PRIMITIVISM AND PROGRESS IN THE FICTION OF
GEORGE S. PERRY AND FRED GIPSON

APPROVED:

George D. Hendricks
Major Professor

William J. DeShazo
Minor Professor

E. S. Pleckton
Director of the Department of English

Robert B. Tewes
Dean of the Graduate School
PRIMITIVISM AND PROGRESS IN THE FICTION OF
GEORGE S. PERRY AND FRED GIPSON

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the
North Texas State University in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

By

James W. Wilson, B. A.
Denton, Texas
August, 1968
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This study will attempt to ascertain the degree of primitivism in the fiction of George Sessions Perry and Fred Gipson for the purpose of determining their respective attitudes toward the effect of modern technology on rural Central Texas. Both writers, in much the same manner, sought to create a body of fiction which would recapture a region relatively untouched by the machine age and its attendant complications. Their protagonists are atavistic hunters and agrarians, attached by a mystic bond to the rivers, woods, and soil. The laws of nature, not those of man, command their allegiance. They are thrown into conflict with the philistines--bankers who threaten to seize their property, merchants who cheat the poor, and farmers who have laid claim to the land by legal deeds of trust, seeking to exploit it for wealth. Hence both writers, to a great degree, depict evil in terms of materialistic greed, the parent of modern technology, and ever-growing civil forces which seek to bind the free soul.

Yet they both, in the final analysis, acknowledge the inevitability of progress and accept it as a necessary condition of modern man. At the end of Hold Autumn in Your
Hand, Perry's last serious work of fiction, the blue ribbon becomes a symbol of progress and security for the nomadic Tuckers. Gipson's boy protagonists, while initiated in the wilderness, are always brought to an awareness that their final and most compelling duty in adulthood is to the stability and progress of civilization, a civilization suborned to material acquisition. Thus two seemingly opposing ideas, the doctrine of primitivism and the doctrine of progress, are juxtaposed in the fiction of Perry and Gipson, although the idea of primitivism holds a supreme position. A subordinate purpose of this paper will be to illustrate the seemingly paradoxical appearance of these two ideas throughout the fiction of Perry and Gipson.

This study grew out of an observation that the idea of primitivism appears as a motif, sometimes lurking far beneath the surface but more often a dominant theme, in the literature of the Southwest. Research has failed to disclose any attempt by the scholars of Southwestern literature to account for this phenomenon. A study such as this could not attempt so large a question for obvious reasons; therefore, the scope of the study has been narrowed to a small area within the region and to two contemporary regional writers who have manifested strong primitivistic impulses. The study has further been narrowed to the fiction of these two writers, although some of the non-fiction will be considered
when deemed pertinent. Such a narrowing of focus can permit no conclusions, then, about Southwestern literature in general until some evidence that the same forces which impelled the minds of Perry and Gipson are both common and peculiar to Southwestern writers in general is brought to light. Such an undertaking is outside the realm of this study, but hopefully the study will provide conclusions from which further studies of primitivism in Southwestern literature may evolve.

Primitivism appears to be the common denominator of writers of Southwestern fiction. It is the ancient and persistent belief, or collection of beliefs, that man in his most natural state of existence, either in the past, present, or future, is both morally and physically superior to his more sophisticated, civilized counterpart and that the natural life is a simpler and therefore a happier one. A. O. Lovejoy and a group of his colleagues were the first to formulate these beliefs into a system whereby critical identification of primitivism could be made.1 One's conception of primitivism will vary according to his view of

the history of mankind; but Lovejoy divides primitivism into two large classifications: chronological primitivism and cultural primitivism. He further divides these two classifications into a number of subdivisions, according to the various possible philosophies of human history; but the two larger classifications will adequately serve the purposes of this study.

Chronological primitivism presupposes a belief in the finite existence of the human race. It attempts to answer the question as to when the best condition of man existed and what constitutes his best condition. The chronological primitivist more generally believes that man is historically in a state of moral and physical decline, that at some prior time, when he lived in his most natural state—i.e., in a state freest of the arts and civil restrictions of man—his life was most simple and innocent and therefore happiest and most noble. Chronological primitivism in its purest form is embodied in the ancient classical myth of the Golden Age, when man lived in a state not unlike the Christian vision of Heaven, or in the Garden of Eden of Hebrew myth, where man lived briefly in a state of perfect bliss and innocence.2

Cultural primitivism is defined by Lovejoy as the belief which results from
the discontent of the civilized with civilization, or with some conspicuous and characteristic feature of it. It is the belief of men living in a relatively highly evolved and complex cultural condition that a life far simpler and less sophisticated in some or all respects is a more desirable life.\(^3\)

The best condition is not necessarily in primeval existence, but may be at any time in history that one most admires. For example, Yeats extravagantly admired the Byzantine culture; many Christians admire the pre-Constantine era. Cultural primitivism is based largely on a comparison of one's own relatively complex culture with that of a past or present one which he conceives to be more compatible with man's natural desires. The late Eighteenth Century poets, in revolt against the order-in-nature concept of the Neoclassicists, were greatly influenced in their noble-savage cult by reports published of life in the South Seas and the savage tribes of North America.\(^4\) But most generally the cultural primitivist conceives a better life, as Lovejoy says, in some presently existing primitive peoples, "either the so called 'savage' or the peasant or simple farmer."\(^5\)

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\(^3\)Lovejoy, *Primitivism and Related Ideas*, p. 7.


Cultural and chronological primitivism usually operate together. Since either of these views supports the other, both can be found in a work which contains either chronological or cultural primitivism. Both will be shown to occur in the works of Perry and Gipson.

Lovejoy further classifies primitivism, both chronological and cultural, as either soft primitivism or hard primitivism, according to the ease or discomfort experienced by the primitive peoples. Soft primitivism encompasses life relatively free from restraints on the natural instincts and conventionalities imposed by a highly structured civilization. Its people, bounteously supplied by nature and free from the apparatus of civilization, are free from the rigors of war, greed, hunger, and toil. Thus soft primitivism "has often owed its appeal to men's recalcitrance to some or most of the inhibitions imposed by the current moral codes, or to the alluring dream, or hope, of a life with little or no toil or strain of body and mind." Hard primitivism, on the other hand, is characterized by physical hardship. The primitive man is admired for his austerity and his courage in the face of extreme poverty, his endurance against the adversities of nature, and his indifference to economic security. Because he is inured to hardship, he bears it

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Ibid., p. 9.
cheerfully and bravely. His poverty results from a contentment to be free from material goods. The hardy Laplanders were held up as hard primitives par excellence by the Eighteenth Century primitivists. The best qualities of both soft and hard primitivism, it will be shown here, are incorporated in the primitivism of both Perry and Gipson.

Although ancient classical literature is imbued with primitivism, as Lovejoy and others have clearly demonstrated, the term is more traditionally associated with Eighteenth Century romantic poets. Primitivism rose to prominence with the Industrial Revolution. To the extent that industrialization has been deemed to contribute to social failure, primitivism has increased in direct proportion, although the concept of it has changed in the Twentieth Century. Stanley Alexander, in his unpublished dissertation, notes that "recent primitivism no longer envisions a 'return to nature' in the sense of a radical reformation of culture along primitive or even pre-industrial or agrarian lines." The rise of naturalism in fiction, Alexander continues,

7FitzGerald, p. 220.
introduced the alternative of seeking "the remains of 'man as he was,' and further, explores those remnants and reflections of primitive life which still have, as it were, a subterranean existence beneath the glittering glass and steel structure of modern society."\textsuperscript{10} By relating modern psychology to ancient myth, Freud pointed to the primitive impulses which reside yet in the bosom of modern man. As a result Twentieth Century writers have concerned themselves more with the primitive instinctual actions of modern man reacting within a highly structural civilization than with man seeking a primitive Utopia in the past or present.\textsuperscript{11} Twentieth Century fiction has dealt more with the poor, the ignorant, and the downtrodden members of their society, supposing them to be more actively responsive to their primitive impulses. More often than not these people are depicted as victims of a machine-oriented, over-structured society. Further, the rapid changes which technology has wrought have invoked a nostalgic longing for the simplicity of a more immediate past. The development of the historical novel is at least partially due to the idealization of a relatively recent past. Primitivism has played a large role in contemporary writers' depiction of the sterility of the machine

\textsuperscript{10}Ibid., p. 32.

age, with their themes of decaying aristocracy, receding wilderness, and alienation of man from his past and from God; but the doctrine of progress, according to Alexander, is "triumphant in the Twentieth Century, as it has been in virtually every time in modern history."\textsuperscript{12}

The doctrine of progress is the belief that the best condition of man lies in the future and that he is progressing toward a better life. It is antithetical to chronological primitivism in the sense that it holds that modern man is superior to the primitive man in at least most respects. Like primitivism, progressivism has accelerated in prominence with industrialization. Alexander notes that the idea of progress has gained in the past three hundred years as a result of an increase in material gains and of a wider acceptance of democracy:

The strength of [the doctrine of progress] is primarily a function of the improvement in human material conditions that has occurred in roughly the last three hundred years; it is usually attributed to the success of democratic political systems and the liberalization of social institutions in general, . . . pyramiding successes achieved by the sciences, especially those which have contributed most to the material benefits which we have identified with human welfare.\textsuperscript{13}

Progressivism and primitivism are companion ideas. The degree of acceptance of one of the ideas implies a corresponding degree of rejection of the other. Since individuals

\textsuperscript{12}\textsuperscript{12}Alexander, p. 2.

\textsuperscript{13}\textsuperscript{13}Ibid., pp. 2-3.
rarely embrace either of the ideas in their purest forms, they may be assumed to hold both views in varying degrees. Both Lois Whitney and Alan McKillop illustrate the presence of both attitudes in the poetry of Pope and other poets of the Eighteenth Century.14 Henry Nash Smith, in tracing the primitivistic tradition from Cooper's Leatherstocking (the progeny of a romanticized biography of Daniel Boone) to Western literature of the present, observes the ambiguous role played by the hero of Western dime novels and literature. Ever pushing westward to escape the civilization he cannot tolerate, he unwittingly opened the wilderness to its destroyers. Thus he was admired by both the advocates of progress and the primitivist.15 Commenting on the paradox of these two ideas in American literature, Alexander expresses the belief that primitivism is the motivating force of the change that is called progress. He states that primitivism is a unit-idea or motive which, paradoxically, is at the very center of process of social change and that the primitivistic impulse acts strongly upon the human imaginative process which, actively and passively, individually and collectively, attends the continuous transformation of our society and culture.16

14 Lois Whitney, Primitivism and the Idea of Progress in English Popular Literature of the Eighteenth Century (Baltimore, 1934) and Alan Dugald McKillop, English Literature from Dryden to Burns (New York, 1948).


16 Alexander, pp. 5-6.
Though, generally speaking, primitivism looks backward and progressivism looks forward, both ideas are related in that both views result from a dissatisfaction with present conditions. Both primitivism and progressivism are idealistic impulses of escape from the unpleasantness of the here and now.

The interplay of these opposing and yet sometimes similar ideas in the fiction of Perry and Gipson has already been noted here and will be illustrated at some length later in this study. This study will consist of three chapters in addition to this introduction. One chapter will be devoted to the study of the fiction and some of the non-fiction of Perry with the ideas of primitivism and progressivism uppermost in mind. Another chapter will be devoted to a similar study of the works of Gipson, concentrating on his fiction. Both studies will consider the region of the writers, and some attention will be given to biographical details of each. The concluding chapter will consider the effects of rapid changes which have resulted largely from scientific progress on the regions and the fiction of these two writers.

Perry and Gipson were selected for this study for a number of reasons. While neither is as prolific as Paul Horgan, for example, they have an appreciable body of fiction on which to make a fair evaluation. While neither is so openly primitivistic as Oliver La Farge, they both reflect
the idea clearly even while accepting the idea that the old must inevitably give way to the new. While perhaps neither has the depth of theme or the taut control of his art form as have William Humphrey, Tom Lea, or Larry McMurtry, they have both produced serious fiction with universal themes. Katherine Porter and Conrad Richter have wider audiences, but Katherine Porter has not written extensively of her native region and Richter is not indigenous to the Southwest. It is the matter of region and both Perry's and Gipson's deep affection for their region in Central Texas that make them so apt a subject for a study of contemporary man's reaction to the staggering change that has come since World War I.

George Sessions Perry was born in 1910 in Milam County, where he spent all of his formative years and most of his productive years. He became one of Texas's most successful commercial writers, writing mostly for Saturday Evening Post, in which he published more than one hundred articles. He also published a large number of short stories, many of which were collected in a volume and published under the title Hackberry Cavalier. Besides these stories he published two novels, Walls Rise Up (1939) and Hold Autumn in Your Hand (1941). According to Robert Cowser, who has extensively researched Perry's works and life, he wrote five
more novels that were never published. He produced only three more short stories (and these of poorer than usual quality) in the way of fiction after the publication of *Hold Autumn in Your Hand*.

The twenty-year span between two great wars was the period in which Perry matured and wrote his body of fiction. Men were coming to a realization for the first time how impersonally destructive war could be in the age of technology. Milam County lay ravaged by overproduction of cotton, caused largely by high wartime prices, and resultant erosion. Economic depression gripped the Western World. In his critical study of Perry, Stanley Alexander describes Milam County during this period as follows:

Changes came in Central Texas in ways that were typical of the whole country and in some other ways that were regional and special. It was the era of the motorcar and, at a slower pace, the mechanization of farming. The heritage of Milam County was the Southern one, and it had fallen on evil days. Between 1910 and 1940, the chilliest winds since the 1870's blew across a chronically depressed South whose cotton lands were worn out, whose most beneficient view of life involved keeping the mythic childlike and happy Negro in his agrarian and pastoral place, and whose deepest cultural and historical impulses were opposed to the New Deal philosophies. The gullied and leached-out thin sandy hill lands of the South and of Milam County, Texas,


18 Ibid., p. 127.
would no longer grow the cotton necessary for subsistence.19

It was this time, this land, and its people which compelled Perry's best writing.

Just as Perry had reached his creative zenith in fiction, he abandoned the genre. The war erupted shortly after the publication of *Hold Autumn in Your Hand*, interrupting his writing routine. He became a war correspondent during World War II. What effect this had on his writing of fiction is unclear. Nevertheless, he did continue to publish for the *Saturday Evening Post* and other magazines for several years. Two serials which he wrote for the *Saturday Evening Post* were later bound into the volumes *Cities of America* (1947) and *Families of America* (1949). In addition he wrote *My Granny Van* (1949), *The Story of A and M* (1951), *Tale of a Foolish Farmer* (1951), *Texas: A World in Itself* (1942), and *The Story of Texas* (1956) after publication of *Hold Autumn in Your Hand*. John Mason Brown, Perry's personal friend, gives an explanation to the question of Perry's abandonment of fiction in an essay published as an introduction to *Walls Rise Up and Hold Autumn in Your Hand*. He relates that Perry, in answer to the question of his returning to the writing of fiction, replied that the war had "de-fictionized" him.20

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While Brown and Cowser accept this explanation at face value, Alexander suggests that the more lucrative payment and security of commercial writing lured him away from fiction.\(^{21}\) If this surmise is correct, we must accept the fact that Perry abandoned not only his most creative form of writing but also the principles to which his fiction attests. Whatever the reason may have been, his fiction stopped; and the Hackberry of his fiction became the Rockdale of reality. He continued to publish; and, as one might expect, the best of his post-fiction material is about his home town and its surrounding area.

Fred Gipson has remained even more faithful to his native soil than did Perry. Like Perry he ventured from his native region only briefly before returning to it and committing it to the annals of literature. Unlike Perry, however, he was not lured to summers in Connecticut or the lucrative rewards of big-time magazine reporting. Also unlike Perry, who set his fiction in the present, Gipson has preferred to write of former times.\(^{22}\)

Gipson was born in Mason County, Texas, in 1908. Mason County lies approximately one hundred miles west of Milam County in the region known as the Texas Hill Country. Mason

\(^{21}\)Alexander, George Sessions Perry, p. 33.

\(^{22}\)The Home Place is an exception to this statement, being set in 1950, the year of publication.
County is better known for cattle, sheep, and goat ranching than for cotton farming; but small dry-land farms can be found in the county. Gipson was born and reared on one of these farms. Graduating from high school in 1926, Gipson weathered the depression years working as farmer, ranch hand, soda jerker, cotton picker, tractor operator, construction worker, fence builder, bookkeeper, mule skinner, and reporter before studying journalism at the University of Texas from 1934 to 1937. Sam Henderson states in his study of Gipson for the Southwest Writers Series that Gipson spent the next three years working as a newspaper reporter, but was fired from his job in 1940, at which time he began his free lance writing career.

Whereas Perry's fiction predates World War II, the bulk of Gipson's has been written since the close of the war. Gipson's first short story was published in 1936 in the Southwest Review, a publication which was to publish most of his later short stories. Other stories followed, one of which was reprinted in the Reader's Digest in 1944. In 1946 he published Fabulous Empire, a biography of Colonel Zack Miller. He established his literary integrity and his


ability to "tell it like it was" in this book.\textsuperscript{25} His success with this book rests largely in his empathy with Colonel Miller's story, which represented the passing of an era. Hound-Dog Man (1949) was his first book-length work of fiction and the most important one to this study. A discrepancy appears in Henderson's account of Gipson's development as a writer at this point. Henderson earlier states that Gipson quit newspaper reporting in 1940. He later places the date at 1949, when Gipson retired from the Denver Post to return to his farm near Mason to devote his full time to creative writing.\textsuperscript{26} At any rate The Home Place, published in 1950, may be largely autobiographical in its account of a man who has left a well-paying job in Kansas City to return to his eroded farm in the Texas Hill Country. Two more successful biographies followed The Home Place—Big Bend: A Homesteader's Story (1952), with J. O. Langford, and Cowhand: The Story of a Working Cowboy (1953). His last book-length works consist of four juvenile novels: Recollection Creek (1955), Trail-Driving Rooster (1955), Old Yeller (1955), and Savage Sam (1962). Although Fred Gipson is still living, he has produced no books since 1962.

Neither Gipson nor Perry definitely expresses a sentiment of antagonism toward the encroachment of the machine on

\textsuperscript{25}Ibid., p. 11.

\textsuperscript{26}Ibid., pp. 5, 23-24.
rural Central Texas, but their reaction to its effects on farm life there are nonetheless discernible in their works. Gipson ignores the machine for the most part. Perry's Granny Tucker perhaps expresses his sentiments regarding the automobile: "It's a mighty funny bunch, it looks like to me, that the Lord seen fit to furnish with cars."27 Both writers have consciously or unconsciously imbued their works with primitivism. An examination of the settings, characters, themes, and motifs of their fiction will reveal this fact most clearly.

27George Sessions Perry, Hold Autumn in Your Hand (New York, 1941), p. 120.
CHAPTER II

GEORGE SESSIONS PERRY

A Survey of His Works

Perry provides a great deal of autobiographical material in some of his works, especially in *My Granny Van* and *Tale of a Foolish Farmer*. In the first chapter of *Texas: A World in Itself* he tells something of his travels outside the state of Texas. But he sheds no direct light on the interesting question as to when he decided upon a writing career. Cowser quotes Lewis Nordyke as saying that Perry first thought seriously of becoming a writer while he was abroad.\(^1\)

There are facts which indicate that he had considered such a career even before this. Although his refusal to discipline himself in spelling and in developing other rhetorical skills led to his failure in three different colleges, he acquired a taste for good literature during that time. His imitation of Faulkner's techniques in his earliest writing attempts indicates an early admiration of that artist. His travels to Chicago, New York, Europe, and Africa immediately after abandoning college would seem to indicate a desire to widen his experience in the manner of Hemingway. At any

\(^1\)Cowser, p. 11.
rate, on his return to Rockdale in 1933, after his unsuccessful college career and an eight-month traveling period, he devoted most of his time and effort to writing.² In a period of four years he wrote four novels,³ none of which has been published. The manuscripts of these novels reveal attempts to imitate both Faulkner and Hemingway. In one of these, "After Many Days," Perry attempts to chronicle the events of a typical day in a small Texas town. The events are narrated through the point of view of an idiot in the stream-of-consciousness technique developed by Faulkner.⁴ "Frost in the Garden of Allah," an unpublished novelette set in Algiers, in Cowser's judgment is "undoubtedly influenced by the style of Hemingway, an author whom Perry admired very much."⁵ Hence, the conclusion that Perry had already decided to attempt a writing career before entering college is not unreasonable.

From the beginning of his first attempts at writing, Perry was largely motivated by the primitivistic impulse. "Story of Jim," his first unpublished novel, is set in a

²Alexander, George Sessions Perry, p. 13.
³There is some disagreement about the number of his unpublished novels. William Peery, in his introduction to Perry in Twenty-One Texas Short Stories (Austin, 1954), p. 115, says he wrote eight unpublished novels. Alexander says that there were six (p. 13). Cowser explains that he wrote four unpublished novels, some of which he revised once or twice, leaving a total of eight manuscripts (p. 13).
⁴Cowser, p. 28.
⁵Ibid., p. 29.
small Texas town and is an account of a boy growing to manhood. "Portrait of the Morning" is a revision of "Story of Jim." The story in both novels closely follows the events of Perry's early life. These stories emphasize Jim Cowan's yearning to return to his home town Blackjack even though he realizes it is economically depressed. "After Many Days" is an attempt to resist the inroads of a mechanized society. He praises individuality over conformity to mass standards provoked by mechanization, a theme which runs throughout all his later works. In this novel he draws a parallel between the farmer and the artist, which Cowser quotes in his dissertation as follows:

Plainly the artists and the farmers were stragglers as yet not abreast with this bright new mechanical day, but plodding along wearily in primal night where a thousand dark forces belabor and cudgel them. Humble, whereas the inhabitants of this new day are barricaded behind the sound of whirring, clanking metal, the new anaesthesia, the new, sterner, and ever more wholly unforgiving God.6

A more succinct condemnation of the machine age would be difficult to find. In 1934, Perry published three short stories under the name of Nick Kalantar in a short-lived (only five issues were published) little magazine called The Calithump.7 These stories are set in and around a community called Blackjack (in his later fiction Blackjack becomes Hackberry, both being fictional names for Rockdale). In one

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6Ibid., pp. 28-29. 7Ibid., p. 13.
of these stories, "And There Is No New Thing," Perry sympathetically portrays a tenant farmer from the sand hills south of Blackjack. He later expands this story to Hold Autumn in Your Hand.8

After serving a lean four-year apprenticeship in writing, Perry applied to the agency of Mrs. Edith Haggard, an employee of Curtis Brown, Ltd., in New York, for publishing contacts. The results were almost immediate. He sold a story entitled "Edgar and the Dank Morass" to the Saturday Evening Post for $500.9 It is the story of a young town-bred man from Hackberry on a walking tour in the South-east Texas swamplands in search of adventure. He encounters a backwoods family there and becomes involved in a feud which has degenerated over the years into a fist fight which is always followed by a congenial feast together. At the encouragement of his agent and the editors of the Saturday Evening Post he adopted this pattern for a series of stories of a similar nature.10 With few exceptions the stories are uniformly poor in quality. The characters are over-caricatured portrayals of stereotypes of the comic pastoral tradition. The obviously contrived plots all follow the familiar romantic-love motif. Stanley Alexander judged the

9Alexander, George Sessions Perry, p. 13.
stories to be so poor that their acceptance for publication "at all is a commentary on abysmally poor public and editoria
torial taste in 1937."\footnote{11} Perry himself felt moved to apolo
gize for the quality of his stories for the Edgar Selfridge series.

\ldots I was, I am afraid, pampering and spoiling Edgar rather badly; making things too easy for him, leaving him always a tiny, climactic out, tempting him along a primrose path upholstered with lovely maidens, a path which passed a reviewing stand occupied by peering magazine editors. I am afraid I guided Edgar in such a way that he should be happy and that a little check should occasionally be passed to me from the reviewing stand.\footnote{12}

Despite the superficiality of his stories, however, his idealization of rural life, his admiration for innocent roguery, and his contempt for sophistication and materialism stand forth. His first published novel, \textit{Walls Rise Up} (1939), is an idealization of soft primitivism written in the tradition of the picaresque novel. \textit{Hold Autumn in Your Hand} (1941), his chief work, is a farm novel involving the problems of tenant farming; but much more it is concerned with the close rapport which Sam Tucker holds with nature and the land he farms. This novel and many of the short stories show that Perry was as comfortable with hard primitivism as he was with soft primitivism; for Sam Tucker,

\footnote{11}{Alexander, \textit{George Sessions Perry}, p. 13.}

\footnote{12}{George Sessions Perry, \textit{Hackberry Cavalier} (New York, 1944), p. 19.}
though he faces one hardship after another, is, in quite a different way, as happy as the sensualists of Walls Rise Up.

Almost all of Perry's published fiction was produced in the five-year period from 1937 to 1941, ending with the publication of Hold Autumn in Your Hand. The fictional works outside this period are, of course, the little-known Calithump stories, the four short stories published after 1941, and the detective novel Thirty Days Hath September that he ghostwrote for Dorothy Cameron Disney. The total fictional output consists, then, of two short novels and a collection of short stories. After serving as a war correspondent, he devoted his energy and talent to commercial writing and non-fiction. Two serials of articles which he wrote for the Saturday Evening Post were later published in the volumes Cities of America (1947) and Families of America (1949). During the year that he spent writing the series on cities of America, the agrarian impulse which he displayed in Hold Autumn in Your Hand was strongly reinforced. After finishing his tour of the cities, he viewed them as monsters and correctly predicted that their people would soon move en masse to the outlying suburbs. It was during this time or shortly after that he purchased the farm which

13Cowser, p. 115.

had served as the model for the farm in *Hold Autumn in Your Hand* and attempted to enact the role of the farmer, at least vicariously. He humorously relates some of his farming experiences in *Tale of a Foolish Farmer* (1951). In addition to these books, he wrote four more books in his post-fiction period: *My Granny Van* (1949), a biography of his grandmother in which he dwells nostalgically on his own past and some of the Rockdale days of the past; *Texas: A World in Itself* (1942), a study of contemporary Texas in which he devotes some space to its history; *The Story of Texas* (1956), a juvenile Texas history book; and *The Story of A and M* (1952), a seventy-fifth anniversary memorial.

Primitivism in one form or another underlies all of his fiction and much of his non-fiction. It is most obscured in his magazine reporting and often subdued and distorted in his short stories which were written subject to the approval of magazine editors. For this reason *Hold Autumn in Your Hand* and, to a lesser extent, *Walls Rise Up* are the most valuable sources for determining the degree of primitivism in Perry because they most nearly reflect his true thoughts.

**Primitivism in His Fiction**

Perry is, for the most part, a cultural primitivist. The characters of his fiction are contemporary Texans living in the backwaters of America's mechanized, progressive culture. Although the characters of his magazine stories are
conventional comic stereotypes, they sometimes bear a resemblance to some of his actual Rockdale acquaintances, whom he describes in much of his non-fiction. Rather than verisimilitude, however, it is his comic mode that dictates the portrayal of his characters, both in his stories and his novel *Walls Rise Up*. His best, most realistic characters are those of his more serious *Hold Autumn in Your Hand*. In his comic fiction he scarcely acknowledges the existence of evil in human nature. Almost all of the characters are motivated by cheerful good will. When the antagonists are evil at all, they are only mildly so; and they usually repent as the stories inevitably progress toward a happy solution for all. Whether the characters be peasant farmers, bathless scavengers, Amazonian types of women, sixteen-year-old seductresses, young townsmen on the prowl for adventure, or rogues, they possess a common purity of heart. If they offend established conventions, they do so innocently because they are naturally responding to their primal impulses. These characterizations are in accord with Perry's view of human nature.

Perry says that chicanery is a part of the Southwesterner's heritage. In the preface to *Roundup Time* he interprets the attitude of the typical Southwesterner in the following manner:

Most of our people, of whatever economic strata, seem to feel that either a man and his family can live
off the land, or he can go and steal something. If he has neither the daring nor the energy to steal at such times, it is felt that he is a person with neither spirit nor courage, and therefore not entitled to the respect of good men. For the fact remains that what the Southwest has in large quantities is not morals, but vitality.15

Another example of the expression of this attitude is noted in his account of the Gonzales family of San Antonio in Families of America:

The Gonzales, along with 100,000 other Mexicans and United States citizens of Mexican descent, live in a sunny agreeably free-wheeling, indelibly Mexican old San Antonio. They do not particularly feel themselves to be the victims of race [sic] prejudice. Their Anglo-American townsmen, in company with richer United States Mexicans, will exuberantly skin them out of their last cent, but so will they you out of yours, if they get the chance.16

This cynical view of human nature is exactly the philosophy which lies behind the characterization of the protagonists in his stories and in Walls Rise Up. Alexander, in his comment on the transgressive behavior of Jimmy, Eddie, and Mike, accounts for their appeal to the reader. Their sometimes illogical rationalizations of their transgressions heighten the comedy and at the same time allow the reader to participate in their outrages against society.17 He is presented


17Alexander, George Sessions Perry, p. 20.
with an acceptable philosophy of life. Alexander says,

This philosophy is, for the most part, a kind of childish transcendentalism or an idealism cleansed of all values having to do with work, property, and social morality. The natural world is made for men to live in and actively aids men in their enjoyment of life. The behavior that results from this philosophy is a variety of primitive epicureanism that glorifies delight above all things.18

Thus the behavior of these characters reflects Perry's serious view of what constitutes good and evil even while he treats them humorously.

Perry's primitivism is most easily understood in terms of his conception of good and evil. A study of the antagonists in his fiction will be useful in establishing his concept of evil. In the Hackberry Cavalier series, Edgar's uncle Grover Selfridge is the most universally disliked by all other characters, including Edgar. He is the Hackberry banker with all the worst characteristics of the Philistine; he is insensitive, wealthy, stingy, and without human sympathy. As controller of the Hackberry wealth, he obstructs romance in a number of the stories by steadfastly refusing to loan money by which the young swains may gain a start in farming. Although he lacks the pomposity and wealth of Grover Selfridge, Newt Tabor is as heartily disliked by the members of the Brazos Forks community in Walls Rise Up. He is the chief antagonist of the novel, possessing no good

18 Ibid., p. 20.
qualities. He is the target of most of the roguery of Jimmy, Mike, and Eddie, who undertake to mend his evil ways. In the microcosm of the Brazos Forks community, he is the lone representative of commerce and industry. This fact, more than the parsimony of his ways, accounts for Perry's harsh treatment of Newt, for his villainy is actually no worse than that of the hoboes. He is a materialistic interloper in a wilderness paradise designated by the "Higher Powers" as a refuge for the pure in heart. Nature in the form of a flood finally smites him when all others are allowed to escape. The traveling medicine man gains immediate acceptance by the rovers because he has renounced the regimentation of operating a drug store in response to a desire to sleep under the stars at night.

Perry's dislike for the regimentation of a highly ordered society and suppressive authority is evident in his unsympathetic treatment of policemen and constables in his fiction. They are never portrayed sympathetically. For example, in "A Dab of Constructive Revenge," Sam Aiken, the San Antonio policeman visiting Hackberry while on a furlough, is depicted as unscrupulous and oppressive. When he had been a deputy in Hackberry, he had impounded Scudder's legally tied mule, declaring it to have been at large in violation of the livestock law, and had held it for a two-dollar ransom. When he enters the Sweet Shop where Scudder
is bidding for Mata's affection, he greets them both.

And in Mata's reply it was plain to Scudder that she thought Sam was eligible. Scudder also spoke civilly, being a little afraid not to. In his worst nightmares Scudder always saw this Goliath advancing to grind the heels of the cowboy boots on his cringing feet.19

Scudder finally gets revenge through the winning of Mata and through humiliation of the policeman. The sheriff in Walls Rise Up is similarly humiliated. He is easily outwitted by Jimmy when he comes to arrest Mike for beating Mr. Henderson. The picaros are equally effective in thwarting the sheriff's arrest of Mexican Pete for the growing of marijuana for sale. They intercede in Pete's behalf only because the sheriff represents the established social order, which has no place in their paradise in the wilderness. They do not approve of Pete's selling marijuana and agree to foil the sheriff on the condition that Pete will promise to grow no more marijuana,

which anybody knows deadens the senses and makes tramps of good men. If we caught him at it again, we said, we'd turn Oof loose on him. Also, we said, have him tell that sheriff that the Brazos Forks neighborhood takes care of its own, that there are forces at work which will nip any iniquity in the bud and will do the same for nosy sheriffs.20

They similarly outwit a constable at the Hackberry dance in the penultimate episode of the novel. The Hackberry

19Hackberry Cavalier, pp. 158-159.

constabulary is further discredited in *Hold Autumn in Your Hand*. Sam Tucker, recalling an episode from the past, congratulates Dave Lock on his attempt to resist arrest:

"It was just flat-footed wonderful," Sam said. "And the way you stood up to them hen-house policemen with your belly shot open, knocking hell out of em! I've wished a hundred times you could of went on and whipped them too. You did, of course. But I mean had em layin out in the floor with their pistols restin on their chests like lilies. That way it'd really been perfect."21

Yet both Dave and Sam are depicted as gentle-natured men who are aroused to anger only by gross injustice. Perry wrote a short story entitled "Heritage of Hate," in which he expanded the episode recalled here, but in the short story Dave is killed by the policeman.

Although Perry's treatment of the farmer is usually one of sympathy and respect, there are two notable exceptions. Mr. Henderson, the farmer who unwillingly provides the Brazos River camp with milk and vegetables, is presented as parsimonious and irascible. Yet his only overt offense against the protagonists is the beating that he administers to Mike for stealing milk. Perry's unsympathetic treatment of him does not reflect any prejudice against the farmer in general, however. He merely chose this means to advance his story line. Mr. Henderson is really more of a scapegoat than an antagonist. This cannot be said of another farmer.

21 *Hold Autumn in Your Hand*, p. 67.
of Perry's creation. Henry Devers, Sam Tucker's chief adversary, is Perry's most consistently evil character. His depravity advances the argument for Perry's primitivism in that he is not attuned with nature as Sam is, although he too is a dirt farmer. His is the profit motive, whereas Sam's is the joy of making the fertile but recalcitrant soil produce an abundant crop. Sam, in fact, being a day laborer, has no financial stake in the crop he produces. The conflict between Sam and Henry is the major one in the novel. It finally culminates in a life-and-death struggle on the river bank after Henry has twice deliberately destroyed Sam's vegetable garden, on which the Tuckers' winter food supply largely depends. Henry Devers is above all stingy, a trait common to all of the antagonists in Perry's fiction. He even resents sharing his water well with Sam. He is a misfit on the river-bottom land because he has neither the persistence nor the desire to produce crops successfully on the black land. His temperament is more that of the sand farmer. He, like Sam, wants to catch the fabled catfish Lead Pencil; but he lacks the knowledge of the ways of nature. Sam catches the fish on a trotline at the same time that he overpowers Henry in their riverside struggle. Henry offers to trade a share of his own garden produce to Sam in exchange for Sam's word that he will publicly accredit Henry with catching Lead Pencil. For Sam the
satisfaction is in the knowledge that he has caught the fish; for Henry the satisfaction lies only in having people believe that he has caught it. Sam, too, wants the fame that would accompany the catching of Lead Pencil; but he was going to let Henry have the fish, all right. But for a moment longer he held the rope, looking at Henry, trying to figure what real good it would ever do him to be able to pretend he'd caught Lead Pencil. And as Sam stood there, he supposed there must be two kinds of people: those who want to be, and those others who are satisfied simply to appear to be, whatever it is their hearts long for.22

Sam's anger with Henry subsides as he finally sees his foe as a pitiful creature so lost that he can deceive himself with a set of appearances.

This examination of the traits of the chief antagonists in Perry's fiction suggests that he has little respect for men of commerce or civil authorities or even farmers if they have not an affinity with nature. And nature is, of course, central in the idea of primitivism.

Perry's more likable characters far outnumber the despicable ones. A consideration of their character traits offers further insight into Perry's concepts of good and evil. Perry's fiction quite clearly reveals that he admires the hardihood and simple dignity of the peasants around Rockdale who are forced to struggle for existence:

If you worked like a son of a bitch and just barely got by, Hackberry looked on you as a peasant. Just exactly

22Ibid., p. 247.
that, which is one of the least ridiculous things on earth.

Everywhere, and in Hackberry too, peasanthood means a hard life lived with simple fortitude. It also means a thing which outsiders can push only so far. A thing that is running in low gear but has stamina and is getting somewhere slowly. So you are persevering and indestructable, because you know that as long as you are you'll survive.  

In My Granny Van, Families of America, and Tale of a Foolish Farmer Perry writes in sympathetic and admiring terms of the poverty-ridden Rockdale Negroes who persevere cheerfully in the face of hunger and bigotry. Although he mostly ignores Negroes in his fiction, almost all of his most endearing characters are of the hardy peasantry who best typify hard primitivism. The Hackberry Cavalier protagonists belonging to this class are developed in harmony with the comic mode. The plots of these lighthearted stories, built on the romantic-courtship motif, feature two different types of heroines: the Amazonian heroines with masculine traits and the voluptuous young beauties (usually sixteen). The Amazons are gruff, physically unattractive, but good-natured women of amazing physical strength and dexterity. Typical of these are Double-Bit Lil ("Wooden Wedding") and Zuralene Kelly ("The Winning of Zuralene Kelly"). The tobacco-chewing Lil wins the hand of Polecat Crittenton by out-chopping the male contestants in a woodchopping contest. In "The Winning of Zuralene Kelly" the mild-mannered clerk

23Ibid., p. 85.
Albert Judkins has lost out to the town bully in his suit for the robust Zuralene because she regards him a weakling. After a strict physical training program, he forces her at gunpoint into the woods, where he challenges her to a fist fight with the hope of winning her favor. By beating her soundly, he wins her enthusiastic love. The young beauties, on the other hand, are courted in the more conventional manner. They often differ from the conventional romantic heroine, however, in their disregard for the sexual inhibitions conventional social mores have placed on women. Both types of women are most noted for their freedom from convention. The same attitude is observed in the women characters of Walls Rise Up. All of them—Lola, Daisy, Iza Bell, and Fanny—yield freely and readily to their natural impulses.

The only fully developed female characters in Perry's fiction are Sam's wife Nona and his grandmother Granny. Nona is a durable, hard-working woman who often works in the field alongside her husband. She lacks much of Sam's enthusiasm for working the river place, for she realistically foresees the backbreaking work involved in farming the place.

Nona's eyes just saw land that would be hard to farm, and she thought of the incalculable effort a sixty-eight acre, black-land crop would demand from this brood, most of all from the slender, half-fed man beside her. . . . Sam had come here to pour himself
into this recalcitrant, indomitable earth, to make a
great crop he could not sell as his own. She could see
why he had come, but not how he might bring enthusiasm
with him.  

She is not unhappy in her poverty, however, because she has
the love and respect of her husband. Her greatest burden is
Granny, who nags Nona almost constantly. Granny is a more
complicated character than Nona. She bears a striking
resemblance to Perry's grandmother as he has portrayed her
in My Granny Van and is obviously drawn from his grandmother.
Granny is childish and selfish. She is often at cross pur-
poses with the family's efforts for survival, especially if
they conflict with her personal desires. She prates and
nags constantly, but she can be silenced. In one memorable
episode Nona, vexed to the breaking point, silences her by
switching her with a mesquite limb. Nevertheless, the old
woman can be lovable when she wishes to be; and with her
chatter and caprice she provides humor and excitement in an
otherwise rather drab household.

Perry's male characters are just as free of social
inhibitions as the female characters. Those in his short
stories comprise several different types of individuals, but
they are all beset by poverty and ignorance. They are
usually reduced to the role of human scavengers, such as
Polecat Crittenton, who figures in a number of the stories

\[^{24}\text{Ibid.}, \text{pp. 34-35.}\]
and who is content to live in the open, feeding off the waste of the Hackberry grocer. Other types, all comically portrayed, are hound-dog men, fishermen, and marginal farmers. Their courting, fighting, drinking, and philandering are always conducted in innocent good will. Their minor conflicts are usually resolved by the young townsman, Edgar Selfridge, who is strongly attracted to these simple people. Innocence is his common denominator with the backwoodsmen. His relationship with them is the primitive impulse. Alexander characterizes him in the following manner:

The young town man, socially and intellectually much the superior of the rather hackneyed rural characters and the plots they are involved in, is nevertheless much attracted to these people. Among them the old struggle between good and evil seems to occur on better terms, and the master trope of primitivism, innocence, plays a part that it rarely does in the complicated events of life.25

Edgar is a comic knight in the picaresque tradition. He has a strong attraction to women, an aversion to labor, a love of adventure, and a natural empathy with the underdog. Perry acknowledges to the reader his debt to Cervantes for the form of Hackberry Cavalier in his explanation of the series:

Many of these episodes have a similarity in form; all too frequently Edgar was caught up in the clutches of action and swirling circumstances by his lack of immunity to the loveliness of a pretty girl. Yet, in what other direction lies wisdom?—not, certainly, in

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puerile retreat from the complications incident upon following loveliness and succoring the distressed, which were the things that he, like a famous Spanish knight, principally did.  

The characters in Walls Rise Up are more unconventional in many respects than those of Hackberry Cavalier. The three sensual hedonists—Jimmy, Eddie, and Mike—are more complicated characters than Perry had previously tried to create. His intention was to anglicize Steinbeck's paisanos of Tortilla Flat and shift them to his own region in Texas—a feat in which he was largely successful. However, Perry's distinction between the amorality of the hoboes and the immorality of Newt Tabor does not come off quite as successfully as does Steinbeck's distinction between the paisanos and Torelli, the storekeeper in Tortilla Flat. The fine distinction is sometimes blurred in Perry's work because his is not strictly a proletarian novel while Steinbeck's is. In his study of pastoral elements in literature William Empson defines the proletarian novel as one which serves as propaganda of a factory-working class which feels its interests opposed to the factory owner; . . . [but] the wider sense of the term includes such folk-literature as is by the people, for the people, and about the people.  

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26Hackberry Cavalier, p. 19.  
27Alexander, George Sessions Perry, p. 17.  
Steinbeck clearly presents the paisanos as an exploited class and Torelli as a member of the exploiting class. The anti-New Deal, anti-labor union propaganda in Walls Rise Up tends to weaken its proletarian position. But Empson's broader definition might include Walls Rise Up. Newt Tabor is clearly a member of the class of society which corresponds to Torelli's class. The hoboes briefly join the employer class, but they quickly tire of their business enterprise. Their rejection of the moral standard of society accompanies their rejection of conventional society's lust for wealth and security. Hence Newt Tabor lacks the innocence of the pleasure-seeking trio.

The thoughts and actions of the hoboes are responses to the primary drives. They are relatively unsophisticated, and they seek out the simplicity of the wilderness to pursue their pleasures. They are at ease in their natural environment, living almost luxuriously in their idyllic river camp complete with a private island. They spurn financial security. Mike is relieved when their well-digging business stops because he had become "stifled with all this security." They detest the grubbiness of conventional society. Jimmy feels the "white man's burden" to train the alien Oof in citizenship.

\[^{29}\text{Walls Rise Up, p. 116.}\]
"Yes," Jimmy says, "we must guard him from all the pitfalls into which we have fallen, make him a first-class citizen in every respect."

"Looks like to me," Mike said, "he's hard enough to stand as it is."

"There's wisdom and foresight in what you say, Mike," Jimmy says. "If we do our duty and teach him all the virtues of drudgery and chinchiness and all the stuffy conceits of respectibility, he'll make mighty tiresome company."30

Much of their roguery is a symbolic nose-thumbing at stuffy respectability. And they distinctly operate within the bounds of the picaresque tradition, for they do attempt to make a shadowy distinction between rascality and crime. The rogues have a definite primitivistic appeal even if their double standards are sometimes puzzling.

Sam Tucker is a more consistent character than those of Walls Ride Up. Perry undoubtedly admired Sam above all of his other creations. In Tale of a Foolish Farmer he discloses the influence of Sam Tucker on his decision to undertake farming as a vocation:

My second novel, which was called Hold Autumn in Your Hand, dealt with the high adventures of a man coping singlehandedly with a stubborn, fertile piece of land in a lovely little valley. The book was well received, but apparently upon no one did it exert such overwhelming persuasiveness as upon its author.

I envied Sam Tucker, the protagonist, his almost godlike sense of creation as he watched his labors materialize in substantial fruit and beauty of the earth.31

30 Ibid., p. 62.

Sam is from the beginning of the novel portrayed as a man with a very close relationship with nature. His physical description is written in natural metaphor which blends him into the vividly described landscape.

The Texas January day was all blue and gold and barely crisp. Only the absence of leaves and sap, the presence of straggling bands of awkward crows, the gray-yellow flutter of field larks, and the broad, matter-of-fact hibernation of the earth said it was winter as Sam Tucker walked along the road, his long legs functioning automatically, farmerly. His body had about it the look of country dogs at the end of winter, when they are all ribs and leg muscles and jaw muscles and teeth. His eyes were bright and dark and small, with no more evil or softness in them than a hawk's. His hands were knotty with big knuckles and were gloved with protective calluses.32

Sam, though a tenant farmer working for only seventy-five cents per day, has a dignity which derives from a good knowledge of his natural environment. He wants to work and live on Ruston's sixty-eight acre farm on the San Pedro (San Gabriel) River. He wanted no part of life in the "anonymous civilization" of Ruston's large upland plantation, for "Sam was a river man."33 The first place he goes after moving to the farm is to the river. Although he is forced to struggle for existence, his motive for securing the farm has nothing to do with money; he wants to work closely with the forces of nature in producing a bumper crop and at the same time be

32Hold Autumn in Your Hand, p. 7.
33Ibid., p. 11.
near the river. He refers to his year on the river as his "play-prettty year."  

Sam proves himself master over elements of nature time after time, turning it to his profit. He charms bees into a basket with ease. He hunts with skill and restraint. And he proves his mastery over the river by catching the timeless Lead Pencil. He had earlier given up the financial security of factory work because he could not tolerate the monotony of the work. He recalls his quitting:

"What's the matter?" the foreman asked. "You looked like you were doing all right."
"I don't know," Sam said. "It just don't seem to do me no good."
"Five bucks a day!" the man said.
"Mister," Sam said, "I ain't really smart. But you could give me this God damned factory and I wouldn't rub no more fenders. Can't you see I hate the son of a bitch? It's eatin me up."  

Sam is too much of a natural man ever to adapt to the sterility of the automobile factory.

Both Alexander and Cowser note Perry's close empathy with his protagonists. Cowser has this to say:

Whether he wrote in a serious or humorous vein, Perry usually identified himself with a principal figure in the plot. Instead of identifying himself with a sensitive young man, frustrated by conflicting ambitions, as he had done in the unpublished novels, . . . Perry assumed the persona of a backwoods innocent in Hackberry Cavalier and a Brazos River hobo in Walls Rise Up.  

34Ibid., p. 27.  
36Cowser, p. 43.
As he has indicated in *Tale of a Foolish Farmer*, he identified just as closely with Sam Tucker. These characters, then, embody much of what Perry deems good in human nature.

While Perry's primitivism is clearly manifested in his character treatment, it is further evidenced by his choice of settings. The Faulkner influence seen in some of Perry's unpublished novels can also be observed in his treatment of setting. As the fictional Yoknapatawpha County is taken from the region around Oxford, Mississippi, so is the Hackberry locale modeled after the area around Rockdale, Texas. As has already been shown here, most of the action of Perry's fiction takes place in a setting far removed from the industrial revolution. In fact, Perry almost ignores the existence of machinery. Nowhere in the farm fiction is there mention of a farm tractor, although by 1941 tractors had largely replaced horses as a source of farm power in Texas. Even Ruston, the owner of a large cotton plantation, uses mules for working and planting his land. The hoboes do reach the river site by locomotive, but the residents of the Brazos neighborhood travel by foot. In *Walls Rise Up* only two episodes involve automobiles. In one the automobile is hopelessly mired, and the operator is at the mercy of the rogues' chicanery. In the other incident Daisy's Durant is

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37 Ibid., p. 1.
quickly destroyed in a drunken orgy. The farmers in Hold Autumn in Your Hand farm with primitive walking plows.

The setting of Walls Rise Up is very strictly confined to the small area of wilderness surrounding the rovers' camp after they are settled there. Hold Autumn in Your Hand is confined largely to the farm where Sam lives. The peasants of Hackberry Cavalier live up and down the creeks and rivers in the area around Hackberry. The river is, indeed, central to the setting of nearly all of Perry's fiction.

The river is the major symbol in the fiction of Perry. Rivers are the focal points in both of his novels. In Walls Rise Up the action takes place on the banks of the Brazos River. Hold Autumn in Your Hand is set on a black-bottom farm on the San Pedro River. Some of the most significant action in the novel occurs directly on the river. Perry attaches a mysticism to the river that borders on religion. Sam Tucker is repulsed by his necessity for seining and trapping fish to help support his family "because fishing was a thing you did on the river at night and was a rite and a mystery."\(^{38}\) A man could properly claim the respect of his fellow men only if he fished in the prescribed manner. Fishing on the river at night is a more significant communion ritual to Sam than any church rite.

\(^{38}\)Hold Autumn in Your Hand, p. 42.
And there is a communion among men because it is night on the river and the men are fishermen. The real ones are not just other men, but those who are concerned with a mystery. They are the kind of people Jesus Christ would naturally traffic with. If He came back, He would hang around with the boys at night and help catch fish again. You always have to make a little magic to do it right, and you can feel in your bones what's needed, which of course is what He'd do.  

Sunday morning was the highlight of the Tuckers' week. All of the family (except Granny, who sat on the porch reflecting on the River "Jerden") always went to the creek to fish, swim, and, significantly, to cleanse themselves. While there is no suggestion of ritual in these Sunday outings, the facts nevertheless remain that this is traditionally the time of church worship and that the washing in the river corresponds to the Christian purification ritual of baptism. In Walls Rise Up the three hoboes are so pleased with their new camp on the river that they (by now thoroughly intoxicated) subject themselves to a baptism in the river.

Suddenly Jimmy turned around and said, "I'll tell you what. Let's go swimming."
"In the name of God," Mike said, "what for?"
"Well," Jimmy says, "it's like this. This is our new home. And what I mean, I really like it. I like it so much that I reckon I just kind of want to wallow in it... You don't feel like a really good lodge member, do you, till you've rode the goat? Nor you ain't no part of a Baptist till you've gone down over your head in holy water?... I just figured we'd feel more like we belonged here if we took a little swim."  

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40 _Walls Rise Up_, p. 46.
The picaros claim divine guidance to this place; and, noting a large marker bearing the legend "Los Dos Brazos De Dios," Jimmy confirms the conviction:

"They called it 'The Two Arms of God'!" Jimmy says. "That's where we drifted to and where we lit." I said it looked like a miracle and Mike cried some more. Then Jimmy says, "Is that sign enough for you boys?"

Mike was still bellowing but I said it was.41

The river appealed to these independent souls because its wilderness offered asylum from the civilization in which they refused to participate.

Yet they are not so keenly attuned to the ways of nature as is Sam Tucker, and must therefore depend more heavily on the fruits of civilization than he. Alexander sees a special significance in Perry's placing their camp in the wilds of the river bank but underneath a highway bridge which serves as a symbol of the link to the society on which they prey.

With his characters settled under the bridge, they are situated slightly outside and beneath the realm of organized society (which they do not fear or shun, precisely, but need as the barbarians needed Rome) and barely inside the realm of nature where they tend catfish lines, pick berries, steal produce, and enthusiastically pamper their healthy biological impulses.42

The food on which they subsist comes partly from the river and its environs and partly from the cultivated fields.

41Ibid., p. 43.
42Alexander, George Sessions Perry, p. 19.
Their welfare (which includes copious amounts of whiskey) depends rather heavily on Newt Tabor's trading post, the symbol of commerce.

Whereas Faulkner broods over the diminishing wilderness in his region, Perry delights in the invincibility of those diminished strips of wilderness which follow the rivers; for civilization has made the least inroads on nature along the rivers in Central Texas. The steep slopes of the banks prohibit the use of heavy machinery which subdued the wilderness of the surrounding areas. The fecund soil and ready moisture have produced large trees and a heavy cover of smaller vegetation in which wild animals still abound. Fish inhabit the streams, which yield their secrets only to the initiated such as Sam Tucker.

Perry believed the soil along the river produces a durable quality in its people. He makes a distinction between the character of the river-bottom farmer and the sand farmer. Sam Tucker knows that he must convince Ruston that he has the persistence to farm the black, gummy soil for the river bottom if he is to get the opportunity to farm it.

But first something had to be taken away from Ruston: his belief that you were of sand caliber, because you had worked there. No one would know better than Ruston that sand attracts people that have not

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43 Ibid., p. 19.
much to give. Because the sand farms easily with jack-rabbit mules and a Georgia stock. Yet in the end it crushes your spirit more utterly with its bland refusal to give what it does not possess. For it is the loose incipient mother of nubbins and stunted cotton, and that is all. The implication is that man draws a moral substance as the soil draws a fertility from its contact with the river. As the bottom land is tough and stubborn, so is the river-bottom farmer endowed with the stubbornness and moral fiber to hang on in the face of adversity.

The river further resists the advances of man's subduing influence through its flooding. Man's attempts to tame the river bottom (in Perry's fiction anyway) are erased by flood. The structures of man are swept away and the crops buried in silt. The flooding Brazos reminds the hoboos that their river camp is a temporary one. Twice the San Pedro rises up and claims the fruits of Sam Tucker's labors.

Perry's devotion to the river arises partially from his abhorrence of change. In Cities of America he understandably treats Rockdale with a special deference. The chapter on Rockdale is by far the most outstanding one in the series. After viewing the rapidly changing faces of the American cities, Perry sees the most striking quality of Rockdale as

its changelessness. He concludes his nostalgic account of Saturday afternoon rituals thus:

Yet this Saturday is but one in a long continuum. Its excitements, its pleasures, its exertions will, like the movie that today left a handsome cowboy hanging off a cliff, be continued next Saturday.⁴⁵

He observes the same continuum in the flow of the river.

Sam Tucker reflects on the reassuring certainty of the river in an otherwise capricious world.

Once this little river rose in the night and drowned ninety people, left mules and bales of cotton caught in the tops of the highest trees. And yet it is certain as it is erratic. It was flowing before you came, when you were nothing, and will still be flowing after you are gone. Its creatures will go on devouring each other when every tree in the bottom has lived out its life, there will still be the river, and another fellow will come down and sit by it.⁴⁶

In view of Perry's reverential regard for the river, the strange circumstances of his death have a possible significance. His final year was one of intense physical and mental suffering. The pain of crippling arthritis had rendered him alcoholic. He suffered unfounded pangs of guilt and experienced frightening hallucinations. John Mason Brown gives this account of his death:

On December 13, 1956, the author of these two novels, which spill over with happiness and vigor, disappeared. On February 13, 1957, after a long search by police with bloodhounds, neighbors, helicopters, and small planes, George, once a strong swimmer, was found,

⁴⁵Cities of America, p. 262.
⁴⁶Hold Autumn in Your Hand, p. 179.
not in the pond on his own place at Guilford where many had looked, but on the Madison side of Connecticut's little East River in a channel only six to eight feet deep into which he had waded.\footnote{Brown, p. 15.}

No one, of course, can say what inner compulsion might have led Perry into the river; but one nevertheless senses an appropriateness in his final tribute to the river whether it was consciously or unconsciously made.

Closely related to the river theme, Lead Pencil is another natural symbol. This giant yellow catfish has some of the quality of Moby Dick in his majesty of size and agelessness. Sam observes the same dignity in him as he had in the hounds during the hunt when they are "roaming the dark woods with the strange dignity of things doing what they were born to do"\footnote{Hold Autumn in Your Hand, p. 79.} and in the cock quail which stood in the road and "looked at Sam with a strange dignity."\footnote{Ibid., p. 8.} He presents a challenge to Sam which adds a new dimension to his small world.

And now in their little world there was a new being, an incredible monster, one to scheme against on sleepless nights. For to whoever caught Lead Pencil fame would be assured. His capture would make a legend that would be told whenever the San Pedro men sat around a fire at night waiting to run their lines. Whoever caught that fish would sell only the carcass. The feat of catching it would be non-transferable.\footnote{Ibid., p. 104.}
Sam, unlike Ahab, is not at cross purposes with nature and, therefore, catches the fish. Sam knows that his two rivals for the honor of catching Lead Pencil cannot succeed, for they are too puerile.

The natural symbols here considered effectively demonstrate Perry's primitivistic yearnings. In addition to an examination of symbols, characters, and settings, a study of the themes in Perry's novels will suffice to determine the prevalence of primitivism in his fiction. Both novels depict man in concert with nature, but they do so in quite different ways. The protagonists of Walls Rise Up have very little in common with Sam Tucker. Their experiences in Hollywood and San Antonio and their final destination for Houston show that they can adapt to city life as comfortably as they did to outdoor life. Sam had tried city life for two weeks and had found it intolerable. The vagrants eschewed labor; Sam sought the more exhausting labor of black-land farming over sand-land farming. They fished grudgingly for a means to barter for whiskey, whereas Sam regarded fishing a cherished ritual. They depended largely on the labors of their fellow men for their existence, whereas Sam was fiercely independent. Yet the relatively urbaine hoboes and Sam found a common ground in their ability and resourcefulness in a natural environment.
Walls Rise Up is primarily concerned with social conventions and attitudes. The satire is directed at some of the widely accepted puritanical concepts. The happy state of the carefree hedonists in this novel serves to emphasize the absurdity of the notion that wealth and security gained by diligence and hard labor assure the best life. Newt Tabor's destruction is further illustration of the futility of acquisition. The satire is also aimed at the puritanical influence on sexual mores in conventional society. The only role that the female characters play in this novel is to provide an outlet for the vagrants' sexual appetite. The women's eager acceptance, rather than their pursuit, of this role spoofs the conventional sexual attitudes. Newt's abortive attempt to prevent being cuckolded only results in his wife's defection to the baking-powder salesman. Frank, on the contrary, raises no objection when he learns that he has likewise been cuckolded. He, like his friends, regards Lola's response to her biological impulse as natural and therefore innocent.

Innocence is the justification for all of the transgressions committed by Jimmy, Eddie, and Mike. Jimmy's declaration of innocence is embodied in the phrase from which the title was taken: "Walls rise up to protect the pure in heart."\(^5\) Perry's statement of belief that theft

\(^{51}\)Walls Rise Up, p. 42.
and chicanery are widespread in the established business world has already been cited in this chapter. The deceit of Newt Tabor, who is the most nearly representative of the establishment, is a further expression of this belief. The rogues' purity of heart lies in their openly taking the advantages that nature and civilization offer.

*Hold Autumn in Your Hand* has usually been called a novel about the struggle of a tenant farmer against the unfriendly forces of nature. Mabel Major calls Sam "Every Farmer who in spite of drought and flood and pests wins a living for himself and his family during the round of the seasons."\(^5\) Cowser places the novel in the tradition of American farm fiction depicting the personal struggles of the farmer pitted against the adversity of nature. He says the theme is "basically man's struggle against the forces of nature."\(^5\) Actually Sam Tucker is more in harmony than in conflict with nature. His conflicts with nature are on his own terms. Whether he is farming, hunting, or fishing, he is stimulated by the challenge nature presents. His prime interest in farming is in the creativity of producing a bumper crop. He is not confined to the hardship of agrarian life by economic conditions. He could have chosen instead


\(^5\)Cowser, pp. 71-72.
the economically secure job in the automobile factory where he had scabbed, but he preferred farm life. For him happiness existed not in materialism, but in the creativity of farming and in the freedom of spirit which could be maintained only in a natural environment. Perry's purpose in this novel was to exemplify the belief that the agrarian life, though austere, is more conducive to creativity and happiness than the industrial life. Time and again Sam Tucker compares the richness of his life to the meagerness of that of the factory workers. While on the hunt Sam experiences a "feeling of shame for the richness of his own life when so many thousands of other men must undergo the steady desiccation of the spirit that factories would impose on them."54 As Sam's "play-pretty" year rolls through the four seasons, he adjusts to them as naturally as to the other elements of nature. In the spring as Sam turns to planting, he again exults in his freedom from the factory.

And now it is time to do the thing with the earth the thing that is still big and meaningful in your blood, because in yours, at least, time, clocks, the factory whistle, the whir of machinery and stink of chemicals have, as yet, no place.55

The novel ends on a victorious note, even though the family are still poor, for the reader is left with the feeling that Sam will remain on the land he loves. Cowser states,

54 *Hold Autumn in Your Hand*, p. 143.
55 Ibid., p. 86.
however, that in the original ending Sam realizes that the only way he can provide a living for his family is by leaving the farm and taking the factory job in Houston which he so detests. Only at the insistence of the editors of Viking Press, says Cowser, did he change his final ending to one of victory for Sam.\textsuperscript{56} Perry's original intention, then, was to show the great loss suffered by a man who is forced from the land to the factory by the technical revolution. His foremost theme in all his fiction, in one form or another, was the glorification of the simple rural life. With this theme he is squarely in the tradition of cultural primitivists, who date back to antiquity.

The Idea of Progress

Little of the idea of progress appears in the fictional world of Perry. This world is an idealized world which gives an indication, at least, of Perry's primitivism. In his real world, progressivism swirled about him; and he made little attempt to escape it except in his fictional pursuits, which fact, in view of his total writing output, is lamentable. In his non-fiction, and especially that written for magazine publication, he often writes approvingly of the materialistic and social progress made in the United States. As has already been indicated here, Perry's attitude concerning

\textsuperscript{56}Cowser, pp. 71-72.
progress cannot entirely be trusted in his magazine reporting because there is no way of knowing to what extent the writings reflect the views of magazine editors. For this reason his praise of advances of aviation, for example, are not as convincing an argument for progressivism in Perry's thought as it would be if it appeared in his fiction. However, the very fact that he would consent to write such a series suggests that he was not unduly disturbed by the advent of aviation. In *Texas: A World in Itself* Perry frequently expresses pride in technological progress in Texas. In the chapter dealing with bodies of water in Texas, his only mention of rivers, which play such prominent roles in his fiction, is to tell of the large dams that are proposed or have been constructed. In the same chapter in which he acclaims the ranchers the last free men in a rapidly industrializing America, he lauds the progressivism of the King Ranch.

Though the Klebergs are horse-riding, gun-toting, genuine ranch folk, the ranch has been mechanized and organized to the hilt. Lesser methods could hardly keep its gigantic processes in flux. ... For one thing, the King loaders use electric prods for quickening the pace of the animals in the loading pens and chutes.57

Although his idea of progress is most clearly expressed in the non-fiction, there is nevertheless some concession to

the advantages of social and scientific advances in his fiction. The vagrants in *Walls Rise Up* pay tribute to progress when they ride freight trains from one destination to another. They never shun the comforts of civilization when they are available. They abandon the wilds for the comfort of a plush hotel when they get the insurance check for their "brother Eric." They even venture into capitalistic enterprise with notable success after they are provided with a cheap labor supply in the person of Oof. The expectation of a steady, fixed income is the product of the industrial age; but Eddie confesses his weakness for a steady income when Oof, having regained consciousness, makes ready to resume his labors.

Maybe you've never had one and don't know but there is nothing that rids a man's mind of the shoddy financial details of life like a good steady income. . . . We all felt worlds better being back in the money and talked about what it did for your morale.\(^{58}\)

The argument for progressivism is weakened here, however, by his later rejection of the oppressiveness of financial security.

The idea of progress is more lucidly evident in *Hold Autumn in Your Hand*. Sam Tucker's determination to assure his children a public school education, which he had never had, is a progression of his family toward the more accepted values of society. He demonstrates his resourcefulness by

\(^{58}\)Walls Rise Up, pp. 119-120.
fashioning a presentable coat for Daisy from a blanket so that she can attend school to be "doctored for her ignorance, be injected with wisdom." Only scientific knowledge finally saves Jot from pellagra after Sam and Nona have exhausted all the natural remedies. Doctor White learns of a new cure for pellagra, nicotine, after Jot has failed to respond to the citrus-and-milk diet.

At school Daisy learns that the disease which had infected Jot can be prevented by the raising of fall gardens and canning the produce for winter consumption. The garden then becomes for Sam a dream, "the dream he'd had of holding autumn in his hand throughout the winter." The garden becomes a symbol of the Tuckers' advance from the nomadic to the more stabilized phase of agriculture.

The blue ribbon which Daisy wins for persuading her parents to preserve the garden produce for winter consumption represents the achievement of the transition, and it thus becomes the greatest tribute to the idea of progress. The closing dialogue of the novel leaves no doubt of the hope inspired in the Tuckers by their new knowledge:

"Better get to bed, Honey," he said. "There's always another day."
She smiled, exhausted.
"I'm tard," she said. "Almost too tard to move."

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59 Hold Autumn in Your Hand, p. 34.
60 Ibid., p. 234.
Her eyes fell on the sea of preserved food, the ribbon.
"But it don't differ," she said, "long as we're gettin somewhere."61

Thus Sam's play-pretty year ends with a tribute to progress and scientific knowledge.

By his tempering of primitivism with the idea of progress, Perry is acknowledging the embodiment of good and evil which is inherent in any scientific achievement.

61Ibid., p. 249.
CHAPTER III

FRED GIPSON

A Survey of His Career

Fred Gipson's course of development as a writer was, in one sense, opposite to that of Perry. Perry apprenticed his writing career by writing fiction. Gipson, on the other hand, developed his narrative skills as a reporter and feature writer for newspapers, later achieving his greatest success through the writing of fiction and biography. Perry seems to have received greatest satisfaction, at least financially, from journalistic writing in his later years.

The result of this difference in development reveals itself in the quality of their fiction. Perry's fiction is extremely uneven; his first published stories are generally poor while his last novel received wide literary acclaim, at least in the Southwest. Gipson's fiction is more uniform in quality.

Despite this difference in their development, their fictional works possess many striking similarities. Both bodies of fiction treat rural characters--farmers, huntsmen, woodsmen, and fishermen--in a rural setting. Both select their native region as a setting for their fiction. Both emphasize the nobility of the peasantlike people who have
retained an alliance with nature, shunning for the most part the social and mechanical contrivances of man. The wilderness of the Hill Country, like the river bottoms of Milam County, provides a retreat still relatively free from these contrivances. Thus, Gipson chooses small dry-land farms along the river bottoms not unlike the one on which he grew up in Mason County for the settings of his five novels and numerous short stories.

Gipson began his writing career at a later age than Perry did, being twenty-eight and a junior at the University of Texas when his first short story was published in the *Southwest Review* in 1936. The eleven years between his high-school graduation and his enrollment at the University that he spent working on ranches in various capacities provided much of the material which he later used in his fiction.

The first story, "Hard-Pressed Sam," set the pattern for most of his later fiction. It is narrated in the first person by an adult reflecting back on his youth. The first-person point of view of this story proves most comfortable for Gipson in almost all of his later fiction. In this story the man is recalling an event which occurred when he was eight years old: the visit of Hard-Pressed Sam at the narrator's farm home. The epithet "Hard-Pressed" is, of course, ironic; for as the narrator naively reveals Sam's nature, the reader realizes that Sam is the least-pressed
person conceivable despite his pretension of business. Sam, having failed at farming, has moved to town, where he officiously serves as county tick inspector. The humor of the story lies in the fact that Sam, all the while protesting that he must be about his business, prolongs his visit with the boy's father through the course of three meals, which, of course, entails an overnight stay. This story demonstrates Gipson's narrative knack and his mastery of the Hill Country vernacular which distinguishes all his fiction.

Eight years elapsed before another of his stories appeared before a more literary public. During this interim he left the University of Texas in 1937 without completing his journalism course to take a job with the Corpus Christi Caller-Times. He appears to have been moderately successful with his job. The Alcade, the University of Texas alumni magazine, reported in 1939 that Gipson was at that time writing a column for the Caller-Times which, according to a recent survey, nearly half the newspaper's subscribers read regularly.¹ He later worked briefly as a reporter for the San Angelo Standard-Times. According to Sam Henderson, Gipson began his free-lance career in 1940 after he was fired from his newspaper job.² He supported himself and his

¹"The Eyes of Texas Are Upon You," Alcade, XXVII (June, 1939), 213.
²Henderson, p. 5.
family for the next four years writing for what William Peery, in his introduction to Gipson in *Twenty-One Texas Short Stories*, terms "western pulps."³ Henderson quotes Bill Walraven of the Austin *American-Statesman* as stating that Gipson "churned out a quantity of copy for the hunting and fishing journals and the pulp westerns."⁴ In May, 1944, *Collier's* magazine published "Lonesome Man," a story of Aaron Blood winning a race astride his roan bull. This story later becomes an episode in *Recollection Creek*. Shortly after the publication of "Lonesome Man" the *Southwest Review* published "My Kind of Man." This story is the nucleus of *Hound-Dog Man*.

The publication of "My Kind of Man" is significant to Gipson's career. In the first place it established a relationship with the *Southwest Review* which would continue for a number of years. In the second place it led to a contact with the *Reader's Digest*, which reprinted a number of Gipson's stories appearing first in the *Southwest Review* giving him wider readership. Finally, it led to the publication of Gipson's first book-length work, *Fabulous Empire: Colonel Zack Miller's Story*. In his introduction to *Fabulous Empire*, Donald Day, then editor of the *Southwest Review* tells

⁴Henderson, p. 5.
of his inspiration to preserve Zack Miller's fascinating story after reading a manuscript about him submitted to the Southwest Review in 1944. Colonel Miller agreed to the writing of his biography with the provision that the story be written "as it was and not as a spiritless whitewash."5 Day accounts for the selection of the then unknown Gipson in the following words:

Back in Dallas I found on my desk a coon-hunt story, "My Kind of Man," by a writer I had never heard of. I read it—and let out a Comanche yell. Here was the man to write Colonel Zack's story. A few days later I was on my way to Mason, Texas, where its author, Fred Gipson, lived. . . . Fred, encouraged by his wife, Tommie, agreed to do the book.6 This fortunate coincidence may have been the turning point in Gipson's successful career.

While the biography conforms to Zack Miller's stipulation that the story be told "as it was," it reads remarkably like fiction. Gipson, in his best narrative form, builds suspense by constructing each chapter on a smaller climax which finally builds to the major climax of the story—the fall of the empire. The thematic structure of the story, like most of the stories Gipson has written, is based on the passing of an era when men were freer, bolder,

6Ibid., p. viii.
and more plain-dealing: an era when the land was still unfenced, grass-covered, and fertile.

Gipson's two other biographies, *Big Bend: A Home-\textit{steader's Story* (1952) with J. O. Langford, and *Cowhand: The Story of a Working Cowboy* (1953), are equally remarkable in several ways. In the first place they are about ordinary people in ordinary pursuits. J. O. Langford is a salesman from Mississippi who went to the Big Bend Country hoping to restore his failing health and there established a health spa on the Rio Grande. Fat Alford, as the title implies, is a common, real-life cowhand who never packed a gun or avenged a crime. *Big Bend* is really more of a naturalist's description of the flora, fauna, and topography of the Big Bend Country than it is a biography; but it is also the episodic story of the settlement of a portion of the area as well as the story of one family's primitive but pleasurable existence in the lonely land when it was still a frontier. Finally, they both, like *Fabulous Empire*, are the story of an irretrievable past. The one note of lament in *Big Bend* is the destruction of the once-abundant grass by cattlemen lured into overstocking the land by high World-War-I beef prices. World War II, says Gipson in *Cowhand*, marked the beginning of the end of the practicing cowhand and his age-old methods of wrangling cattle. In his later years Fat Alford had to
support himself and his aging mother by trucking cattle to the market.

Between the writing of Fabulous Empire and Big Bend, Gipson wrote his only two adult novels: Hound-Dog Man (1949) and The Home Place (1950). Hound-Dog Man, as stated earlier, is really an expansion of the short stories "My Kind of Man" and "Hound-Dog Men Are Born" (later published in the Reader's Digest under the title "Hound-Dog Man"). It is the most significant of his works for the purpose of this study, for it most clearly delineates the primitivistic ideals which all his other works substantiate. The Home Place is Gipson's only fictional work set in a contemporary scene, and it is quite possibly partly autobiographical since it parallels Gipson's return to his own home place. It is also the only fictional work that is not narrated from a boy's point of view, although boys play a significant role in the story.

Gipson's empathy with boys and animals is more poignantly illustrated in his four juvenile books: Recollection Creek (1955), The Trail-Driving Rooster (1955), Old Yeller (1956), and Savage Sam (1962). In the last three-listed books animals are the heroes of the story, but Old Yeller

7A possible exception to this statement is the short story "Natural Born Hunter," in which the sixteen-year-old narrator, his father, and a neighbor drive to the hunting site in an automobile.
and Savage Sam are really more about boys than animals. The Trail-Driving Rooster is unique in Gipson's fiction; it is his only fictional work which does not include a boy character. Yet it has a strong appeal for young readers because of the combination of humor and action. The New York Times Herald Book Review recommends it for boys from nine to twelve.

Gipson's only other book-length work to date is "The Cow Killers," a brief book containing thirty-five short vignettes by Gipson. The credit for this work, however, really belongs to Bill Leftwich, who accompanied an expedition of Anglo-American veterinarians to Mexico in 1949 to join the Aftosa Commission in its battle against hoof-and-mouth disease. While on the expedition Leftwich made drawings and took notes from which Gipson fashioned the vignettes.

In addition to the works already mentioned, Gipson continued to write occasional short stories and sketches for the Southwest Review, Frontier Life, True West, and other magazines. He served as editor of True West, worked as a reporter for the Denver Post, and wrote for the Rocky

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8This statement does not include the stories written for the pulp magazines, which are in no way considered in this paper.

Mountain Empire Magazine of the Denver Post. This magazine published Gipson's most poignant and beautiful short story, "High Lonesome Place." It is an autobiographical story of a Hill Country farm boy who is almost mystically lured from the cornfield where he is hoeing to the top of a distant mountain. The higher he ascends on his mountain climb, the more intimate becomes his relationship to the surrounding elements of nature. As he nears the top, he is awed by his surroundings: "I had the sort of quiet, scared feeling I get sometimes going into a big church." On the top of the mountain a lizard leads him to the discovery of a spear point which links him with the savage man who had left it there "at some time too long ago to think about." He descends the mountain, knowing that he will be whipped hard for slipping away to the forbidden mountain, but the experience has rendered physical punishment insignificant. It is a story of initiation into manhood, a constantly recurring motif in Gipson's fiction. Unlike the other stories, however, this one is imbued with a pantheistic mysticism.

Fred Gipson still lives, but his pen seems to have stilled since the publication of Savage Sam. Henderson

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11 Fred Gipson, "High Lonesome Place," Rocky Mountain Empire (Garden City, N.Y., 1950), p. 266.

12 Ibid., p. 269.
cites Gipson's own explanation for the cessation of his writing. "I've just exhausted Fred Gipson and can't seem to do anything else with him." Gipson nevertheless expresses hope that he will discover other themes on which to write. If he produces nothing further, however, he will remain an important contributor to Southwest literature. No small part of his success is measured by the fact that four of his five novels have been portrayed on the screen.

Primitivism in His Fiction

The primitivistic impulse lies behind all Gipson's works. His reaction to the rapid changes of technology were much more pronounced than Perry's. This reaction is what led him to professional writing. In answer to the query put to him by a reporter of the Library Journal as to why he happened to write, he states,

It just happens that I love boys and dogs and horses and the wild creatures in their natural habitat—just as I resent big cities and traffic-jammed streets, and the screaming, snarling, dog-eat-dog struggle of a Big Money culture that governs my life whether I like it or not.  

No one who has read Gipson's fiction can doubt this statement. As a chronological primitivist he prefers to depict a glorious, but forever lost past relatively free from the

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13 Henderson, p. 12.

14 "Fred Gipson on Writing for Young People," Library Journal, LXXXV (February, 1960), 832.
bothersome machines and oppressive regimentation of the post-World-War-II era. He chooses to portray the noble frontiersmen who lived by a code of honor which is more binding than the laws which have largely replaced it and to portray innocent boys who are a resurrection of his own Golden Age of childhood. As a cultural primitivist he portrays peasantlike rural people—farmers, farm boys, and woodsmen in their native surroundings. As a hard primitivist he admires the hardihood of the frontiersmen who not only endure but are happy in their poverty. The bravery and nobility with which he endows the dogs and other animals in his stories are a form of cultural primitivism.

In addition to Gipson's writing, his personal life further attests to his repugnance to the bustle of city life. Twice he lived briefly in a metropolitan area only to return to his rural home county. The last time he returned to the farm where he grew up. William Peery reports that, when asked if he would go to New York, Gipson replied, "New York? I can't even take Dallas. Mason County is the only place for me." The attitude which impelled Gipson back to the farm may be assumed to be that expressed by Sam Crockett of The Home Place, which will be discussed at length later in this chapter.

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\(^{15}\)Peery, p. 203.
Most of Gipson's fiction concerns itself with elemental man in concert with nature. A study of some of the major protagonists in his fiction will provide the best clue to the extent and nature of Gipson's idea of primitivism.

Blackie Scantling is an enlargement and combination of Charlie in "My Kind of Man" and "Coooooon" and Uncle Dewey in "Hound-Dog Men Are Born." He obviously possesses some of the characteristics that Gipson most admires in adults because Blackie is most attuned with nature. Blackie has much of the innocence of the boy protagonists, but he is not entirely innocent. His weakness for women is not entirely moral. He acknowledges this by allowing himself to be trapped into marrying Dony Waller. For by marrying Dony he is acquiescing to the puritanical moral code of the frontier which demands that, when a man seduces a girl, or rather if he is publicly exposed as the seducer, he is obligated to marry her. Although, in fact, Blackie did not have sexual relations with Dony, she succeeds in making the community believe that he did. Blackie is not just a hound-dog man; he is as much a part of nature as the wild creatures of the woods. He is so confident in his knowledge of animal behavior that he confronts an angry, charging bull, "goat-jumping toward the bull on his hands and feet, his head down and his rump end sticking up high in the air,"¹⁶ knowing

that the bull will turn at the last instant. He deceives an armadillo into coming within arm's reach by tossing pebbles one after another in front of it. He successfully predicts what an animal will do in a given situation. He proves himself master of any situation out-of-doors, but he is not nearly so adept indoors. At the river he easily subdues Hog Waller with the aid of his hounds; but Waller beats him just as easily in the parlor of Dave Wilson and would have, in fact, killed him except for the intervention of Aaron Kinney. When he is dining with Fiddling Tom Waller, he shatters the tranquility of dinner as well as a plaque inscribed "GOD BLESS OUR HAPPY HOME" by pulling a wild tom cat into the dining room through an open window.

In the novel Blackie represents the primal forces of man pitted against the socializing forces of civilization. The home, the marriage institution, education, and the "respectability" and security of a stable job are some of the institutions in the novel which represent civilization. The major conflict in the novel is natural man versus civilization. Blackie is natural man; and, as such, he is a threat to the civilizing forces. His strong appeal to young boys and to older unwed girls threatens to lure them away from civilization. His way of life is also appealing to the married, settled men, who have themselves at one time enjoyed
the freedom that Blackie presently enjoys. Therefore, the older married women distrust Blackie.

The women in the novel are the defenders of the social order. As such they are antagonistic to Blackie and his hounds. Just as Blackie's hounds invade the kitchen of Mrs. Kinney, so does Blackie threaten her sense of security. While conversing with Blackie, Aaron Kinney reveals that before his marriage he, too, had been an outdoorsman as Blackie is; but his wife has forced him to abandon hunting and assume a more responsible role. She objects to Cotton's coming under Blackie's influence. In her reply to her husband's protestation that Blackie is a "pretty good sort of a duck," she reveals the reason for her antagonism:

Good for what! What's he ever done? Has he ever married and tried to make a home? Has he raised any children and done a lick of work to feed and educate them? What's a man good for if he dodges that kind of duty?\[17\]

In her view Blackie's sexual depredation intensifies his threat to domestic life: "In the last fifteen years, he's had chances a-plenty [to marry]. And what's he done about it? Just left back of him a trail of heartbreak and regrets. It isn't marrying that Blackie Scantling's after."\[18\] Dony's mother makes the same charge against him when she warns her daughter to avoid him. Her argument is strengthened when he

\[17\]Ibid., p. 19.  
\[18\]Ibid., p. 20.
shortly thereafter accidentally breaks the plaster-of-Paris plaque which has been a symbol of happy home life to her.

Dony, however, is the woman who finally subdues the atavistic threat which Blackie represents just as her mother has done with Fiddling Tom and Mrs. Kinney has done with Aaron at some previous time. Cotton's uncontrollable tears, flowing from his realization that Blackie's marriage marks the end to the boy's chance of ever learning the secrets of the woods, signal the reader that an era has passed. Cotton will undoubtedly grow up to become, like the narrator of "My Kind of Man," a bank cashier "with a watch-chain belly" just as his mother wishes. Only after Blackie is safely betrothed does Mrs. Kinney consent to let Cotton have a hound, which he fervently desires.

*Hound-Dog Man* is as much the story of Cotton Kinney as it is of Blackie Scantling. On a more elementary level it is the story of a boy who yearns for and finally gets a dog of his very own. It is also the story of a boy initiated into manhood and the realization that life is much more complicated than he had suspected in his innocent childhood. Blackie is his tutor, not only in the ways of nature and the hunt, but also in the awareness of evil. He learns that Blackie has another, more sinister nature (represented by the party clothes which he always carries) that the boy had never before suspected. He learns that his hunting is not
always confined to the wild creatures of the woods, and he is disturbed without knowing why. When Blackie eyes Dony appraisingly at their first encounter, Cotton becomes aware of the other part of Blackie: "I'd never seen the kind of look that came into Blackie's eyes then. It gave me a funny, kind of uncomfortable feeling, like maybe I didn't really know Blackie, here after I'd known him all my life."19 At the end of the novel Cotton cries partly because he realizes that he will never learn the woods; but he also cries because he has learned that adults, including Blackie, are not the creatures that he had idealized them to be. He had earlier been exposed to the evil nature of Hog Waller. He had later been sickened at the sight of Blackie and Hog Waller's wife slipping into the corn crib. And when this act leads Blackie into a trap, Cotton is thoroughly disillusioned. Finally, he is thoroughly confused by the adults who say one thing and mean another or lie outright:

I didn't know what to do. I was all mixed up. Hog Waller's woman had lied. Dony had lied. And if I didn't tell the straight of it, Blackie was trapped. Dony would marry him and that would be the ruin of everything.20

Thus, Cotton is initiated into the adult world more completely than he is into the mysteries of the woods.

Gipson affirms again and again through the growing awareness of the boys of his fiction--Cotton Kinney, his

19Ibid., p. 45.  
20Ibid., p. 240.
companion Spud, Travis Coates, Steve Crockett, Hopper and Jay Creech, and other nameless boys of the short stories—that growing up, like death, is a tragic but inescapable phase of the life cycle. With the approaching of manhood come the attendant evils and a resultant loss of innocence. The loss of innocence accompanies a growing away from the joy of the "wild and free" life in natural surroundings free from the conventions of society. Like Cotton's father, they will become entangled in the struggle for money and security which home life entails. At the beginning of the story Cotton vows to "take to the woods" when he grows up, as his hero Blackie has done. He says,

Blackie was smart. Smarter than Papa, even. Blackie didn't do the kind of living that kept him at home and hard at work all the time. I guessed he was the smartest man I knew. I hoped I could be like that too, and not let money get a strangle hold on me.21

But Cotton soon learns that Blackie, too, must finally yield to society's edict. Some adults, Gipson implies, may retain some of the carefree aspects of childhood for a while; but in time he must take up the cudgel of adulthood.

It is a wiser and perhaps sadder adult Hopper Creech who tells the reader of Recollection Creek of the best time of his life. He looks back on it as

that rare period of living when the days are especially bright, the world is extra new, and the events that transpire are so full of color, excitement, and high

21Ibid., p. 59.
drama, that, forever afterward, that time is a shiny little gem of remembrance, holding for the one who owns it a special, though often mysterious, significance.22

That rare period is a summer which the nine-year-old Hopper and his ten-year-old cousin Jay spend in high adventure in rural Mason County. The highlight of the summer comes when Aaron Blood presents each of the boys with a "proud-stepping" horse complete with saddle and all the trimmings.

Aaron Blood is one of Gipson's most interestingly drawn characters. He is a lonely, embittered man who cannot reconcile himself to the adult world in which the process of time has thrust him; and he can no better gain full acceptance by the boys with whom he wishes to identify. He refuses to accept adult companionship:

The really queer thing about Blood, I guess, was his attitude toward grown folks. I think he hated them. I know that he had no more dealings with them than was absolutely necessary. When circumstances forced him to exchange words with men, he seemed to resent it. He'd speak, all right, but in a vicious, sharp tone calculated to end conversation as quickly as possible.23

He succeeds in conveying his contempt for all the men in the community by riding a roan bull in a country where horsemanship is the finest distinction of manhood. When the swaggering Shiner Maverick announces the coming of a horse race "For Anything That Wears Hair and Runs on Four Feet,"24

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23Ibid., p. 23. 24Ibid., p. 8.
Blood seizes the opportunity for humiliating the men of the community by entering his bull in, and winning, the race—twice. He likes boys as much as he hates men, but he is rather uncomfortable in their presence. Nevertheless, he seeks out their company; and he is satisfied to sit apart from them at times, deriving a vicarious satisfaction from just watching them in their carefree enterprises. When he does approach them, he does so in a shy and apologetic manner because he is, after all, an adult and, therefore, unworthy of complete acceptance by the boys. Even when he has a plan that will help the boys avenge Tate Ishum's unjust accusation against them, he approaches them hesitantly. Hopper acknowledges an aloofness in the boys when Aaron Blood approaches them:

We were hidden out under a shed in the wagon yard, suffering the misery of wronged innocence, when Aaron Blood showed up. He came, looking uncomfortable and somehow shy around us, as if he had something to say but wasn't right sure he'd be welcome. We all stopped talking and stared at him as he came toward us across the wagon yard. That seemed to make him even more nervous.²⁵

Aaron's timidity around the boys indicates a feeling of inferiority which he doesn't exhibit in his dealings with adults. This further indicates that he includes himself in the contempt that he holds for all adults. He conveys this contempt most succinctly in his retort to Hopper's father, ²⁵

²⁵Ibid., p. 158.
who questions his ulterior motive for giving the horses to the boys:

"Well, Emil Creech," he said, "let me tell you something. I can afford to do whatever I goddam please with my money. I give them horses to them boys because I like 'em . . . On top of that, I was a youngun once and I done some hoping and dreaming, just like them boys. You was a boy once and you done the same thing. And now look at us. Me, a crabby old fool, too soured out with life for the good Lord hisself to get along with. You, greedy as a hog and trying to git your hands on every piece of land in the country. So damned suspicious you can't let a man give your boy a present without looking for some meanness behind it."26

Blood's sourness derives from his inability to recapture his Utopian dreams of his childhood, that period in his life "when he is more himself than at any other time between birth and death."27 His primitivistic impulse is to experience pleasures of that period vicariously by adding to those of the Creech boys.

The most memorable of the old men of Gipson's fiction are rugged individualists who have retained, or rather reverted to, the joys of boyhood. They are Grandpa Firth in The Home Place and Grandpa Vesper in Recollection Creek. They have, as it were, entered into their second childhood without losing the wisdom of age. The two old men have much in common. Having performed their duties by their families and society, they reclaim their rights to return to the more pleasing pursuit of the hunting that they had abandoned

26Ibid., p. 206. 27Ibid., p. 27.
while performing the role of father and husband. Like Blood, they identify with boys. Grandpa Firth's remaining passions are hunting and recounting the old frontier days. Grandpa Vesper's only passion is turkey hunting, and especially hunting the evasive phantom gobbler which appears to have lured him to his death. Both had lived exciting yet useful lives in their youthful days in pursuits which are no longer in wide demand. Grandpa Vesper had been a breaker of wild horses. Grandpa Firth had been a frontier lawman, who in his old age still has a stealth in the woods which matches that of the wild animals. He affirms his belief that to hunt is a natural instinct: "Hang it, a man was born to hunt, and when he don't keep it up, he's a-goin agin nature."28 Their deaths are also similar in nature, and both are symbolic of a complete atavistic reversion to natural man at the time of their deaths. Grandpa Firth, sensing his approaching death, takes his rifle into the woods, where he dies at a deer stand with the rifle across his knees. In a similar manner Grandpa Vesper leaves his deathbed to take a position at his favorite turkey stand in the graveyard of his ancestors. He is discovered later slumped across a grave with a rifle and a hollow-bone turkey caller in his hand and a green leaf in the roof of his

mouth, cut square for calling turkeys. With both deaths the reader becomes aware of the passing of an era.

The characters discussed until now have been mostly people from a past which corresponds to the time of Gipson's own childhood. Sam Crockett, however, is a Post-World-War-II man. He, like Gipson, has confronted contemporary life in the city and found it undesirable. He has rejected the glaring lights, blaring horns, and hustle-bustle of the city dweller. Realizing that he is going against the farm-to-city trend, he has given up a substantial salary and a secure position in Kansas City for a financially precarious life on a mortgaged dry-land farm where he grew up. Although one of the reasons that he gives for moving back to the farm is to give the boys more financial security, he confesses to Ann Marshall that the main reason for his coming back to the farm was his desire to live free. He was "fed up" with his city way of life. He explains why he could not adjust to life in the city,

"I'm pretty antisocial, I guess. I don't like swarms of people, all of them dressed alike, thinking alike, eating the same sort of food and going to the same shows and living all jammed together; all of them pushing and shoving and fighting each other for money or power or whatever they think everybody else wants the most at that particular time. . . . I'm afraid there's too much Grandpa Firth in me."

29Ibid., p. 113.
His desire for the individuality of country life is coupled with a nostalgic yearning to recapture something of his youth and his hometown.

Loma, undoubtedly drawn from Mason, is much like Perry's Hackberry; and Gipson expresses a similar feeling of warmth for it that Perry does for Hackberry. One is immediately reminded of Rockdale as described in Cities of America when he reads Gipson's description of Saturday afternoon rituals in Loma. He evokes the same sense of changelessness of small-town Texas life. To Sam Crockett, Loma is different because it provokes old memories: "In your home town, for instance, a knotty liveoak tree growing in the square is not merely another tree; it's an embodiment of memories." While Sam Crockett seeks to recapture a past era, he is nevertheless a cultural primitivist. He considers the life of the dirt farmer a nobler calling than most. The farm, not the city, is the place where a boy learns the true and lasting values. The farm in a natural environment is the best place for the boys to come to an understanding of the true nature of good and evil.

Steve, Sam's oldest and most sensitive son, has experienced more difficulty adjusting to the farm than the other members of the family. And just when he is most distressed

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30 Ibid., p. 30.
over Yo-Yo's illness resulting from a rattlesnake bite, he is horrified by the sight of buzzards pecking the eyes out of a newly born fawn. Sam comforts him and at the same time explains to him that evil also lurks in the city:

"Look, son," he said, "It's no different back there [at Kansas City]. It's just that there you don't see the ugly happenings. Here, everything is out in the open; it can't be hidden behind a hospital door. But that doesn't change the nature of it."  

Love of the land is the common bond which attracts Sam and the neighboring Ann Marshall to each other. She also has just returned from the city to claim her share of the large ranch adjoining Sam's farm, which she plans to operate. She and Sam have kindred devotion to farm life which draws them together despite the antagonism which exists between her brother-in-law Rod Murray and Sam.

Rod Murray is one of the few human antagonists in Gipson's fiction. This seems strange since Gipson relies heavily on external conflict to develop his adventure-laden plots. But the plots more often than not revolve on the protagonists' conflicts with fate or nature. Rod Murray is a city-bred man who married into his ranching interests. The implication is strong that his city breeding has rendered him unfit for the land. Although he provides Sam with the fence-building job which enables Sam to meet his land payment, he is the chief adversary in Sam's struggle to retain

\(^{31}\text{Ibid.},\ p.\ 31.\)
his farm. Murray is dishonest. He discovers that Sam's boys had been riding one of his steers. Although the steer has not been harmed, Murray tells Sam that the boys killed the steer, and thus collects payment from Sam. He also lies about providing the necessary materials for Sam to complete the fence-building job. And he is avaricious. He attempts to default on his payment for the fence-building job. His interest in the land lies entirely in what he can leech from it; he hasn't the affinity with the land that Sam and Ann have. He objects to Grandpa Firth's poaching on the land, not from any desire to preserve the wildlife there, but because he demands that property rights be respected. He is, in short, without human compassion and integrity.

Ed Waller is another of Gipson's more highly developed antagonists. Like Rod Murray, he is relatively wealthy, although he is not city-bred. He does, however, marry a city woman whose depravity contributes to the trapping of Blackie. Ed's outrageous actions stem from his greed for material acquisition. His nickname "Hog" has been assigned to him because he raises hogs, but it suggests his greedy nature as well. In the novel he more nearly than all other characters represents that element of society which Gipson finds so odious in city life. Not only is he bellicose and grasping; he is a social conformist as well. He dislikes Blackie from the beginning because Blackie fails to conform
to the puritanical concept of the virtue of hard work. His anger is further aroused when he sees Blackie's traps, which he believes will present a danger to his hogs which range the river bottom. The presence of Ed's hogs spoils the natural beauty of the river bottom as well as the campsite of the hunters. Ed's presence destroys Cotton's empathy with the wild creatures. Cotton joyously watches a vee of wild ducks fly over in the last light of the setting sun; the beauty of the sight bewitches him:

I walked not looking where I stepped, watching those fast-flying ducks. Then something happened, and I wasn't Cotton Kinney any more. I wasn't tied down to earth and stumbling over a heap of river boulders. I was a redhead duck, high in the air, traveling with the speed of a cannon ball.32

Just at that moment Hog Waller comes belligerently on the scene. An altercation occurs, and Waller is routed by the dogs to the delight of Blackie and the boys; but Cotton's charm has been broken:

Out in the middle of the river, I heard the whistle of wings again. I looked up. It was another V of wild ducks winging up river. I stood on a stepping rock and watched them. I tried to leave myself and go with them like I'd done with the first bunch, but it was no good this time. The ducks just flew on off and left me standing there.33

Waller and his wife played a vital role in the symbolic demise of Natural Man, represented by Blackie until the time of his marriage.

Gipson's noble-savage concept is interestingly revealed in his treatment of the Indians in *Savage Sam*. The Indians possess a moral and physical superiority over the white men in the novel. If they are cruel in their treatment of their captives, they are nevertheless honest and courageous. At least one of them, the Comanche, displays acts of kindness and a desire to understand better the captives. The Comanche seems superior to the Apaches in most respects. He displays uncanny intelligence at times. Travis observes that the Indian's shield bears a detailed map of the sky. Travis realizes that the shield somehow served the Indian as a guide:

> It shook me, coming to learn that a wild Indian was that smart. I couldn't have figured out and made a skymap like that to save my skin; and I'd already learned enough to read three or four books all the way through.34

There is subtle irony in the statement. Travis, who at this time believes himself to be mentally superior to the savages, compares his limited book learning to the Indian's vast knowledge of nature. The comparison stresses the pre-eminence of knowledge gained through experience. The Indians also demonstrate more wit in warfare. By their cunning maneuvering, the Indians, though outnumbered, incredibly massacre an entire troop of cavalrymen armed with superior weapons without the loss of a single man.

Their physical stamina and prowess is even more remark-
able than their knowledge of nature. They mount and ride
with almost superhuman skill. The Comanche wins Travis's
grudging admiration by running on foot alongside the fleeing
horses for hours without tiring—and with a gaping bullet
wound in his leg:

I could ride there beside him and hate him. I could
tell myself that I hoped he bled to death before sun-
down. But watching him run like he did, I couldn't
help marveling. He might be a cruel, merciless savage,
but he was all man.\textsuperscript{35}

Later when the rescue party picks up Travis, the men are
left one mount short, necessitating a duplication of the
Comanche's feat. One man must run alongside the horsemen as
the Indian has done. Even though the party is made up
mostly of young men, none of them can come close to matching
the performance of the Comanche. The hardiest of the men
tire after only an hour or so. In battle the Indians ride
so as always to shield themselves with their mounts,
incredibly clinging to the side of the running animals and
shooting simultaneously. When a bullet brings one of the
horses down, its Indian rider hits the ground running in
such a manner as to cling to another passing horse. The
Indians exhibit the same daring courage in a buffalo hunt.
The Apache Gotch Ear mounts and attacks a buffalo bull with
only a knife for a weapon. Riding alongside the bull,

\textsuperscript{35}Ibid., p. 30.
he made his leap. He quit his horse and landed astride the bull. I caught a glint of sunlight on polished steel and knew that Gotch Ear was making an even bigger bid for glory than when he'd tried to ride that killer stud.\textsuperscript{36}

He kills the bull, but too late for personal glory. The rescue party had seized this distraction to open their fatal attack on the Indians. At the end of the battle when Travis finds himself face to face with the now fatally wounded Comanche, his hate dissolves; and he is moved by the Indian's stoic courage in the face of death: "He lay there, looking death square in the face without flinching, without even appearing to be much concerned about it."\textsuperscript{37}

Gipson's idealization of the Indian approaches the Eighteenth Century romanticists' conception of the noble savage. His treatment of the Indian suggests a possible influence of the western pulps, to which he contributed.

Gipson holds an equally romantic concept of the nobility of animals. Glorification of animals is closely akin to that aspect of cultural primitivism which glorifies the so-called savage. Just as the cultural primitivist believes the savage to be guided more by instinct than civilized man (i.e., man oriented to Western European culture), so he believes animals to be guided by pure instinct. Furthermore, he holds natural instinct to be infallible.

Hence, the animal, at least so far as motivation is

\textsuperscript{36}Ibid., p. 189. \textsuperscript{37}Ibid., p. 203.
concerned, is far superior to reasoning man. Gipson unquestionably holds this view of animals, especially of dogs. A story by him which does not involve both wild and domestic animals is inconceivable indeed. Not once does Gipson write derogatorily of animals. When the wild bears or hogs act as adversaries, they are only acting within the bounds of their natural behavior. He depicts wild-life behavior with realism, and his hound dogs are equally believable. But Gipson sometimes assigns a nobility to his dog heroes that stretches credibility. Old Yeller and Savage Sam possess such traits of nobility and courage. Old Yeller risks his own life time after time to rescue Little Arliss or Travis from peril. His bravery is matched only by his intelligence and devotion. Knowing that he is no match for the angry mother bear, he battles her until Arliss and Travis have reached safety. Only then does he bolt for safety himself. He shows even more incredible insight when he refuses to take meat which hangs within his easy reach. Travis, who hates Old Yeller at first, hangs the deer meat within reach, hoping that Mrs. Oates will banish the dog for twice stealing meat: "But Old Yeller was too smart for that. He gnawed around on some of the deer's leg bones that Mama threw away; but not once did he ever even act like he could smell the meat we'd hung up."38 Since Travis did not voice a

clandestine motive for thus hanging the meat, the dog's restraint is truly remarkable. Old Yeller's selflessness is not restricted to his acts of rescue. After he and Travis are both wounded by the wild boars, Old Yeller lies near death. Yet it is not his own wounds, but Travis's wound that receives the dog's soothing licks: "A big lump came up into my throat. Tears stung my eyes, blinding me. Here he was trying to lick my wound, when he was bleeding from a dozen worse ones." If this sacrificial act of devotion on the part of a severely wounded dog seems excessively sentimental, it is probably the way a person looking back would remember a dog he loved. In any case it serves to illustrate Gipson's high regard for dogs. Savage Sam, a descendant of Old Yeller, is invested with equally exalted traits and even greater physical stamina as he relentlessly trails the Indians and their captives great distances across Texas.

Dick, the remarkable rooster in The Trail-Driving Rooster, was, according to Gipson, drawn from a true experience in the 1870's. This story of a stunted rooster with an extraordinary personality actually has all the earmarks of a tall tale. Dick cunningly escapes the cook's pot, wins the heart of the cowhands with his fighting spirit, and finally emerges a hero in a barroom brawl. The rooster, as are

39 Ibid., p. 107.
Gipson's other animal heroes, is developed as fully as the human protagonists.

Gipson's characters, people and animals, antagonists and protagonists, are so consistently drawn throughout his entire body of fiction that one can easily sum up his concepts of good and evil in terms of human behavior. He most admires the free-spirited individualists, the unsophisticated woodsmen, and the innocent boys, all of which have a close affinity with dogs and nature. He detests cupidity, duplicity, and ostentatiousness in men. Only boys are capable of the pure innocence cherished by Gipson; but hound-dog men, who remain aloof from the restrictions of property and society, can retain a measure of the free spirit if not the innocence of youth. Old men in retirement, who have withdrawn from the race of acquisition, are also closer to the innocence of their boyhood.

Characters of this type must, of course, be set in a rural area which has retained much of its pristine character. They must be set in a social milieu which has as yet escaped the leveling influence of modern technology. For this reason Gipson's own Hill Country and the time of his own boyhood provide the most suitable place and time setting for his fiction. The rivers and creeks of Mason County, like those of Perry's Milam County, persist in their natural state. For this reason and for the reason that Gipson knows
the area so well, he chooses to confine all of his fiction to this area. While most of the stories chronicle the early nineteen hundreds, they actually span a seventy-year period. From the late 1870's of Old Yeller to the late 1940's of The Home Place there is relatively little change in Gipson's description of the wooded areas. Perhaps the ruggedness of much of the terrain defies change. Cotton expresses his sense of the changelessness of the river-bottom site where Blackie has set up camp: "It was such a rough and wild and lonesome-like country that it scared you off and pulled at you to stay, all at the same time. . . . I felt like nobody but God and the Indians had ever been there before."\[40\]

The greatest change has occurred in the grasslands. There the tall, abundant grass has given way to barren, eroded land. The Home Place, crusading for a restoration of the native grasses, becomes a lament of nature's loss to greed. Gipson's selection of natural settings coupled with his sympathetic treatment of unsophisticated characters is an expression of a sense of loss, both in natural environment and man's moral rectitude.

The various themes of his stories and biographies are a further expression of his primitivism. His themes center around change. The most recurrent of these themes is that of the passing of an era. This theme is most explicitly

\[40\]Hound-Dog Man, p. 40.
developed in *Fabulous Empire*. Henderson notes the sense of regret that Gipson imparts in this biography:

> It would be too romantic to say that *Fabulous Empire* reflects a "Golden Age" of the past that can never be recaptured. But the book does reflect the passing of an era, and both Gipson and the Colonel are aware of this in an unsentimental way, however much they may personally regret it. The novel [sic] is no plea for a return to primitivism, but there is underlying regret that the land is filling up, that the prairies are being fenced, and that the land is being increasingly abused. It is not the land only that is undergoing a metamorphosis. People, too, are changing. It is indicative that the brusque honesty which assumed that man's handshake was sufficient to back up a cattle deal gives way by the end of the era to petty squabbling over alimony debts.\(^{41}\)

The same sense of regret underlies Gipson's other two biographies. Fat Alford is one of a vanishing species of highly specialized workmen. The vast cattle empires of the past are disappearing, forcing the cowhands to other jobs. The over-grazing has reduced the sprawling rangelands to wastelands. Gipson's description of the devastation of the Big Bend, as told by J. O. Langford, illustrates his despair at the waste:

> During the war [World War I], cattle prices and the prices of goats and sheep had soared. And to take advantage of these prices, ranchers had poured livestock into the vast region of grassland as fast as they could buy the animals. And now, where once I'd thought there was more grass than could ever be eaten off, I found no grass at all, just the bare rain-eroded ground. And where once beautiful pools of clear, cold water had stood in Tornollo Creek, now I found only great bars of sun-baked sand and gravel.\(^{42}\)

\(^{41}\)Henderson, p. 12.

This is the same scene of desolation that Sam Crockett views on his return to his home place. The lush, tall grass that grew there in his youth is gone. The major purpose of The Home Place is to create an awareness in the reader of the obligation of the landowners to restore the native grasses to the land. Sam despairs at his neighbors' unwillingness to employ the conservation practices by which he hopes to restore his own farm.

The Home Place further concerns itself with change in men. Grandpa Firth is all that remains of the former times.

The old man had known Texas in the days when there wasn't a fence between the Rio Grande and the North Star. He'd known it when the woods were overrun with wild game, and a man shot his own meat where he found it, made his own laws and lived by them, enforcing them in his own ways. But now the old days were gone, and Sam wished there was some way of making Grandpa Firth understand the fact. But the old man dies a poacher, unreconciled to the contemporary way of life.

Hound-Dog Man also concerns itself with change. It is the story of a vanishing wilderness and a vanishing species of natural man. People like Ed Waller are rooting out the wilderness with their hogs and fences. Blackie Scantling probably represents the last of the natural-born hunters. As Gipson's wife Tommie states, his is the "story of Natural
Man and his interrelations with Conventional Community." Conventional Community no longer has a place for the likes of Blackie. All forces of the society work toward subduing the natural impulses in him; and ultimately they succeed. Another era has passed with the marriage of Blackie, and Gipson weeps with Cotton Kinney at this passing.

Another recurring theme in Gipson's fiction deals with the change from the idyllic existence of childhood to adulthood. Old Yeller and Savage Sam deal almost exclusively with this theme. Travis Coates, anxious to be acknowledged a man, is thrust into a position of adult responsibility when his father leaves home to make a cattle drive. He successfully fulfills the requirement of initiation to manhood only to realize that he has passed into a world in which he must confront a senseless cruelty that man cannot control. His later experiences in Savage Sam serve to reinforce his newly gained insights. Steve Crockett grows to this same awareness when he sees the buzzards pecking the eyes of the fawn. Cotton Kinney's final realization is that his adulthood is going to require more of him than the idyllic life he has previously conceived of roaming in the woods with hounds like Blackie.

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Although Gipson laments the changes that technology and socialization bring about, he does not suggest that they represent a lost and hopeless world. He does suggest a decay in human relations. People are losing their individuality and their identity as a result of their shift from the farms to the cities; they no longer trust each other as they once did. He further suggests that man is more greedy and acquisitive and, as a result, that he has foolishly and needlessly wasted natural resources. Nevertheless, Gipson refuses to give way to pessimism. Both Sam Crockett and Mr. Coates tell their sons that, although evil exists in the nature of things, life is basically good. "And a man can't afford to waste all the good part, worrying about the bad parts."45

Gipson's fiction reveals both cultural and chronological primitivism through his treatment of hunters, boys, Indians, and animals and through the largely unexpressed but strongly implied resistance to change.

The Idea of Progress in His Fiction

Despite the primitivism that he exhibits in his fiction, Gipson is no more free of the idea of progress that prevails in this century than is Perry. However, the progressivism in Gipson's works is more obscure and less prevalent than

45The Home Place, p. 156.
Perry's. Although the note of regret at the results of change on man and the land prevails in his fiction, he never succumbs to bitterness. He accepts the necessity and inevitability of change with good grace.

His boy protagonists do not flee from society when they become aware of the evils which surround them, as, for example, Huck Finn does. Instead they accept their position of responsibility as their fathers had done. Cotton Kinney finally transfers his hero worship from Blackie to his staid father, who represents social order: "... I knew all at once that my papa was the bravest man on earth... I never had felt proud of my papa before, but now I was so proud of him that I thought my aching throat would burst. ..."46 The reader knows that Cotton will become a part of conventional society as his father had done. Cotton's mother, who wants him to hold a "respectable" position in the community, will have her way just as the mother of the nameless narrator of "My Kind of Man" had had her way. He, too, had wanted to live a life pursuing the hounds; but he reveals at the end of the story that he has become a bank cashier as his mother had always wished. Blackie finally conforms to society's demands, and he becomes a better man for so doing.

46 *Hound-Dog Man*, p. 237.
Sam Crockett frequently acts and thinks like a progres-
sivist, even though he does move back to the farm. Although
he finds city life odious, his decision to move results
partially from a desire to build an estate for his sons,
which he could not do in the city. And although he sacri-
fices the security of a salary, he seeks a more lasting
financial security on the farm. Sam's concern for soil con-
servation is primarily a nostalgic yearning to restore his
native Hill Country to its primal condition, but he realizes
that by so restoring his land he is building its cash value.
Hence, he is impelled partially by the profit motive. Sam
realizes what Grandpa Firth does not: that times have
changed and that the old man must yield to a new social
order which demands that one must respect, among other
things, property rights. Sam is not uncomfortable with the
restrictions of the new order; he restricts the old man's
hunting in order to mollify his neighbor. He apparently
does not share his grandfather's notion that hunting is
essential to the nature of man, and that the hunting
instinct takes precedence over such arbitrary delineations
as property lines.

The Home Place differs from Gipson's other fiction in
still another way than those already mentioned. In most of
his works Gipson expresses a distaste for bankers and other
men who concern themselves excessively with monetary matters.
However, the central conflict of The Home Place revolves on Sam's financial problems. Sam's struggle goes beyond his need to meet his land payments; he dreams of improving the land and contempororizing his house and outbuildings.

Gipson reconciles himself with the machine in The Home Place. Sam borrows his neighbor's tractor. He admires its efficiency and plans to own one himself in the future. Jeeps, trucks, and automobiles figure prominently in the novel. Sam depends on his jeep and others' trucks for transporting his livestock and produce. But for the speed of the late-model Buick of Ann Marshall, Yo-Yo would surely have died from the snake bite.

Greatest incidence of Gipson's progressivism occurs in The Home Place. The enthusiasm for progress evinced in this novel may well spring from Gipson's own enthusiastic resolution to restore his own home place, to which he had returned just before the writing of this novel. In any event, after writing this novel, he turned to writing more and more of the past. There is barely a trace of the idea of progress in any fictional work written after The Home Place. There is, in the final analysis, little in his fiction to indicate that Gipson believes strongly that man is progressing toward a better condition. There is much in his works to indicate his belief that contemporary man has suffered a loss in freedom and happiness with his sterile city culture.
A survey of the fiction of Perry and Gipson has established that the idea of primitivism is the dominant force behind their themes, plots, characterizations, and settings. A glimpse at their private lives and a reading of some of the selections of their non-fiction serve to reinforce the conviction that primitivism, consciously or unconsciously, motivated their writing careers. These writers produced the two most successful farm novels to come out of the Southwest. Both returned home to purchase a farm of their own after a brief stint in the city. Both writers are regionalists in the strictest sense of that term. Each has restricted his fictional world to the narrow confines of his native region and its people. With meticulousness each has represented the geographical peculiarities of his community and the economic conditions which accompany its present state of low productivity. Each has accurately depicted the speech and manners of the people of his area. Their local coloring has achieved such fidelity that their fiction would suffer a loss of verisimilitude if it were shifted to another geographical area. Both Perry's Hackberry community and Gipson's fictional Hill Country region represent cultural
entities isolated from the sophisticated, machine-oriented culture of the densely populated areas of the United States. The characters are a class of people which most accurately could be termed peasants.

However, the strong primitivistic impulse which underlies their works does not preclude the presence of the idea of progress in these same works, although the idea of progress is greatly subordinated to the idea of primitivism. Furthermore the two ideas, while appearing to be diametrically opposed, actually spring from the same instinct.

The conciliation of the simultaneous appearance of both ideas in the same works offers no great difficulty in view of Perry's and Gipson's strong beliefs in the worth of the individual. Their conception of the common man reacting to his natural instincts in an environment relatively untouched by Twentieth-Century technology forms the basis for their primitivism. They laud the progress of social institutions and scientific advancement only to the extent that these advances promote the dignity and welfare of the downtrodden. They abhor institutions, conventions, and technology when these devices tend to bind the free spirit of man or to corrupt his purity, which he retains only by a close contact with nature. Sam Tucker's family, for example, reap the benefits of formal education as a result of Daisy's learning that fresh-vegetable diets prevent pellagra; and their
learning to preserve the vegetables rewards them further by furnishing them a winter food supply. Similarly, Gipson's Sam Crockett struggles for land ownership because he wants his sons to remain free from the conformity-pressuring conditions of city life. Like all writers who express a concern for the plight of the poor, both Perry and Gipson are humanists. They both deplore the dehumanizing process of a society geared to the machine age. After only a week or two of factory work Sam Tucker comes to deplore the assembly-line production that kills the free spirit of the factory worker even if it does provide more financial security. Yet he can at the same time be grateful for the advances in science (the development of nicotine as a cure for pellagra) which alleviate human suffering. Sam Crockett is just as grateful for the speedy automobile and the snake-bite serum which contribute to the saving of his son's life. Hence, given the two writers' views of the dignity of the common man and their concern for his well-being, one can easily accept the consistency in the presence of the two conflicting views in the same works.

Primitivism, then, is the dominant force in their fiction. It governs their treatment of all elements of their fiction. While each of them has a style which is distinctively his own, the fictional works of both are strikingly
similar in their treatment of settings, characters, and themes.

Perry deals fictionally with such pastoral figures as tenant farmers, backwoods knights-errant, hoboes, hunters, and fishermen. He disdains grasping bankers and merchants, oppressive policemen, and even farmers if they are stingy and inhumane. Most of the action of his stories takes place in bucolic surroundings along river banks or in wooded areas. The major themes treat the changelessness of nature, the virtue of a close affinity of man with nature, and the purity and innocence of man acting in accord with his natural instincts as opposed to the degeneracy of man chained to convention and mercantilism.

Gipson, too, centers his interests in agrarian culture. His protagonists are rustic farmers, carefree farm boys, hunters, fishermen, Indians, and dogs. His scorn for greediness and conformity reveals itself in his consistent treatment of the antagonists in his fiction. His settings are on dry-land farms or along the river bottoms. The constantly recurring motif in all of his fiction is the hunt. The various themes of his fiction treat the initiation of youth, the growing awareness of evil, the passing of an era, and the oneness of elemental man with nature. His themes also reveal a concern for the shift of population from the farm to the city and for the need for soil conservation.
Though Gipson implies a chronological deterioration in the condition of man in his historically oriented novels, both he and Perry are primarily cultural primitivists according to Lovejoy's definition of the term. One cannot doubt that they believe that the best culture is that which allows the most freedom from the sterility of the machine and the social restriction that prevail in Twentieth-Century America.

The primitivistic proclivity which motivated the themes of both Perry and Gipson, as well as all major writers of the Southwest, can best be understood in terms of change. The changes which occurred during the development and writing years of Perry and Gipson were profound. They included two great wars and the Great Depression. These and other conditions precipitated economical and industrial revolutions which evoked a nostalgic longing to return to a simple mode of life which rural Texas still permitted.

Southwestern writers in general have reacted to change either by lamenting the passing of an era or by emphasizing the changeless elements of the region. The Southwest has physical features which resist a rapid encroachment of the taming influences termed progress. In addition, there has been an overwhelming tendency by the writers to look back on a recent and colorful history of their region.
In this connection J. Frank Dobie must be mentioned, for it was he who set the tone for all subsequent literature of the Southwest. His publication of A Vaquero of the Brush Country in 1929 marked the beginning of a new era in Southwestern literature. Francis Abernathy, in his Southwest-Writers-Series pamphlet J. Frank Dobie, called the publication of this book the "beginning of what was to be a Southwestern renascence."¹ Perhaps "birth" would have been a more fortunate term than renascence in view of the scarcity and quality, or rather the lack of quality, of Southwestern literature which preceded the publication of A Vaquero of the Brush Country. In any event, the book had far-reaching effects on subsequent literature of the region. It pointed the way for other Southwestern writers to look upon their own region as a rich source of writers' material. Significantly, the theme of this book is about the confrontation of the new world with the old. Abernathy states that A Vaquero of the Brush Country is

a study of fences and fencelessness, both real and symbolical, now and yesterday. In it Dobie recognizes the conflicts between the restraints of society and the individual's desire for freedom from these restraints. He identifies with the Brasaderos--the Brush Country Cowboys--and their untrammeled wanderings, their explosive exuberance, and their freedom from the bonds of ownership. The cowboy, like the mounted knight on

horseback, was Dobie's ideal of a lost past. He was a creature of circumstances that Dobie nostalgically realizes are not the circumstances of this modern world.\(^2\)

This nostalgic regret for the loss of the past has become the dominant theme of the Southwest. Almost all writers since the publication of this book have fallen under the influence, directly or indirectly, of Dobie. He was Gipson's mentor and Perry's inspiration. Gipson was a student in Dobie's famous literature course at the University of Texas, "Life and Literature of the Southwest." Perry has praised him repeatedly in the most glowing terms. Dobie's varied literary activities have brought him into personal contact with most contemporary writers of the Southwest. His primitivistic impulses were strong indeed; all of his writings have been directed toward the past or present frontiers. Too, the primitive Mexican folklore held a great attraction for him. Therefore, conceding Dobie's powerful sway on the direction of Perry's and Gipson's thoughts, one must suspect a connection between Dobie's primitivism and the prevalence of primitivism, not only in the works of Perry and Gipson, but also in those of many other Southwestern writers.

Other circumstances which contribute to the high incidence of primitivism in the Southwest can only be speculated upon. However, some conditions do suggest a cause for its

\(^2\)Ibid., p. 13.
wide currency. Southwesterners have an inordinate pride in the history of their region and in their present culture, both of which have been richly colored by the confluence of various ethnic groups. Compared to the rest of the United States, the Southwest is still closely related to its adventure-packed frontier. The westering dream with its real and mythical tales of heroic and courageous deeds has forever captured the imagination of residents of the Southwest. The tendency of writers and readers alike to cling to the last vestiges of this frontier in the face of profound change is almost universal.

The leading writers of the region have shown as strong a propensity as have Gipson and Perry to this impulse, which has been termed primitivism. Tom Lea, for example, has exalted the frontier in two mediums. The wonderful country of which he writes and which he illustrates in the novel by that name is a barren desert region lying on both sides of the Rio Grande. But his story, which resulted from extensive research, reveals that it has a glorious past distinguished by heroism and high adventure. It ends on a note of regret for the passing of a wild and adventurous era, represented by Martin Brady's beautiful black stallion Lágrimas. The death of the noble animal coincides with the advent of the railroad's coming to El Paso del Norte with its "iron horse," the locomotive. Lágrimas means "tears"; the name is
symbolic of Lea's tears at the yielding of an era of horsemanship to an era of machine power. Another historical novel, A. B. Guthrie's *Big Sky* (1947), has a similar theme. Its protagonist Boone Caudill, fleeing from a civilization to which he cannot conform, takes refuge in the Rocky Mountains, where he lives for many years. Acting as a guide through the mountain pass, he opens the area to the settlers, thereby destroying the virgin wilderness which he loves. Even writers who are not indigenous to the Southwest strike a primitivistic note when writing of the region. Midwesterner Conrad Richter recounts the conflict which arose when homesteaders brought plows into the Territory of New Mexico in *The Sea of Grass* (1937). While he presents the plight of the homesteaders with compassion and understanding, Richter nevertheless aligns with his protagonist Colonel Brewster, ruler of a vast cattle empire. Brewster, who foresees the destitution which will result from the destruction of the grass, is a tragic figure in the novel. The fall of his empire to the inevitable force of progress represents the loss of a noble era and the devastation of a land. The primitivistic proclivity of Southwestern writers continues into the present decade. Larry McMurtry's *Horseman, Pass By* (1961) and his more recent novel *The Last Picture Show* (1966) both ruefully record the passing of an era with the resulting loss of human values and happiness.
Numerous other examples could be listed here, but these should sufficiently demonstrate the primitivistic temper of writers of the Southwest.

Another contributing factor to the incidence of primitivism in the Southwest might well be the regionalism of its writers. They have consistently confined their writings to their own locales. The Southwestern region is populated for the most part by rural people and small-town dwellers. Further, the concentration in many areas of Mexican and Indian ethnic groups with their still-primitive customs and traditions adds an exotic flavor to the region which writers have found irresistible. In the easternmost part of the region, which Perry chronicles, a third ethnic group, the Negro, who has been suppressed into retaining much of his Old-South culture, adds a primitive flavor to that area. While Perry ignores the Negro in his fiction, the best portrayals in his non-fiction are Negroes that he has known intimately. Thus, the Southwest, the last frontier of the United States, the last refuge for the harassed American Indian, the melting pot for immigrants from Mexico, and the land of the beginning again for Caucasians and Negroes from the Old South, has retained a measure of the primitive elements even while it is gripped in the coils of the rapid changes which scientific evolution and population influx must necessarily entail. Furthermore, the Southwest is
still close to a past which allowed, even demanded, a high degree of individual freedom, bold action, and heroic chivalry.

Both Gipson and Perry have cleaved closely to the Southwestern writing tradition in their regionalism, local-color characterizations, and thematic approaches to fiction. Those forces which have combined to give Southwestern literature a primitivistic distinction have surely acted vigorously on the imagination of these two writers from Central Texas.
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