Stein, Rosenfeld had already begun to work on the special problem that the act of improvisation encompasses, particularly in regard to its capacity to satisfy the individual's all-important "actual" needs. The article clarifies to a great extent the dimension and character of these individual needs, which—while seemingly fragmentary, momentary, and elusive—constituted a central component of the human being. It is also clear from this article that Stein's experience with language made an enormous impression on Rosenfeld at the time, helping to clarify a problem he had long struggled with, namely, the nature of artistic creativity and its relevance to problems of cultural and personal identity.³¹

Rosenfeld argued that Stein's work anticipated and in fact directly influenced the whole movement of modern poetry toward recognizing the relative limitation of language and "its competency to communicate only what lies between the thinking mind and the objects present to it." The thrust of modern poetry is toward "the location of the field of poetry in the floating space between the poet and the object brought into relation to him in the quick movement"—the interaction between artist and object. In this interaction, the artist brings his or her whole self into contact with the object, not just his or her mind, which depends on ordinary language to describe what it sees. The whole self contains the individual rhythm, the inner life--what Rosenfeld calls a whole "suite of involuntary attitudes." Thus, the "floating space" that Rosenfeld refers to is filled with responses and feelings toward the object which we have no immediate, denotative words for. By locating the field of poetry in this space, the interaction of

³⁰ Rosenfeld, "Americanism in American Music," *Modern Music* 17 (1940), 231.

³¹ Rosenfeld, "Gertrude Stein," *The Saturday Review of Literature* 2 (1926), 462.

the poet with the object is stressed; his or her total and immediate response is to be evoked. This, of course, includes those consistently varying and momentary "actual" needs that Rosenfeld felt music was so capable of responding to.³²

But Rosenfeld's article on Stein is noteworthy also because in it, as in no other article, Rosenfeld strains to explain how words can perform the same function that music seems to do so naturally. Rosenfeld's concept of "quick movement" is central to his point. Often unpremeditated and involuntary, this movement "places all facts in solution and bids the artist reconstruct them." The artist, then, uses words primarily as volumes, accents, and effects that express reality rhythmically. What he or she sees is dynamic and changing, so words must have this capacity to evoke movement and rhythm. In this connection, Stein's writing seemed to Rosenfeld to partake of qualities closely akin to the most subtle qualities of music. "Words themselves," he wrote, "have come to have dynamics for her; abstract qualities of movement and direction, weight and lightness, positive and indefinite tendencies." What emerges is writing closely allied to Cubism, writing which evokes a three-dimensional world of continuous movement, sliding planes, and changing dimensions. The complex rhythm that accompanies the poet's relation to objects and people is expressed through words, which Stein and her followers use to describe "volumes in combinations, dispositions and sequences" that express these relations. The very nature of our diverse impulses requires a highly suggestive, flexible, and dynamic art form to express them.³³

In line with Rosenfeld's romantic-idealist loyalties, he quickly asserted that Stein's work, and the poetic movement that was heir to it, produced a "personal democratic American

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

literature” close to the intention of Whitman, in that it invited “the individual rhythm of the writer, his way of moving, and profound, inner, subconscious life.” This kind of literature has the quality of valuing the subjective element in each individual, that inner reality which is unrelated to ordinary reality and which resists the prying of logic. Later, in the 1940s, Rosenfeld applied these ideas to the role of improvisation in music. Improvisation he began to understand recognizes the necessity of individual interpretation and the significance of changing relationships. But, in the Stein article, he was emphasizing that through the “quick movement,” or in the interaction of poet and object, the poet was led to discover his potential or peculiar pattern of feeling. And his effort to express this “blind rhythmical state” produces “the poet’s individual experience, vocabulary, and response to life, and the expression of the universal principle with which he harmonizes.”³⁴

Much like later writers on the question of jazz dynamics, Rosenfeld saw all this movement, rhythm, spontaneity, and instinct as operating against a background of flexible convention--the culture’s musical grammar and particular structure of language--and timeless, fixed principles. In practice, the improviser works against a known base in a composer’s music; the composer, in turn, works against a static background of nature’s changeless laws. Generally speaking, the whole idea of movement, individuality, and “becoming” against a static and universal background was as congenial to Rosenfeld’s concept of reality as it was to Stein’s, particularly the latter’s concept of the “continuous present.” “The only thing that is different from one time to another,” Rosenfeld wrote, “is what is seen.” Moreover, Rosenfeld read Stein as a writer who attempted to correlate and combine the parts of language with the tradition which

³⁴ Ibid.

recognized that “the world is one nature, flesh moving into flesh and becoming spirit in motion, a great ever-changing, ever-remaining body.”³⁵

True to his romantic sensibilities, Rosenfeld argued that Stein’s conception of reality harmonizes with his own view. “The flow of which the universe is full is mere equilibration, the steady balancing of the swing.” For Rosenfeld, the great significance of Stein was that, while recognizing these concepts, and most of all the limits of language, she insisted nevertheless that language communicated the “direct feeling” of things, that rhythmic pattern that is created in the artist by his interaction with his environment. Therefore, when Rosenfeld once defined Beauty as the “apprehension of changeless law through the individual adventure,” he was attempting to celebrate the revelatory nature of human existence and its quest for equilibrium amid the tension and uncertainty that accompanies individual innovation, experiment, and improvisation.³⁶

In his ongoing refinement of the artist’s function and purpose in the human community, Rosenfeld insisted on seeing the artist in the context of the ever-moving and constant flux of things--a world in which relations are forever changing. The artist must be equal to the task of recognizing the changes and expressing them as they presently exist. In doing so, he beats the “rhythm of his age, and the truth of life, the relationships of things which is different in every age and perhaps at every hour . . . he forces the system of relationships which has to be said at this very moment, and unexpressed prevents the daily intercourse, to come to light. He holds the mirror up to men.” In these sentences, written in the middle of the 1920s, lay the seed for

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Rosenfeld, *Men Seen*, 62.

Rosenfeld's more fully theory of the value of improvisation.³⁷

To be sure, Rosenfeld was not always explicit and clear about it, but he always valued innovation and improvisation across the arts. Thus, it remains puzzling that in his early years he minimized the cultural and musical significance of jazz, the Negro spiritual, and the folk song as pure forms in their own right. For a critic such as Rosenfeld who was so often sensitive to the inventions of indigenous traditions and the primitive and vernacular imagination, Rosenfeld was very slow to treat these musical genres as anything but material for more formal and ostensibly higher musical compositions. Perhaps his interest in musicology and literary genres that blossomed in the 1930s and matured in the 1940s opened his mind to the potential value of different kinds of musical invention. But this late interest in improvisation did not come before Rosenfeld had thought through where jazz and the folk song fit in the scheme of America's musical expression. Rosenfeld's willingness to rethink his position on these genres, and especially jazz, is a tribute to Rosenfeld's intellectual honesty.

Underlying these developments in Rosenfeld's thinking on indigenous forms such as jazz, is the persistent tension in his mind between a faith in people and a lack of confidence in them, between his interest in primitive and native art and his abhorrence of mass culture. His early indifference to jazz and folk songs may have been simply a symptom of the side of Rosenfeld that feared the herd. Yet, to his credit, he never dismissed such musical forms as irrelevant sources of inspiration for formal composers as long as these composers aimed beyond these forms and were not limited by them. Ironically, early in his search for the organic in American

³⁷ Ibid.

creative expression, Rosenfeld had rejected as derivative and not autochthonous such native American musical forms as the spiritual and the folk song. He had argued in *An Hour With American Music* that the peculiarities of each were “traceable to extra-American traditions” and that “America was settled by people developed beyond the stage of civilization that is productive of folk songs.” Here he referred not only to the predominantly Scottish and Irish origin of many American ballads, but to his conviction that true indigenous art reflects a certain cultural style, or condition of life, that is relative to the particular stage that culture has attained. In his attempts to sweep away the false claims of non-derivative and uncongenial traditional art forms, he too hastily dismissed much art that he had believed did not reflect a culture's stage of growth. In this connection, he reasoned that because Americans had never lived in a culture that was primarily communal and closely attached to the soil, they could not claim the folk song as a relevant part of their cultural grammar.³⁸

Furthermore, in the 1920s Rosenfeld was suspicious of purveyors of the merely exotic and picturesque in American art. These he viewed with alarm as a temptation awaiting composers who were keenly aware of the emerging popularity of “Jazz Americain” in the 1920s, especially in France. The issue lay not so much in jazz as a legitimate motivating musical force as in self-consciously using these materials because of their modernity. In particular, he was concerned that American composers, in trying to impress their counterparts in Europe, would submit to “ready-made formulas before starting off on their adventures.”³⁹

Nevertheless, in the 1920s Rosenfeld had little sympathy for straight jazz. In 1923, for

³⁸ Rosenfeld, *An Hour With American Music*, 29, 31.

³⁹ Rosenfeld, “Jazz,” *The Dial* 75 (1923), 519.

example, Rosenfeld declared flatly that jazz was an inferior musical product. "Jazz is a series of jerks. In rhythm, you do not have to be conscious of the one two, one two; of the one, two, three, one, two, three.... But in jazz, to get your pleasure, you have to count the beat. Ten minutes [of jazz] used as entertainment, makes a bore. For dance music, it cannot compare with Viennese waltzes." Still, because of his interest in an American music, Rosenfeld could not dismiss jazz as a motivating force, since the ideal artist must immerse himself in the stream of things and respond to what he would describe later as "new, original authoritative promptings."⁴⁰

During the 1920s, Rosenfeld held that jazz might be a useful source of motifs for "serious" composition. The successful modern American composer would not consciously and deliberately seek to employ jazz rhythms; rather the material of jazz would seek out the composer. Only when jazz polyrhythms are an intrinsic part of the composer's background and cultural environment will his or her use of jazz idioms be natural and legitimate. In this sense, the unselfconscious use of jazz motifs becomes a kind of natural cultural reflex as the composer works with his culture's "characteristic phraseology." In short, the musical material expresses itself through the composer.⁴¹

Three years later, in the first of his many articles on Aaron Copland, Rosenfeld applauded Copland for his easy submission to "the raw stuff of nature." In reviewing a performance of the composer's *Music for the Theatre*, Rosenfeld found it exhilarating that such a young American could outshine other contemporary Europeans on the program simply because he recognized the principle that "the artist's relation to life, letting a vital impulse, a living rhythm coming as from

⁴⁰ Rosenfeld, *An Hour With American Music*, 127-8; "Jazz," 518.

⁴¹ Rosenfeld, "Jazz," 518.

the soil pass through him, remains the sole medium of wonders.” The strong points of Copland's composition, in contrast to the weaker parts, include just those portions where the music sprouts from the jazz repertory, but what quality there is in these portions is “bare of the formal intention of jazz and jazzy in quite unconscious fashion.” Being more “intentionally jazzy,” the other jazz episodes are musically inferior. Therefore, in this article, Rosenfeld still exhibited only a grudging tolerance of jazz, as he asserts that “jazz is too exclusively the product of second-rate feelings.” But the American composer has no choice but to represent the forces of American life and try to interpret them in a significant way.⁴²

In an essay written only a year after his first review of Copland's work, Rosenfeld already was moving toward a more serious and discriminating position on jazz. Although he was still concentrating on jazz as an ingredient in formal music, and not talking about its legitimacy in and of itself, it is important that he alludes to the possibility of jazz fulfilling one of his prime requisites for all significant art: that it transcend the plane of things by exhibiting vision, the chief agent of aesthetic form. Rosenfeld condemns George Gershwin's music, with its limp jazz motifs, for lacking this vision. He also attacks the attempts by Stravinsky, Milhaud, and Hindemith “to mint values for art from the polyrhythms and colorations of commercial jazz” by transposing the idioms of jazz bodily into their compositions rather than abstracting their characteristic elements. But Copland “has daringly [in his first piano concerto] utilized jazz polyrhythms and colorations in an interest entirely transcending that of the commercial jazz composers.”⁴³

⁴² Rosenfeld, “Copland,” *The Dial* 80 (1926), 175.

⁴³ Rosenfeld, “Ragtime: Copland's Concerto,” *The Dial* 82 (1927), 357.

In this essay of 1927 Rosenfeld begins to distinguish between the merits and demerits of jazz as inspiration for formal music. Even more significantly, he finally alludes to the possibilities of pure jazz as something other than a motif for a more formal composition. Anticipating one of the values he will later attach to jazz, Rosenfeld attacks the “commercial jazz composers”--by which he meant those formal composers who use jazz elements in their work--for an excessively tepid use of jazz's characteristic polyrhythms. In order to placate a public averse to rhythm and dependent upon a predictable and static beat, these composers avoid those very expressive qualities of jazz that could liberate the public. Their timidity causes them to dilute the vigor of jazz polyrhythms by constant reference to traditional and predictable musical rhythms. This practice, in fact, brings out that side of the herd-audience that Rosenfeld despised and which, to him, threatened the spiritual development that his criticism aimed to cultivate.⁴⁴

Rosenfeld's response in this essay reveals a growing, yet still involuntary, appreciation for the possibilities of music composed or performed outside the traditional concert hall. Ineffective use of jazz material, characterized by mechanical transplanting of jazz themes, alternated with frequent use of conventional non-jazz rhythms, does nothing but “bring into play the most undifferentiated strata of the human being in its animal and mechanical manifestations. Born out of the American's desire to escape individuation and the choice, values, and responsibilities of the individual existence, it periodically permits him to become the blind integer of a crowd, or the will-less twitching piece of a machine.” On the other hand, while the jazz in the work of the commercial jazz composers merely calls for an unthinking, automatic response, Copland's first piano concerto “liberates the characteristic jazz rhythms, letting them

⁴⁴ Ibid.

develop fully in their own spirit.” Rosenfeld observes that Copland, by abstracting the unique idioms of jazz, is able to retain jazz's capacity to release the audience's “actual” needs, peculiar to each individual. “The 'I don't give a damn' of jazz remains, releasing feeling instead of confining it on the undifferentiated, automatic plane.” By retaining the essence of jazz, Copland has been true to its spirit and allowed it to make its unique contribution. “The trombone slides; the saxophone whines and chuckles; but all the machinery of vulgarization sounds forth with tremendous laughter that lets spirit free above the masses vulgarities of life.”⁴⁵

In merely four years, Rosenfeld had come a long way from his earlier rejection of jazz as an inferior form of music. By the end of the 1920s, he had expanded his musical horizons to include an idiom that he once considered inferior dance music. Now he saw that jazz contained qualities that he will attach later to improvisation: the capacity to satisfy certain needs of soul, to supply vision or some view of the whole of life. Indeed, by 1933 Rosenfeld could see all music as having the potential of offering vision, even music that he once would have dismissed contemptuously as a product of mass culture. “Nothing which lacks vision may logically be called music, even *vulgar* music. A music has it. Whether vulgar or elevated, it presents a picture of reality, a feeling of things as a whole, through the medium of tone.”⁴⁶

Accordingly, the field of Rosenfeld's critical inquiry continued to broaden and diversify in the late 1920s and early 1930s. But even while he ranged over an increasingly large area of American culture, he still retained his idealistic awareness of certain basic conditions. As he viewed art in the context of constantly changing forms, and appealing to constantly shifting

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 357-8.

⁴⁶ Rosenfeld, “No Chabrier,” *The New Republic* 73 (1933), 218.

human needs, he saw this legitimate and necessary movement always anchored to “ever-remaining” bodies. Some kind of traditional element was essential to sustain changeless values. Even in the transitional essay on Copland's piano concerto, he saw its vivid expression of jazz elements as a condition of its attachment to such permanent values. “As in certain writings by contemporary Americans, [the concerto's] demotic idiom is so combined with the traditional means of communication that it sustains ultimate values.” Art must have its necessary focal point, its unchanging element, which is needed to clarify and define its experimental components that reflect the soul, or inner reality.⁴⁷

The expressiveness of art, Rosenfeld seemed to indicate, comes from its ability to press upon the limits of possibilities while still maintaining its connection with form, tradition, and the past. It also comes from sustaining the paradoxical relations between a call to limitlessness and an awareness of limitations, the ecstasy associated with possibility and potential, and the pain associated with discipline and the realization of limits. Out of these tensions, Rosenfeld believed, great art comes forth.

It is at this point in his career that Rosenfeld's lifelong attempts to resolve the paradox of human existence--a paradox embodied so acutely in art--reached a new level of effort and entered a much wider field of inquiry for Rosenfeld. Early in the 1930s, he began to see certain literary genres as expressive of that interior reality that revealed itself in so many forms and which he was so engaged in making distinct to his audience. This reality embraced Whitman's “self” and the individual's actual needs to become at once distinctive yet bound to a universal element. Rosenfeld's new searches were designed to illuminate this reality; they led him to examine, in

⁴⁷ Rosenfeld, “Ragtime: Copland's Concerto,” 358.

critical detail, such widely differing genres as the dithyrambic novel and the traditional fairy tale. These forms he saw as representing the varying but changeless dimensions of interior reality--fusing humor and pathos, fantasy and earthfastness, the sensual and intellectual.

It is not surprising that Rosenfeld's interest at this time focused on the work of Henry Miller, who was just beginning to come into public prominence. Rosenfeld's interest was partly aesthetic and partly personal. The circumstances of his own life during the early 1930s were such that the age-old conflict between the centripetal and centrifugal forces of life--those driving for release and threatening old unities and those imposing control--presented itself with a new vividness.

Miller's early works seemed to Rosenfeld to be a splendid dramatization of the essential unity that underlies the demonical. Miller's characters immerse themselves in the "chaos" of life which appears disintegrative yet is borne by a "primordial unity." The surface manifestation of this unity reveals all the pain and contradictions of human life. Accordingly, the viewer or reader is both attracted by the "lurid poetry and color" of modern life and repelled by its incomprehensible pain. This ambiguity, notes Rosenfeld, accounts for the tone of irony and nostalgia characteristic of Miller's works. Underlying this dual attitude and accounting for it is the artist's ability to comprehend the forces of disintegration--"lassitude, decomposition, frozen sexuality, ecstatic sensations of disgust"--and equally embrace "the hibernation of forces, the first tiny reemergence of light." Rosenfeld calls this wide-angle vision, this recognition of life's eternal swinging back and forth from death to life, a "vital rhythm ... the essence of literature."⁴⁸

Here again, Rosenfeld stresses the beat of life as a swinging, rhythmic motion, a

⁴⁸ Rosenfeld, "The Traditions of Henry Miller," *The Nation* 149 (1939), 502-3.

Stein-like “quick movement,” which the artist must attain--a fusion of antithetical elements which ordinary logic can never resolve. In fact, for Rosenfeld, Miller's recognition and even celebration of these opposing elements constitutes the heart of *Tropic of Capricorn*. The protagonist of the novel is seen not only as the seed of a new emerging life against the “frozen-rubble” background of Parisian Bohemia, but he is portrayed as a true *dithyrambic* hero. As such, he wilfully plunges into the maelstrom of human society, even while he sees the source of life in the eye of the storm. “He is a writer,” Rosenfeld says, “sharing their sterile riot but believing in himself. He starves and suffers for the sake of freedom to express his feelings of truth.”⁴⁹

Autobiography and Criticism

It is difficult to resist the autobiographical echoes in Rosenfeld's comments on Miller. Without taking away from his critical achievement in celebrating a relatively unknown writer, we can also appreciate the subjective elements that influence Rosenfeld's writing during the 1930s, especially his criticism of Miller.

The early and middle 1930s were not a happy time for Rosenfeld. His financial problems had intensified, and his sense of isolation from the mainstream of American critical writing had sharpened as he had letters of refusal from editors and publishers with increasing frequency. Along with these things went a general and pervasive feeling of inadequacy that appeared to overwhelm any attempt to hold to a fixed writing schedule. Closely associated with

⁴⁹ Ibid., 503.

this feeling was an extreme sensitivity to both private and public criticism. He wrote Stieglitz:

I undoubtedly irritate a great many people, but then a great many people are unconsciously prepared to be irritated, and cavil at three faults of grammar when thirty green fields stretch before them. At the same time, I wish these ignorant toadstools who climb into the positions on the papers whence they can do the loud speaking would not have the power to mortify me so. They don't shake my faith in the value of what I have held of worth; it's value in itself, of course; but by denying it a value in their world, half on the territory of "the artist" and half on that of ordinary efficient people, they manage to make me quite sick of life."

Rosenfeld, then, was not only irritated by what he regarded as the carping nature of adverse criticism, but also by its power to affect him and even his enthusiasm and gusto for life. In the early 1930s, this tendency became much more overt and insistent. To such criticism, often contained within letters of refusal from "unsympathetic" editors, he typically reacted with indignation and extreme petulance. He began to accuse his editors, including Malcolm Cowley of *The New Republic*, of lacking integrity and gratitude. Even his old standby, *The New Republic*, he believed, was trying to ease him out. "They're a shabby lot," complained Resented to Stieglitz, "they don't have any loyalty."⁵⁰

After Rosenfeld's death in 1946, Cowley addresses the issue of Rosenfeld's position in the literary world of the 1930s. He said that both he and Edmund Wilson had continually defended Rosenfeld against the other less sympathetic members of the *New Republic* staff. Though the staff had complained about Rosenfeld's style, he refused to alter it. So, Cowley writes, his musical criticisms, "the most generous and perceptive that were being written ... slowly disappeared from magazines of circulation." Even though Cowley's last point was correct, it is not entirely clear why he was not able to exert more influence in the editorial

⁵⁰ Rosenfeld to Stieglitz, 27 September 1934, Rosenfeld Papers.

decisions of the magazine, especially since he was such an important figure in his own right and one who apparently found Rosenfeld's work so "generous and perceptive."⁵¹

Perhaps the real answer to this question lies in Cowley's statements about Rosenfeld and his style earlier in the same article. Here he recalls that in his many disagreements with Rosenfeld, he found him to be an unusually stubborn and rigid adversary—a man who refused to admit he was wrong. In fact, Cowley regarded Rosenfeld's alleged obstinacy as the source of his refusal to jettison "his extravagantly bejeweled style long after the fashions had changed and prose was being worn without decorations." These observations seem to reflect Cowley's actual opinion of Rosenfeld more candidly and, perhaps, give more substance to the verity of Rosenfeld's suspicions.⁵²

The discouragement Rosenfeld suffered during the early 1930s had another cause: his dissatisfaction with the quality of his latest collection of critical essays, *Discoveries of a Music Critic*. Apparently, the experience of writing *Discoveries of a Music Critic* had left such a bad taste in his mouth that Rosenfeld considered abandoning musical criticism, not only because of his writing problems but because he had all but lost confidence in the direction of American music. In an attempt to break out of his malaise, Rosenfeld returned to writing fiction. During this period he habitually but politely refused invitations from Mumford and Stieglitz to spend time in Amenia and Lake George, excusing himself with the demands of a novel in progress. There is very little indication that Rosenfeld had any great hopes for his fiction, yet he saw in his creative efforts something which had to be expressed and which somehow sustained him at

⁵¹ Malcolm Cowley, "St. Martin's Cloak," in *Voyager in the Arts*, 134.

⁵² *Ibid.*

the same time. The product of his efforts toward a novel resulted in an unpublished manuscript, he tentatively entitled, *Concert in Rome*; it rests unfinished amid his others papers at Yale University.

Rosenfeld also turned his attention to literary genres. He published prolifically during the late 1930s in the mainstream American literary magazines. In part this outpouring of writing on form and genre resulted from Rosenfeld's interest in a "usable past" for the purposes of prompting a national spiritual revival. Under attack from the left and the right, liberal democracy was under great pressure to produce a culture worthy of European culture among other great cultures of the world. Such pressure was the impetus for new research and thinking on American culture by Lewis Mumford, Constance Rourke, Van Wyck Brooks, and Jacques Barzun. It seems also to have energized Rosenfeld; for as he approached fifty his intellectual interests expanded to include a whole new range of artistic subjects, from literary genres and Continental writing to folk songs and musicology.

The Critic and Scholar

It is apparent that Rosenfeld derived great incentive from his study of certain literary genres and a multitude of Continental writers like Arthur Rimbaud, Paul Claudel, Louis Aragon, and Charles Peguy. His description of these genres, literary movements, and artists often read like a defense of his own philosophical tendencies, which were always attempting to resolve the great contrarities of life (life and death, the sensual and the intellectual) by recognizing the presence of a single spirit in man and nature, or by pointing to some central principle, some unchanging foundation or truth, that underlay the flux, conflicts, and paradoxes

of existence. With his long-standing interest in Plotinus, Rosenfeld searched for examples of unity in diversity—a variation of the classical problem of the one and the many. Like the Whitman of *Democratic Vistas*, Rosenfeld was constantly haunted by “the threat of irreconcilable interiors,” the fear that the immense diversity of America had no common ground. With the financial depression threatening to fracture the nation, Rosenfeld looked to culture as a unifying principle.

A trip to a folk-song festival in the mountains of southwest Virginia in 1939 proved to be a particularly dramatic restorative. Here Rosenfeld encountered directly, perhaps for the first time, examples of a real grassroots musical tradition grounded in changeless essentials. He was drawn immediately to the setting and format of a festival of this sort, with its spontaneous and unselfconscious outpouring of native music in a community setting. The only wonder is that Rosenfeld had not attended such informal gatherings of unsophisticated musicians before. Here he was in Virginia listening to the scraping of the fiddles and the plucking of banjos. Obviously moved by the performances, Rosenfeld relates their effect on him in a characteristic fashion that was made familiar by the technique he used in his seminal articles for *The Dial* in the early 1920s on the Bethlehem, Pennsylvania Bach Festival and the Indian Corn Dance in New Mexico. The effect is typically one of revelation, a composite of many feelings which wash over the listener.

Suddenly, Rosenfeld feels an impending unity that is suggested by the traditional ballads, derived from Scottish border songs and English minstrelsy but indigenous to the area. The music gives him both a sense of the gritty soil, of hard earned existence, and a feeling of dignity, religion, and poetry. But more than this, the music includes not only a wide range of

immediate personal experience but also the history of much of our American heritage through its use of common musical techniques and dramatic themes, and its local expression of an agrarian culture attached to an earlier European one. All these ingredients remind Rosenfeld of music's capacity to express a variety of human traits, celebrating distinctly regional characteristics while pointing to a larger national synthesis.⁵³

In an article for *Modern Music* about this visit to Virginia, Rosenfeld traces the growth of the recent folk-song revival in the United States. By way of field recordings and the work of the Lomaxes, Rosenfeld arrives at the central hypothesis of his essay. What really interests him is that songs may presage a new nationalism or "introversion" on the part of American society. Rosenfeld supports this idea by citing certain historical evidence in which "past emotional discoveries of their folklore on the part of sophisticated societies have been tangential with occult revolutions in their consciousness tantamount to introversions." He argues that this can be a healthy movement, in which regional independence and national unity become not mutually exclusive conditions but interdependent ideals. The folk song, in effect, attracts people by virtue of its natural warmth, and then it "magnetizes them by virtue of its reflection, along with the images of old customs and ideas, of the traits, the beloved collective unity."⁵⁴

Thus, the ideal of unity in diversity continued to dominate Rosenfeld's new critical emphasis, as he continued to seek varied examples of individual creative expression which would reveal the dynamic presence of the organic principle. But he was not so smitten with this idea that he was blind to insidious elements in American life which would tend to work against

⁵³ Rosenfeld, "Folksong and Culture-Politics," *Modern Music* 17 (1939), 22.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 23

the possible (but, alas, no longer inevitable) national synthesis. In the case of the folk-song revival, "culture-politics" could assert itself and see the growth of rural regionalism and self-consciousness as part of a plan to save the "purity" of the area from the engulfing industrialism of the modern age.

As a Jew, Rosenfeld was on guard for the possibility of an emerging racism, particularly in the South, as the defenders of the local culture try to avoid the "infections" from the outside while the spiritual and economic salvation of the region become identified with the purity of bloodlines. Rosenfeld wonders aloud which way the process will go. Will it spread to a national level and be a foreshadow of a larger communalism and neighborly affection, or will it degenerate into regionalism and racism of a strictly local character? Meanwhile, Rosenfeld saw the American folksong as the very image of the American idea because it showed a Whitman-like "free interplay and interchange of groups and influences drawn from many parts."⁵⁵

Another curious facet of Rosenfeld's late renaissance, not unrelated to his revelation concerning the significance of the folk song, was his new interest in musicology. This was somewhat out of step with his frequent earlier habit of maligning the academic establishment and the methods of formal research. Rosenfeld was never one to show much interest in, or sympathy for, the organized world of scholarship. He had even gone out of his way to attack directly the "ineffectuality" of the university and the inhibiting nature of "intellectualism" on creative minds. But now, in 1939, Rosenfeld began to attend meetings and international congresses of the American Musicological Society. Part of this interest may have come from work for *Modern*

⁵⁵ Ibid., 24.

Music and *The Kenyon Review*, for which he was now a regular contributor. But the main reason derived from his recent interest in literary genres and his general desire to establish, for emerging contemporary artists, a background of historical knowledge which would provide a base from which they could work out of their own creative inventions. More than before, Rosenfeld began to emphasize the value of tradition and a disciplined view of history. After years of making caricatures out of many American figures and movements, especially the Puritans, Rosenfeld began to study Puritan psalmody. Wesley's hymns, and the fugueing tunes of early American composers like William Billings. His attendance at the meetings of the American Musicological Society directed the now receptive Rosenfeld to these early musical subjects. Also, the society's "wholesale recognition," as Rosenfeld put it, of folk songs undoubtedly inspired his visit to the Virginia mountains in 1939.⁵⁶

Once more taking his lead from Van Wyck Brooks's *America's Coming-of-Age*, Rosenfeld now saw a potentially fatal highbrow-lowbrow chasm dividing practical musicians from theoreticians. The study of musical aesthetics, music history, and comparative musicology could bring the practicing musician into contact with a vital fund of knowledge supplied by the disciplined methods of the theoreticians. Rosenfeld observed that musicology "addresses itself to the recovery and stylistic study of characteristic works of the past, and has importance for the composer in contributing to his technical education.... It may even be a source of inspiration." The growth of professional musicology in America then presented an opportunity for two divided realms of the musical world to converge, mutually reinforcing one another's work, and providing an example of the kind of organic community in the realm of music that America

⁵⁶ Rosenfeld, "The Musicological Congress," *The Kenyon Review* 2 (1940), 127.

should be working toward in many fields of human endeavor not the least ones being politics and culture.⁵⁷

Rosenfeld's decision to immerse himself in a great body of highly technical and historical information, both literary and musical, proved immensely exciting to Rosenfeld. It also was somewhat dismaying and frustrating, as he constantly expressed his feeling of intellectual inadequacy before his new tasks of study. Such feelings of inadequacy were at times simultaneously reinforced and eased by his new opportunities to write fairly regularly for *The Yale Review*, *The Kenyon Review*, and especially The League of Composers' organ, *Modern Music*. Each of these magazines seemed genuinely receptive to his new interests and offered him a chance to work out what he considered to be new experiments in criticism.

Although most of his essays for these journals were on musical subjects, they were distinctly wide-ranging. Together with his more exclusively literary articles that appeared in *The Nation* and *The Saturday Review of Literature*, they became part of Rosenfeld's efforts (as he wrote Lewis Mumford) to "acquire all the arts necessary to the solution of my problem." The "problem" was not a new one; it was related to Rosenfeld's continual efforts to be a prophet of America's destiny, to find in certain aesthetic forms, past and present, particular motivating forces that constituted an ongoing American tradition. The only difference now was that Rosenfeld was bringing new resources to bear upon his determination to make *The Seven Arts* dream of a unified spiritual America come true. The study of literary genres, musicology, and folk songs would reveal the exact nature of those artistic forms which created their "own rhythm

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 127-8.

and shape out of inner necessity.”⁵⁸

Modern Music, especially, offered a hospitable forum for Rosenfeld's critical interests in the late 1930s and 1940s. The magazine was one of those influential and vital “little magazines” of the interwar years. Founded in 1924 as *The League of Composers Review* under the auspices of The League of Composers, it was edited by Minna Lederman until it suspended publication in 1947. The magazine functioned partly as a literary outlet for composers. In the 1920s, it had a primarily aesthetic emphasis in which various composers discussed their works, promising directions in composition, and controversial issues that touched upon the music. Since Rosenfeld was not a musician with professional or technical training, in the 1920s he would not have found the magazine, with its specialized emphases, a suitable organ for his more culturally oriented musical criticism. But in the 1930s, many of *Modern Music*'s articles concerned themselves with the relation of music to society. At this point in the magazine's history, Ms. Lederman invited Rosenfeld to contribute a series of articles which increased in frequency from 1938 until his death in 1946.

Rosenfeld's essay, “‘Americanism’ in American Music,” written for *Modern Music* in 1940, is a typical example of his wide-ranging cultural criticism of the period, and it illustrated how he used a variety of documents to portray a pervasive cultural theme. Even though the essay was designed to trace the “desire to embody national experience, sentiment, and subject matter” in American music, his study ranges over a broad expanse of cultural expression. He still believed that the desire to embody national themes is a “profound tendency” in any nation's history and therefore all facets of a culture's expression must be studied in order to understand its

⁵⁸ Rosenfeld to Lewis Mumford, 13 July 1942, Mumford Papers.

peculiar native spirit—or, in the case of America, its Americanism. This assumption, so crucial to Rosenfeld's critical approach, led him in “‘Americanism’ in American Music” to examine literary documents as a means of illustrating the same nationalistic elements that pervaded such early musical works as Billings's fugueing tunes, Reinagle's ballad *America, Commerce and Freedom*, and Cram's *The Death-Song of an Indian Chief*. Quoting Joel Barlow's *Columbiad*, Noah Webster's *Dictionary*, and Emerson's *The American Scholar*, Rosenfeld notes that these literary works are adumbrations of the later conception that “music by Americans might, should or would adjust the traditions of the art to the fresh air of American life, set free its intuition and imagination, even represent the national experience and further the national existence.” Although the early music and literature of the United States of America often concerned itself with merely representing national subject matter, Rosenfeld observed that writers like Emerson and Whitman had a larger conception of art's ability to “further the national existence” and set the stage for a meaningful musical nationalism by the 1850s.⁵⁹

A pioneer in this area, wherein music was to play its role in transforming the America's national life, was Anthony Heinrich, the immigrant composer who composed symphonies using typically American subjects and themes. Aware of the derivative and tawdry nature of Heinrich's music, Rosenfeld nevertheless saw him as preaching a thesis dear to him: “every country, if it wishes to make its contribution to humanity at large, must develop its peculiar culture; and that the inevitable basis of music is the expression of the strata of the folk immediately in contact with nature.”⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Rosenfeld, “‘Americanism’ in American Music,” *Modern Music* 17 (1940), 227.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 231.

Rosenfeld's explorations in the history of Americanism led him to consider the importance of geography in the development of music. He viewed geography historically as a trend and an idea beginning in the fifteenth century and manifesting its influence in an incipient way in the crude beginnings of American native music of the middle nineteenth century. Men like Heinrich and Arthur Farwell seemed to Rosenfeld to be at least dimly aware "of the influence of topography upon the human spirit; the close relations between the soil, the life of the nation . . . and the character of art." In the early 1940s, whether Rosenfeld discussed music, literature, or painting, he was still concerned with the artist's responsiveness to physical environmental forces that conditioned his work. As he put it in his essay on Americanism, all great artists' work has "the indefinable and yet ineluctable aroma of what was national and racial in the various peoples, and the breath of the soil." Conversely, a weakening of the cultural or environmental reflex results in inferior art which is excessively derivative and dependent on tradition.⁶¹

The importance of geography predominates in another major article Rosenfeld wrote on the advent of American music that appeared in two parts over two numbers of *The Kenyon Review* in 1939. These essays proceeded from the presupposition that a significant American music appeared only when composers began to be limited and conditioned by American life. Even though composers like Edward MacDowell, Charles Loeffler and Horatio Parker were primarily dependent upon nineteenth-century neo-romanticism, they did respond in some ways to American life, and this fact gave them "perceptions, tools, unusual abilities." Although Rosenfeld does not show precisely how these composers reflected American conditions, he does

⁶¹ Ibid., 228, 230.

suggest that whatever is tepid, sentimental, or mawkish in their work is partially attributable to the fact that “each remained subject to the influence of the music of other men and other worlds,” especially composers such as Robert Schumann, Richard Wagner, and Peter I. Tchaikovsky, who composed music which was “unaggressive, deliberate and leisurely.” The problem, as Rosenfeld saw it, was that such music simply did not reflect American conditions, as it did for the “closing eighteenth and opening nineteenth centuries” in Europe.⁶²

Rosenfeld's new interest in the techniques of musicology and ethnomusicology led him into a study of the relations between music and language, resulting in new insights into the nature of great art. In “Language and Modern Music,” for the March-April 1941 number of *Modern Music*, he concluded that music must be loyal to the rhythm and timing of speech. Deprecating the attempts of composers like Arnold Schoenberg and Igor Stravinsky to make the human voice utter sounds unrelated to ordinary language, Rosenfeld insisted that the composer-lyricist keep in touch with a language base that was faithful to the rhythms of speech. Such faithfulness provides the composer's art its necessary focal point, that unchanging element needed to clarify and define its experimental parts which, in turn, so genuinely express the soul, or inner reality, of the composer and performer.⁶³

Rosenfeld's turn to a more systematic and scholarly study of the arts bore good fruit. For example, his essay on an exhibition of Renaissance painters at the Museum of Modern Art, early in 1940 reflects a great subtlety in the control of his materials and especially in his use of history. In this article Rosenfeld argues that historical movements may be looked at from a variety of

⁶² Rosenfeld, “Advent of American Music,” *The Kenyon Review* 1 (1939), 46, 48-9.

⁶³ Rosenfeld, “Language and Modern Music,” *Modern Music* 18 (1941), 147-54.

perspectives that often contradict one another. The purpose of the exhibition was to reveal the connection between the great painters of the Renaissance and contemporary artists; Rosenfeld, however, begins his essay by emphasizing the significant differences. On the one hand, the moderns have qualities that are missing in the works of men like Botticelli and Titian; they are less restricted by arbitrary conventions in subject and style, and they exhibit a more complete aestheticism. On the other hand, how remote our world is from the vital graces and virtues of the Renaissance! That world, he wrote, was inhabited by “strangely self-confident creatures,” with broad and deep spiritual interest. They were “surprisingly energetic, able individuals who delighted in their personalities, knowing they contained the seeds of universal life.”⁶⁴

Is our great distance from the world of Michelangelo, Rosenfeld asks, a sign that man's world has been permanently blighted? He answers, no, not because Rosenfeld suddenly asserts any glib faith in the mystical nature of things, but because a closer look at the Renaissance reveals some curious ambiguities. For one thing, for all of their inner dynamism, the Italian Renaissance paintings often deal with subject matter that reveals the corrosive materialism and the “ruined pestilence-smitten Italy of the puritanical Counter-Reformation.” This is a reminder to Rosenfeld that, even in the sixteenth century, the spirit of rebirth must have seemed frustrated as it does in contemporary America. But we all know, Rosenfeld suggests, what magnificent art came out of a place and period so apparently cynical about current politico-religious events. But more than that, the spirit of the Renaissance continued awake in other lands which had lain in a state of apparent death: “Periodically it has died and then resumed . . . we are in one of the

⁶⁴ Rosenfeld, “The Sleeping Renaissance,” *The Nation* 150 (1940), 288.

periods of seeming death.”⁶⁵

Rosenfeld’s final assessment is written with calm, but also with a sort of emotional conviction that gains force from its tone of muted intensity and apparent scholarly objectivity. The crucial word for Rosenfeld is “seeming,” which suggests that within Rosenfeld’s America lay the seeds of an American Renaissance. Perhaps it is possible for the critic to discover those artistic works that foreshadow this rebirth. Perhaps this same critic can help fertilize the seeds by examining the past and providing the artist with a “usable” tradition which he can draw upon for sustenance and inspiration. Viewed in this way, Rosenfeld’s current scholarly investigations were quite consistent with his previous critical goals.

Similarly Rosenfeld’s new study of literary genres and forms revealed new evidence for the reality of a spiritual realm, a reality that had been both the inspiration and the object of his earlier criticism and theory of art. His essay on the “Duino Elegies” of Rainer Rilke reminded Rosenfeld of the power and importance of a supernatural outlook. His essay on the elegies at times reads like a hymn to what Rilke discovered. Rosenfeld found the elegies prophetic in that they confirmed the existence of the supernatural world which “is over or under the natural world, sustaining, explaining and never violating it.” Rilke spent his entire life moving from a position of spiritual resignation toward one of total affirmation, and the elegies trace the tortured path of this movement. Along the way, Rilke had glimpses and intimations of “life’s mysterious kingdom” and began to be filled, at the same time, with a tragic sense of man’s evanescence in

⁶⁵ Ibid.,

this world. Rosenfeld observes that this saddened Rilke at first, but later his knowledge of man's ephemerality only served to strengthen feelings of affirmation. Rosenfeld:

Rilke had comprehended the possibility of accepting ephemerality as a condition, challenging an eternal destiny in the name of the "nameless bond between earth and heaven." The heroic principle became apparent: indifference to continuity and the sense of the heroic deed's endurance among the stars. There followed ecstatic comprehensions of "super numerous existence" welling from the double realm, and man's capacity for immortality. In exhibiting the inward forms of things, man, it seemed to Rilke, could "stamp the provisional, perishing earth deeply, painfully, passionately into himself" and become "a mouth of creation."⁶⁶

Rilke's discovery that this inward reality is closest in Spirit to the supernatural world enabled him to overcome his fear of death and his dismay over the temporality of man's earthly existence. Rosenfeld highlighted in his essay the lesson Rilke learned: earthly man has the opportunity to lead a heroic life, while revealing the inward form of things and speaking as the prophetic voice of God. Rilke's insights served as a dramatic reminder for Rosenfeld of the incompatibility of personal morbidity and a truly organic view of human culture and politics. "So long as life maintains itself merely out of a frantic fear of death and desire to cheat it," Rosenfeld concluded, "it cannot be healthy, holy, whole."⁶⁷

This article on Rilke echoed powerfully Rosenfeld's reading of Henry Miller's work. In both cases, Rosenfeld emphasized the artists' capacity to resolve conflicts through the careful cultivation of an interior world. This world, the center of their spiritual being, is also the inspiration for their aesthetic creations. In effect, Rilke and Miller created a Beauty that is not measurable in terms of temporal values.

⁶⁶ Rosenfeld, "The First Whole World," *The Nation* 149 (1939), 176.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 177.

Rosenfeld's re-discovery of the importance of interiority powerfully informed his last essays on the aestheticism, interiority, and fairy tales. At first take, these studies in literary genres seem the farthest removed from a treatment of ordinary reality and the dynamics of an ongoing cultural tradition. But insofar as Rosenfeld was interested in the spiritual progress of humankind, these genres were highly significant, since they were about the importance of cultivating a rich interior life. Here were forms that allowed the artist to express the highest unity--the unity of the aesthetic and the spiritual--and anticipate the direction of American culture.

In his essay "Last of Young Vienna," for a 1945 number of the young *The Kenyon Review* Rosenfeld depicts the nuances of the aesthetic movement as they are manifested in works such as John Keats's "Grecian Urn," Henry James's *Golden Bowl*, John Ruskin's *Stones of Venice*, and Rilke's elegies. As in the Rilke essay, Rosenfeld stresses the value and permanence of man-built objects that evoke noble values: "beauty set above humanity in the scale of values, seen as something so necessary it cannot but endure, believed in with passionate intensity." Rosenfeld offers, by inference, a justification for his deliberate avoidance of directly connecting art and politics, and for his faith in cultural nationalism. His idea of Beauty leads to a vision of the divine. Like Emerson before him, he regarded the phrase "Beauty is its own excuse for being" not as a credo for ivory-tower seclusion but as a mandate for spiritual awareness. The phrase suggests the possibility for Man to identify with a divine force larger than himself, who can supply the impetus for self-transcendence. "The loving evocations and 'imitations' of 'things of beauty' exhibit the desire to absorb and achieve the qualities of the cultivated, precious, perfected object." Accordingly, great art gives us a glimpse of a world beyond an ordinary reality

obsessed with self-limiting and self-absorbing preoccupations.⁶⁸

In the year before his death, it seemed that Rosenfeld was attempting to recapture with greater vividness that elusive inner reality where the truly significant human drama was being enacted. Much earlier in his life, he had attempted, through the paintings of Albert Ryder, to depict graphically the landscape and topography of this world of subjective aspirations. In the Ryder essay, he had related the painter's depiction of moon lit voyages to the soul's search for its faith and a nation's pursuit of a dream. In 1945 Rosenfeld returned to this theme in a review of Kenneth Patchen's *The Journal of Albion Moonlight*. Once more again the voyage metaphor is evoked, and once again the journey is seen as an effort by the complex human soul to reveal itself and its yearning for expression. Only now, Rosenfeld sees an entire literary genre devoted to the task of capturing the very atmosphere of these heroic, many-sided, interior voyages. As in the earlier Ryder essay, he calls upon all the powers of his impressionistic style of criticism to suggest the peculiar quality of these interior voyages.

The methods in all of them is that of a Log or Voyage; the symbols are incidents of travel through an unfolding landscape....a many-colored archipelago and an ocean stretching toward the Pole. The incidents are arranged along the lines of unverifiable experience, and somewhere in each book the author's voice is heard declaring that the journey is his dream or imagining. He marks his fiction thus as a piece of self-reflection. Indeed, the scenes and details, the personages and their adventures are allegories or symbols of the interior life and its impulses, objects, and conflicts. The Voyages are the upshots of combinations of the motives of romantic fantasy and exclusive self-reflection....efforts to mirror the psyche and its complex contents.⁶⁹

The metaphor of voyage and exploration recalls Rosenfeld's use of it in *The Port of New*

⁶⁸ Rosenfeld, "The Last of Young Vienna," *The Kenyon Review* 6 (1945), 667.

⁶⁹ Rosenfeld, "The Interior Voyage," *The Nation* 160 (1945), 651.

York, wherein he applied the voyage metaphor to convey his own travels through the “unfolding landscape” of contemporary America.. There is no better way to describe the thrust and intention of his work than by recalling his definition of the Interior Voyages, especially these lines: “The scenes and details, the personages and their adventures are allegories or symbols of the interior life [of America] and its impulses, objects conflicts.”⁷⁰

Rosenfeld's return to themes and concerns that he treated earlier in his life—indeed as early as Yale—reflects a surprising unity and a certain symmetry. One of his last essays, published a few months before his death, capped his study of literary genres and made a final prophecy. Resisting the temptation to say that Rosenfeld had premonitions of his own death in 1946, there is nevertheless the presence of certain culminating factors in his 1946 essay, “Conscious Faerie-Tale,” for the Catholic magazine *Commonweal*. The essay bears the subtitle “History of the Origin of a Romantic Literary Genre.” In this article Rosenfeld acknowledges his immense debt to German romanticism. Never before had he so directly related the tenets of this philosophy to the primary assumptions behind his own criticism. He pays final homage to the system that made it possible for the modern American artist and critic to explore the spaces of that intensely personal and subjective world so rhythmically attuned to divine intentions.

[German romanticism] had rediscovered the interior reality: the hidden and the semi-conscious and the sub-conscious life; and dreamt of harmonizing and developing it. To make life real, thought the romantics, man had to bring about a fusion of his contrarily-striving sensuous and intellectual natures. Sensuous had to be spiritualized, and intellect to become part of earth.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Rosenfeld, *Port of New York*, xii.

⁷¹ Rosenfeld, “Conscious Faerie-Tale,” *The Commonweal* 43 (1946), 651.

It was highly appropriate and fitting that this essay--one of Rosenfeld's last, with its interweaving of mind and matter, sense and intellect, spirit and matter, should appear in a Roman Catholic magazine. For no other great world religion besides Catholicism insisted on holding these opposites in paradoxical tension, and symbolized this paradox in the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, a manifestation of this incarnational reality. Moreover, romanticism, for Rosenfeld, revived the "forgotten core of child hood . . . wonder, innocence and acceptance of death." The contemporary fairy tale embodies these central characteristics of Romanticism again because they sustained a union of opposites--humor and pathos, fantasy and earthfastness.

What Rosenfeld suggests in his discussion of the fairy tale is yet another symptom of dramatic changes beginning to occur in modern society. The increasing appearance of organically oriented art, illustrated in part by the work of Henry Miller, the folk-song revival, jazz, and improvisation, foreshadowed for him a new movement to American life. In Rosenfeld's words written in an earlier essay on Nodier, these musical and literary innovations "proceed like naive emanations from the practical inventions of civilization." The fusion of opposites in ordinary life is the prerequisite for the appearance of mediums and forms which give voice to these grassroots tendencies. Therefore, concludes Rosenfeld, it might even be said that the "unions and combinations" of lay existence "has but to effect itself, and conscious faerie-tales refreshingly appear!"⁷²

It was but a short step from this assertion to a final prophesy which places all Rosenfeld's other prophetic stances in philosophical perspective. For it is new embodiments of German romanticism that "will constitute the substance of the next great revival among us." Typically

⁷² Ibid., 653.

the familiar word “revival” is used with its spiritual overtones and its suggestions of variation upon an unchanging theme. Here in the last months of his life, Rosenfeld was still standing “on tip toe to greet the dawn of a new day.”⁷³

⁷³ Ibid., 646.

Chapter XI

Conclusion: The Legacy of Paul Rosenfeld

The untimely death of Paul Rosenfeld came in 1946 just a few months after the death of his mentor and intellectual father, Alfred Stieglitz. Their deaths in this pivotal year in the history of America as a world power, also marked the end of an era in American arts and letters. Ironically, the cultural nationalism Stieglitz and Rosenfeld worked to establish in America had become passe by 1946, but at the same time their efforts formed the basis for the Americanism that many among America's elites hoped that they could export to the rest of the world in their wider effort to rebuild a shattered Europe, and also disseminate more broadly to all classes of Americans. The victory of democratic forces in the Second World War and the expansion and increasing sophistication of the recording and broadcast industries seemed to many composers, critics, writers, and patrons of the arts to signal the arrival of the Progressives' moment for the wide dissemination of the fine arts, and especially music.

American music criticism drew special attention as an important and theretofore untapped medium by which to bring about this democratization of high culture and concert music. The function and condition of music criticism in America therefore became the object of wide and intense public interest from 1946 to 1955. With great fanfare Harvard University and *The*

Hartford Times convened two conferences to consider music criticism as “an element of the wider culture” in 1947 and 1948. Moreover, in numerous books, articles, and lectures E. M. Forster, Roger Sessions, Max Graf, William Schuman, Joseph Kerman, Virgil Thompson, Paul Henry Lang, among many others, looked to music critics to lead the way in widening the base of American musical life, and thus “to realize,” in the words of the music and art critic Alfred Frankenstein, “an American musical potential which as yet has not been dreamed of, much less realized.” *Paul Rosenfeld: Voyager in the Arts*, the very unusual collection of essays, tributes, and remembrances on Rosenfeld and his contribution to American arts and letters was an important part of this public debate on music criticism; in fact some key figures who took part in this debate read this volume of essays as part of this new national interest in the unrealized promise of music criticism in America.¹

Rosenfeld And The Mid-Twentieth-Century Discourse on American Music Criticism

A few months before Rosenfeld died Max Graf, a Viennese emigre critic, and a

¹ Alfred Frankenstein, “Criticism: An Unrealized Potentiality in America,” *Musical America, Fiftieth Anniversary Issue*, 68 (February 1948), 22, 160. Aside from Jacques Barzun’s contributions, some account of which follows shortly, a brief sample of this considerable body of literature on music criticism at mid-century would include Max Graf, *Composer and Critic* (New York: Norton & Company, 1946); Richard T. French, ed., *Music and Criticism: A Symposium* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1948); Robert E. Garis, “Sour Notes From Harvard.” Review of *Music and Criticism* edited by French in *The Kenyon Review* XI (Spring 1949), 325-30; *The Hartford Times* and others, *The New England Music Critics Symposium and Festival of American Music* held in Hartford, Connecticut, May 18-19, 1948; Joseph Kerman, “Music Criticism in America,” *Hudson Review* i (1949), 557-60; Roger Sessions, *The Musical Experience of Composer, Performer, Listener* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1950), collects six lectures Sessions delivered at the Juilliard School in 1949; F. D. Perkins, “The Number, the Function, the Problems of the Nation’s Music Critics,” *Musical America* 69 (February 1949), 22, 23, 182, 306-7.

contributor to *Voyager in the Arts*, in his highly successful *Composer and Critic: Two Hundred Years of Musical Criticism*, described Rosenfeld's writing on music as "a noble and civilizing type of musical criticism." In this book Graf made music critics preeminently responsible for establishing music as "an integral part of the life of the masses." Graf "dreamed" and "hoped" that a "spirit of peace" congenial to "the life of the spirit" would follow upon "the agony" of the Second World War. The "new epoch" would bring "a new social structure with a new art and new relations between art and society." In this new society "the critic may take his destined place as the interpreter of musical creation to society. He may once again "diffuse knowledge and enlightenment" and thereby close the rift between artist and society that had opened in the nineteenth century. Under the critic's knowing guidance "society and the artist may once again join forces, united by the great ideas of their times." The "noble work" of the twentieth century critic is to make music "the property of all."²

But no one more than the incomparable Jacques Barzun was (and continues to be) more insistent on the importance of music criticism to the wider appreciation of good music. Barzun himself has spent much of his long career lecturing, writing, and editing toward making music accessible to a wider public. In 1951 he gave the prestigious Elson lecture at the Library of Congress, entitled "Music Into Words." In 1955 he published *Music in American Life* for the American Council of Learned Societies, which the Council commended to readers as "a penetrating look at the virtues and vices of our musical culture." Barzun, like Graf, relied heavily on music critics to restore music's significance to "the realm of ideas," and to "the total

² Max Graf, *Composer and Critic*, 325-6; and "Reprise from Vienna," in *Voyager in the Arts*, 145.

sphere of pleasure and significance.” “The unfortunate separation of music from the other arts” and from “the realm of ideas” proceeds “from the lack of a critical vocabulary,” and “the indolence and other limitations of those who write about music.” From the vantage point of 1951, Barzun saw “no reason why in the next half-century the meaning of music should not become just as well understood as that of the eternal hills. If the critic seeks the way, this civilizing effort will not prove a superhuman task, despite the relative backwardness of discourse about music.”³

In 1955 Barzun brought out *The Pleasures of Music*, “a reader’s choice of great writing about music and musicians” to exemplify how the experience of music can be conveyed with clarity, power, verve, and grace to others “with no special knowledge” of music. “Anyone, with or without a musical ear,” he asserted on the first page, “who has learned to read words, can understand everything in this book.” Emphatically a social art, the experience of music had nevertheless become over the course of the twentieth century a private, incommunicable experience. Since “music is interwoven with the texture of our lives from morning until night,” restoring its meaning in common was for Barzun a valuable thing, and good music criticism presented itself as the way to do it. For reading about music extends the musical experience, enabling one to more readily “enter into the feelings” of another, and thereby enabling him to make his own “the best part of what is common to him and you.”⁴

Barzun has renewed his plea many times since mid-century for simple and direct

³ Jacques Barzun, *Berlioz and the Romantic Century, Volume I* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1950), 9; and “Music into Words,” 26.

⁴ Barzun, *The Pleasures of Music*, 1-3.

interpretive criticism. In 1987 he did so in a front page article for *The New York Times Book Review*, and soon after that during his 1988 Annual Humanities Lecture at the 92nd Street Y in New York City. The issue of criticism of the arts and of music in particular emerges again and again in Barzun's most recent tour de force, *From Dawn to Decadence: 1500 to the Present* (2000). The thesis that Barzun has pressed for the last half-century is that the critic's office is indispensable to an advanced civilization; his sole purpose is to serve the artist and the public. "Art does not disseminate itself unaided," artists require "go-betweens," wrote Barzun. "The worst environment for an artist in a high civilization is dead silence." The critic may be of any kind -- "from the textual to the impressionistic and from the formal to the cultural"-- but his reason for being "vanishes" if he abandons "*maieutics* -- midwifery," the necessary office between the artist and his public that prevents "art from being stillborn." Among the Ancients, Barzun said, the critic justified his existence solely by the value of his *maieutic* art. The midwife, according to Plato, is a "respectable" woman with "a character to lose." Plato's famous allusion in the *Theaetetus* was to Socrates's idea of himself "as midwife to ideas." Socrates "in most respects" served the thoughtful man the way the midwife served the woman in labor. His "triumph" lay in bringing to gestation the man's thought to learn whether it was "a false idol or of noble and true birth."⁵

What Barzun rejected was the tendency of post World War II critics of the arts who had been lured by the urge to write "creative criticism," "to poeticize," and who therefore had

⁵ Barzun, "What Critics are Good For," in *The Culture We Deserve*, 64, 70; *From Dawn to Decadence*, 71, 109, 142, 167, 189, 299, 325, 336, 562, 791; The *Theaetetus* quoted in Ralph M. McInerney, *A History of Western Philosophy: From the Beginnings of Philosophy to Plotinus* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1963), 119.

abandoned his or her proper service to both “public” and “artist.” The “urge to poeticize matches the fact that in our present state only two social types, two human endeavors, enjoy any regard: art and science, the poet and the physicist, or their counterparts.” These are the two fields whose practitioners merit the rank of genius, “which is for us the only democratic figure deserving the cult of personality.” For the sake of prestige the critic seizes the “double chance” in this situation. Identifying with the artist, “he soon thinks he is one”; understanding criticism as analysis, “he readily begins to talk like a scientist.” Accordingly his vocabulary consists of such new words as “orbit, dialogue, parameter, paradigm, quantum jump, and interface.” By using the word “mimesis” where “imitation” would do, “he feels he has gained status in the world.” Thus instead of removing “barriers to understanding and enjoyment” in line with his role as midwife, the creative, scientific critic raises them.⁶

Barzun drew on the experience of Henry James--a figure with to whom Lewis Mumford likened to Paul Rosenfeld--to underscore the critic’s double accountability to artist and public. On the artist’s side James, who “suffered much from critics,” pleaded for “the beneficent play of criticism” that would guide artistic production. On the public’s side James, said Barzun, saw criticism as “the only gate of appreciation (by now a bad word),” which, “is in regard to a work of art, the only gate of enjoyment.” Hence for Barzun the critic is a whetstone against which the artist sharpens his ideas and their expression; at the same time the critic “flashes a beam” at various places on the work of art to illuminate or to enhance the public’s understanding of it. “If,” said Barzun, “the critic’s role is truly defined by these concerns and these services to art and

⁶ Jacques Barzun, “A Little Matter of Sense,” *The New York Times Book Review*, 21 June 1987, 27-8.

the public, then critics have a right to live, even when stupid or biased.” Barzun retained his faith in the invigorating potential of the *maieutic* critic even as he was painfully conscious that “culture in the old sense of high arts and letters,” and Liberalism, the “movement of ideas” and “form of behavior” that energized it, were moving after 1960 toward “a common oblivion.”⁷

Barzun was not in search of a more technical and analytical discourse on music. Quite the reverse “the so-called technical criticism of music is not criticism at all. Immensely useful as it is for teaching -- like grammar and rhetoric to the writer -- it *adds* relatively little, even to the trained reader who understands it” (Barzun’s emphasis). Regrettably, Barzun wrote, music critics “have taken refuge in technicalities instead of devising the phrases that would enlighten ‘even the deaf.’” In so doing they have ignored “their art and their task” and “frightened the common reader.” Writing about music “is to be neither special nor strict; precise, yes; but not strict in the sense of inflexible,” for music criticism must “mediate between common experience” and music’s “characteristic means or effects.” Consequently the “whole effort” of Barzun’s Elson Lecture at the Library of Congress in 1951, “Music Into Words,” went towards “the great desideratum in contemporary American culture, namely a comprehensive grammar of criticism for dealing with art.” The critic, insisted Barzun must use the language of “a layman, and not a professor,” in fulfilling his role “as go-between, as midwife, between the artist’s conception and

⁷ Barzun, “Music into Words,” and “Liberalism and the Religion of Art,” in Friedland, *Critical Questions*, 24, 169; Barzun, “What Critics Are Good For,” in Krystal, ed., *The Culture We Deserve*, 72.

the beholder's recognition of it in the created thing."⁸

A Character Preserved: The *Maieutic* Art of Paul Rosenfeld

Barzun very probably knew Paul Rosenfeld personally through their mutual friend Francis Steegmuller, who was a classmate of Barzun's at Columbia College in the 1920s, and also contributor to *Paul Rosenfeld: Voyager in the Arts*. Barzun certainly knew Rosenfeld's work, citing with approval Rosenfeld's criticism of Hector Berlioz and Richard Wagner from *Musical Portraits* for his own books. But it was not Barzun who submitted Rosenfeld, nor for that matter any of his favorite critics -- Berlioz, Robert Schumann, Claude Debussy, George B. Shaw, John Ruskin, John Jay Chapman -- as exemplars of the *maieutic* art. As mentioned in the first chapter of this dissertation, the first to apply the metaphor of midwife to Rosenfeld was Llewelyn Powys in 1924, Powys was the brother of writers John Cooper and Theodore Francis Powys.⁹

Then surveying the whole span of Rosenfeld's life and work in *Voyager's* longest and most probing essay, Mumford wrote: "for the special function that he performed for his time and his country, in a very special sense, Paul Rosenfeld was the midwife of arts and letter in America." And again in 1981 in one of Mumford's last essays: "It would be trite to call

⁸ Jacques Barzun, Introduction: "Music and Words" in Jacques Barzun ed., *Pleasures of Music* (New York: The Viking Press, 1951), 10, 14-5; Jacques Barzun, "Music Into Words," in Bea Friedland, ed., *Critical Questions on Music and Letters Culture and Biography 1940-1980* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 6, 24, 26.

⁹ Shirley Hazzard, "Biographies of Contributors," in *From Parnassus*, 382; Llewelyn Powys, "Midwife to Culture," review of *Port of New York*, by Paul Rosenfeld, *The Nation*, 16 April 1924, 448.

Rosenfeld the midwife of American arts and letters between 1917 and 1937; but that was precisely his role. He aided in the gestation of the spirit at a moment of abundant, if undirected, fecundity.” If one took inventory of “the young poets and novelists and painters and musicians to whom Rosenfeld offered appreciation and intellectual hospitality -- to say nothing of a timely meal or outright financial aid -- the list would almost be a roll call of the new American artists of the twenties and thirties.” Such offerings are always welcome, but in those decades of acute cultural, social, and economic dislocation Rosenfeld proved a most trustworthy guide.¹⁰

Mumford’s careful and sustained discussion of Rosenfeld as midwife to artists, and the results he achieved, conforms astonishingly well to Barzun’s ideas about criticism. When Rosenfeld started writing criticism in the 1920s, his “warm receptive approach,” Mumford wrote, “was the best encouragement an artist could have: it helped create the very audience that was needed for the communication of the artist’s work.” Rosenfeld critical responses thus assured that “dead silence” -- “the worst environment for an artist in a high civilization” would not meet the artist.¹¹

For Mumford the *maieutic* art stands in the same relation to academic criticism as midwifery does to gynecology and obstetrics. The midwife calls to mind “both patience and certain impromptu amateurishness of technique” qualities which in Rosenfeld flowed from “the deeper sympathy, the truly profound sense of life, he brought to his office.” Other critics “had more intensive professional training” than Rosenfeld. They “may accordingly write on their

¹⁰ Lewis Mumford, “Lyric Wisdom” in *Voyager*, 68; Mumford, Preface to *The Writings of Paul Rosenfeld*, ed., Charles L. P. Silent (New York: Garland Publishing, 1981), xiii.

¹¹ Mumford, “Lyric Wisdom,” in *Voyager in the Arts*, 49.

shingles 'Gynecologist' or 'Obstetrician'; but that does not mean that either mother or child will, in the normal event, be safer in their hands." Rosenfeld knew that "the prosperous birth of works of art," proceeds better "when one leaves most of it to nature." If the undue neglect of American artists in childbirth had been a "crippling handicap" in the past; there was also the chance in Rosenfeld's day that the artist "might be subject to brusque intervention and forceful aids: the academic probe and the editorial forceps carry their own dangers with them."¹²

Rosenfeld intuitively understood "the creative process," Mumford said, and was therefore adept at helping "those who labored in the spirit." For example the composer David Diamond, after playing through his setting of e. e. cummings's ballet scenario *Tom* on the piano with Rosenfeld's help, "was thrilled" with Rosenfeld's ability to know "at every right place...just what [he] meant to achieve in this score. It was "as though [Rosenfeld] himself were functioning as part of my very own inner creative process," Diamond wrote. Such "sympathy" enabled Rosenfeld, as Mumford said, to "share the mother's proud joy in the child that came forth." The result is not the kind of criticism that merely assigns grades for the sake of the artist's next work, but the kind that through an intimate understanding of the artist's purposes shows the artist what his work achieves and fails to achieve. What Rosenfeld did in his writing and in his many of sittings, walks, and gallery tours with artists "is an art even harder to practice: midway between the creative act itself and the judicial sword; and it justifies itself through the work which it helps to bring forth, and awakens to life with the sharp slap of approval."¹³

¹² Lewis Mumford, "Lyric Wisdom" in *Voyager in the Arts*, 68-9.

¹³ Lewis Mumford, "Lyric Wisdom" and David Diamond, "Steps Toward Achievement," in *Voyager in the Arts*, 70, 251.

It was not only David Diamond who appreciated and marveled at Rosenfeld's ability to enter imaginatively into the mind of the artist; *Voyager in the Arts* records many such instances of Rosenfeld's *maieutical* art with a wide variety of American writers, composers, and visual artists. Indeed, the collection of artists is so varied that, as Alfred Kazin put it, it was only their common experience of knowing and working with Paul Rosenfeld that brought them together. For in many cases the contributors stood opposed to each other ideologically, artistically, and politically. In a review of *Voyager in the Arts*, Kazin remarked that "so many writers [in *Voyager in the Arts*] usually hostile to each other have found a common ground in their feeling for [Rosenfeld]," forming, as Kazin put it, the "community of temperament" that was sorely missing in American arts and letters after the Second World War.¹⁴

By the analyses of Rosenfeld's life and work undertaken on these pages, it would seem that crucial to the formation of such communities of temperament—another term for Rosenfeld's ensemble idea—is sustaining a view of life that enables one to transcend partisanism, hardened categories of thought, and stylized methods of analysis. Rosenfeld possessed just such an outlook. His hard-won transcendent perspective on life and art distinguished him from the majority of his contemporaries. It was a view that found support and resonance in the Stieglitz circle, but even more so in *The Seven Arts* group of the late 1910s. But by the middle of the twentieth century such ensembles had disappeared from the American arts scene. As Lewis Mumford wrote in 1948:

A whole age seemed to separate these men of *The Seven Arts* from their immediate successors; for the first World War created not so much a dividing line as an abyss between the generations. No matter what the hardships, frustrations,

¹⁴ Alfred Kazin, "The Solitude of Paul Rosenfeld," 155.

or anxieties of Rosenfeld's generation might be, they never shared the bitter disillusion of the younger literary group.... *The Seven Arts* group, coming together when a new world was being conceived through the embrace of the aesthetic and the social, so long held apart in American life, escaped the pre-mature disillusion of their juniors. Men like Rosenfeld had been formed by the more stable and hopeful century that preceded the outbreak of our present Time of Troubles; and they had an inner sense of buoyancy which kept them afloat.¹⁵

It was Rosenfeld's "religious sense," his supernatural outlook that supplied this buoyancy, during the solitude of his last years. Despite the death of Alfred Stieglitz two days before Rosenfeld's own death, Rosenfeld, as Edgard Varese tells it, was as ebullient and hopeful as ever. During an extended telephone conversation that Varese had had with Rosenfeld, Rosenfeld said: "You will see me returning next fall the same incurable enthusiast. But now, I hope and believe, with the power of controlling *En Theos*"—that is the God of the Within, from which English gets its word, "Enthusiasm." It was this "withinness," Rosenfeld's deeply imaginative and richly cultivated interiority, that made him so resilient.

Varese and Rosenfeld had planned to meet for a *pot de vin*. "I looked forward to toasting with him his new lease on life and a wine of good omen," Varese wrote. "It was tragic moment for death to choose," especially so, we are compelled to add, for arts and letters in America.¹⁶

¹⁵ Mumford, "Lyric Wisdom," in *Voyager in the Arts*, 44.

¹⁶ Edgard Varese, "Wine of Good Omen," in *Voyager in the Arts*, 237-8.

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