JOHN GRAVES AND THE PASTORAL TRADITION

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John Graves's creative non-fiction has earned him respect in Texas letters as a seminal writer but scarce critical commentary of his work outside the region. Ecological criticism examines how language, culture and the land interact, providing a context in which to discuss Graves in relation to the southwestern literary tradition of J. Frank Dobie, Walter P. Webb, and Roy Bedichek, to southern pastoral in the Virgilian mode, and to American nature writing. Graves's rhetorical strategies, including his appropriation of form, his non-polemical voice, his experimentation with narrative persona, and his utilization of traditional tropes of metaphor, metonymy, and irony, establish him as a conservative and Romantic writer of place concerned with the friction between traditional agrarian values and the demands of late-twentieth-century urban/technological existence.

Sequentially, Graves's three main books—Goodbye to a River (1960), Hard Scrabble (1974), and From a Limestone Ledge (1980)—represent a movement from the pastoral mode of the outward journey and return to the more domestic world of georgic, from the mode of leisure and contemplation to the demands and rewards of hard work and ownership. As such they represent not only progression or maturation in the arc of the narrator's life but a desire to reconcile ideological poles first examined so long ago in Virgil: leisure and work, freedom and responsibility, rural and urban values.

In this dissertation, by employing diverse interpretative strategies such as Bakhtin's discussion of chronotopic qualities in narrative, poetics of the greater Romantic lyric, and contemporary treatments of pastoral ideology, I demonstrate how Graves's involvement with the rich tradition of pastoral motifs provides him a historical perspective in which to situate his ideas about human relations with the natural world, while providing a means for him to enter into dialogue with other writers who share his ecological and cultural concerns.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Consider this excerpt from a scene John Graves entitles "A Comment" near the beginning of Hard Scrabble. Graves and a friend from the city, a lawyer, enjoy a pleasant May evening at Graves's home in the Somervell County, Texas hills from the "screen porch" after a light rain. The friend comments that Graves's place is pretty, that he won't pretend he doesn't envy it, but he "wouldn't run it" the way Graves does:

> "You're too much into it," he said. "You ought to get somebody living here on the place that could tend to all this little crappy carpentering and farming and just let you enjoy things. . . . The way you're doing it, it's like . . . I don't know."
>
> "Like work."
>
> "Well, I don't know," the lawyer said again after a pull at his beer can. "What it makes me think about—it's like some old fart at the edge of town in one of those junk suburbs that just kind of grow up before the city reaches out that far. Watering his Super Sioux tomatoes. Reading magazines about making compost and how to build things out of hunks of busted concrete. . . ."
>
> "Never you mind about that old fart," I said. "He's a friend of mine—kinfolks, sort of." (7-8; second ellipsis in original)

The lawyer assures Graves that he wouldn't bother "that old fart" if he could: "He's got it made. I expect he and his kind will watch me and my kind pass right on out of existence . . . " (8).

Two aspects of this scene bear upon our discussion of Graves, one pertaining to style and the other to content. Borrowing a trick from Virgil, Graves uses this dialogue to contrast two perspectives, that of the urban lawyer who enjoys the view out in the country, but not the requisite kinds of labor that would accompany the lifestyle for an inhabitant like Graves. He might work hard in his vocation as a lawyer, but not the kind of menial jobs, "crappy carpentering and farming," he associates with his country friend, who is "like some old fart" with his interest in organics and self-sufficiency. But the lawyer, seeing the irony in his own existence, suspects the ultimate sustainability of the older mode represented by Graves and his "friend," conquering cucumber beetles with marigolds.

Mikhail Bakhtin describes the "dialogization" of diverse individual voices in novelistic discourse into "social dialects, characteristic group behavior, professional jargons, generic languages, languages of generations and age groups, tendentious languages . . . languages that serve the specific sociopolitical purposes of the day" (262-63). These differing speech types, termed "heteroglossia," enable a writer to manipulate not only theme, but also the world of objects and ideas represented in the writing:

> Authorial speech, the speeches of narrators, inserted genres, the speech of characters are merely those fundamental compositional unities with whose help heteroglossia . . . can enter the novel; each of them permits a

> multiplicity of social voices and a wide variety of their links and interrelationships (always more or less dialogized). (263)

The dialogic quality of the scene mentioned above characterizes Graves's contrasting ideology with his urban friend, and how Graves's work is in dialogue with other texts: with Virgil and other writers of pastoral, with ancient and modern practitioners of organic methods, with the many writers whose words frequent his own pages as allusions and epigraphs, particularly those sharing the social and artistic values that shape his work. Graves, utilizing the voice of the lawyer, contrasts pastoral oppositions of city and country, sophisticated and simple, leisure and labor, temporary and lasting, by playing off the values indicated in his speech with those of the "old fart," with whom Graves identifies and feels kinship. By means of this seemingly simple dialogue, Graves establishes recurrent themes that will shape his oeuvre and the dominant characterization for those values eliciting his sympathies, which he later designates as the "Old Fart school of land use" (Hard Scrabble 81).

Although admittedly "archaic" and anachronistic, Graves is unregenerate, asserting that "archaism, in times one disagrees with, may touch closer to lasting truth than do the times themselves" (263). This tendency toward self-assurance and willingness to stand against times one disagrees with demonstrates a vital portion of Graves's voice both as a writer and as a farmer and family man, traits that frame the themes and forms with which he has chosen to express himself artistically: a sense of place, a sense of what has come before, a sense of community, and concern for the natural world. Graves, by emphasizing these themes, offers a critique of mid-twentieth

century American culture that has consistently moved away from an earth-centered perspective valuing links to place, an awareness of previous generations' traditions and knowledge, and a sense of obligation to bequeath something to future generations toward a consumption-oriented society that instead values mobility, a reliance on scientific and technological solutions providing present gratification at the expense of future sustainability, and alienation from each other and the world of nature. Rather than the strident voice of polemics and rhetoric, though, Graves employs the subtler mode of irony, a condition Allen Tate described as essential for the maturation of the southern writer. Always with Graves "there is internal dialogue, a conflict within the self" that takes the rough edges from his delivery while acknowledging the "ironic 'other possible case.'" His utilizing various modes of pastoral and Romantic poetics connects his own internal dialectic with "a universal myth of the human condition" (Tate 567-68).

When John Graves completed one extended journey through Europe, arriving back in his home state of Texas to help care for his ill father only to begin another shorter one down the Brazos River, he scarcely realized he had discovered the mode which would launch his most significant writing: the pastoral venture into the wilderness. This sojourn would eventually work its way into Goodbye to a River (1960), the first of his three major works—along with Hard Scrabble (1974) and From a Limestone Ledge (1980)—exploring narrative style and mapping both his inner and outer travels, all the while under the guise of somewhat innocent autobiographical rumination. Sequentially, Graves's three main books represent a movement from the pastoral mode of the outward journey and return to the more domestic world of georgic, from the mode of leisure and

contemplation to the demands and rewards of hard work and ownership. As such they represent not only progression or maturation but a desire to reconcile ideological poles first examined so long ago by Virgil: leisure and work, freedom and responsibility, rural and urban values; they comprise Graves's attempt to negotiate complexities and paradoxes of twentieth-century life, to "scratch through to an answer," to "accomplish various bucolic purposes" while living in an increasingly technological world (Hard Scrabble 4, 5). They do not represent, as Graves notes, "a triumphant return to the land, a rustic success story, but mainly a rumination over what a certain restricted and unmagnificent patch of the earth's surface has meant to me, and occasionally over what it may mean in wider terms" (5).

Goodbye to a River's structure suggests the pastoral journey and has been compared favorably to Thoreau's Walden and Two Weeks on the Concord and Merrimac Rivers, whereas the place-centered Hard Scrabble and From a Limestone Ledge are closer to the georgic values of property and ownership and the agrarian concerns of Thomas Jefferson. Critical studies of Graves's work have been scarce during the four decades since the appearance of Goodbye to a River, a finalist for the National Book Award for 1960 and winner of the Texas Institute of Letters Carr Collins Award for nonfiction in 1961. Besides his three major books, Graves has compiled a fourth, A John Graves Reader, containing excerpts from his larger works and revisions of earlier fiction. He has contributed extensively to journalism and literature in the form of articles, essays, introductions and narratives for a number of books and periodicals on the Southwest, and has had short stories and essays published by the Encino Press in Austin.

Graves grew up the son of "good parents" in Fort Worth, Texas, which "in the Twenties and Thirties of this traumatic century was a pretty fair place to be young in" (Growing Up 67, 66). In his words he has always been a bit of a "backward looker," but "generally I have looked back more at the historic and natural past than at my wondrous younger self" (Growing Up 75, 65). He describes his youth as "neither so oppressive as to saddle me ever after with its burdens, nor so idyllic that I was not glad enough to set it behind when it was over," and himself as having led "a somewhat bookish life," although he "consorted with his equally repulsive peers at selected drugstores, hamburger joints, Saturday movie matinees, football games, and high school fraternity affairs" (Growing Up 65, 68, 69). His reading was "hodgepodge," but he "had an early chance to see that good books were sense and language woven together, and that the weaving mattered greatly" (Growing Up 70).

Apart from his parents and his books, Graves found his values in South Texas spending a large part of his youth with his grandparents and other relatives in Cuero near the lower basin of the Brazos River, where he cultivated his interest in nature while involved in hunting and fishing:

> In my time it was not a place of drifters or new people, nor did it look forward as much as back, or outward as much as in. It was Southern and old-Texan, and cemented into ways of being that had been shaped as much by the earth's rhythms as by economics. . . Big dark liveoaks hung with Spanish moss stood around the houses and sometimes in the middle of the streets, the soft Gulf air working through them and beneath, with always

> somewhere the frenzy of mockingbirds and the sad low fluting of doves. . . .
>
> . . . It was a lot of things that Fort Worth was not, but mainly for me, I think, it was the past. Not as you find the past in books, even good books, but as you find it to touch. South Texas was where I could reach back to the things, good or bad, that my own people had been, and comprehend a little bit about what other people had been in relation to them. (Growing Up 72,75)

In these passages can be found the major themes that would come to shape Graves's writing: looking backward, looking inward, things "Southern" and "Old-Texan," "ways of being shaped by the earth's rhythms," natural imagery, a tactile past apart from books, and how all these relate in human terms.

After graduating Phi Beta Kappa from Rice University in 1942, Graves entered the Marine Corps, serving in the Pacific as an officer and losing his sight in one eye as a result of wounds that won him a Purple Heart. He retired a captain and returned stateside, living briefly in Mexico before attending graduate school. He received an M.A. from Columbia University, where he studied under Lionel Trilling and Joseph Wood Krutch, who would later describe his own sojourn in The Desert Year. A letter of recommendation for a graduate scholarship written by George A. Williams, his mentor at Rice, describes Graves as "a very exceptional person" with a "wide reading background" whose "interests are literary and intellectual" and whose "mind is superior" (Feb. 1946). At Columbia Graves concentrated in British and American literature and continued his

study of the Spanish language, which he had picked up during his youth in Cuero. He wrote his thesis on Faulkner at a time when there wasn't a great deal of Faulkner criticism, which seems entirely appropriate considering Graves's own experimentation with form in Goodbye to a River and Hard Scrabble, with those books' characteristics of blending fiction and non-fiction and self-reflective narration. One passage is particularly telling of what Graves admires in Faulkner, something he will later use to his own advantage:

> [Go Down Moses and Other Stories] has a great deal more unified force as a book, even without a book structure, than a piece like The Hamlet, which attempts to bind together its diffuse parts into one formal whole; this is the dominance of subject-matter over form, of theme over technique, the irrefutable looming truth which always confronts those who would make of literature a "pure" and formal art.
>
> In its structure, then, Go Down Moses is somewhat in the tradition of books like Winesburg, Ohio and In Our Time: its component parts are independent (most of them were published separately in magazines) but are drawn together by interlocking themes and characters. ("Technique" 103)

These early thoughts on technique would come to inform Graves's major work, which also emphasizes subject-matter and theme, and which has occasionally, as in the instance of From a Limestone Ledge, been published separately as essays in Texas Monthly, later to be woven into a whole, "drawn together by interlocking themes and characters," the

principal of these being the one he calls himself. Graves's technique of first-person narration in which the writer takes license in blending imagination and truth, fiction and non-fiction into a narrating subject that he in turn calls "John Graves" has proven popular in the past couple of decades (Milan Kundera and Frank McCourt come to mind), but it certainly was not common when employed by Graves in the 1960s and '70s.

At Columbia Graves also studied creative writing and had his first short story published by the New Yorker in 1947. After his stay in New York he began teaching at the University of Texas in 1948, but gave that up after two years, weary of grading freshman compositions he inevitably found stuffed in the pockets of his jackets. Following the trail of expatriates before him to Europe, he traveled in France, attended bullfights and fished for trout in Spain, and lived briefly in the Canary Islands and New Mexico. He returned to Texas in 1957 and published an early version of his Brazos canoe trip in Holiday. He tried teaching again, this time at Texas Christian University in Fort Worth, but left there in the mid 1960s, working briefly for Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall on environmental issues concerned with water usage. Out of this experience came his "only venture into activism," The Water Hustlers. He moved his family to the house he built at Hard Scrabble in 1970 and concentrated on farming and writing.

Since he is and has been chiefly a writer of concrete experience rather than of pure imagination—a doer then a thinker, if you will—he has had to put in considerable time experiencing. He describes the time before he moved his family to the land near Glen Rose he had earlier purchased, spending the better parts of summers and

going down in other seasons as often as time and energy permitted, and sometimes more often than that. I would poke around after quail or dove or whitetailed deer, study birds or vegetation or the way rain works its way into and across the land and down the watercourses, stare at a liveoak fire and listen to the windowpeck of sleet borne along on a January norther, puzzle over traces of old human presence—or, more usually, plunge into one phase or another of the harsh labor that adapting such a property to even minimal use requires. Fences, pens, garden, house, outbuildings, livestock, roads, brush control, a little forage farming. . . . (Hard Scrabble 4; ellipsis in original)

In this passage we can also see the keys to the transition Graves makes from solitary sojourner in the wilderness, essentially an idyllic concern of leisure, to the hard work ethic of georgic. Graves consumes a good deal of time involved in "harsh labor" while "adapting . . . property to even minimal use." That Graves is concerned with "property" and "use" indicates he has agricultural as well as ecological concerns. He is vitally interested in nature and place, but also in how those concepts are affected by land ownership and usage. As he confesses, he's "never been able for very long at a time to view the earth and its ways without considering what it may mean in human terms" (6).

This interest in nature as it relates to human concerns aligns him more with traditional agrarian thought than has, at times, been popular within the American environmental movement, where interest with the "wilderness" image of nature has often been privileged over the "garden." While his subjects and themes indicate that he is

clearly concerned with ecological issues, Graves has avoided the notoriety of such contemporaries in the environmental field as Rachel Carson, Edward Abbey, Gary Snyder, Annie Dillard, and Barry Lopez. As a political movement, environmentalism has been able to generate interest in terms of preservation of public lands, as with John Muir's battles in Yosemite or Abbey's in the Moab desert, whereas issues of cultivation are often referred to in pejorative terms, even though historical interest in the subject traces from the ancients Theocritus, Virgil, Cato, Varro, and Columella, to modern writers such as Louis Bromfield, Wendell Berry and Graves. Joan Weatherly describes the pastoral form's tendency to help situate ecological problems within a historical perspective. "Deeply ingrained in Western culture from Greek times and in all human experience through the Edenic myth, to which it is closely related," she writes, "the pastoral motif affords a means of discussing without sentimentality humankind's place in nature . . . Viewing pastoral in its broad historical perspective shows that environmental problems are age-old, though they may have accelerated in the last century" (73). Additionally, pastoral "often marks a writer's entry" into the poetic tradition. "Usually concerned with ecological problems, [pastoralists] nearly always have deep roots in their native region and find regeneration in the myths they weave around their native landscape" (Weatherly 74).

Recent literary criticism has witnessed the emergence of a perspective called ecological criticism—ecocriticism—that, as Cheryl Glotfelty puts it, studies "the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender-conscious perspective, and Marxist

criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts, ecocriticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies"(xviii). Taking as its subject the "interconnections between nature and culture," ecocriticism presupposes that "literature does not float above the material world in some aesthetic ether, but, rather, plays a part in an immensely complex global system in which energy, matter, <u>and ideas</u> interact" (Glotfelty xix). One notion that has accompanied this heightened awareness of the ways in which people, language, and the land interact is <u>bioregionalism</u>, a term first popularized in the mid-1970s. Kirkpatrick Sale defines <u>bioregion</u> as "a place defined by its life forms, its topography and its biota, rather than by human dictates; a region governed by nature, not legislature" (43), a concept in harmony with Aldo Leopold's "land ethic," first proposed in 1949, which "simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land" (204). This heightened awareness of things non-human involves a philosophical shift in values away from deeply rooted Euro-American tendencies toward "conquering" nature and results in a bioregional ethos corresponding with what Leopold posits as a change in "the role of <u>Homo sapiens</u> from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it," a change that has been described as <u>deep ecology</u>. As the poet Gary Snyder would later describe this attitude, a bioregional ethos conveys a sense of non-exploitation, a "nativeness," which is less a matter of skin color or ethnicity than "how you relate to the land. Some people act as though they were going to make a fast buck and move on. That's an invader's mentality. Some people are beginning to try to understand where

they are, and what it would mean to live carefully and wisely, delicately in a place . . ." (Real Work 86).

Besides this movement away from the ideology of conquering a place and toward inhabiting it, another aspect of the bioregional ethos is an awareness of the physicality of nature as a medium through which human consciousness and activity occur. According to Snyder, "culture," which means literally that which is grown, arises from the soil and is dependent on photosynthesis, what he calls "the first level of production" (Practice 179). The entire process of photosynthesis holds the key for bioregional communities, including humans, dependent upon the amount of sunlight falling on the earth at a particular point. Following from photosynthesis, in Snyder's words

> plants and their communities form mosaics of type and structure appropriate to the nature and degree of solar energy falling on that spot. The economic systems of various cultures are precisely adapted to that area—to the plants that grow in that area. Indigineity is having the plant and animal, soil and water knowledges that are specific to those mosaics. And in turn, the sense of spirit, the sense of sacredness, the cultural devices, and the songs and dances flow in terms of that as well. (Practice 179-80)

For Snyder, bioregionalism goes beyond the specific knowledge of flora and fauna and soil to encompass as well the "cultural information of how people live there." It transcends the merely political boundaries of state, entailing the knowledge of the "mythic, spiritual, [and] archetypal implications" of the wildlife that makes up a symbology. It is to know "from both inside and outside what the total implications of a

place are. So it becomes a study not only of place, but a study of psyche in place" (Practice 180-81). This type of attending to surroundings and intimate knowledge of the natural world, a bioregional ethos, Graves describes in his own writing as well. He comes at it, however, from a slightly different angle: that of the owner of property who acquires his knowledge of place from the type of intense labor and what he calls "hard way" learning that results from commitment to a particular place.

Bioregionalism as a literary description can be seen as different from traditional literary regionalism, which recognizes cultural variances in speech, dialects, mores and humor. Bioregionalism is less dependent upon human constructions and more influenced by the physical environment, and has always been a major aspect of what has sometimes pejoratively been called "local color," which finds its higher expression in the regionalism of Mark Twain and William Faulkner, and of the Texas literary tradition, the line of writing running through Roy Bedichek, Walter Prescott Webb, and J. Frank Dobie. This triumvirate in Texas letters, whom Graves has referred to as "the Old Three," have each in his own way been vitally concerned with Leopold's larger community of "soils, waters, plants and animals." Bedichek, the traveling naturalist, emphasized close observation and philosophic reflection in his Adventures with a Texas Naturalist; Webb, the historian of the frontier, described in The Great Plains the settling of the southern Plains as "a gigantic human experiment with an environment" (141), one which is ongoing and whose outcome is far from being ultimately determined one way or the other; and Dobie, the folklorist, set about the important task of archiving the oral tradition of narratives concerned with life in the Southwest, including both humans and

nonhumans, in works such as <u>The Longhorns</u>, <u>The Mustangs</u>, and <u>Voice of the Coyote</u>. Collectively, their work establishes an ecological tradition within Texas literature that anticipates current interest in the interaction of nature and the culture arising from an environment, and which culminates in the voice of John Graves.

Graves and the Old Three before him have come out of a societal tradition of land usage and attitudes prominent in the westward moving frontier, one similar to that of the old farmer Graves mentions in <u>Goodbye to a River</u> who had "done wore out three farms" in his lifetime (29). While industrialism and the extraction-oriented mindset intensified into what Max Oelschlaeger calls the "dominant social matrix" at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century (55), there appeared in this region, as elsewhere in the nation, voices countering economic exploitation and offering alternatives for contemplation in and cognizance of the interconnectedness of humans and an environment. The Southern Agrarians of the 1930s represent one source of resistance to the dominant paradigm of industrialism and exploitation of nature, their writing a concerted effort to counter the philosophy of utilitarian "Progress" with one based on agrarian economics, utilizing the traditional literary mode of pastoral as a rebuke to the corrupting influence they saw in materialism and consumerism. But they were seldom taken seriously, labeled as reactionary and Romantic, unable or unwilling to negotiate the cultural changes considered inevitable with modernity.

Similarly, and though they are often admired for their efforts, the Old Three are not without their critics as well, chief among them Texas novelist Larry McMurtry, who derided concern with the physical environment in his 1968 essay "Southwest Literature?"

as overly sentimental, Romantic "lamentation for Nature Despoiled [that] is sounded so many times . . . it comes near achieving the opposite of its intended effect. After a time one begins to wonder if man's divorce from Nature is really as bad and as belittling as they make it out to be" (35). "Whether it is or no," McMurtry continues,

> we arrive immediately at the crucial difference between the generation of Southwestern writers and the generation that is developing now. Bedichek, Webb, Dobie and their disciples revered Nature, studied Nature, hued to Nature. At their worst they made a fetish of it; at their best they drew on it brilliantly for context and metaphor.
>
> For my generation the reverse holds—and will hold, I suspect, for the generations that follow. I doubt we could scrape up enough nature-lore between us to organize a decent picnic. To the Presences, that could only be a damning remark. For them, Nature was the Real. Knowledge of it made a full man, and accord with it was the first essential of the Good Life. (35-36)

McMurtry, citing what he considers generational differences, bemoans the rural and romantic orientation of Texas literature, even though one of his fine early efforts, the elegiac <u>Horseman, Pass By</u>, clearly depicts a prevalent conflict in this century—the impending and apparently unstoppable loss of nature and agrarian values to modernization. McMurtry's take on this theme reflects what Mark Busby has called "a good-riddance attitude" and attacks "the myth of a beneficent nature" (<u>Ambivalent</u> 74, 75). Busby attributes McMurtry's zeal for countering the Old Three as Bloomian

"anxiety of influence," a deliberate "misreading" of an older writer in order to "clear the imaginative space for himself" (Ambivalent 110-11). This view would seem to bear out in McMurtry's insistence that these differences are "generational," even though there are any number of writers born in the decades immediately before and after McMurtry who don't share his enthusiasm for the urbanization of Texas, or America for that matter, and even though, as Busby says, "In reality, of course, nature has been and continues to be a fundamental aspect of McMurtry's work" (Ambivalent 112). While McMurtry later softened his attack against "the sacred old bulls of Texas literature," after his own flirtation with the mythos of the west in Lonesome Dove, his original "misreading" of them resulted in his "confus[ing] an appreciation of nature with sentimentalizing the past" and his "overstat[ing]" their "weaknesses" (Ambivalent 107, 112).

Graves, born just sixteen years prior to McMurtry in 1920, seems not to have felt the same desire to counter the influence of Dobie, Webb, and Bedichek, instead acknowledging the contributions of each to his own developing attitudes. He admits that "admiration has run and can still run so high that you occasionally read or hear assessments of the Three's accomplishments as writers that come close to bestowing literary apotheosis on them" ("Old Guard" 17). But he strongly disagrees with charges of their lack of "relevance" in an "urban atmosphere" simply because they were "ruralists in their drift," and because "their concern focused on nature and on country people and ways and phenomena," a criticism that Graves admits "treads pretty close to [his] own toes." He also wants to avoid "a tendency people have had to lump them as a sort of wise triple intelligence," preferring instead to point out their individual distinctions. He

concedes that "they were all Texans deriving from rural roots in the same Victorian, post-Confederate era" and "they all ended up . . . in Austin at about the same time, with academic connections. And being close friends for many years, as they were, undoubtedly created other minor likenesses in attitude and reaction, through a rubbing-off process." But Graves believes that "none of these things made them alike in essential ways, or made their works alike either. They were themselves" ("Old Guard" 18).

Reading Graves describe the Old Three and their differences provides insight into how each one affected him as a writer. In Bedichek, who published "his first and best book, Adventures with a Texas Naturalist, . . . at the incredible age of sixty nine," Graves finds "a cultivated, well-read, benevolent, and subtle-minded man of parts":

> Though his interests were mainly Texan and rural as was the subject matter he dealt with when he finally started writing, fundamentally his writing is not. In style it is almost urbane, not "country" at all, or even folksy. Texan-ness is discernible in it, of course—in the pleasantly cranky prairie populism that underlies much of Bedichek's thought, in the kinds of standardly Texan obtuse thinking that are his frequent targets, and certainly in his informed fascination with Texas flora and fauna and geological and cultural phenomena—with roadrunners and cedar choppers and all that. ("Old Guard" 19)

Despite Bedichek's interest in the cultural mosaic arising from his bioregion, that interest reflects a literary choice rather than a "provincial-mindedness" imposed out of ignorance of any other places or things. Bedichek had previous to his writing efforts traveled and

worked across the United States and Europe, and Graves believes that "if in mature years he had chosen to familiarize himself with the natural and rural aspects of some other mid-American or western-American area than Texas, he could have managed it easily, and the feelings and thoughts he would have given us in his writing would have been much the same" ("Old Guard" 19).

Of Webb's work, Graves finds in his early attempts at pulp western fiction "Confederate and West Texas habits of mind" resulting in "romanticism and chauvinism and racial attitudes" that "show through in places" ("Old Guard" 19). These tendencies are particularly noticeable in The Texas Rangers, which Graves points out was Webb's first book though published second. But "hardly any visible provincial limitations recur" in his later historical work ("Old Guard" 20), which includes The Great Plains and The Great Frontier. In the mature Webb Graves sees a "calm and exact" writer who has "applied to the modern western world at large, not grandiosely but precisely, understandings about land use and resource exhaustion and other things that had begun to flicker in him as a youth." "Through ambition and hard work and some luck," Graves claims, "[Webb] came to terms with the world of his youth by studying out its meanings in stages and writing them down in clean, strong, readable prose" ("Old Guard" 19).

Graves's opinions of Dobie reflect the most ambivalence concerning his three main predecessors. Although he admits that his judgment is "colored" by how well and affectionately he came to know Dobie toward the end of his life, Dobie "was the one of the three who had the least overall success in coping with his background . . . a long time ago it struck me that there was a sort of lifelong continuing tension within this man

between the forces of gentility and retrospection and provincialism on the one hand, and the pull of broadly humane thought on the other." But recognizing this tension doesn't alter the overall admiration and respect Graves has for one of his earliest influences. The work Dobie achieved in documenting through Southwestern folklore the ways of multiple and divergent peoples that forged a culture specific to this environment has been a major influence on Graves: "I started reading his books when very young, long before I'd ever heard of the other two, and those books became a part of the texture of my region for me. They are that still" ("Old Guard" 20).

The "pull of broadly humane thought" is important to Graves, as is fidelity to the "texture" of his region. Trying to reconcile the two has never been easy for anyone, particularly to a "bookish" sort of person trying to write far from the Eastern marketplace. The conflict that Graves cites in Dobie is common to many writers attempting to walk the fine line between the particulars of a specific place or region, leading to charges of provincialism, and the general appeal of what used to be called universal themes. Some believe this conflict is particularly acute for Texas writers dealing with a storied and mythic past. William T. Pilkington has described two choices available to the individual Texan aware of the often-contradictory state of intellectual pursuits and the "pleasant legends of a heroic past," which are to either leave the state completely, or to stay put. The former "seems to increase a young person's chance for material success and intellectual development; it also imposes upon him [or her] a kind of exile philosophy. . . A second possibility, and one recommended only if the young person has a thick skin, an even temper, and a measure (however small) of optimism, is that he

will decide to remain in the state and attempt to assimilate—emotionally, psychologically, and intellectually—the land and its people" (Pilkington 165). Graves has followed a third route: leaving, then returning to practice his craft and make his home and, ultimately, his peace. As he states in Goodbye to a River,

> If a man couldn't escape what he came from, we would most of us still be peasants in Old World hovels. But if, having escaped or not, he wants in some way to know himself, define himself, and tries to do it without taking into account the thing he came from, he is writing without any ink in his pen. The provincial who cultivates only his roots is in peril, potato-like, of becoming more root than plant. The man who cuts his roots away and denies that they were ever connected with him withers into half a man . . . . (145; ellipsis in original).

In this telling passage, despite its combination of metaphors, Graves describes the balance he seeks between provincialism and worldliness, between self-knowledge and self-denial. Graves's own roots are Texan and southern, and his attitudes toward land and nature, property and responsibility, reflect this. Rather than cultivating only these roots, however, Graves has traveled widely and lived in a variety of places, always with an eye toward cultural practices and attitudes relevant to those places. But in so doing he has not separated himself from what connects him to his community and to the generations before him, seeking rather to maintain and strengthen such ties, howsoever intangible they may appear to be.

Chapter 2 examines how Graves establishes his psychological and physical

connection to place and to older generations through the linking of time and space. Bakhtin, in his discussion of the chronotope, describes how narrative is organized thematically and generically around fundamental representations of time and space. In this way, landscape and memory are interfused with associations that provide cultural relevance, or, in other terms, a feeling of unity with a place. Graves achieves this unity by utilizing chronotopic features of the idyll along with poetics associated with the greater Romantic lyric. Chapter 3 utilizes Leo Marx's discussion of pastoral design to describe the idyllic journey of the pastoral ideal and how Graves's imposition of irony into the representation of that ideal differentiates his complex form of pastoral from mere sentimentality. Chapter 4 elaborates on this distinction by examining Graves's psychological movement from the interim mode of the pastoral journey to what Marx calls a "middle landscape" between wilderness and the city, which corresponds with his narrative shift toward georgic values of ownership, labor, and commitment found in the Virgilian tradition. Chapter 5 then analyzes how Graves's narrative and ideological concerns detailed in the previous chapters indicate his southern and conservative attitudes toward ecology, history, and community, attitudes which have left him on the margins of environmental discourse despite his prescient cultural critique. His utilization of pastoral oppositions, like that of the Southern Agrarian movement of the 1930s and contemporaries such as Wendell Berry, rebukes societal drift toward an over-reliance on technological knowledge and discontinuity with history and tradition.

CHAPTER 2

TIME, SPACE, AND PLACE: THE IDYLLIC AND THE LOCAL IN GOODBYE TO A RIVER

> Powers of my native region! Ye that seize
> The heart with firmer grasp!
>
> William Wordsworth, Prelude, Book Eighth

Early in Goodbye to a River, John Graves describes how the Brazos River "slices across Texas history as it does across the map of the state" (4-5), an illustration of the river's flow not only across some 800 or so miles of geographic space from its sources in West Texas and New Mexico to its outlet into the Gulf of Mexico, but across centuries of cultural significance as well. Graves's image—sparsely worded, almost off-handed—emphasizes the interconnectedness of time and space, of event and place. "The history was in it," he tells us. "When we were young we would beg tales from surviving old ones, obscure and petty and always violent tales, hearsay usually and as often as not untrue . . . they were a part of the river." Graves describes how the river has "personal meaning" and "the specialness of known good places" (7), suggesting fundamental thematic and organizing principles of his idyll: how a place acquires meaning for an individual or a collective through the actions and events that have occurred there over time, and how this meaning, whether personal or shared, provides the context for an

understanding of the local, for a sense of place, a necessary component in Graves's quest for a theory of ecologically sound inhabitation.

The narrative is based on his canoe trip in autumn of 1957, which he put together during some unexpected time at home. After living abroad for the better part of the previous decade and believing he "had left Texas more or less for good" (Hard Scrabble 36), Graves had returned home to help care for his father recovering from major surgery, fully "intending to move along elsewhere when the time came" (Selected 6). The excursion was instigated by Graves's learning of plans by the Brazos River Authority and the Corps of Engineers calling for the construction of a series of dams along a stretch of river frequented by the writer and his friends in their youth. Two of the dams were already in place, forming Possum Kingdom Lake to the north and Lake Whitney to the south, which left the bulk of a two hundred mile stretch of river and the chance to say goodbye, not to "the whole Brazos" but, as he puts it, to "a piece of it that has had meaning for me during a good part of my life in the way that pieces of rivers can have meaning" (Goodbye 4). Graves predicates his desire for leave-taking on meaning found in part in memories of his prior experience, in his personal recollection of a youth

> that includes trips when you were a kid and, with the others like you, could devil the men away from their fishing by trying to swim against orders where the deep swirls boiled, and catfish on the trotlines in the mornings, sliced up then and there for breakfast . . . And later trips . . . where you camped under pecans by a creek mouth, above the wide sand flats of the river . . . Later still, entrusted with your own safety, you went

> out with homemade canvas canoes that were almost coracles in their shapelessness, and wouldn't hold straight, and ripped on the rocks of the rapids. Squirrel shooting on cold Sunday mornings, and ducks, and skunk-squirted dogs, and deer watering while you watched at dawn, and the slim river bass, and bird song of a hundred kinds, and always the fly-fishing for fat bream and the feel of the water on bare skin and its salty taste, and the changing shore. (Goodbye 6)

For Graves the memories are sensual, tactile, involving sights, sounds, smells, and tastes, "bird song" and "the feel of the water." They are part of his consciousness that comes brimming up even after an extended period away as student, soldier, and sojourner, and represent the type of individual experience in nature that has traditionally proven inspirational for some writers, and for those with romantic leanings particularly.

Besides his personal memories, Graves recalls oral narratives of the "river people," his appellation for farmers and ranchers living along the banks of the Brazos and up its feeder streams who tell stories of their forebears in the region, handed down each generation through families and the community, as with all cultures in all times. Additional recordings in diaries and journals of explorers, settlers, folklorists and self-appointed archivists, like the unnamed merchant in Weatherford, chronicle events of a passing era, from pre-Columbian occupation of the southern plains to the present. This type of story represents what Mikhail Bakhtin calls a "local myth," which

> explains the genesis of a geographical space. Each locality must be explained, beginning with its place-name and ending up with the fine

> details of its topographical relief, its soil, plant life and so forth—all emerging from the human event that occurred there and that gave to the place its name and its physiognomy. A locality is the trace of an event, a trace of what had shaped it. Such is the logic of all local myths and legends that attempt, through history, to make sense out of space. (189)

One might justifiably ask, along with Bakhtin, why all this concern for "geographical space"? Literature, and literary criticism, has historically been concerned more with the human condition. What relevance do cultural patterns utilizing "local myths" that attempt to "make sense out of space" have for critics and readers? In "The Nature Essay in the West," Thomas Lyon posits that "Place, after all, is a logical center and starting point: from a home ground one may venture thoughts on the human condition" (222), proceeding from the specific to the general. In a home ground one may also come into contact with the types of local myths and traces of events defining localities, "traces," Graves avers, "of the kind that tell stories" (Hard Scrabble 27).

In Landscape and Memory (1996), Simon Schama suggests how intertwined with the actual topography of the land are myths and metaphors of human association, how one might "see the ghostly outline of an old landscape beneath the superficial covering of the contemporary," layering like a palimpsest significant events of the past and present, making us "vividly aware of the endurance of core myths" (16). Such a mythology, what "marries us to rock and hill" to paraphrase Yeats, perpetuates a culture's legacy in the actual terrain of the local, an agent of its own narration. In Graves's words, "Sometimes you take country for itself, for what shows merely, and sometimes it forces its ghosts too

upon you, the smell of people who have lived and died there. They do not have to be individual ghosts . . . often they're only the feel that a time past has for you, the odor of an era . . . and they don't have to smell good" (Goodbye 36). Cultural meaning, figured as the ghost in the terrain, accumulates in a place over time through the lives of those "who have lived and died there." "The sum of our pasts," Schama declares, "generation laid over generation, like the slow mold of the seasons, forms the compost of our future. We live off it" (574).

Schama's organic metaphor perhaps conveys even more accurately the accretion of meaning in a particular place than the textual analogue of the palimpsest, particularly for oral cultures able to bequeath traditional myths and symbols to succeeding generations with tools other than literacy. Meaning builds around the topographical features of a space and the events that occur there like layers of humus and topsoil, often not "smelling good," but enriching and nourishing the lives of those planted in its soil. Exemplifying this characteristic is the Apache oral tradition of abbreviated speech called "speaking in names." In Western Apache Language and Culture (1990), ethnographer Keith Basso describes how cultural wisdom for the Apache comes from a highly evolved sense of place, recognizing in the names for places important social lessons connected to the land. "[G]eographical landscapes are never culturally vacant," Basso explains. "Filled to brimming with past and present significance, the trick is to try to fathom . . . what it is that a particular landscape may be called upon to 'say,' and what, through the saying, it may be called upon to 'do'" (143). Such is Graves's task as he floats his piece of a river once before the Corps dams silence forever the inundated terrain lying below

flood level, his premier book largely an attempt to fathom what the land and its traces, its local myths, are saying. A significant part of what they reveal is the inevitability of change, which constitutes "the only real unchangingness, solidity" (Goodbye 119). But they offer as well insight into the human condition as perceived within the context of a particular place and time.

As means for investigating Graves's concern with place as a source of meaning I utilize two divergent heuristics: Bakhtin's concept of the "idyllic chronotope," and the "greater Romantic lyric" delineated by M. H. Abrams. Though each approach differs in its primary focus, they share fundamental concerns with the importance of the specific, local place opposed to the abstract, universal "world," and with ways in which place affects how time is perceived. Additionally, they both describe techniques that transcend traditional concepts of genre: Abrams asserts that a particular device associated with the greater Romantic lyric, the Wordsworthian "double awareness of things as they are and as they were," while a convention of verse, remains applicable to prose, citing its "anticipation" of the "structural principle" of Proust's A la recherché du temps perdu (533); Bakhtin relates his discussion of the chronotope to the novel, by which he means "novelistic discourse," including all forms of "artistic-prose" (260). In a similar spirit of generic merging, Graves indicates in a prefacing note that Goodbye to a River blends fiction with nonfiction and creates composites of characters, including the narrating subject he calls himself, but that "even those parts are true in a fictional sense. As true as I could make them" (emphasis added). Blending elements of novelistic discourse and pastoral poetics, Graves's lyrical first work, while "neither novel nor memoir," according

to M. E. Bradford, is "a thing made: a conscious creation structured to serve its own ends" ("Arden" 949). And Graves is a "maker" with the old Anglo-Saxon resonance of that word with "poet." That his creation is a hybrid need not deter us from discovering those ends it serves. "After all," as Bakhtin says, "the boundaries between fiction and nonfiction, between literature and nonliterature and so forth are not laid up in heaven" (33).

I use the term "idyll" not in the popular sense of a work in which an artificial perspective of civilization frames picturesque qualities of nature, nor only in a traditional Theocritan sense of a short piece emphasizing rural and domestic issues. Bakhtin denotes the idyll as a fundamental chronotope of novelistic discourse. The chronotope, a term borrowed from Einstein combining chronos (time) and topos (place), refers to "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature" (Bakhtin 84). "What counts for us," Bakhtin argues, "is the fact that it expresses the inseparability of space and time":

> In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history. This intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterizes the artistic chronotope.

> The chronotope in literature has an intrinsic <u>generic</u> significance. It can even be said that it is precisely the chronotope that defines genre and generic distinctions. (84-85)

Interestingly, though he establishes the "inseparability" of time and space by definition, Bakhtin privileges time as "the primary category" (84) of the chronotope, and concentrates the bulk of his "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel" toward discussion of that aspect. He differentiates, for instance, between "adventure-time" in the Greek romance chronotope—which requires "an <u>abstract</u> expanse of space" wherein "the link between space and time has, as it were, not an organic but a purely technical (and mechanical) nature" (Bakhtin 99)—and the "folkloric time" of the idyllic chronotope (Bakhtin 224). In the former, the development of the adventure and its constituent mechanisms of plot and motif "needs space, and plenty of it . . . The world of these romances is large and diverse. But this size and diversity is utterly abstract" (Bakhtin 99-100). In the idyll, however, one finds "the immanent unity of folkloric time" (Bakhtin 225), which, because of its roots in "a pre-class, agricultural stage" of social development, is a time "sunk deeply in the earth, implanted in it and ripening in it. Time in its course binds together the earth and the labouring hand of man . . . Such time is fleshed-out, irreversible . . . realistic" (Bakhtin 208). Although one could argue that, indeed, any concept of time is abstract, the relevance for our discussion of Graves lies in Bakhtin's differentiation between types of space, for all of his concentration on time. The key point in the idyllic chronotope is its connection to "real" space—concrete, organic space—rather than abstract space. By attending to the features of organic space,

to the trace events and myths uttered, if you will, in the terrain, time attains its "immanent" unity, with separation of past from present and future becoming less distinct.

Bakhtin categorizes four different types of idyll: "the love idyll (whose basic form is the pastoral); the idyll with a focus on agricultural labor; the idyll dealing with craft-work; and the family idyll" (224). Besides the four "pure" types of idyll exist various mixed idylls with "one or another" of the above aspects predominating. Other variations are identifiable, exhibiting "differences between different types as well as between different variants of the same type" and "distinctions in character and degree in the metaphorical treatment of individual motifs" (Bakhtin 224-25). But all of these types and variants, no matter how they differ, have a commonality expressed primarily in the "special relationship" between time and space in the idyll, a relationship described by Bakhtin in a lengthy passage as

> an organic fastening-down, a grafting of life and all its events to a place, to a familiar territory with all its nooks and crannies, its familiar mountains, valleys, fields, rivers and forests, and one's own home. Idyllic life and its events are inseparable from this concrete, spatial corner of the world where the fathers and grandfathers lived and where one's children and their children will live . . . in this spatially limited world a sequence of generations is localized that is potentially without limit. The unity of the life of generations . . . in an idyll is in most instances primarily defined by the unity of place, by the age-old rooting of the life of generations to a single place, from which this life, in all its events, is inseparable. This

> unity of place in the life of generations weakens and renders less distinct all the temporal boundaries between individual lives and between phases of one and the same life. The unity of place brings together and even fuses the cradle and the grave (the same little corner, the same earth), and brings together as well childhood and old age (the same grove, stream, the same lime trees, the same house), the life of the various generations who had also lived in the same place, under the same conditions, and who had seen the same things. (225)

According to Bakhtin, then, the unity of time is directly influenced by a "the age-old rooting of the life of generations to a single place." This linking of consciousness to place, defined by the familiar territory of one's own home, fuses the generations who have lived there and those to come by obscuring the "temporal boundaries" between individuals as well as those distinguishing the various stages of one individual's life, from "childhood [to] old age." For Graves these generations refer not only to "Anglo-American tejanos" (Goodbye 20)—elsewhere mentioned as "hard-bitten yeomanry" (6), "the old ones" (25), and "cedar people" (217)—but to the Comanche, "The People" in their nomenclature (18), and to a slightly lesser extent the Kiowa and Caddo who roamed the upper-middle Brazos before European incursion. The unity of place obliterates as well the boundaries between the past, present, and future, "where the fathers and grandfathers lived and where one's own children and their children will," helping to create the "cyclic rhythmicalness so characteristic of the idyll" (225). The relationship

between folkloric time and the unity of place as it relates to Graves's narrative merits a fuller discussion, and I will return and attend to this point shortly.

Besides this "grafting of life and its events to a place," Bakhtin identifies two other distinctive features of the idyllic chronotope. The idyll is "limited to only a few of life's basic realities," which he calls the "ancient matrices" (Bakhtin 226). These he identifies as, among a few others, love, birth, death, marriage, labor, food and drink, and stages of growth (Bakhtin 225). In the idyll, these common aspects of everyday life assume an elevated importance, often in a "softened" or "sublimated" form, as with sexuality, for instance. This "softening" of the sexual matrix is exemplified by an episode in which the giggling of two "girls" who stop to fish along the river one morning while Graves shaves reminds him of a "botched" youthful interlude with two other young women while accompanied by his friend Hale. Though in the earlier instance the two women "were solid in their intentions" toward Graves and his friend (Goodbye 108), the experience is interrupted, at least in part because of Graves's feeling of incongruity between the scene and the act: "What had bothered me then, besides the hot pubescent confusion, was a feeling that the women and the beer hadn't gone with the river, with the way I felt about the river and being there. Years and beers and women later, they still didn't't" (109). Sexual attraction to the women, though confused by adolescent inexperience, is sublimated as a feeling for the river and repeated years later as an adult by the unity of place inherent to the idyllic chronotope.

An additional feature is the "conjoining of human life with the life of nature, the unity of their rhythm, the common language used to describe phenomena of nature and

the events of human life." Bakhtin emphasizes that in the idyll, this "common language" is largely metaphorical, and he assigns any significant degree of the "actual" to the agricultural idyll of labor, as in Virgil's Georgics (226). To this type we might also add works by Cato, Varro, Horatio, Columella, and Graves's own Hard Scrabble (1974). Goodbye to a River, however, exhibits predominantly features of the love idyll, conjoined with the family idyll and the agricultural idyll. As a brief aside here it is interesting to note Bakhtin's discussion of the "enormous influence of the idyll on the development of the novel" (228), particularly idyllic time and the idyllic matrices on the "provincial novel":

> In the provincial novel, as in the idyll, all temporal boundaries are blurred and the rhythm of human life is in harmony with the rhythm of nature. At the heart of this idyllic resolution of the problem of time . . . common everyday life is transformed . . . the events of everyday life takes [sic] on an importance and acquire thematic significance . . .
>
> . . . one occasionally finds a hero who has set off for the city and either perishes there or returns, like a prodigal son, to the bosom of his family. In novels of the Rousseauan type, [the author and his contemporaries] . . . heal themselves through contact with nature and the life of simple people . . . (229, 231)

The implications of Bakhtin's description of the provincial novel for Graves's work provide a sense of the overall scheme as developed through his three major works. Rather than perishing, Graves returns to the bosom of his family and his piece of a river

to find healing and simplicity, attaining by an "ancient sense of the whole" derived from folkloric unity an "ideal for the future" and a "basis . . . for criticizing the current state of society" (231).

For Bakhtin, the love idyll offers the ancient matrices in their most sublimated form, metaphors for the "utterly conventional simplicity of life in the bosom of nature . . . opposed to social conditions, complexity, and the disjunctions of everyday life" (226), the inherent tension in pastoral. By foregrounding one or another of the various matrices, artists have addressed an array of concerns with the form's evolution, as in the graveyard elegy of Gray and others, "an elegy of the meditative type with a strong idyllic component . . . incorporating the matrices of the grave, love, new life, spring, children, [and] old age" (Bakhtin 228). Later Romantics "reinterpreted" the "elegiac matrices" of love and death, to which Graves, and even later Romantic, has added autumn, change, and loss. Love and death are sublimated, abstracted to the level of metaphor, as the object of affection in Graves's elegy is the river the Spanish conquistadors called "the Arms of God." What is passing, what is "about to go" as one critic put it (Perrin 721), is the river and its environs, both as natural phenomena and as a trope for the very "bosom of nature" wherein Graves finds meaning amid the "disjunctions of everyday life." And as is often the case involving the loss of a loved one, the narrator acknowledges various stages of emotional involvement, including denial and anger: his feeling that "it was not [his] fight" because of his prolonged absence gives way to "a certain enraged awe," which in turn precedes his eventual resignation, melancholy, and desire for a proper farewell (Goodbye 9,8).

Graves's narrative begins with a suggestion of why he feels this sense of loss for a river that has "personal meaning" in the epigraph for the first chapter, which conveys a theme of inheritance. In the epigraph, a brief and unacknowledged excerpt from Tristram Shandy, a father exclaims to his son that "I have not one appointment belonging to me that I set so much store by" as a pair of "jack-boots" that "were our great-grandfather's . . . they were hereditary" (Goodbye 4; emphasis in original). In this image the great-grandfather's jack-boots are invested with emotional value because they symbolize the descendants' inheritance, representing the tangible connection to a line of "generations who had also lived in that same place, under the same conditions, and who had seen the same things" (Bakhtin 225). Graves's epigraph suggests an analogy between the jack-boots and "a river that you've known always, and that all men of that place have known always back into the red dawn of men" (Goodbye 9). For Graves the river is part of his inheritance, both for the physical entity running "primitive and neglected" and "the history [that] was in it" (5,7). "When you paddle and pole along it," he says, "the things you see are much the same things the Comanche and the Kiowa used to see, riding lean ponies down it a hundred years ago to raid the new settlements in its valleys" (5). He aims to re-visit a "piece" of the river familiar from his youth because "you can comprehend a piece of a river. A whole river . . . is much to comprehend":

> A whole river is mountain country and hill country and flat country and swamp and delta country, is rock bottom and sand bottom and weed bottom and mud bottom, is blue, green, red, clear, brown, wide, narrow, fast, slow, clean, and filthy water, is all the kinds of trees and grasses and

> all the breeds of animals and birds and men that pertain and have ever pertained to its changing shores, is a thousand differing and not compatible things in-between that point where enough of the highland drainlets have trickled together to form it, and that wide, flat, probably desolate place where it discharges itself into the salt of the sea.
>
> It is also an entity, one of the real wholes, but to feel the whole is hard because to know it is harder still. (4)

Here Graves describes a river's unity in diversity, the various manifestations in physical space which comprise it. But the image is abstracted in order to perceive separate parts as a whole. Historically, myriad cultures have considered the circle representative of a whole, and a river has been a symbol of a whole because of its circularity, specifically its role in the circulation of water, from falling rain gathered in watershed, then downriver to the ocean and back to rain via condensation. Schama tells us "Plato had believed the circle to be the perfect form, and imagined that nature and our bodies were constructed according to the same mysterious universal law of circulation that governs all forms of vitality" (247). As a platonic metaphor for the circulatory system and for wholeness, a river suggests an image of a whole, "an entity." The Romantic in Graves reminds us that while it remains a difficult task of comprehension to "feel" this whole in any concrete way, "to know it is harder still."

This abstraction, this difficulty in comprehension, is not because Graves is unaware of other segments of the river besides his "piece" of it. On the contrary, as he puts it, "I have shot blue quail out by the salty trickles, and a long time ago hunted

alligators at night with a jacklight on the sloughs the river makes in the swamplands near the Gulf, but I do not know those places. I don't have them in me." Nor is he the type of parochial youth unaware of the larger world outside his own province. After all he has served as an officer at war in the South Pacific and lived and traveled across much of Western Europe. He is a man in his late thirties who has seen large sections of the outside world as well as those other portions of the Brazos, saying of them "I like them as I have liked all kinds of country from Oahu to Castilla la Vieja, but they are part of that whole which isn't, in the way I mean, comprehensible" (Goodbye 5). He has "liked" various locales and settings, but they have lacked something that makes them comprehensible. To be comprehensible in the way Graves means, to "know" a place means that place is "in" him. It is known concretely through the senses; it is "fastened-down" in sensory experience and memory, and therefore achieves a level of emotional attachment for Graves as a part of the whole that the abstracted whole cannot.

For Graves, then, his "piece" of the river represents the "unity of place" Bakhtin suggests as characteristic of the idyllic chronotope, comprising a "little spatial world . . . limited and sufficient unto itself, not linked in any intrinsic way with other places" (Bakhtin 225). This point Graves acknowledges when he admits that the local history he "sets so much store by" was in fact "not the pop of a cap gun in the big pageant." "But," he continues, "that knowledge never stopped the old names from ringing like a bell in my head" (Goodbye 8). The local myths and histories, the lives of the "various generations who had lived there in the same place" are part of the river and his inheritance, "all the murdered, scalped, raped, tortured people, red and white, all the proud names that

belonged with hills and valleys and bends and crossings or maybe just hovered over the whole" (7). These names "ringing" in Graves's head, "hover[ing] over the whole," signify the trace events and local myths that provide a foundation for his sense of attachment to this place, and demonstrate the relation between language and land expressed in the following passage by Basso:

> Because of their inseparable connection to specific localities, placenames may be used to summon forth an enormous range of mental and emotional associations—associations of time and space, of history and events, of persons and social activities of oneself and stages in one's life. And in their capacity to evoke, in their compact power to muster and consolidate so much of what a landscape may be taken to represent in both personal and cultural terms, placenames acquire a functional value that easily matches their utility as instruments of reference. (144)

It is apparent that Graves shares the Apache conviction in the evocative power of names described by Basso, which helps explain his disgust toward "real-estate men" and "dullards" who take a place with a "good name" and call it "Inspiration Point": "The nation's map is measled with names like that, pocks from the old nineteenth-century plague that made people build gazebos and well-tops of rough masonry with oaken buckets on ropes but no well beneath . . . disregarding the guts and soul in the old nomenclature of American places" (<u>Goodbye</u> 126-27). Graves blames such sentimentalism on "Gothicists" who "read Scott for his worst qualities." "It was worse in the interior than on the East Coast, where the old names had rooted themselves before

that frame of mind came along," Graves claims, adding that the practice represents "a flouting of real ghosts and genii, an unimaginative lamina of Greco-Scotch-English never-neverism on the surface of a land that seemed too new to would-be-cultured sensibilities" (127).

Graves's complaint suggests relevance to our discussion of place and meaning. Perhaps people following the westward movement of expansion moved onto new territories, but feeling an alienation from the land and lacking specific emotional ties to previous generations, conditions counter to those described by Bakhtin as essential for a "unity of place," some sought these connections in an Old World "lamina." At any rate, for Graves the land is "ghost-laden. Violent, obscure history piles in on you . . . remembrance of the frontier . . . strong . . . It sat on the land. It still does a little, if the land means anything to you" (127-28). Here Graves expresses Basso's expectation of "emotional association," a technique he repeats whereby he implies his own attachment by means of a prefacing conditional, as with the phrases "if you care" (107), "if the land has meaning for you" (140), and "if you're built to care anything" (207). In this last instance, Graves refers specifically to such local myths as we've described, and qualifies his condition by adding, "Not that it's necessarily a good way to be built." But clearly this is how Graves himself is built, and his rhetoric is apparent enough: for the land and the stories it tells to have relevance requires some sense of attachment, some emotional investment for the perceiving subject. They must "mean" something. They must be comprehended sensually, emotionally, and intellectually: in short, they must be internalized.

This type of internalization of the local space makes possible the "blurring of all temporal boundaries" and "contributes in an essential way to the creation of the cyclic rhythmicalness of time so characteristic of the idyll" (Bakhtin 225). Graves attends to this chronotopic fusion of time and space when he describes his awareness in the early morning darkness of his first night camped on the river. Having returned to the haunts of youth, internalized and emotionally invested with values described as unity of place, he awakens in the dark to discover an autumn rainfall. Initially he is aware only of his own presence and the rain:

> Rain . . . Even in gray heaped cities it has a privacy and a sadness. Tented, cocooned in warmed quilted feathers . . . you come awake to its soft-drumming spatter and the curl of the river against a snag somewhere, and move your shoulder maybe against the warmth of the bag, and the shoulder prickles in separate knowledge of its wellbeing, and the still cold is against your face, and that tiny blunt wedge of sheltered space is all that exists in a sensed universe of softly streaming, gently drumming gray sadness beyond the storm flaps. And the sadness is right, is what should be. Knowing you do not have to get up at all, for an hour or for two hours or for a year, you lie there warmly sad and then you go back to sleep without dreaming. (Goodbye 21; first ellipsis in original)

We can immediately notice the melancholic tone established on the trip's first early morning, the "privacy" and "sadness" of the egalitarian rain that falls "even in gray heaped cities," reminiscent of Wordsworth's "turbulent world / Of men and things"

(Prelude 8: 71-72). But Graves is not back in the city; instead he is aware only of the womb-like warmth and comfort of his "tiny blunt wedge of sheltered space." His tent on the riverbank is "all that exists in a sensed universe." Time itself has no significance, as nothing divides the interval that elapses between his self-consciousness and dawn. He sleeps for "the hour or the two hours or the year," a segment "without logic or the need for it," awakening again with the "grayish dawn at the crack between the flaps" (21). With daylight comes the awareness of time: "Day . . . Time now . . ." (22; ellipses in original), but time is not segmented mechanically, logically, reflecting instead only the cyclic rhythm of dark and light, demonstrating the opposition of "real organic time" in the idyll to the "frivolous, fragmented time of city life" (Bakhtin 228).

This opposition is enhanced further when Graves reveals that in an early entry for that morning he had jotted down in his notebook, "The hard thing is to get slowed down" (Goodbye 22; emphasis in original). The transition to organic time from mechanical time is not magical or instantaneous, a period of adjustment remaining for the sensibilities and emotions. Graves's awareness of such a transition results in his later speculating about how to interpret his brief entry: "Probably it means I was impatient with my own dawdling slowness," he suggests, "and that I then grew irked with my own impatience," his impatience irksome because of its connection to the "fragmented time" of the city. "Impatience is a city kind of emotion," he writes, "harmonious with 'drive' and acid-chewed jumping stomachs, and I presume we need it if we are to hold our own on the jousting ground this contemporary world most often is. But it sits poorly on a river" (22). Graves relates to impatience as "a city kind of emotion" because of its genesis in city or

mechanical time, segmented into seconds, minutes and hours, with each elapsing interval drawing attention to scheduled events and demands made upon one in a competitive world. "It sits poorly" on Graves's river, however, because in organic time, mechanical segmentation recedes before "the rock-bottom facts of ax and wood and fire and frying pans, and wet feet inside boots one forgot to grease, and the hauling of buckets of water up from the beach, and the endless packing and unpacking of sacks and boxes and the stowing and unstowing in the boat." With the labor aspect of the idyll foregrounded, these everyday acts assume a greater significance, become as Bakhtin says, "essential life events" (227). Labor imposes its own organic rhythm of action based on necessity of the present, usurping fragmented mechanical time. But old habits are not easily shed. For as Graves notices before pulling out for the day's canoeing, "My watch had run down during the night; I set it again by guess" (Goodbye 23). Before trip's end, though, Graves relies solely on the sun for the hour and the day's paddling to gauge its length, foregoing this last reminder of the city's demands.

Another, subtle way Graves indicates this difference in organic time and mechanical time is the contrast he draws to our attention when his friend Hale joins him briefly on the river. Graves by now is calm, relaxed, assured of his own competence on the river, his actions measured and unhurried. He notices that Hale, on the other hand, initially is restless, unable to slow down to the rhythm of the river. Part of Hale's behavior is characteristic for him, described by Graves as "a hunter and fisherman clear through" who becomes "impatient" with Graves's self-described tendency to mosey and "snoop." To Hale the acts associated with "killing wild meat" deserve "taut attention,"

and he favors "tight-scheduled expeditions" (Goodbye 183), a clear reference to someone accustomed to the demands of mechanical time. Although Graves initially had exhibited a similar impatience and adherence to the clock as does his good friend Hale, by now he has adjusted to the rhythm of the river and its labor, to the cycles of natural phenomena. He observes his friend's "restless" behavior, unwilling to sit idly by the fire while dinner cooks, jumping up instead in the dark to check on a trotline they'd set earlier that afternoon, and tossing and cursing all night in a sleeping bag dampened a bit by a leaking tent. At one such outburst Graves had teasingly asked Hale, "How come you don't go run that trotline?" And though he gives his friend the benefit of citing his discomfort as "first-night-out insomnia" (186), his description of Hale portrays the "city" type of "drive" and "acid-chewed jumping stomach" Graves has left behind.

Similarly, Graves contrasts himself accustomed to river time with a man known simply as Potts, parent of one of a group of "fifteen or sixteen Campfire Girls" on their own outing at a camp above the bank where Graves has pulled ashore awaiting a norther to blow through or "show its intention" (256). Lean, tanned, and sporting three days' beard, Graves's roguish appearance spooks some of the girls, and Potts is sent, Graves supposes, "to take the measure of my degeneracy" (257). After observing Graves secure his stores in the canoe, Potts tells him what he's doing "looks like fun," though he wouldn't be able to do what Graves is doing since "he got most of his exercise mowing his lawn." "That's what he told me," writes Graves,

> or rather told himself in answer to the discontent that sat plain on him as he looked at me and the boat and the Brazos River.

> He said: "There's never enough time."
>
> Sluicing loosened mud from the propped-up canoe, I found myself wanting to tell him that for God's sake there was plenty of time always, and why didn't he come on along with me, telling whichever of the big-jawed women over there he belonged to that he'd see her in a week or so, or a year? (257-58)

The difference in these two perceptions seems to go beyond the differences in the two personalities involved. For Potts, "engineered for patio living" (258), a euphemism by which Graves means one completely accustomed to the city, time is segmented, fragmented, linear, a resource one may deplete, of which "there is never enough." For Graves, however, within the unity of place time is cyclical and boundless, with no apparent difference in the cycle of a week or a year. He doesn't ignore the disparity of their individual situations, acknowledging that he likes Potts, who has his familial responsibilities and who "probably would feel the cozier there for having seen me lean and filthy on the river, even if at that moment I looked romantic to him." But Graves recognizes as well that each has chosen, "and a man nearly always picks centrally the channel of life that best suits his boat." For Graves the choice has led to his journey down a river, and the "feeling that I could go on forever, if there were only river enough and time" (289).

Besides this contrast between cyclical and mechanical time, Graves demonstrates the idyllic "blurring of temporal boundaries" by the manner in which he integrates the

history he associates with the river into the narrative, both those of his own experience and the lore associated with the generations who have come before. This chronotopic characteristic, achieved by the unity of place, as Bakhtin states, "renders less distinct all the temporal boundaries between individual lives and between phases of one and the same life." To achieve this effect, Graves employs a leitmotif in which the narrator, at the end of the day's progress downriver, or less often as respite from the rigors of the trip, pulls ashore, usually at the mouth of a creek joining the main current. If the place becomes the night's camping spot, the narrator secures his camp, then wanders upstream, often seeking a specific site or ruin. After briefly describing the scene, the speaker reflects upon the location's historical relevance, usually relating a narrative involving the scene that emphasizes moral or philosophical associations with the events and the landscape. The narrator then returns to the present, often with a sense of resolution for what has transpired there, but at other times with an awareness of a more abstract, more ambiguous theme related to his journey.

Graves's leitmotif constitutes essentially what M. H. Abrams has identified as the "greater Romantic lyric." In Abrams's paradigm for the technique

> a determinate speaker in a particularized, and usually a localized, outdoor setting . . . begins with a description of the landscape; an aspect or change of aspect in the landscape evokes a varied but integral process of memory, thought, anticipation, and feeling which remains closely intervolved with the outer scene. In the course of this meditation the lyric speaker achieves an insight, faces up to a tragic loss, comes to a moral decision or resolves

> an emotional problem. Often the poem rounds upon itself to end where it began, at the outer scene, but with an altered mood and deeper understanding which is the result of the intervening meditation. (527-28)

Abrams suggests that the key to the lyric's origin can be found in the poem's opening description, in which the landscape "is not only particularized; it is in most cases precisely localized in place, and sometimes in time as well" (534). These attributes have their closest antecedent in the "local" or "loco-descriptive" poem that was "immensely popular" in the eighteenth century and "one of the most stable and widely employed of all the neoclassic kinds" (Abrams 535). Sir John Denham "authored" the genre, "concisely defined" by Dr. Johnson as "a species of composition . . . of which the fundamental subject is some particular landscape, to be poetically described, with the addition of such embellishments as may be supplied by historical retrospection or incidental meditation" (qtd. in Abrams 535).

To this form the Romantics—notably Coleridge and Wordsworth, owing to their interest in the "sustained dialogue between mind and landscape" (Abrams 550)—added their own particular innovation to the meditative element, described by Wordsworth as the "two consciousnesses" (qtd. in Abrams 533). With this device, which first appeared in "Tintern Abbey," "a scene is revisited, and the remembered landscape ('the picture of the mind') is superimposed on the picture before the eye; the two landscapes fail to match, and so set a problem ('a sad perplexity') which compels the meditation" (Abrams 533), often producing a "profound sadness . . . at the sense of loss, dereliction, [or] isolation" (Abrams 553). This emotional response on the part of the viewer is not an

element of “public symbolism,” but rather has “been brought to [the scene] by the private mind which perceives it” (Abrams 556), the qualified “caring” to which Graves refers as an essential condition for the unity of place and time we’ve been discussing. As a variation on the Wordsworthian mode of recalling a deeply personal experience from the speaker’s youth, Graves offers the local myth to instigate the “sad perplexity.”

Some of Graves’s lyrical meditations are prompted by “moseying” up a creek that “drains history into the Brazos along with silt and leaves and drift and water” (128). An example of this technique occurs fairly early in the narrative, at the end of the second day of the journey. “Somewhere on Schoolhouse Mountain, in the Fortune Bend,” Graves writes

> a man was calling cattle in the old long melancholy way. They called back, wending probably toward his feed-laden pickup truck. . . . In another drifting mile or so it was four thirty by my guess time, and I pulled out at the mouth of Ioni Creek, above a tumbling rapids, and made camp in a bed of thick, tough, oily dark green weeds, below willows. It was the sort of place that in summer would have been insect-ridden, but the footing was sandy turf instead of mud, and I wanted to get settled before evening brought whatever weather it might bring.
>
> Jesse Veale fought the old, useless fight just up Ioni, one day in 1873. . . . (33; ellipses in original)

In the passage natural description is sparse and undiluted, “only the occasion for a meditation,” but which, in keeping with Abrams’s definition, is “present, particular, and

. . . precisely located" (528, 556). Graves provides a suggestion of mood in the image of the unseen man, precisely on "Schoolhouse Mountain, in the Fortune Bend . . . calling cattle in the old long melancholy way." His choice of the old Anglo-Saxon verb "wending" to describe the cattle's imagined progress toward the "feed-laden pickup truck" helps to establish the unity of time linking the lives of generations, as the modern image of the truck is conjoined with the "old way" of herding, fusing the pastoral mood and labor aspects of the idyllic chronotope to the present scene. It is evening by organic time, "guess time," and the speaker briefly describes his campsite on "sandy turf" at the "mouth of Ioni Creek," followed immediately by his relating the present scene with a historical reference to Jesse Veale and the "old, useless fight" there in 1873. His memory of this local tale is sudden in its conjunction with the present, and the final ellipsis indicates it as a passing thought, something that has occurred to him but upon which he doesn't elaborate immediately.

Instead Graves focuses his thoughts on the present, on the mundane task of cooking his dinner, which consists of an "old squirrel" he'd shot earlier, "thick-hided and with testicles as big as a dog's" (33), an activity reminding him of his wartime experiences and how he "doesn't much like to skin" squirrels now. "You cut them at the wrists," he writes, "and make a slash or two and peel away the tough pelt, and what you have then in your hands is a bug-eyed, naked, dead homunculus whose looks I do not care for." The squirrel's disturbing resemblance to a miniature human when skinned helps to establish in the speaker a mood which will redirect his thoughts to the earlier incident at Ioni Creek:

> I ate about dusk and sat staring at a little stick fire that needed constant fueling. The pup had dry dogfood with squirrel gravy, and sought the tent. Aloneness is most striking at evening, however it may happen to be striking you at the moment. Day's absorbent busy-ness is past, and the dishes are stacked dirty, and you are confronted with yourself and confronted too with whether or not you like being where you are, by yourself.
>
> I didn't like it overmuch just then, with blackness attacking a low gray sky. It takes time for the habit of people to wear off you, especially at evening. I sat and listened to the rapids, and thought for no good reason about Jesse Veale, who rode to Ioni with two of his brothers and a friend from Palo Pinto town a few miles away, to fish and to hunt turkeys and to camp and, probably, to stick cockleburs under one another's saddles and tie knots in one another's bed rolls and laugh the kind of laughter you laugh with friends out that way, young. (34)

This lengthy passage provides important clues to the source of the meditation that follows his relating the tale about Jesse Veale, which details how Veale ended up "the last man killed in that county" by Comanches. The references to "dusk" and "evening" sharpen the sense of "aloneness" when one is "confronted" with one self. The sound of the rapids causes Graves to think "for no good reason" about Veale and the others, described thus far simply as "two brothers and a friend." The activities he supposes they enjoyed—fishing, hunting, practical jokes—are presented in paratactic style a la Hemingway, with

the interjection of that speculative “probably” preceding the imagined horseplay, and the final appositive “young” essentializing in one word all previous description, providing the tale’s poignancy for the speaker.

Graves follows this passage with a rehearsal of the events leading to Veale’s death, how Veale and Joe Corbin “on their way back to camp from checking some hooks at the river” came upon Indians whose ponies the boys had “likely” taken the previous afternoon, “the assumption with Indian ponies” being always that the ponies “had been stolen, or if not that others had been” (35). In the ensuing melee, Veale was wounded in the knee by an arrow, and Corbin, interpreting something Veale shouted as “Run it out!” had narrowly escaped, his last view of Veale “on the ground shooting and clubbing with his pistol” (36). In a parenthetical aside Graves wonders “how many times did [Corbin] see it again, the rest of his life, how many times did he wonder if what Jesse Veale had said was: ‘Fight it out!’” (35-36). Returning to the present, he speculates that “some of the lines they had been checking” when the fight occurred “must have been set where I was camped just then, a good fish hole still” (36). He muses how country sometimes “forces its ghosts . . . upon you,” until a “sizzling rain” forces him to hastily cover his gear and retire to his tent where he continues his meditation, an extended reverie concerning the Romantic dialectic of youth and experience.

“Young one <u>was</u> Jesse Veale,” thinks Graves, “or sometimes an Indian, a brave one” (37; emphasis in original). Youth, or to voice Graves’s assumption, young males, see such figures as “heroic in size and posture” and “transmute them into myth.” Experience teaches a different perspective, not altogether cynical, but “having seen a few

heroics at first hand and having probed one's own possibilities, one knows more about Joe Corbin, feels what he likely felt." The mythologizing hero-worship of youth gives way to empathy for Corbin's failure to behave heroically, based largely on Graves's own experience of not being able to sustain idealized behavior. He extends this contrast to consider human alienation from nature:

> Young one moves in upon the country and thinks himself a tile in its tessellated ecology, and believes that he always would have been such a tile, and hoots with the owl, and scorns even tents.
>
> Older, one know himself an excrescence upon the landscape and no kinsman to any wild thing; one hears the bass drumbeat and the gabble of the rapids below and the roar of the rain and feels abrupt depression and wonders why he barged out alone into the wetness and the winter. (37)

This reflection on a youthful, idealized relation to nature, similar to Wordsworth's "bounding roe" in "Tintern Abbey," when opposed to the more experienced perceptions of adulthood results in "depression," in a "three-o'clock-in-the morning apprehension" suggesting that not all epiphanies in nature lead to a rhapsodic infusion of atonement; rather some of these experiences produce a bitter look in the mirror of human separation from what was wild, the tension between then and now leading to the Wordsworthian "double awareness" and "profound sadness" described by Abrams.

In other instances the tales associated with intangible ghosts of place are augmented with physical ruins, another characteristic of the Romantic elegy, particularly in those associated with The Wanderer, Wordsworth's speaker in a collection of poems

bearing the same title. In "Margaret, or the Ruined Cottage," for illustration, the Wanderer describes the title character's sufferings prompted by a "useless fragment of a wooden bowl" (1: 493), which reminds him of "the cool refreshment drawn" from a spring near the woman's hut, "itself abandoned to decay, / And she forgotten in the quiet grave" (1: 504, 509-10). Similarly, at Shut-in Crossing, Graves relates the "sad, sentimental story" about John Davis and the floorboards he brought back from Waco for his bride, who died a few months later in childbirth, prompting Davis to rip up the floorboards and convert them into her coffin. We see in this brief narrative both Bakhtin's ancient matrices—love, birth, death, and regeneration—and the second consciousness described by Abrams, contrasting how "then [Davis] stayed in the valley, morose, and proceeded with mule and plow and straight uncontoured furrow . . . to wear it out" with the valley lying fallow "now, its old small fields choked with briars and the low second-growth brush they call shinnery" (Goodbye 26). Graves's elliptical description of the site as well suggests elegiac imagery:

> Mud . . . An old corncrib, collapsed at one corner, and the rat-chewed gray cobs spilling out between the logs like a travesty of a cornucopia . . . Frostbitten sumac the color of arterial blood speckled the high hillsides. Deer tracks pitted the old corral. Silence. Ruin . . . (27)

In this example, we don't hear the speaker's meditation, but the mood is suggested by his commenting that "Though the day was bleak and low still, moseying up the valley had cleansed my feeling about it" (28).

Again at "the old Welty crossing" just "west of Big Keechi" Graves recalls a local tale concerning a night spent "huddled fireless and lightless" by Mrs. Welty and her children after the death of Mr. Welty at the hands of "The People":

> I just wanted to see if I could find the place. The gullied trough where the wagons had come down to the crossing since more than a century before was still sharp; I climbed up through it into a wide pasture dotted with mesquites and post oaks from which the wind was whipping yellow leaves, and followed the ruts of the old road to a second rise maybe a half-mile inland. There, where they should have been (the old ones seldom built next to the river), I found a roughly rectangular jumble of squared sandstone blocks, what was left of a foundation and chimney. Even a rotten log or two would have been too much to expect; most of the cabins went long ago for fence posts or cordwood, or burned down. (59)

Again the description is functional, the means for a meditation that fuses past and present in the speaker's mind as he contemplates what might have occurred on "nights like that one Mrs. Welty spent in the house that had rested on those sandstone blocks. No light, no fire, no sleep, no explanation, maybe, except a sweat-cold hand over your mouth if you started to whine from the discomfort and the felt fear." The scene is localized, sketched in broad strokes, only an impression of a landscape "dotted" with trees and wind-whipped "yellow leaves," but rooted to the preceding generations, the "old ones." The lyrical motif occasions the Romantic fusion of the external and internal, with temporal boundaries between individual lives obscured in the idyllic unity of time and space. "I

stared at the blocks for a time and kicked a couple of them and looked about a little for pieces of iron or china," Graves writes, searching for "useless fragments" similar to Wordsworth's "wooden bowl." "Then, finding none and having proved nothing, I went back to the canoe well satisfied. Either you care or you don't. . . . " (60; ellipsis in original). Again the elliptical opening offers the unspoken understanding that Graves himself cares a great deal, and that from caring comes meaning.

These last lines, in a sense, summarize the project Graves envisions for himself when he undertakes his journey of farewell. Having "proved nothing," the trip is not based on intellectual endeavor, but it leaves him feeling "well satisfied" nonetheless. He exhibits the requisite emotional attachment implicit in both the idyllic chronotope and the greater Romantic lyric for experiencing the unifying properties of the local. The unity of space and time, enhanced by the significance of names for specific places, allows the writer his artistic expression of the underlying urge to reconcile issues pertaining to change and loss, themes as timeless as the narrative urge, represented in the ancient matrices of the idyllic chronotope. The book's chronotopic qualities "are the organizing centers for the fundamental narrative events" found therein, and "to them belongs the meaning that shapes narrative" (Bakhtin 250). This personal meaning, besides establishing narrative structure, becomes the impetus for Graves's metamorphosis from sojourner to inhabitant, a theme developed more fully in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 3

GRAVES'S PASTORAL DESIGN: THE JOURNEY

> Whate'er its mission, the soft breeze can come
>
> To none more grateful than to me; escaped
>
> From the vast city, where I long had pined
>
> A discontented sojourner: now free

Wordsworth, Prelude, Book First

We have seen Graves's shaping of narrative via chronotopic qualities associated with pastoral, specifically those of the idyll and its various aspects of love and family. Fundamental to the structure of Goodbye to a River is the journey, the underlying metaphor, in M. E. Bradford's phrase, "always at the heart of pastoral." In one of the earliest critical readings of Graves's work, Bradford calls the book "hard pastoral" in the tradition of Burns, Wordsworth, Faulkner, and Frost, citing its narrative movement from a "settled society to a 'green world' and then back to the place of its beginning: from a 'made' world to a 'given' creation and thence to a double identity derived from both" ("Arden" 950).

Bradford's description offers several entry points. Graves's journey entails a Campbellian "separation from the world, a penetration to some source of power, and a life enhancing return" (Marx 228). It therefore represents a temporary state, both in its literal conditions and as a figure for psychic transformation, an "interim time,"

as Graves later calls it, of renewal, rebirth, reinvention of the self:

> It was a pleasant segment of life . . . one of the unencumbered clear-minded interim times that come after one way of being has ended for you, though you may not yet know that, and before another has set in. They do not last, such times, not unless you have built a better wall against life's insistences than I have ever managed to do. And maybe, for that matter, they are not supposed to last. . . . (Hard Scrabble 41; last ellipsis in original)

The journey is transitional, is "not supposed to last," and demonstrates a desire for a golden age, "to recreate in imagination the infancy of mankind" (Leach 31). But for the most part such times don't last against "life's insistences," the encroachments and demands of the daily world.

Bradford emphasizes as well the acquisition of a "double identity" derived from synthesis, from a mediation of the art/nature dialectic. Robert Bone claims that pastoral, like paradox, is "essentially a means of reconciling opposites . . . The harsh dichotomies of poor and powerful, provincial and metropolitan, simple and complex, innocent and sophisticated, natural and artificial, ideal and actual, timeless and historical, active and contemplative, are momentarily dissolved. The result is a gain in balance and proportion, and a greater complexity of moral vision" (133). William Empson calls pastoral a "trick of mind" wherein by means of the fundamental trope of irony the writer seeks "to reconcile . . . opposites into a larger unity, or suggest a balanced position by setting out two extreme views" (63). Harold Toliver claims that "the dialectical, tensive structure

characteristic of all worthwhile pastoral" derives from exploiting "the potential contrasts between a golden age and the normative world" (5). David M. Halperin sees pastoral's significance in "the set of contrasts, express or implied, which the values embodied in its world create with other ways of life" (65), the most "traditional" contrast being "between the little world of natural simplicity and the great world of civilization, power, statecraft, ordered society, established codes of behavior, and artifice in general" (66). Halperin also suggests another contrast "equally intimate" to pastoral representation as "that between a confused or conflict-ridden reality and the artistic depiction of it as comprehensible, meaningful, or harmonious" (68). In this light, pastoral represents "the interpretative activity of the mind" as a means for establishing order, an attempt not to see "the countryside solely for what it <u>is</u> but for what it <u>means</u>" (65). Similarly, Lucinda Hardwick MacKethan asserts, "The pastoral quest is always basically a search for order" (10).

Conceptions of pastoral as a metaphor for order and unity demonstrate the influence of the post-Kantian German philosopher Friedrich Schiller, whose work in the eighteenth century, according to Halperin, "constitutes the intellectual foundation for all modern approaches to pastoral" by virtue of its "psychological account of the origin of the modern sensibility" (43, 44). Schiller posits a pre-lapsarian condition in which sense and reason do not "stand in conflict with one another." This condition changes, the primitivist claiming for the worse, "once man has passed into the state of civilization [Kultur] and art has laid her hand upon him" (qtd. in Halperin 46).[1] Thereafter, wholeness can only be expressed as a "<u>moral</u> unity . . . a striving after unity," because the

"agreement between feeling and thinking, which in the first condition actually took place, exists now only ideally; it is no longer in him but outside of him, a thought still to be realized, no longer as a fact of his life." The Romantic project at large (as with Blake and Whitman) and the pastoral mode in particular (as with Coleridge and Wordsworth), can be viewed, then, as an attempt to reconcile these oppositions, to approximate in poetry "the harmonious cooperation of man's whole nature" by means of an "elevation of actuality to the ideal or (what amounts to the same thing) the representation of the ideal" (emphases in original).[2]

Tracing this dialectical relationship between civilization and nature to its literary roots in Virgil's Eclogues, Leo Marx describes an oppositional balance, which he terms the "pastoral ideal," as a "middle ground somewhere 'between,' yet in a transcendent relation to, the opposing forces of civilization and nature" (23). This pastoral ideal "has been incorporated in a powerful metaphor of contradiction" that represents "a way of ordering meaning and value that clarifies our situation today" (4), in effect approximating Schiller's "moral unity." Taking his bearings from Virgil's first eclogue, in which the exiled and harried Meliboeus converses with a lounging Tityrius under a shady bower, Marx points out that the "ideal pasture" represented by Arcadia has vulnerable borders on two sides, one separating it from Rome, the other from the "encroaching marshland":

> It is a place where Tityrius is spared the deprivations and anxieties associated with both the city and the wilderness. Although he is free of the repressions entailed by a complex civilization, he is not prey to the violent uncertainties of nature. His mind is cultivated and his instincts are

> gratified. Living in an oasis of rural pleasure, he enjoys the best of both worlds—the sophisticated order of art and the simple spontaneity of nature. (22)

This middle ground representing the "best of both worlds" constitutes as well the setting for Virgil's other pastoral, Georgics, which focuses on the practical considerations of mediating as an actual rather than as an ideal condition the "middle landscape," the symbolic integration of art and nature (Marx 71). Georgics marks a literary improvement upon the agrarian interests of Cato and Varro in its concern with agricultural labor and sustainability, values contrasting with an ethos of temporary leisure in the bucolic tradition of Eclogues that Virgil inherited from his Greek forebear, Theocritus. Glancing further backward at Hesiod as well, Georgics represents "the processes of fertility and renewal by which nature, through timely and efficient labor, is coaxed from a dormant period, brought to fruition, and prepared for harvest" (Toliver 4). In this light, georgic pastoral exemplifies Mikhail Bakhtin's chronotope of the family idyll conjoined with the agricultural idyll, with an emphasis of its labor aspect. These characteristics embody the values Graves eventually embraces and, according to Bakhtin, in this chronotope "the ancient matrices are revealed most fully and with the greatest actuality" (226).

Graves's journey into the Brazos region ends near Glen Rose, where he subsequently buys land and takes up life as a farmer and writer. His relationship to that place and his restorative efforts at reconciling utilitarian interests, which he terms "the Ownership Syndrome," with "the Way," the harmonic relationship of the whole of nature and its parts, constitute the bulk of Hard Scrabble. Graves's interlude provides an overall

design detailing the writer's gradual balancing of the sojourner's idealistic concerns with the actuality of the middle landscape. This results in a condition reflecting Schiller's "moral unity," what Bradford calls "equipoise" ("In Keeping" 193) and Graves "balance" (Goodbye 293) and "the old rightness" (Hard Scrabble 75).

In The Machine in the Garden (1964), Marx differentiates a complex mode of pastoral from what he terms the "simple-minded wishfulness" of a "naïve, anarchic primitivism" (11), identified by Freud as "discontent" with civilization (qtd. in Marx 8). This discontent, which generates an "urge to withdraw from civilization's growing power and complexity" (Marx 9), results in a "symbolic motion away from centers of civilization toward their opposite, nature, away from sophistication toward simplicity, or to introduce the cardinal metaphor of the literary mode, away from the city toward the country" (9-10). Whereas in the primitive recoil from civilization, the hero continues an outward movement, eventually "locat[ing] value as far as possible . . . from organized society," pastoral employs the image of the shepherd who "seeks a resolution of the conflict between the opposed world of nature and art" (22). In this way pastoral often "becomes a figure for the contemplative life, a withdrawal from action" (Lincoln 2), with the shepherd or herdsman a symbol of leisure or, in Halperin's term, a "watchful ease." Meliboeus, driven from his ancestral lands, comes upon Tityrius resting in the Arcadian shade, and in much pastoral of the "soft" type, the shepherd or herdsman must demonstrate only a minimal vigilance toward his flock, being rarely required to perform any "very strenuous or absorbing activity" (Halperin 63). This soft image of Arcadia

based on Virgil and Theocritus flourished in the neo-classical pastoral of Sydney, Spenser, and Milton.

Contradictory to the "languid nymphs and shepherds" occupying the pastoral landscape of the Renaissance, Simon Schama reminds us that the original Arcadians, "hunters and gathers, warriors and sensualists . . . inhabit a landscape notorious for its brutal harshness" (526, 527). Theocritus softened this image in the third century B. C. E. in his bucolic idylls, wherein the shepherd Lycidas resides in a countryside reflecting a "sophisticated, even urbane taste" (Schama 527). Pan, the goat-footed god, nymphs, and goatherds are still evident, but the "wild notes of the syrinx," once the instrument of the archaic tradition that produced states of "pan-ic" and "pan-demonium" has been replaced by "melodious fluting and endless song contests," and Pan resembles the "custodian of flocks and amiable prankster the Romans would recognize." Some three hundred years after Theocritus, Virgil's "drastically reinvented Arcadia" comprises a "rich composite of Aegean olive groves, Egyptian cornfields, and Sicilian vineyards" (528).

Yet, if in the more complex pastoral that Marx describes nature is still idealized and metaphoric, as following Schiller's description for the modern condition it must be, it demonstrates as well the conditions Bradford terms "hard." Life is simpler on the river than in the "world" of the city, but it is still far from an Edenic garden free of toil and trouble, "more ceremonial than useful" (Toliver 4). The conditions of the journey themselves constitute a refining process, "a purgatory, a proving ground of souls, where the impurities are burned away as in a great blast furnace" (Bradford, "Arden" 954). Rather than in watchful ease, Graves employs the majority of his days in prolonged

paddling, chopping and hauling "abrasive armloads" of firewood, and carrying buckets of water for cooking and cleaning. "When camping for a time is one's life, one tries to improve his style," he writes, but "one way or the other, it all generally turns out to be work" (Goodbye 165), an appropriate assessment for a self-described "puritan" who echoes the "old tough Calvinistic" bromide "if it hurts it's probably doing you good" (227, 190), and who tacitly concurs with the sagacity of one of the river people, Old Man Willett, and his stoic prescriptive: "A man needs it hard. I don't give a crap. He'd ought to have it hard a-growin' up, and hard a-learnin' his work, and hard a-gittin' a wife and feedin' his kids and gittin'rich, if he's gonna git rich. All of it" (174).

We see this ethic of sternness early in Goodbye to a River, when Graves utilizes a subtle polemic to contrast not only work and leisure but also the rural and urban. He describes the Brazos as "treacherous for the sort of puttering around on water that most people like":

> It snubs play. Its shoals shear the propeller pins of the big new outboard motors, and quicksands and whirlpools occasionally swallow folks down, so that generally visitors go to the predictable impounded lakes, leaving the river to the hard-bitten yeomanry who live along it, and to their kinsmen who gravitate back to it on weekends away from the aircraft factories and automobile assembly plants of Dallas and Fort Worth, and to those others of us for whom, in one way or another, it has meaning which makes it worth the trouble. (6)

The dominant image of the wild and still dangerous river with its “quicksands and whirlpools” opposes the lakes, or to be more precise, the reservoirs, which are “predictable” and “impounded.” The river “snubs play” and “puttering around,” represented by leisure-craft and their “propeller pins” and “big new outboard motors,” being more suited to work-oriented modes of transportation, like manual-powered canoes that “don’t storm the natural world or ride over it, but drift in upon it as part of its own silence” (32). The river is therefore not suited to “most people,” appealing instead to “us,” those who see meaning in what is wild and unpredictable and “trouble.” This group typically consists of the “hard-bitten yeomanry” who populate its banks and their “kinsmen” who return to the country after earning wages all week in the manufacturing centers of the city, but who nonetheless retain a taste for values that here come to be associated with the rural. It includes Graves and those “built” like him who care, contrasting with “visitors” accustomed to what he later calls the “philosophy of patio living” (285).

This passage also establishes a dichotomy of natural and mechanical, figured by the “treacherous” river and the machine with its propeller pins and outboard motors. Adding to the complexity of this image are “impounded” lakes made possible by the construction of dams similar to the one “that blocks the canyon at Possum Kingdom” where his journey begins. Graves describes in menacing imagery his approach to this departure point, how he “rattled the gate of the chain-link enclosure around the [control] tower and a grim humming network of wires above squat finned transformers classified deadly by red-painted signs” (12). The image recalls Marx’s discussion of the machine

in the garden, which when placed “in opposition to the tranquility and order located in the landscape” becomes “an emblem of the artificial, of the unfeeling utilitarian spirit, and of the fragmented, industrial style of life” (18). This metaphor, used to introduce a “countervailing force to bear upon the pastoral ideal” (21), offers a paradigm for what Marx terms “imaginative and complex pastoral” (16). This second type of pastoral contrasts with “simple” pastoral of sentimentality the “sophistication” of its composition, managing to “qualify, or call into question, or bring irony to bear against the illusion of peace and harmony in a green pasture” (25). Frequently the “countervailing force” is introduced by what Marx calls “the trope of the interrupted idyll” (27), utilized throughout American literature to symbolize the intrusion of the machine into the pastoral setting. The machine, associated with “fire, smoke, speed, iron, and noise,” and emblematic of industrial power, always appears suddenly, startlingly, forcing the subject in the idyll “to acknowledge the existence of a reality alien to the pastoral dream,” thereby estranging him from the source of meaning and value to be found in idyllic nature (15, 27). In Marx’s paradigm for the trope the locomotive represents the machine. Its first appearance in Goodbye to a River, however, involves an airplane.

One of Graves’s extended reveries, initiated by a romantic meditation on the “sad, sentimental story” of John Davis’s wife and her floorboards, concludes with a subdued and tranquil mood. An atmosphere of “silence” and “ruin” hangs over everything, the only sounds being the occasional whistles of towhees and cardinals, the gurgling river, and wind that hissed in the treetops” (Goodbye 27). Suddenly, Graves writes, “a yellow

Cub came flying up the river low along the wind, with two men in it. They waved. I jerked my head in answer":

> Irked perhaps by my calm—people who fly around near the ground seem to require delight and awe from earthbound watchers—they banked into a tight circle and came back to buzz me, too low now, and with the plane's wheels slapped the top branches of a cottonwood.
>
> It scared them. They pulled up steeply and flew off in the direction they had come from, and the roar of their dive became a drone. . . . The pup yapped after them. (27-28; ellipsis in original)

Clearly Graves reports the incident as an intrusion into the existing mood. The machine's alienating effect interferes not only with the thoughts and sounds to which Graves has been attending in his calmness, but with his overall benevolence towards other people. The plane's "roar," augmented by the yapping of the startled dog, breaks the spell of the moment.

In another instance offering a similar pattern, Graves again has been savoring memories associated with a particular place, the Welty crossing near Big Keechi creek, a site of confrontation between the old ones and Comanches. After idly kicking at a few foundation stones, all which remains of the Welty cabin, Graves returns to the canoe "well satisfied." He continues downstream, meditative, and describes how as he "rounded down at its wide rock-strewn eddying mouth . . . two army helicopters rounded down at me" (60). Here as before the aircraft interrupts the mood, although Graves tolerates the "young and harebrained" pilots' intentions more easily, reflecting on his own military

experience. His attention broken from the idyllic, he remarks that he briefly envies the pilot, "dominant as a hawk over the country and the river." But the envy passes quickly, a "spasm and without point," as Graves remembers, "I was on the river in the way I'd chosen to be there" (60-61). He had chosen to be "unobtrusive," to "drift in upon" the natural world, a part of its "silence" rather than "storming" it or "riding over" it. "As you either care about what the land is or not," he writes, "so do you like or dislike quiet things" (32). But the momentary fluctuation toward technology and civilization underscores its strong pull on the modern mind, even one with a predilection for natural ways.

A third occurrence of this trope combines the interrupted idyll with the admirable qualities of labor. It occasions perhaps the best example of Marx's paradigm of a startling intrusion on the pastoral dream conjoined with an appreciation for the beneficence of the "hard":

> The wind died at sunset. The night, its wisp of a moon not yet out, was clear, with stars, and so still that I found myself resenting the fire's hoarse whisper and snapping against a boulder that bounced its heat into the little tent. Screech owls, rare in that country since the big drouth, were quavering tentatively to one another near where I'd seen a deserted flagstone house across the river. Masses of tangled dead timber overhung the tiny flat I was camped on; six inches from one of the rear tent stakes the earth fell away into an eroded pit eight feet deep, eaten out by the river in a flood.

> A truck's working-groan to the east, where Two Eighty-one climbed the scarp . . . Southward, a freight train threaded the T. & P., and sounded faintly the Cadillac honk of its Diesel, importunate, lacking the lonesomeness of the old steam wails we had once listened to from there. The day's wind and bright light and paddling had washed me with clean fatigue, and my muscles felt good, in tone. A week it had taken, seventy unhurried miles, longer than it had used to, but I was older now. The skin of my hands from work and from the alternate wetting and drying and the cold had chapped hornily, and at the knuckles of my thumbs and forefingers had broken in bloody stinging cracks. Cuts and little sore knots where sandbur tips had embedded themselves finished the disfigurement . . . one might make symbols out of those fingers. But one didn't. One felt damned good. One was for the moment a simple puritan, soaking reward from the glow of a fire on one's front while at one's tail the creeping cold of night only italicized (puritanically?) one's simple comfort, and in the embers one's simple supper, a potato, lay baking. . . . (121; ellipses in original)

The passage begins with Graves describing his idyllic surroundings, which contribute to the contemplative mood of stillness and ease with silence so deep even the fire's "hoarse whisper and snapping" is resented and "Screech owls" are reduced to tentative "quavering." As Marx declares in explicating the "Sleepy Hollow" passage, "what counts . . . is not the matter so much as the feeling behind it," the generally restive state

while attending to the pleasing sounds of nature (12). Intruding upon this mood are, initially, the "working-groan" of a truck, and then the paradigmatic "Cadillac honk" of a train, which even if "sounded faintly" nevertheless is "importunate." These sounds impose an acknowledgement of the outside world of cities and commerce, alien to the pastoral world of nature upon which he had until that point been musing. Then, in a twist upon the archetype, rather than returning to his contemplation of nature, Graves instead focuses on the physical benefits of his labor on the river: the "clean fatigue" of aching, toned muscles, the "chapped" hands and "cracked" knuckles of "thumbs and forefingers." He shares in the "simple" comforts of the shepherd, but rather than extolling a watchful ease, Graves sings the pleasures instead of the active, laborious "puritan," leaving him feeling "damned good."

As Graves's journey nears its mid-point, he physically moves from the upper Brazos to the middle, from a region of frontier and scant settlement to the older stretches of "Anglo-Hibernian" inhabitation. In terms of narrative there is a shift as well, becoming more focused on the present and the writer's self, and the book's second half is less concerned with history, reverie, and origins, with the Jesse Veales and John Davises. But the familiar pastoral oppositions are still evident, joined by contemplation with concerns of old and new, inner and outer, individual and collective, provincial and cosmopolitan. Reflecting an awareness of the type of alienation from nature Schiller describes, Graves writes

> In terms of the outdoors, I and the others like me weren't badly cheated as such cheatings go nowadays, but we were cheated nevertheless. We

> learned quite a lot, but not enough. Instead of learning to move <u>into</u> country, as I think underneath we wanted, we learned mostly how to move <u>onto</u> it. (157-58; emphases added)

Nature is no longer in us, but outside of us; not something we move "into" but "onto." Graves describes the "old old entry points" into nature for humans, hunting and fishing, which "are not bad ones either, but as standardly practiced these days, for the climactic ejaculation of city tensions, they don't go deep. They aren't thoughtful" (158). Graves's imagery seems clear enough on this point. The problem lies in inherent attitudes toward nature and how these affect human behavior as it is "standardly practiced these days." Nature is objectified, feminized, a repository for "city tensions." As in Schiller's description of a Fall where Nature gradually disappeared from the lives of humans as "experience" and as the "active and perceiving" subject (qtd. in Halperin 46), Graves believes this age lacks the "organic kinship to nature that the Comanches had, or even someone like Mr. Charlie Goodnight":

> For them every bush, every bird's cheep, every cloud bank had not only utilitarian but mystical meaning; it was all an extension of their sensory systems, an antenna as rawly receptive as a snail's. Even if their natural world still existed, which it doesn't, you'd have to snub the whole world of present men to get into it that way. (<u>Goodbye</u> 158)

And therein lies the dilemma of the pastoral interlude, by definition a temporary state. One would have to "snub the whole world" and become Freud's discontent primitivist to

get into it "that way." One would have to be capable of building a lasting "wall against life's insistences."

A large part of the quandary of "the whole world of present men," in Graves's view, pertains to technology, the machine. The natural world of the Comanches and Mr. Charles Goodnight doesn't exist presently, even if one chose the primitivist route, that world being supplanted by the "terms of extant human beings":

> The terms of today's human beings are air conditioners and suburbs and water impoundments overlaying whole countrysides, and the hell with nature except maybe in a cross-sectional park here and there. In our times quietness and sun and leaves and bird song and all the multitudinous lore of the natural world have to come second or third, because whether we wanted to be born there or not, we were all born into the prickly machine-humming place that man has hung for himself above that natural world . . .
>
> . . . With a box gushing refrigerated air (or warmed, seasonally depending) into a sealed house and another box flashing loud bright images into jaded heads, who gives a rat's damn for things that go bump in the night? (Goodbye 159)

Within these contrasts of old and new, country and city, nature and art, the "lore of the natural world," of which Larry McMurtry has claimed modern folks "couldn't scrape up enough between us to organize a good picnic" ("Southwest" 36), has been supplanted by what Graves calls "that pleasant air-conditioned pattern" (Goodbye 238). The whole of the "prickly machine-humming place that man has hung for himself" above Nature,

symbolized by “sealed houses” in “suburbs” with “box[es] flashing loud bright images into jaded heads” that don’t give a “rat’s damn,” serves as Marx’s “countervailing force” of alienation.

Graves’s journey is as much an escape from cultural apathy as anything else that could be categorized by the art/nature dialectic. “What one does in time, arriving a bit late at an awareness of the swindling he got—from no one, from the times—is to make up for the shortage as best he may,” he writes. “I mean, too—obviously—if you care” (Goodbye 160). Though at times “disgruntled from caring,” Graves strikes out alone into the still relatively wild environs of the Brazos River, to the chagrin of the man back at the Possum Kingdom dam: “‘All by yourself?’ he said. ‘Without no motor?’” (13). “It is a nasty question to answer, the way he put it,” Graves writes, “It is the question of gregarious, colonial man, and it contains outrage, and it means: What the hell’s the matter with you?” (15-16). It also represents a framing device by which Graves contrasts the individual and the collective, echoed at the book’s end by “someone’s wife” at a party “in town” after his return (301). As Bradford puts it, “Mass man is the antagonist here, the antithesis of the speaker and most of his companions along the Brazos, living and dead” (“Arden” 951). People grown too accustomed to the “philosophy of patio living” avoid both the solitude and labor of Graves’s journey into the wilderness. Graves ponders how “We don’t know much about solitude these days, nor do we want to. A crowded world thinks that aloneness is always lonliness, and that to seek it is perversion. Maybe so” (Goodbye 83), he muses, that “maybe” Graves’s characteristic acknowledgement that there are more ways than his to view life.

By the end of his sojourn Graves doesn't "miss anyone on God's earth's face. You're no more bored with the sameness of your days and your diet and your tasks than a chickadee is bored" (Goodbye 292). He emerges physically and mentally honed from his withdrawal and labor, with muscles "gone supple-hard" and "hands as crusty as dry rawhide, and your head has cleared, and your boat goes precisely, unstrenuously where and how you want it to go, and all your gear falls into its daily use with thoughtless ease." He has, or he thinks he has, which amounts to the same thing, achieved what he calls "balance . . . rightness . . . knowledge," something akin to Schiller's moral unity or at least the "striving after" unity. His rhetorical shift to second person suggests that others willing to make the journey have and will find similar reward:

> You were spare, bare, and ascetic. You knew Saint Henry, Yankee moralist though he might be, and knew too all those other old loners who'd ever baked their bread by fires in manless places. You knew the sovereign pulse of being.
>
> Or thought you did. . . . (293)

The "countervailing" force of technology's intrusion upon the pastoral ideal emphasizes the temporary nature of Graves's balanced state as he emerges from the river on the trip's final day. Fighting a sore throat, a "raw" December wind, and needing to phone his friend Davis Birdsong for a ride home, he encounters a "very ugly bloated old man" smelling of "white cedar-country whisky . . . strong" who tries to interest Graves in "Comanche treasure maps," and then tells him how "the proposed Bee Mountain dam just down the river was going to put him in the boat business and make him rich" (297, 298).

Bradford, commenting on this bit of irony, suggests Graves's theme: "Out of foolish expectations man continues to make ruin" ("Arden" 955). After three weeks on the river with limited human contact, the first person Graves encounters imagines himself intending to capitalize on the river's demise with a pipe dream. Nevertheless, he does direct Graves to a phone at a "ser sta gro up the road, a one-pumper, [where] two women were watching television beside a blistering-hot oil burner made out of blued, thin, stovepipe steel":

> One of them, old, sat in a wheel chair sucking snuff, with a can that had once held Hunt's peaches perched on the foot rest. The other without rising turned down the loud machine to hear me and said yes, it was there on that shelf—and so it was, among boxes of detergent. I put through a call to Davis collect, and the women said no further word, though they kept the set turned down during the time I was at the telephone, their eyes remaining on the bright screen. A young man's wide-mouthed face filled it. He sang how the cats was a-rockin' and that wasn't all. . . .
>
> Davis said he'd come. I hung up, and immediately the younger woman twirled up the machine's sound. I offered to pay for using the phone.
>
> "No, you don't owe me nothin'," she said without looking at me.
>
> I thanked her. The old woman in the wheel chair, with a dried, resigned, tragically strong face of the kind that Spanish peasant women sometimes have, had not to my knowledge glanced my way once, and as I

> left she leaned over to spit with amber exactness into her peach can, without removing her eyes for a second from the fascination of that adolescent dance, the fascination of the future. . . . (299-300)

The ubiquitous "loud machine" makes its entrance immediately upon Graves's movement back toward civilization. Although after three weeks of nearly total solitude Graves is not much inclined toward idle chitchat, the television's presence ensures the least likelihood of that even if he so desired. The women hardly notice his presence, "their eyes remaining on the bright screen," transfixed by "the fascination of the future" while nearly oblivious to the natural world just outside or the conventional world of human intercourse. Perhaps they can't look at Graves because, as Don Graham suggests, "the lone figure on the river is a living rebuke" to television, "the symbol of the new America." "Outside," Graham writes, "is the river, the weather, the primordial reality of nature. Inside is the simulacrum of televised experience, a dazed and glazed mass consciousness supplanting whatever perceptions the women might have been able to muster on their own" (23).

Whatever he represents to the women in the store, Graves's journey signifies an alteration from "mass consciousness." Like Plato's figure who has been outside returning to the cave, Graves can not comfortably embrace the normative "world" again, even if he doesn't dislike, or even likes some aspects of it. When "somebody's wife," whom he "liked" and "had known" most of his life asks if he "didn't get lonesome," he reflects a moment in the climate-controlled room before responding, while "outside the windows the cold sleet mixed with rain was driving down at a hard slant, and far far up

above all of it in the unalive silent cold of space some new chunk of metal with a name, man-shaped, was spinning in symbolism, they said, of ultimate change." This symbol of "ultimate" change and human technology represented by a new "chunk of metal" stands in stark contrast to Graves's values, the "stark pleasures of aloneness and unchangingness and what a river meant." Rather than attempt an explanation of what at the time seems "inexplicable," Graves tells the woman, "Not exactly. I had a dog" (301). Graves's response, ironic but without sarcasm, seems appropriate for the situation. He doesn't dislike the woman or the shelter provided in the room from nature's own insistences. But not long before he'd weathered such storms outside, stinging rain to flesh, and grown accustomed to it, and to his solitude. Graves is too much a gentleman to embarrass a lady with tales of his stark pleasures, to which he's certain she won't relate, or about which he's uncertain he can verbalize. His literary attempt to articulate those pleasures would be published three years later in Hard Scrabble.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 3

1. The bracketed words indicate Halperin's gloss of Schiller's original text in German. Hereafter I rely on Halperin's translation for all the Schiller quotations.
2. This is not to suggest that the representation of a culture/nature dialectic is unique to the Western literary tradition. The Babylonian epic Gilgamesh demonstrates in narrative the same oppositional construction via the figures of Gilgamesh and Enkidu. In this way it deals with fundamental tropes of a human condition that have been termed "pastoral," as does the biblical conflict between Cain and Abel. The scope of this dissertation, however, is limited to the Hesiodic-Virgilian line that was re-established during the Renaissance and articulated thereafter in Romantic philosophy.

CHAPTER 4

GRAVES'S PASTORAL DESIGN: THE MIDDLE LANDSCAPE

> What makes the corncrops glad, under which star
>
> To turn the soil, Mæcenas, and wed your vines
>
> To elms, the care of cattle, keeping of flocks,
>
> All the experience thrifty bees demand –
>
> Such are the themes of my song.
>
> Virgil, Georgics, Book 1

> All things natural and rural being parts of a whole. . .
>
> John Graves, Hard Scrabble

The stark pleasures of his journey Graves later recalls as part of "an odd good interim time . . . of looking again at the part of the world I had known in youth, and learning with some surprise that I would never know any other part as well" (Hard Scrabble 36). They comprise an interlude of "floating down rivers and poking through stretches of country . . . juvenile activities, I suppose, in a businesslike nation and time, and certainly having the leisure on your hands for them is a juvenile sort of privilege these days" (36-37). During one trip, doing just this sort of "moseying" Graves is fond of, he crosses a "stretch of stream that had to be White Bluff Creek" and finds a place where "the cedar dwindled to scrub size and the land rose gently westward in what had once been a field. At that lower end someone had had a garden long before" (38).

Graves then begins a local description that so often has marked his lyrical meditations, elegiac musings of an admitted "inveterate romantic" (Hard Scrabble 62), only this time he provides a twist:

> a piece of crumpled netwire fence had been interwoven with cedar branches and bits of tin and old car parts to keep rabbits and other nibblers out. It had the melancholy and mystery and unlikelihood of old human things found in wild places, and the pathos.
>
> That was on the old Kyle part of what is now Hard Scrabble. The garden is now my garden, though fenced less picturesquely, and my house is notched into the lower hillside just above. (38-39)

With the same fluid ease of prose and technique we've grown accustomed to, Graves introduces what will be the new focus of his pastoral, what he terms "the incipient disease of land . . . the simple yeoman notion . . . that grass and crops and trees and livestock and wild things and water mattered somehow supremely, that you were not whole unless you had a stake in them, a daily knowledge of them" (42). Wholeness, unity, and balance—the goal remains the same but the means for achieving it, the striving after it, change.

During the same year as the publication of his first book, Graves, seeking a "stake" in and "daily knowledge" of the natural world, purchases the first section of what eventually comes to roughly four hundred acres of cedar brake and "limestone ledge" near Glen Rose in Somervell County. Prior to this purchase he avoids owning possessions he can't carry with him or "walk away from," because of his belief that anything "worth having you still owned . . . in your head" after you've left them behind

(Hard Scrabble 42). This is not a novel idea for him—he had written something to this effect in Goodbye to a River. There Graves questions the "impulse" of some "city people" to practice absentee ownership as an "investment," for whom "an occasional brief glance at green things and growing things for whose existence one is responsible financially if not personally" serves as their only connection with the actuality of their investment. By contrast, Graves believes that "land is owned more with head and heart, with eye and brain, than with pocketbook and title deed." He understands city people's decision to live on the land they buy, or "even [to] go there often": "We will be nearly finished," he writes, "when we stop understanding the old pull toward green things and living things, toward dirt and rain and heat and what they spawn. Most of us still have it in us, whether as would-be squire or peasant or drifting, poaching gypsy" (Goodbye 262). But he is ambivalent about absentee owners who seldom visit their holdings, relying instead on locals for requisite maintenance. He recalls the Norwegian caretaker for a "Dallas man who owned a farm" (210). Having "no tight link to the region himself" the man "thought with gentle detachment" that changes in the region's practices, from old to new ways, "were mainly for the better." Graves, referring to the caretaker but, perhaps, with himself in mind as well, adds that "the flexibility of his insight was of the kind that comes sometimes from not owning anything or anybody and therefore not being obliged by your interests to shape your thought narrowly" (211).

The Spaniard Lucius Junius Moderatus Columella (circa first century C. E.) , whom Graves mentions in Hard Scrabble as a sort of spiritual kinsman, shares Graves's concern about absentee ownership. Columella writes that neither "the constant toil and

experience of the farm overseer, nor the means and the willingness to spend money, avail as much as the mere presence of the master; for if his presence does not frequently attend the work, all business comes to a standstill, just as in the army when the commander is absent." Even the "mere presence" of the owner bears more weight in proper land management than what Graves later calls "financial responsibility," no matter the "means and willingness to spend money." Reinforcing this idea, Columella cites his own literary antecedent, Mago the Carthaginian, whose thought on the matter implicates the city/country dichotomy: "One who has bought land should sell his town house, so that he will have no desire to worship the household gods of the city rather than those of the country" (I. i. 18). Even before he becomes a rural owner himself, Graves voices an underlying belief in the principles Columella describes: that attachment and obligation make the owner, not the fact of possession.

Graves describes the genesis of his own transition from drifter to owner in a chapter of Hard Scrabble appropriately titled "The Forging of a Squireen," how the "casual interim time" of the journey "blended and then changed into what came next." What came next for Graves meant being married a second time, starting a family, university teaching, "wearing a coat and tie most days," and generally being restricted by this newer "unjuvenile shape of life" (42). Along with what he calls his newfound and "relative respectable stability" come thoughts of owning land, followed by the conscious and life-altering decision to make a "durable relocation . . . a placement by choice of the outsider inside" the rural environment of his pastoral sojourn (Bradford, "In Keeping" 190). The immediate trouble Graves discovers is the incompatibility of his

presuppositions about owning land with the actuality he discovers incumbent upon utility. As he describes, looking back to the time he first purchased the old Kyle Place,

> I was thinking then of land in terms of that interim time. Terms of aloneness, of hunting and poking about, of secret cedar places from whence you could peer out at the far world of other men without having to feel yourself a part of it, of enjoyment rather than use. Maybe it is by such vulnerability to mood that romantics and drifters ultimately bare themselves to the scratchiness of a practical world. (Hard Scrabble 42)

By admission what Graves envisions initially resembles the pastoral ideal, a little piece of Arcadian "unencumbered interim time" (44) offering refuge from the "far world of other men," a place of enjoyment rather than use. Despite the labor involved with camping and canoeing, his "puritan" work ethic, and Old Man Willett, Graves still associates the hard pastoral of the journey with "drifting" and "floating" and "poking about": in short, with leisure and juvenile activities. Only by baring himself to the "scratchiness" of the practical world, by committing to "something more or less lasting," does he necessitate coming to terms with what he calls the "Ownership Syndrome," a frame of mind that, ironically, actually puts one at odds with fevered attempts to make "rocky acres useful" (43). In fully recognizing new values accompanying ownership and use, by accepting the obligation to shape his thoughts narrowly, Graves leaves behind the idyllic interim and embraces Virgilian georgic.

Hard Scrabble, while still hard pastoral of the kind seen in Goodbye to a River, is thematically and structurally more akin to Virgil's georgic matter, not largely by virtue of

its relation to ownership, since Graves already considers owning to be a state of mind, as by a shift in emphasis to ownership's correspondent values of commitment, responsibility, utility, labor, and sustainability. These values obviate a different sort of caring than that seen pertaining to the pastoral idyll because stability, labor, marriage, family—the ancient matrices Bakhtin associates with the idyllic chronotope—attain their greatest "possible actuality" in a conjunction of the agricultural and family idylls accentuating their labor aspects (Bakhtin 226). Writes Bakhtin, "It is the agricultural-labor element that creates a real link and common bond between the phenomena of nature and the events of human life (as distinct from the metaphorical link in the love idyll)" (227). It is only natural and appropriate, then, that as the events of John Graves's life transit from a drifting, interim time to a stable, lasting period, the chronotopic qualities shaping his narrative, drawing primarily from his life, would correspond accordingly.

As mentioned briefly in an earlier chapter, the events of Graves's life as an overarching plot pattern resemble the provincial novel, wherein "we witness directly the progress of a family-labor, agricultural or craft-work idyll moving into the major form of the novel. The basic significance of provinciality . . . [is the] uninterrupted, age-old link between the life of generations and a strictly delimited locale" (Bakhtin 229). Hard Scrabble utilizes this link, also called folkloric time and unity of place, in its rehearsal of how Graves comes to identify with the locale he calls the "Tonk Nation" and its relation to previous generations and geologic time. These chronotopic qualities shape the thematic structure linking Graves's first two books and provide the narrative framework for how he came to choose "a collection of wild rough rocky cedar hills traversed by

water that bubbles and swirls clear over solid ledge limestone" rather than "wide deep flat bottomland fields and grassy rolling pastures all tamed and manageable, such as the practical world has had the good sense to choose unto itself over the ages" (Hard Scrabble 43). Graves's four hundred acres of rocky cedar hills connote a middle landscape hewn by labor and love from the rough material of its genesis. The chronotopic qualities of agricultural labor and family provide "organizing centers for the fundamental narrative events" (Bakhtin 250). How he describes his life and work there—the literary mode of that expression—is hard Virgilian pastoral of the georgic variety.

To illustrate the distinction I am attempting here, since the two concepts are so fundamentally related, Graves describes in various chapters labor associated with cedar chopping, fence and shelter building, beekeeping, and stock herding. All but the first of these topics appear in Virgil's Georgics, appropriate since that work represents Bakhtin's premier example of the agricultural-labor idyll. Bradford indicates a connection as well with Horace's "cultivated gardens" ("In Keeping" 191), but agricultural topics dominated early literature, with works on farm management described as "voluminous." Marcus Terentius Varro (B.C. E. 116-28), a Roman literary antecedent to Virgil, "cites fifty Greek authors on the subject whose works he knew, beginning with Hesiod and Xenophon" (Harrison 4). Varro was preceded by Marcus Porcius Cato (B. C. E. 234-149), whose De Agri Cultura "constitutes our earliest extant specimen of connected, if loosely connected, Latin prose" (Cato xiii). His book, which Columella claims "taught Agriculture to speak Latin" (qtd. in Harrison 4), emphasizes the moral virtue of work, as did his Greek forerunner, Hesiod. But Cato's book, according to Harrison Boyd Ash,

lacks "systematic arrangement" and "resembles rather a farmer's notebook in which the author has jotted down in random fashion all sorts of directions for the care of the farm" (Cato xiii). Exemplifying this observation is the advice from Book 37: "You may make compost of straw, lupine, chaff, bean stalks, husks, and ilex and oak leaves;" and from Book 41: "What is good cultivation? Good ploughing. What next? Ploughing. What third? Manuring."

Later, Varro's Rerum Rusticarum marks literary improvements over Cato in style and technique, particularly in his use of dialogue and metaphor. To demonstrate, he subordinates "agriculture," the concern of the farmer, with "grazing," the concern of the herdsman, by means of a trope utilizing a musical instrument. In Varro's metaphor the Pan pipe is a vehicle for expressing a natural correlation between the smaller pipes carrying the "air" or melody, figured as grazing, and the larger pipes representing the accompaniment and agriculture. In the passage below, Varro and Fundanius, to whom the treatise is addressed, discuss the figure's construction:

> "Surely," said Fundanius, "feeding cattle is one thing and agriculture is another, but they are related. Just as the right pipe of the tibia is different from the left pipe, yet are they complements because while the one leads, it is to carry the air, and the other follows, it is for the accompaniment."
>
> "And, to push your analogy further, it may be added," said I, "that the pastoral life, like the tibia dextra, has led and given the cue to the agricultural life, as we have on the authority of that learned man

> Dicæarchus who, in his Life of Greece from the earliest times, shows us how in the beginning men pursued a purely pastoral life and knew not how to plough nor to plant trees nor to prune them; only later taking up the pursuits of agriculture; whence it may be said that agriculture is in harmony with the pastoral life but is subordinate to it, as the left pipe is to the right pipe." (Harrison 66)

It has been claimed that Varro's treatise on farm management is "the best practical book on the subject which has come down to us from antiquity," constituting "the authority from which Virgil drew the practical farming lore, for which he has been extolled in all ages . . . indeed as a farm manual the Georgics go astray only when they depart from Varro" (Harrison 9, 10). With Varro's book appearing in B. C. E. 37, the same year "Mæcenas commissioned Virgil to put into verse the spirit of the times," Fairfax Harrison believes it "not impossible that the Rerum Rusticarium suggested the subject of the Georgics, either to Virgil or to Mæcenas" (11). Virgil, regarding Varro's treatise as a "solid foundation . . . used it freely," according to Harrison, who delineates over fifty passages "for which a suggestion may be found in Varro, usually in facts, but some times in thought and even in words" (12, 15).

The perhaps too belabored point here is that while all of these examples, including Columella, fit by type Bakhtin's idyll of agricultural labor, it is with Virgil's contribution in Georgics, following Varro's farming lore and Hesiodic theogony, that we begin to see the flowering of a literary mode of pastoral contrasting pre-lapsarian leisure and the benefits of Hesiod's version of the Fall in which the "products of hardship and need are

human effort and inventiveness" (Patterson 136). In his poem Virgil describes a golden time of fertility and ease prior to ownership:

> Before Jove's reign no tenants mastered holdings,
> Even to mark the land with private bounds
> Was wrong: men worked for the common store, and earth
> Herself, unbidden, yielded all more fully. (Georgics 1: 125-28)

But with the onset of "Jove's reign" leisure is supplanted by labor:

> He put fell poison in the serpent's fang,
> Bade wolves to prowl and made the sea to swell,
> Shook honey down from the leaves, hid fire away,
> And stopped the wine that freely flowed in streams,
> That step by step practice and taking thought
> Should hammer out the crafts, should seek from furrows
> The blade of corn, should strike from veins of flint
> The hidden fire. . . .
> . . . Next hardened iron came
> And the creaking saw-blade (for the earliest men
> Split wood with wedges), and last the various arts.
> Toil mastered everything, relentless toil
> And the pressure of pinching poverty. (1: 129-36, 143-46)

In Virgil's theogony, the onset of ownership, marking the land with "private bounds," coincides with the onset of labor. Gone are the golden times accepting earth's bounty

"unbidden." "Pinching poverty" is kept at bay only by the "step by step practice" of "hammer[ing] out crafts" and "seek[ing] from furrows/The blade of corn" by means of "thought" and "relentless toil."

Graves expresses similar sentiments as they relate to the "Ownership Syndrome," reflecting what one critic calls pastoral's "capacity to stand as a metaphor for the condition of the writer-intellectual" (Patterson 133). What began as a "conviction of owning a piece of golden unencumbered time" (Hard Scrabble 46), Graves's conscious location in the Tonk Nation as a resident of a middle landscape, unfolds into a consistent stream of tasks and projects, not for profit, but merely to hold ground in a "war with nature," an "inexorable" and inevitable aspect of the Syndrome (82). For example, Graves attempts to balance the opposing desire of allowing a field to return to a natural condition with the utilitarian need to control to some degree the proliferation of hardwood brush, a "slew too much" of which "turns into a problem, as do so many other natural things when the Ownership Syndrome gets one in its clutches" (80). Graves determines the impracticality of controlled burning, "hand grubbing," and "potent modern herbicides," determining that for his situation "the best answer to the problem of controlling hardwood brush looks to be goats":

> They are pleasant animals to have around, and feed by preference on the leaves and sometimes the bark of such plants, concentrating on different species in different seasons . . .
>
> Such at least is the theory of goats versus brush, which sometimes works and sometimes doesn't. On cleared ground laboriously and

> expensively reseeded to grass, for instance, your goats are likely to show a quirkish and infuriating predilection for the young grass shoots and to scorn new brush coming up all around. And despite their charms and their appropriateness in the Tonk country they make other problems too, being horribly vulnerable to various sorts of predators. Therefore the goat owner girds for war with nature in yet another form. . . . The Syndrome is inexorable in this respect. (81; last ellipsis in original)

Nature in "another form," in this case the unspoken prowling wolves unleashed by reigning Jove, inevitably manages to offer new challenges and complicate previous solutions. They are part of an inexplicable balance that Graves's "bastard and inconsistent pantheism" knows as "the Way" (111, 113).

Describing the fauna inhabiting Tonk country, from large predators to raccoons to "other beasts the Syndrome lumps as 'varmints'" and "nonvarmints whose chief role in the chain of things is to be chased and slaughtered by us varmints," Graves declares, "there are swarms, from deer on down through birds and mice and shrews and reptiles to the vast kingdoms of bugs and microbes" (Hard Scrabble 99). In even the least of these, an explicit hierarchy described as the "chain of things," Graves finds worth, expressing his conviction that "if there is anything left here of a golden age, varmints and nonvarmints and trees and shrubs and grasses and waters and soils and rocks have everything to do with it. They make the place work, sometimes for me but mainly for its own sake and the world's" (100). If in this perspective reflecting Syndrome utility is a humanistic carryover from the Renaissance "chain of being," Graves tempers that with

his “bastard pantheism” marveling at dirt, rock, brush, and creatures in a passage reminiscent of Aldo Leopold’s biotic community:

> All a part of it, they and the rest on down to the microorganisms of the soil. Teeming around you seen or unseen, going their separate forceful driven ways that add up somehow to a whole and single Way whose intricacies no man truly knows. Making the place work, sometimes for man the Head Varmint and sometimes not, sometimes for themselves and sometimes not, but always for the sake of the Way, and for the world’s own sake. (113)

Syndrome utility necessitates a “Head Varmint,” someone like Columella’s army commander, who by virtue of Virgil’s practice and thought makes decisions regarding where the goats should be allowed to graze and where the fence mended. But “the whole and single Way”—harmonious, organic, intricate—that no one “truly knows” operates outside human purview. Nature remains mysterious and contingent, not even to be completely tamed by a self-described Head Varmint. This point of friction between the Syndrome and the Way, Graves, tongue firmly in cheek, dubs “the war with Mother N.”

In describing the advent of this “war” with language echoing Virgil’s theogony, Graves imagines a “golden time that existed or could or should have long ago” when “men weighed lightly on the land, for they were few and undemanding and it was wide and rich” and “they did not so much use it as admire it, enjoying the plenty with which it rewarded nimble hands and brains, knowing their part in its sacred Way”:

> But if such an age did exist, one knows, it was only a shelf and resting place, an interim time not meant to last more than enough short millennia to glue itself teasingly in the collective unconscious. For nimble hands and brains were not shaped by golden ease, but by harshness and change and flux. And harshness and change and flux raged in again to smash the golden time with floodings and glaciations and five-thousand-year drouths and drifting, shifting continents and God knows what all else, each event a part of the Way, and out of their pinch and scratch came further shaping of men's lives in the form of herding, and farming, and building, and jealous-boundaried private claims to specific hunks of land, and towns, and nations, and politics, and war, and business, and games played with balls, and other sorts of progress. (Hard Scrabble 193)

What was previously implicit becomes explicit: harshness and change mold "nimble" hands and brains, not "golden ease." With ownership, "jealous-boundaried private claims," comes responsibility and obligation, movement from admiration—treading "lightly" and enjoyment of nature's "plenty"—to use. The "pinch and scratch" of unceasing effort overcomes Virgil's "pressure of pinching poverty."

Graves marks his own gradual alteration by the Syndrome, which "moved in slowly with time, like arthritis":

> Wherever it came from and whatever it consists of, it sets you somewhat at war with the Way, or seems to. By trying to do things right, you may minimize the conflict and in truth, if you have any benevolence at all

> toward the land, hardly anything you might do will be half as destructive as what men did here before your time, through ignorance and frontier-mindedness. But the fact remains that when you start to run livestock and to sow seeds for their benefit, you are in essence declaring yourself Head Varmint, a substitute cougar and lobo and screw-worm and bear who aims to ram his own tame herbivores into the niche the Way once reserved for wild ones, and to nurture and harvest them for his own ends, subjugating as best he can various hostile aspects of the natural order. (195)

Whether or not the change in one's outlook is desired or desirable, Graves suggests, the new obligation to shape one's thoughts narrowly is an essential aspect of the Syndrome. No matter the effort to "minimize the conflict," any imposition of the will of the owner represents a "subjugation" of the "natural order," and therefore constitutes, in the language of the military metaphor, the Head Varmint at war with the Way.

Wryly asking in the penultimate chapter of Hard Scrabble's title "Whatever Happened to Mother N.'s Own Boy?" Graves attempts to come to terms with the "impasse" that can never "really be resolved." If "land use, the Syndrome's fruit" does, as Graves writes, "taint the purity of man's feelings about the natural earth," what then? The course of Western culture cannot be reversed: "no teeming urban population such as ours seems likely to swap its bread for a new chance to view millions of wild ungulates roving the prairies and plains. And no people who herd or farm for a living, now or in the past, have been able to look on all the Way's forces and creatures and quirks as beneficent" (229). But Graves is not necessarily in step with the "teeming urban

population" anyway. Besides his tendency away from values associated with the city, Graves consistently demonstrates an aversion to mass consciousness, or what he calls "the world the TV lays before them" (34). Graves's populism, if one would term it thus, is confined to the "us" delineated earlier in the urban/rural dichotomy, those who "care" about a river or nature anyway. The masses are the foil to Graves's archaistic individual. Public perception and the culture at large may never change in the direction of older ways—like the organic methods he advocates as a return to "lightness," thereby "avoiding damage to natural processes and creatures that are part of the Way the world works (234)—but Graves is more concerned with a life of individual worth anyway, acknowledging that his has become "an archaic and sideline sort of existence in a pulsating technological time" bespeaking "no hot noble desire in the Head Varmint for immersion in twentieth-century humanity's rub and stink and clamor" (263).[3]

Graves recognizes how ownership has changed his earlier perspective, how the Syndrome has put him at odds with the Way, but the change has not been entirely negative. He mentions, for instance, how "because of the labor and intimacy implicit" in what he calls the "O. F. [Old Fart] approach to farming, even backsliding and part-time O. F.s tend . . . to feel closer to the land and its ways":

> . . . the resultant identification with one's place can be extreme. In a feed store or on the courthouse lawn men may speak not as themselves but as their holdings, creating flash images that can disconcert, as when a large beefy type avers, "I got broomweed sprouting all over me this year." (Hard Scrabble 235)

The farmer's metonymical expression of his relationship with the land is exemplary of the "extreme" type of "identification with one's place" Graves continues to describe:

> So if after a rain-short spring and early summer the July sun and the hot blasting wind out of Chihuahua burn grasses brown and bake the soil dry three and four feet down, they burn and bake your spirit too. And if in, say, September you have gone ahead and gambled—worked some fields and dusted in seed of wheat and oats and vetch and things on faith and not much of it—and one morning in the gray predawn a fine big crack of thunder sounds close by and raises you jumping out of sleep on the screen porch, and more resounds with lightning striking somewhere on the Booker through heavy air, the thunder is not around you but inside, echoing in your bowels. And when the rain starts . . . it is raining on the place all right but it is raining on you too . . . on your dark cracked fluffy soil and filling it and waking its microbes and fungi and worms, and raining on your hills and soaking into grass and running down rocky draws to brim your tanks . . . All this you feel, being yourself the land, owning it not merely on paper but inside your hard-way head and your guts.
>
> And being that close to the land you are close to the Way itself, in spite of the Syndrome's sway, or maybe because of it. . . . (235-36; last ellipsis in original)

In Graves's morality, labor is not its own reward, but there is reward in it. Because ownership is not on paper but in the head, the object owned must be internalized as well.

Through the labor of agriculture, its attendant chores associated with plowing, seeding, nurturing, constructing fences and barns, even the house his family lives in, Graves has come to understand the "need to learn the hard way" and that "you come to own things in your head by working on them" (170). His kinship to Columella, initially only a type of speculation about absentee owners, has been learned the "hard" way though his own labors. "You don't really own a place," he discovers, "till you own it in your head by watering its soil with your sweat and seeking out its crannies and plants and creatures, and by that time the place comes in a way to own you too" (253).

With this discovery of closeness with the land, "usefully tending crops and beasts," Graves also realizes that he is "seldom in danger of imagining [himself] in some Upper Paleolithic hunting-and-gathering paradise" (Hard Scrabble 236). Not only does he feel little kinship anymore with his primitive ancestors, but neither with his primitivist self who made the earlier journey, "with that lesser man who, landless and glad of it, wandered the unregenerate Tonk hills alone with a shotgun and found a winter stream running clear over ledge rock with ice along its fringes and brown leaves drifting down, and someone's old garden in the cedar . . . " (237). Though estranged from that self, the separation is not total or permanent.

> He pops out still at times, though, that fellow, forgetting usefulness for a morning or an afternoon or a day or so, moving about the wilder parts of his land with gun or field glass and a stealthy tread that does not resemble the forthright clomp of the owner he elsewhile is. At night in bed on the screen porch while the harried wakeful squireen of Hard Scrabble cocks

> an ear toward strange dogs' distant voices and the bawls of frustrated fence-walking bulls and heifers, that other, calmer, more simple man is a part of the night and its wild sounds, listening and sometimes learning. . . . He ponders such things, the muser, while his newer, useful self ponders other affairs. (237-38)

In this passage, Graves expresses a dialectic between landowner and landless, worried and carefree, labor and leisure, stationary and wandering, analyzing and musing, clomping and stealth, the "harried, wakeful squireen" and his "calmer, more simple" counterpart. In effect these two selves suggest Virgil's original dichotomy, embodied by Meliboeus and Tityrius, contained within Graves's consciousness.

These two aspects of Graves's self, the "muser" and the "useful" ponderer, cohabit what Hard Scrabble has become over the years, a "queer, half-wild, half-useful place" (238), its balance of wildness and utility, a middle landscape. Graves's perception of his place corresponds with his perception of himself, exemplifying what Coleridge, in "On Poesy or Art," calls "the mystery of genius in the Fine Arts": "to make the external internal, the internal external, to make nature thought, and thought nature" (qtd. in Abrams 549-50), the "moral" unity suggested by Schiller, the psychological goal of pastoral. Or, rather, it represents the "striving after" unity, which is as close as one can get in the actual opposed to the ideal world and "close enough, most of the time," as Graves puts it:

> The Head Varmint nonetheless tries in his way to do things right, without ever quite succeeding all the way, but in the trying itself becoming a part

> of the land and the Way it works. So that he can no longer truly find the dividing line between his more or less useful country self, who plows and sows and builds and fences and worries and wades through frigid poot and mire while hauling feed to black cows in January, and that other less pragmatic self, older in time but younger in spirit, who sips with bees and envies trumpeting cranes, and is restless when the plover flute from beneath low clouds on their way to the distant pampas . . .
>
> Queerly, they are the same man. (Hard Scrabble 248)

Within this state of moral unity, Graves realizes that "it is only in the trying itself" that one can reach the wholeness he seeks, the balance of desire and necessity, thinking and feeling, Schiller's "thought still to be realized."

This moral vision corresponding with what Graves has called "the old rightness" (75), attained through the same methods of hard labor and learning to shape thought to the actuality represented in the land, to the sense of wholeness therein termed the Way in the manner of men since narrative was passed on, verbally or in writing, provides him with a greater sense of what he has sought since his journey began: what he called at the end of Goodbye to a River "unchangingness" (301). In his sense of finding something resembling stability in a time in which "we've learned to change unchangingness" (296) comes the "potential for wholeness" (Hard Scrabble 256), found in what is admittedly an "older way of life"(263). But in the satisfaction of that older way comes the illusion of harmony with the Way and the gentler usage of land long abused by others, a "needful" illusion, "as is land ownership itself, being only in your head. . . . " (266).

Unchangingness, "a glimpse of old reality," Graves calls it, "blinking at you there, lizard-eyed" (267), provides the stability he seeks in a rapidly changing, technological world, makes him "at one" with farmers from the centuries before. From this perspective of the middle landscape he may write about sustainability.

CHAPTER 5

GRAVES'S SOUTHERN PASTORAL

And I don't want no pardon for what I was or am,

And I won't be reconstructed and I do not give a damn.

Excerpt from "The Good Old Rebel," in Goodbye to a River

In Hard Scrabble, Graves interpolates four seemingly independent sections that initially appear to be digressions but that tie in thematically with the narrative arc of the book. One of these, ironically entitled "An Irrelevance," is anything but in coming to an understanding of Graves's pastoral mode. This brief tale concerns a young man next to whose cot Graves finds himself lying in a field hospital one night on Saipan during the war. The young man, a boy really, with an Italian name and "deep South" accent has been badly wounded. As they both float in and out of consciousness, the young marine recounts events from his childhood near Mobile, Alabama, "where a lot of people were Italian, the grandfathers having come there many years since." Glad that Graves is a "Southerner and a marine," the boy describes to the older man, to whom he feels a kinship, growing truck gardens, raising a few animals, and how the land is sandy, but "rich because it had been manured and handled well" (91). He relates youthful memories of gathering fish by wading out and filling boats from the shallows of Mobile Bay with his father and uncles, and separating out the trash fish on the beach to be trucked home and used for enriching the soil. The boy asks Graves if he'd mind holding his hand, because "You want somebody that knows what you're talking about." Graves obliges, the boy thanks him, and then firmly clenching Graves's hand, he dies.

The young marine's immediate connection with Graves reveals an empathy based on more than the similarity of their accents, though that likeness provides the first means of recognition in the darkness of the Pacific night. He makes a cultural assumption that his memories of family and land find an understanding ear, that Graves is somebody who knows about what the boy is talking. With that particular memory come "recurringly" other memories as the years advance, particularly when he is outdoors working on his land, watching the tandem disk turn over "mellow trashy earth in autumn, or crumbling a clod of garden dirt between my thumb and fingers." "Before I had the land, I did not use to think of it much," he muses. "It is not just a war memory; those are plentiful and cheap enough, God knows, in a time when three or four successive generations of us have seen war. I suppose perhaps what it has to do with is place, and kind, and belonging. . . ." (Hard Scrabble 90; ellipsis in original). These three elements provide the foundation for much writing linked to both the South and Southwest, writing that emphasizes a sense of identification with a place and with inherited values, a sense of shared history, and a sense of community. Rather than an irrelevance, then, the interlude provides an explicit affirmation of the chronotopic, thematic, and ideological characteristics of Graves's major writing, including the extensive use of the pastoral mode to communicate ideas about nature, property, and shared beliefs—characteristics that can be seen as well in the writings of some of the Southern Agrarians.

The Southern Agrarian movement—based at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, where it began in the 1920s with the publication of The Fugitive magazine—"represents a programmatic use of the South as pastoral image to provide the terrain, the history, the

inherited way of living by which the modern industrial world might successfully be reproached" (MacKethan 134). The Agrarians saw themselves as advocates of a philosophical tradition comprising a "continual struggle for discipline, self-control, and order against latitude, excess, and chaos," and standing firm against a dominant American cultural assumption that the "pursuit of power and prosperity ought to be the sole, or even the principal, aim of life" (Malvasi, "Unregenerate" 22). Like the twelve southerners who published I'll Take My Stand (1930) as a means of voicing resistance to numerous changes wrought by modernity, Graves looks askance at the times and their insistent push toward "progress." Though not a direct disciple of such Agrarians as John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, and Donald Davidson—Graves after all received a graduate degree from Columbia University rather than Vanderbilt—he reflects several of their immediate concerns.

While the dry limestone hills of Tonk country in central Texas provide the terrain, history, and inherited way of living for his pastoral image, rather than the wetter blackland soils of East Texas more commonly associated with the South, Graves's thought and mode of expression retain distinctively southern attributes, an affiliation not entirely surprising given the region's literary tendencies in general. Despite some debate about whether literature written in Texas should be categorized as southwestern, which to a degree J. Frank Dobie correctly supposed given the profusion of materials concerned with the western mythos, one can see the sense in James W. Lee's assertion that "one of the interesting things about contemporary Texas literature is that most of the best writing has come from the Southern myth, not the Western" (1). Lee cites work by George

Sessions Perry, William Owens, and William Humphrey exemplifying a mid-twentieth-century "Southern flowering" in Texas letters, although their respective works are situated east of what he calls the "Deep South line," which "runs between Dallas and Fort Worth, through Waco, and nearly to Austin."[1] Somervell County, where Graves's "patch of land" is located, actually lies slightly west of this line, but Graves's ideological concerns with the land, technology, and unrestrained progress in conjunction with a conscious pastoral design implicate his southern and conservative frame of mind.

In The Dream of Arcady (1980), Lucinda Hardwick MacKethan describes southern literature's "persistent use of the southern place as a golden agrarian world that is passing or past, always receding farther back into lost time." This depiction of an idealized landscape by southern writers typically utilizes three "specifically pastoral motifs: the urge to celebrate the simplicities of a natural order; the urge to idealize a golden age almost always associated with childhood; and the urge to criticize a contemporary social situation according to an earlier and purer set of standards" (MacKethan 4). Citing Frank Kermode's assertion that "pastoral flourishes at a particular moment in the urban development, the phase in which the relationship of metropolis and country is still evident" (15), MacKethan describes this "moment" in the development of the southern version of pastoral when "a seemingly simple kind of rural society finds itself being irrevocably set upon a more complex, urban course; it can be seen that in the process much that has always been held to be of spiritual value is being discarded or has already been lost." With the advent of tensions arising from this perception of instability or flux, "cultural aims of the society in question become divided between the pull toward

progress and the trip of the past," resulting in cultural ambivalence (MacKethan 9). The urge to reconcile these competing desires represents the "quest" of pastoral, which is "basically a search for order" (MacKethan 10).

Writing some forty odd years after the publication of I'll Take My Stand , Graves addresses similar agrarian concerns as they apply to the urbanization of his own region. Passing are the cedar ways of the Tonk nation, replaced by bulldozing, absentee owners, overgrazing, crop-dusting, and the proliferation of Ag-Biz techniques. Beginning with his earliest writing in Goodbye to a River, Graves reflects on the changing times, and his own and society's often conflicting feelings concerning them. "To note that our present world is a strange one," Graves writes, "is tepid, and it is becoming a little untrue, for strangeness and change are so familiar to us now that they are getting to be normal":

> Most of us in one way or another count on them as strongly as other ages counted on the green shoots rising in the spring. We're dedicated to them; we have a hunger to believe that other sorts of beings are eyeing us from the portholes of Unidentified Flying Objects, that automobiles will glitter with yet more chromed facets next year than this, and that we shall shortly be privileged to carry our inadequacies with us to the stars. And furthermore that while all the rivers may continue to flow to the sea, those who represent us in such matters will at least slow down the process by transforming them from rivers into bead strings of placid reservoirs behind concrete dams . . .

> Bitterness? No, ma'am . . . In a region like the Southwest, scorched to begin with, alternating between floods and drouths, its absorbent cities quadrupling their censuses every few years, electrical power and flood control and moisture conservation and water skiing are praiseworthy projects. More than that, they are essential. We river-minded ones can't say much against them—nor, probably, should we want to. Nor, mostly, do we. . . . (8; ellipses in original)

Present already are the writer's concerns with urbanization, alienation from the natural world, the age's infatuation with change, "progress," and materialism, and a growing distrust in a bureaucracy overseeing matters of resource management and dam construction. Equally apparent is Graves's penchant for the ironic, in his juxtaposing human inadequacies and imminent technical knowledge, his finding praiseworthiness in both moisture control and water skiing, and his linking essential and official reasons for dam construction in this century. Graves's irony reveals an underlying frustration with the forces behind such decisions. Opponents of projects like those planned for the Brazos, no matter how worthy their opposition, "would make a noise before they lost, but [they] would lose. When someone official dreams up a dam, it generally goes in. Dams are ipso facto good all by themselves, like mothers and flags" (9). The ability to utilize technology, framed in terms of the potential use of natural resources for the good of humans, is a compelling argument to do so in and of itself. The circularity of this logic has long been employed extensively in the execution of large-scale engineering projects by agencies such as the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers, who have been "moved above all

by technical considerations, and happily [have] built any dam that promised to assist agriculture or transportation, on the basis of technical feasibility alone" (Toulmin 182). Cost/benefit analysis has prompted little, if any, obligation on the part of officials to evaluate potential harm in either human or non-human terms, as practically any and every usage could be labeled beneficial to some degree. Emblematic of the machine in the garden, dams offered a concrete target for Agrarians' dissatisfaction with industrialization of the South, and later in the century as well for environmentalists such as Edward Abbey and the group EarthFirst. In an arid region, like the plains of north central Texas, dams can be a tangible representation of power. As Karl Wittfogel argued in the 1950s, both the Chinese and Soviet regimes legitimized their power by establishing themselves as the arbiters of water. Colossal dams and hydroelectric power stations are not only metaphors for the incursion of industrialism into the rural garden, but "emblems of omnipotence" (Schama 260-61). They constitute material evidence of the dominant cultural paradigm's assertion of industrial technology over nature.

Louis Rubin, Jr. describes the collective aim of the essays in I'll Take My Stand as a "rebuke to materialism, a corrective to the worship of Progress, and a reaffirmation of man's aesthetic and spiritual needs" (xiv). The Agrarians' intended audience, a modern society grown enamored of "specialization and money-making," had along the way lost its bearings. Agrarians perceived the spiritual disease of the modern age, expressed in the arts as alienation, fragmentation, and chaos, to be rampant individualism, conditioned by the "messianic cults of rationalism and scientism" (Malvasi, "Unregenerate" 10). Eschewing what Eric Voegelin called "gnostic" modernity's belief

in the capability of human knowledge to alter even the constitution of being (Simpson 76), the Agrarians sought reconnection with a humanistic tradition rooted in contact with the natural world and in aesthetic and religious values. Man, they believed, "far from being a godlike genius of unlimited potentialities, is a fallible, finite creature, who functioned best in a society that took account of his limitations" (Rubin xii). Solidly rooted in nature and history, the Agrarians sought and found meaning in the transcendent dimension of existence beyond the material world of time and space (Malvasi, "Precious" 138-39). The twelve writers agreed to represent their quarrel with the prevailing cultural paradigm in the phrase "Agrarian <u>versus</u> Industrial" ("Statement" xix), a variation of the traditional pastoral dialectic.

In a unilateral "Statement of Principles" outlining the basis of their complaints against industrialism, the twelve writers of the Agrarian position assert that the problem lies not in industry or technology per se, but rather in the indefinite idea of "industrial progress, or an incessant extension of industrialization. It never proposes a specific goal; it initiates the infinite series" ("Statement" xxvi). John Crowe Ransom, in his essay "Reconstructed But Unregenerate," refers to this "gospel of Progress" as the "contemporary form of pioneering . . . [that] never consents to define its goal" (7, 15). Industrialism, as a program for the introduction of "labor-saving" devices into an industry "does not emancipate the laborers . . . so much as it evicts them" ("Statement" xxvi). When applied to the "deeply grounded" love of the farmer for the soil, "industrialism sets itself against the most ancient and the most humane of all the modes of human livelihood" (Ransom 19). Mark Malvasi describes how "as an antidote to a world

governed entirely by reason, science, and technology, and infused with the spirit of power, conquest, and subjugation, the Agrarians posited an older aesthetic and religious vision of order that entailed reverence and submission" ("All" 139). Graves's southern mode of pastoral conveys his similar concerns regarding this ancient human relationship with soil, and in cultural values in conflict with long-term individual and community relations with the natural world. He represents the figure M. E. Bradford envisioned linking the farmer's felicitous dealings with nature and the rhetorician's speaking in their behalf, with both practices demanding "an aesthetic vision, an ethical bearing, and a moral commitment" (Malvasi, "All" 139).

Pitted against the bureaucracy of federal and state legislation that favors industrialists, "forward-lookers with nice manners" Ransom calls them, stands the farmer who identifies with his own soil, which provides meaning to his life and represents his ancient relationship to the natural world:

> He would till it not too hurriedly and not too mechanically to observe in it the contingency and the infinitude of nature, and so his life acquires its philosophical and even its cosmic consciousness. A man can contemplate and explore, respect and love, an object as substantial as a farm or a native province. But he cannot contemplate nor explore, respect nor love, a mere turnover, such as an assemblage of "natural resources," a pile of money, a volume of produce, a market, or a credit system. It is into precisely these intangibles that industrialism would translate the farmer's farm. It means the dehumanization of his life. (Ransom 19-20)

Rather than adapting to the environment by traditional synergistic relationships that allow for the procurement of material necessities, industrialism converts nature into commodities, as line items in cost/benefit analyses, resulting in a determination to "conquer" nature as it proves beneficial in terms of profit or loss exclusively. "Bottom-line" decision-making results in the depletion of topsoil and dependence upon chemical and corporate farm methods, leading to high yields for the short-term, but dubious prospects for long-term sustainability, not to mention the prospects for the independent farmer. "Our progressivists are the latest version of those pioneers who conquered the wilderness," Ransom writes, "except that they are pioneering on principle, or from force of habit, and without any recollection of what pioneering was for" (8). Ransom views modern devotion to Progress as a "curious development" reflecting little credit on Americans' abilities to control their own behavior:

> In most societies man has adapted himself to environment with plenty of intelligence to secure easily his material necessities from the graceful bounty of nature. And then, ordinarily, he concludes a truce with nature, and he and nature seem to live on terms of mutual respect and amity, and his loving arts, religions, and philosophies come spontaneously into being: these are the blessings of peace. But the latter-day societies have been seized—none quite so violently as our American one—with the strange idea that the human destiny is not to secure an honorable peace with nature, but to wage an unrelenting war on nature. Men, therefore, determine to conquer nature to a degree which is quite beyond reason so

> far as specific human advantage is concerned, and which enslaves them to toil and turnover. Man is boastfully declared to be a natural scientist essentially, whose strength is capable of crushing and making over to his own desires the brute materiality which is nature; . . . (7-8)

In terms of economics and "natural resources" they are also pioneering on the principal, the soil, which regardless of reclamation techniques can never be completely replaced.[2]

Graves calls a version of this habitual pioneering "frontier-mindedness" (Hard Scrabble 195), although he acknowledges that the condition is not exclusive to the industrial or progressive frame of mind. Many southern farmers as well, possessed of a "wear out and get out" mentality, moved westward across the rich southern blacklands, overstressing soil through "cash-cropping" monoculture that exhausted humus and left land bare and subject to erosion. Graves describes the frontier practices of "sturdy individualistic yeomen," Scots-Irish who, having reached Texas in their westward migration, found "they were a long way in miles and years from careful European husbandry, and a longer way mentally. Good land by then meant new land, not an old place nurtured through generations. The guiding principle, sanctified, was use it up and move along" (21). Graves and others attribute this attitude to the perception of the New World as limitless virgin land always offering more space to the west. Thus, Old World habits of restoration and conservation fell within a few generations to the eternal lure of the frontier, replaced by habitual pioneering, by a pride in using up "good" virgin land: "'Hell,' the old-timers used to brag in front of the feed stores in Weatherford and

Granbury, 'I've done wore out three farms in my time. . . .'" (Goodbye 29; ellipsis in original).

Graves contrasts this exploitative attitude acquired in the New World with "lightness" practiced in parts of the Old World that remain fertile through the efforts of men who live on the soil and work with it by employing "calm, often difficult techniques" developed over thousands of years:

> Our own progenitors happily shucked most of that lore on the Eastern seaboard when they glimpsed the continent of virginity that lay stretched before them for the raping, though some renewed awareness kept seeping in from time to time with fresh waves of immigrant peasants who had the quaint illusion that land was precious stuff, to be nurtured and passed on whole. These immigrants' children for the most part, though, came to share the general view of a "good" farmer or stockman as one who squeezed the most cash he could out of his patch of dirt without fretting over its future wholeness and health, because westward ho, was the land not bright? (Hard Scrabble 230-31)

This exploitative attitude of squeezing the land's health without concern for the future led to catastrophic results, "to the gullied hill South of hookworms and pellagra and hopelessness . . . to Dust Bowls and rural desperation" (231). Often, however, rather than intentional economic exploitation, the land has been ravaged through ignorance of how to practice nurturing, as exemplified by one of Graves's tales concerning the dissociation of old and new knowledge.

Graves describes quail-hunting with a friend in Virginia on “old cotton land once black but mainly water-gnawed now to pale subsoil and in places gullied to bare ledge rock six feet below the surface, worse than any erosion I have on Hard Scrabble”:

> At the bottom end of one of the biggest gullies we came on a thick stone retaining wall, forty feet long and tumbled down in spots, with the gully, once briefly thus blocked, now crooking past one of its ends. Armed with a little hard-way knowledge of masonry, I could see how angrily and long whoever it was had labored many years ago in an effort to stop the washing of his field. The great sadness—it really was a sadness, like empty vanquished faces in old brown photographs—was that he had attacked the symptom, the gully, and not the cause, which was stormwater sweeping across the naked land from higher up. . . . Sour and whipped, his shade still puzzled there on the place where he had used out his manhood, wanting to do right but not knowing how. (233)

Graves conveys the irony of the old laborer’s situation by highlighting his willingness to work hard, but his inability to work smart. Trapped in a cultural paradigm of unending progress, eternally “forward-looking,” that promises always a new frontier elsewhere, the man knows nothing to counteract the inevitable results of “wear out and get out.” Basic practices developed over time in Europe and built upon the foundation of knowledge inherited from the Romans have been lost, considered expendable in the perpetually exploitable lushness of America. These practices, such as composting, manuring, contouring, studying the flow of groundwater, have served to make areas of the Old

World inhabitable for centuries. "The gospel," writes Graves, "is simple and very old, if fresh among most here: leave land bare as seldom as you can manage, control runoff and the effects of wind, be gentle" (233).

As a prescriptive, Graves seeks a reevaluation of what Ransom called the "gospel of Progress." "It is ironic," he writes, "to a nonprogressivist at least, that most genuine progress in our gadgetful frantic age is likely to turn out to be backward progress toward what ought to be—toward what in fact once was" (Hard Scrabble 59). Isolation from old knowledge represents for Graves and other agrarians a root cause of modernity's problem. While Modernists attacked symptoms—alienation and dissociation of sensibility—the Agrarians attacked the causes as they saw them: industrialization, undefined progress, and specialization. "Will there be no more looking backward but only looking forward?" questions Ransom. "Is our New World to be dedicated forever to the doctrine of newness?" (20-21). Ransom admires the sustainability of "unadulterated Europeanism, with its self-sufficient, backward-looking, intensely provincial communities" wherein life

> long ago came to terms with nature, fixed its roots somewhere in the spaces between the rocks and in the shade of the trees, founded its comfortable institutions, secured its modest prosperity—and then willed the whole in perpetuity to the generations which should come after, in the ingenuous confidence that it would afford them all the essential human satisfactions. For it is the character of a seasoned provincial life that it is realistic, or successfully adapted to its natural environment, and that as a

> consequence it is stable, or hereditable. But it is the character of our urbanized, anti-provincial, progressive, and mobile American life that it is in a condition of eternal flux. (5)

Conceptions of sustainability and inheritability were reasons why Graves had built his house at Hard Scrabble out of stone, admiring what he calls a European "sense of being somewhere that has long made natives of the Old World build homes with generations of blood descendants in mind" (Hard Scrabble 168). These traits also underscore his appreciation for a new pecan plantation along the Brazos, even though the owners had cut down some existing post-oak scrub in order to prepare the orchard, because "pecans are a long-term investment, more for the profit of sons than of the father who plants them. In our razzle-dazzle, speculative economy, that kind of permanent planning for land stands out pleasantly. It contrasts too with the savage traditional wearing out and moving on" (Goodbye 223). Graves prefers European rootedness over the "razzle-dazzle" economy of progressive America resulting in intense urbanization, what he calls the "drifting, truly rootless worker mass that two or three generations of big production and war have brewed among us, on all levels from corporation president to shop sweeper." In terms echoing Ransom, Graves points out the eternal flux of big production that transcends class difference, leading to a mobile population directed "all to the factories now, all to towns . . . In corporation plants they learn well or badly those technical specialties that hour-pay requites, mingling there and in the beer halls and in the suburbs into a new and future breed with other kinds of people" (286).

According to the Agrarians and like thinkers, the modern industrial/technology paradigm's emphasis on specialization and corresponding movement away from place-centered culture leads to separation from the land, and to a loss of the bigger picture, of a sense of wholeness. Specializations thrive on competition rather than cooperation. Self-interest is the rule and rarely is the good of the whole considered. As with the case of Graves's well-intending but ignorant farmer's attempts to stop the loss of his topsoil, often the big picture is not considered because "our culture now simply lacks the means for thinking of it" (Berry 22). This lack is what Graves and other "backward looking" people seem to regret and resist the most: the progressive loss of knowledge and skills that connect people to each other, to a specific community, and to life at the biotic level. The cumulative effect of this lack results in the eventual inability to think about the damaging effects such losses have on the individual and the community, or to even have reason to want to think about them.

Wendell Berry, himself a Kentucky farmer, writer, and contemporary of Graves, believes that "from a cultural point of view, the movement from the farm to the city involves a radical simplification of mind and of character" (44). Berry describes a type of trade-off in which the relative "ease" of urban existence comes only at the expense of "complex" thinking; that the specialized knowledge needed for most urban vocations, be they technical, manufacturing, or service in nature, requires only specific training, leaving the person unknowledgeable in a great many other areas of life. Simplified urban existence, characterized by Graves as production jobs followed by leisurely hours in beer halls, is attainable only with an "oppressive social and mechanical complexity" by which

necessities of life are delivered by other specialists. An agrarian perception to a degree inverts the pastoral dichotomy of urban sophistication and rural simplicity. Deliverance from social complexity comes from freedom attained by undertaking tasks of great mental complexity and diversity. "Farming, the best farming," Berry writes, "is a task that calls for this sort of complexity, both in the character of the farmer and in his culture. To simplify either one is to destroy it. That is because the best farming requires a farmer—a husbandman, a nurturer—not a technician or businessman" (45). Primarily, the reason Graves seeks to do and learn for himself on his own place pertains to this idea of mental complexity and self-knowledge, "a need to learn the hard way and alone" that corresponds directly with "how you come to own things in your head by working on them" (Hard Scrabble 170). Looking backward, then, entails not just nostalgic longing for a passing age that will never return, but an intellectual link with knowledge accumulated over generations. Graves, exhibiting a Jeffersonian preference that reaches back to the Virgilian root contrast between simplicity and sophistication, is skeptical that the loss of this type of "primal lore" can be "really counterbalanced by an upsurge of exact scientific knowledge, though I have done my share of poring over books. They are different things" (80). Like the Agrarians, Graves has no quarrel with science or technology as a useful tool for the completion of labor, his skepticism, instead, pertaining to the absolute faith in science as a replacement for all previous knowledge, to what Malvasi calls the "messianic cult" of "scientism" ("Unregenerate" 10).

"It is," Ransom wrote in the 1930s, "out of fashion in these days to look backward rather than forward":

> About the only American given to it is some unreconstructed Southerner, who persists in his regard for a certain terrain, a certain history, and a certain inherited way of living. He is punished as his crime deserves. He feels himself in the American scene as an anachronism, and knows he is felt by his neighbors as a reproach. (1)

One of his fellow contributors to I'll Take My Stand, John Donald Wade, portrayed the type of untrendy backward looker described above by Ransom in "The Life and Death of Cousin Lucius." In this essay, Cousin Lucius represents a part-fictional, part-biographical composite based on an agrarian relative of Wade who knew himself an anachronism because of his adherence to values and ways running counter to the pace of an industrialized and commercialized modern society: "an old fogy" he heard himself called one afternoon (Wade 291). Graves too creates a composite character that he affectionately calls the "Old Fart" (Hard Scrabble 81), though he sometimes abbreviates this as "O. F." (112). These two characters run similar in more ways than their sharing common initials. Like Cousin Lucius, Graves's alter ego speaking as the Old Fart finds himself an anachronism of a sort, but an unregenerate one. "Archaism, in times one disagrees with," he writes, "may touch closer to lasting truth than do the times themselves" (263).

Although the Old Fart is introduced as a lowercase idea sketched out briefly in a Virgilian dialogue early in Hard Scrabble, and mentioned as the namesake in several passages about various types of organic and archaic activity, his characterization becomes developed most thoroughly in one of the four interpolated sections Graves uses to

illustrate his dominant themes. Entitled “His Chapter,” this section elaborates on the composite’s characterization and the genesis of an organic philosophy, what Graves calls the “mark and sign of a true hydrogen-sulfide Old Fart” (230). Set predominantly in the southwest, it represents a fusion of the agrarian principles of Old World soil management with indigenous New World techniques. The result, an overlapping of elements common to both because of their ancient origins, Graves calls his “bastard and inconsistent pantheism” (111).

Graves’s O. F. exhibits both southern and southwestern traits, having grown up a Y. F. in the southeastern corner of Oklahoma, “the Little Dixie part” along the Red River, “part Choctaw and the part that wasn’t came out of a family that had been sharecroppers since who throwed the chunk” (117). Now, miles and years later, he lives on the southwestern edge of Fort Worth, the city that has “spawned” what he calls “creepingjesus suburbs that had not been there three years before,” but which now encroach upon his little bit of middle landscape where he keeps a vegetable garden (114). He takes pride in his ability to coax early and late vegetables from the “nearly weedless, cultivated prairie earth, blacker now than when he had first turned it up from sod nine years before, mellow and sooty with humus from the manure and hay and compost he had fed it season by season, year by year.” He muses to himself that he will probably never know much about people, “But he knew dirt, and dirt knew him, and dirt mattered. The feel of it light and right in his hand or the smell and look of it turning up and over from a plow or slicing beneath a hoe or churning under the tines of a tiller took away from feeling old and set worry to one side. He knew it was not so for everyone. . . .” (126).

Rather than contributing to the perpetual wearing out of soil, as with the legacy of many others of his generation, consigned to "share-farm" on land long ago robbed of its richness and nutrients (117), attempting to force "a little more production from the sour clay with what bagged fertilizer they could afford" (126), he has learned another way. He realizes that others have known about good soil and how to reclaim it from the forces of abuse and erosion as well,

> some even who understood that by caring and by work you could make sorry tired old dirt over again into good, if you had time and the stuff to do it with. His mother had shown him that in the little garden she kept, red rain-eaten clay in the beginning, with a little sand to it, like everything else around that farm. He had watched and helped from baby hood as she hauled to it pitiful interminable buckets and barrows full of chicken and mule and milk cow poot and forest leaves and pea hulls and hogpen muck and dead dogs and snakes and poultry-plant guts and heads and feathers and anything else she could get hold of, and dug them all in with a hoe, and sowed year after year in the darkening loosening soil her queer Choctaw jumbles of corn and tomatoes and beans and squash and things not even in proper rows, but always lush. (127)

It seems significant that Graves's character learns his relationship with the soil from his mother, and where he also learns you "only own land in your head." The techniques she employs, although less orderly than European ways, represent the feminine and nurturing aspect of farming, a relation to gender that corresponds with

Berry's contrast of nurturer and exploiter. That her male offspring has absorbed and practices these ideas reinforces what Berry calls the necessity of the nurturer to cross with ease the boundaries of the "so-called sexual roles." While "the exploiter is clearly the prototype of the 'masculine' man—the wheeler-dealer whose 'practical' goals require the sacrifice of flesh, feeling, and principle":

> The farmer, sometimes known as husbandman, is by definition half mother; the only question is how good a mother he or she is. And the land itself is not mother or father only, but both. Depending on crop and season, it is at one time receiver of seed, bearer and nurturer of young; at another, raiser of seed-stalk, bearer and shedder of seed. And in response to these changes, the farmer crosses back and forth from one zone of spousehood to another, first as planter and then as gatherer. Farmer and land are thus involved in a sort of dance in which the partners are always at opposite sexual poles, and the lead keeps changing: the farmer, as seed-bearer, causes growth; the land, as seed-bearer, causes the harvest. (8)

Nor does Graves indicate that the mother's role as nurturer necessarily comes from her ethnicity, pointing out that "some full-Indian farmers" the O. F. had known "had been as iron-headed and brutal toward the land as anyone else." Knowing where her wisdom had come from, whether it was something she had worked out herself or been taught by someone else, is irrelevant to the O. F. What matters is its ancient practicality, its recognition of a reciprocal relationship between the planter/nurturer and the soil, which in turn was nurturer of the human. "It was God that did it, she said, God in the dirt. You

fed God and He fed you" (Hard Scrabble 127). He is "glad enough" to have had the benefit of her teaching and experience, "for what she had shown him about dirt," because "dirt was, if truth were told, a big part of his own religion too" (128).

The type of practical knowledge the O. F. has learned from his mother he will pass on as well to his grandson, who visits him in the garden early one Sunday morning while waiting for his grandmother to finish getting ready for church. When he asks his grandfather what he's doing, the O. F. tells him he's "watching things grow":

> "If you lean down and listen right close, you can hear them squeak, coming up out of the ground."
>
> "Go on," the boy said. "Mama says it's nasty, that junk you put in the garden. All that ganure and stuff I helped you with."
>
> "The nastier the better," his grandfather told him, bending to yank at an early sprig of johnsongrass. "And after you feed it to the dirt and the dirt eats it up, it ain't nasty any more. It's beans and potatoes and such." (Hard Scrabble 138)

The O. F. knows that the boy, although doubting at the time the veracity of his lesson, will consider it. His growing up in the city, the "world of which the O. F. stubbornly knew as little as he could manage to know" will require a different type of knowledge than what his grandfather has sought, and there is the chance that the link will not be maintained. But then the boy reveals that an impression has been made.

> "Grummer," the boy said frowning.
>
> "Ho," the O. F. said.

> "Grummer, say you had like a dog and he died, and you buried him in the ground. . . . And then something green grows up there and you eat it. Would you be eating that dog?"
>
> "In a way you would," the O. F. said. "I reckon we eat just about everything that ever lived, every time we eat."
>
> After thought, the boy looked up. "I don't care," he said. "It's not nasty. It's like eating Jesus in church."
>
> "Maybe it is, at that," said his grandfather, nudging dark loose earth with his toe and feeling in old hurts the certainty of rain. "We feed the dirt, and the dirt feeds us." (139)

The boy's mother, who has adapted to the city, teaches the boy that rural ways with their dark, rich, and earthy smells are "nasty." But the boy demonstrates a simple awareness of earth and soil that accommodates an understanding of the mystery of human relationship with nature. In the reciprocal act of caring for the earth and the earth, in turn, caring for the human is a spiritual aspect of life the Agrarians found absent from modern science and rationalism, what Berry calls the "dance" between the nurturer and the land. Graves's parable reasserts the "religious" aspect of an organic view of nature missing from the modern conception of nature as machine. The symbolism of "God in the dirt" is no more frightening to the boy than the symbolism of "God in the wafer" or "God in the wine," and in fact may offer a more practical acknowledgement of "submission to the general intention of a nature that is fairly inscrutable" than the abstract symbolism of the

Eucharist. The scene conveys a return to the sense of nature as “something mysterious and contingent” (“Statement” xlii).

Because Graves can see his yeoman forebears’ mistakes does not preclude his tendency to look askance at “progressivists” and industrialization (Hard Scrabble 56). “What happened here,” he writes, “happened up and down the continent, if more slowly in most other places”:

> It was inherent in the frontier’s view of land, and we are told by those who view such matters with philosophy that it was needful if our nation was to buy industrialization and pay for its rising might. To some others of us the price may look a bit high, but we see it with jaded modern hindsight. . . . (22; ellipsis in original)

The tone of doubt slips into this passage, the idea that industrialization had to be “sold” to a segment of the population, those of “us” who question the price of payment authorized by “those” philosophical apologists for the progressive movement. This national hard-sell began in earnest early in the nineteenth century with industrial advocates offering a concerted response to Thomas Carlyle’s rejection of industrialism. Utilizing Promethean imagery and rhetoric of the “technological sublime,” they proclaimed raw, virgin landscape “an ideal setting for technological progress” (Marx 195, 203). Significant and programmatic acceleration after the Civil War and Reconstruction eras intensified after World War I, raising the ire of the Vanderbilt Fugitives, as seen in Lyle H. Lanier’s broadside proclaiming that the conflation of modern industrialism and progress represents

"the most widely advertised commodity offered for general consumption in our high powered century":

> A steady barrage of propaganda issues through newspapers, magazines, radios, billboards, and other agencies for controlling public opinion, to the effect that progress must be maintained. It requires little sagacity to discover that progress usually turns out to mean business . . . General sanction of industrial exploitation of the individual is grounded in the firm belief on the part of the generality of people that the endless production and consumption of material goods means "prosperity," "a high standard of living," "progress," or any one among several other catchwords. The conviction that our noisy social ferment portends progressive development toward some highly desired, but always undesignated, goal is perhaps the central psychological factor in the maintenance of our top-heavy industrial superstructure. (123)

One can only imagine Lanier's horror at the effectiveness a half century later of television, and now satellite dish networks, to promulgate the gospel of consumerism.

Compare Lanier's passage with how Graves questions the premise that technological progress is inherently good. "We inhabit a time of electronically amplified human crisis and change," Graves writes, "of possible permissive delights of many descriptions, of geometrically burgeoning mortal millions creating geometrically burgeoning mortal problems that demand obsessive concern, of disappearing quiet hard rural ways and the triumph, or so they say, of easeful technology" (Hard Scrabble 4).

Here again are Graves's doubts concerning the dominant cultural paradigm and the "triumph" of "easeful" technology over "quiet hard rural ways." Lanier's "noisy social ferment" has evolved into "electronically amplified" crisis and "permissive" delights, but the general tone of suspicion regarding cultural direction remains evident. Mass consciousness, influenced by "the world the TV lays before them" (Hard Scrabble 34), marches to the drum of wage labor and consumption pounded by advertisement, the reciprocal of industrialization. The Agrarians point out the "inevitable consequence of industrial progress that production greatly outruns the rate of natural consumption," with a result that production, needful of overcoming this gap, "must coerce and wheedle the public into being loyal and steady customers, in order to keep the machines running. So the rise of modern advertising—along with its twin, personal salesmanship—is the most significant development of our industrialism. Advertising means to persuade the consumers to want exactly what the applied sciences are able to provide them" ("Statement" xxvii, xxviii). Similarly, Berry calls salesmanship "the craft of persuading people to buy what they do not need, and do not want, for more than it is worth" (11). As a result, cultural achievement is determined solely by economic discourse in terms of gross domestic product and levels of market fluctuation, while spiritual and aesthetic values historically imperative to existential well being remain largely ignored.

A direct result of this national and social emphasis on production can be seen in the shift away from the traditional independent farmer and toward agricultural industrialization and corporate farming, or "agribusiness." Citing the appearance in 1967 of an article in the Louisville Courier-Journal asserting that "the technological advances

in agriculture have so greatly reduced the need for manpower that too many people are trying to live on a national farm income wholly inadequate for them," Berry found himself enraged at the Department of Agriculture's solution of "government-supplied 'opportunities'" in education and retraining programs:

> Both the commission and the writer of the article had obviously taken for granted that the lives and communities of small farmers then still on the farm—and those of the 25 million who had left the farm since 1940—were of less value than "technological advances in agriculture" . . . Reading that article, I realized that my values were not only out of fashion, but under powerful attack. (vi)

Berry wrote those words in the mid 1970s, contemporaneous with Graves's publication of Hard Scrabble, and a mere forty-five years after the Agrarians' prophetic warnings concerning industrialism's eviction of the laborer from the family farm. Utilizing even stronger language, Berry describes the systematic overthrowing of place-centered communities by unchecked progressiveness: "Generation after generation, those who intended to remain and prosper where they were have been dispossessed and driven out, or subverted and exploited where they were, by those who were carrying out some version of the search for El Dorado" (4). This utopian search results in cultural conquest by exploiters claiming that what they destroy is "outdated, provincial, and contemptible," and "the stuff of a hopelessly outmoded, unscientific way of life" (Berry 4, 41).

Summarizing Bernard DeVoto in Course of Empire, Berry describes how the economy of exploitation is basically the same now as with American Indians:

"technology, weapons, ornaments, novelties, and drugs." One great difference noted by Berry, however, is that commercialization and specialization, more Agrarian complaints, deprive the consuming masses of any independent access to life's staples. Clothing, shelter, food, water, all must be purchased and taxed through the system of industrialized consumption. Even air "has an ultimate tax imposed in the form of pollution." "Commercial conquest," writes Berry, "is far more thorough and final than military defeat. The Indian became a redskin, not by loss in battle, but by accepting a dependence on traders that made necessities of industrial goods. This is not merely history. It is a parable" (6). Critiquing further the "modernization" of farming techniques that have led to the disintegration of the "culture and the communities of farming," Graves's "quiet rural ways," Berry argues that which the dominant cultural paradigm terms "agricultural progress" has actually resulted in the "forcible displacement of millions of people":

> I remember, during the fifties, the outrage with which our political leaders spoke of the forced removal of the populations of villages in communist countries. I also remember that at the same time, in Washington, the word on farming was "Get big or get out"—a policy which is still in effect and which has taken an enormous toll. The only difference is that of method: the force used by the communists was military; with us, it has been economic—a "free market" in which the freest were the richest. The attitudes are equally cruel . . . (41)

Although Berry never suggests any direct connection with the Agrarians, the similarity of their respective concerns for the small farmer is explicit. His apparent outrage at his

perceived marginal status as a "threatened minority" comes through in his polemical positioning of himself as independent agrarian against the industrial and economic might of an entire economic system; he is, in effect, taking his own stand. In the same historical and social context in which Berry's work appears, Graves employs a different rhetorical strategy to convey the tragedy of the small farmer against the authoritarianism of industrialized agribusiness.

Utilizing pathos rather than polemics, Graves describes the plight of one individual displaced farmer in a chapter entitled "A Loser" in From a Limestone Ledge. The story details Graves's attendance at a "sellout auction" to be held ninety miles or so north of his home for the dispersal of properties belonging to a displaced farmer (219). Loath to participate because of the melancholy nature of such events, described as "aromatic with defeat and often with death," Graves relates his reasons for overcoming his natural inclination to forego attendance. He seeks a specific item, an Allis-Chalmers grain combine small enough to assist him in his own "rough area" pocked with small pastures, "little tracts strewn out between the hills . . . narrow rocky lanes and steep stream crossings," which inhibit hiring in contractors with their larger equipment and overhead. Since it is not cost effective for the large operators to transport their rigs into rough country for the "sake of reaping just twelve or twenty or thirty acres of oats or wheat,"

> we often let our cattle keep on grazing winter grain fields past mid-March, when they ought to be taken off if harvest is intended, or we cut and bale the stuff green for hay. But sometimes when you'd like a bin full of grain

> to carry your horses and goats through winter and maybe to fatten a steer or so for slaughter, you wish you had a bit more of the sort of control that possession of your own varied if battered machinery gives. (220)

Graves, as with the Agrarians in general, is not averse to machinery per se, despite his preference for archaic methods. Indeed, as he mentions in Hard Scrabble, both time and human assistance are "scarce and dear, and because too I am willy-nilly a corrupted impure inhabitant of this corrupted impure shortcut world we have built . . . in the world as it is, which is surely far from ideal, the use of such tools and materials is often the only way you can get some things done by yourself" (180-81). Doing things by and for oneself reflects for Graves both the isolation the independent farmer must come to terms with and "solid satisfaction, and a perhaps less solid but nonetheless agreeable illusion of independence in a world of intertangled men" (179).

With these motives in mind, Graves arrives at the auction and inspects the items arranged about the farmyard, "the relics and trophies of someone's ruptured love affair with the soil," finding that "much of the farm machinery had a scarred third-hand look quite familiar to me, for it was the kind of stuff that we marginal small-timers tend to end up with" (Limestone 221). These lines indicate Graves's affinity with "marginal small-timers," prototypical agrarians with a deeply grounded love for the soil, to recall Ransom's description, who haven't gotten out even though they haven't gotten big. Closer inspection of the items produces a unique, humanizing element: "a large and gleaming tuba" amid the array of tools, implements, and household items that affirm this family's existence. Graves also details the others gathered to inspect the objects for sale,

the wary “hunched locals in caps and heavy jackets and muddy boots” contrasting with the “Western-clad and cliquish” dealers who will “move in for the kill” on farming implements (222, 225). These dealers, who only practice good business after all, can outbid locals sometimes double for the heavier machinery, and then double their original investment by re-selling at retail prices back at their lot. This practice prevents the small family farmer from attaining the needed equipment within his budget while increasing the dealers’ own profit margins, indicative of competing interests between “free market” economics and small place-centered communities and individuals.

As the bidding begins, Graves identifies a “hatless thin-clad man who sat on the edge of the pickup’s bed beside the auctioneer” by the man’s reaction to the prices his equipment brings in:

> He was in his forties, pale and slight and balding and with the pinched waxy look of sickness on him, maybe even of cancer, and as I watched his dark worrier’s eyes switch anxiously from bidder to bidder and saw the down-tug of his lips when something sold far too low, I knew very well who he was. He was the erstwhile lord of this expanse of wet sand and red mud, the buyer and mender and operator of a good bit too much machinery for forty-five arable acres, the painstaking nurturer and coddler of those fat penned cows, the player perhaps of a tuba, the builder of a hip-roofed brick-veneer castle, 3 b.r. 2 baths, from which to defend his woman and his young against the spears of impending chaos. Except that chaos,

> as is its evil custom, had somehow stolen in on him unawares and confounded all his plans. He was, in short, the Loser. (225-26)

Graves's characterization highlights the contingency of events and the vulnerability of the small landowner. Though a "painstaking nurturer and coddler," in keeping with Ransom's ideal for the ancient and humane traditional husbandman, chaos nonetheless has confounded this farmer's plans and intentions. The ironic designation "Loser" signifies not only the man's status in relation to his loss of property and limited return on the years of investment he and his family have put into the place, perhaps for generations, but as well the derogatory euphemism attached to such an individual by the advocates of an economic system that flourishes with such losses. Although Graves implies physical illness in this instance, the capitalized "L" denotes this loser's representation for all such farmers displaced by the grind of keeping afloat against the storm of "corporate totalitarianism" (Berry 10).

Knowing that the Loser will receive less than market value for the auctioned items, often below 25 percent of what he has paid, Graves describes the crowd's "lingering fog of feeling" connoting shame and guilt, and their "knowing that if we found any bargains there it would be because of someone else's tough luck." This empathy "was waiting there within us," but there was another underlying emotion as well, "less altruistic and thus maybe stronger" (Limestone 227). The family's tragedy has provided the observers with the cautionary opportunity for realization of their own vulnerability to the contingencies of nature and the market, the ubiquitous awareness of "there but for the grace of God":

> At three o'clock in the morning, once or twice or often, many of us had known ourselves to be potentially that small pale man as we sweated against the menaces of debt not to be covered by non-farm earnings or a job in town, of drouth, of a failing cattle or grain or peanut market, of having overextended ourselves on treasured land or machinery or a house, of perhaps a wife's paralyzed disillusionment with the rigors of country life, and above all of the onslaught of sickness with its flat prohibition of the steady work and attention that a one-man operation has to have, or else go under. The Loser had made us view the fragility of all we had been working toward, had opened our ears to the hollow low-pitched mirth of the land against mere human effort. (228)

"Enjoying the growth of [a dealer's] cold resentment," Graves stays in the bidding for his Allis-Chalmers combine long enough to drive the price closer to fairness, but quits, mainly because of "thinking about the Loser and all he stood for." "Nor did I stay to watch the bidding for the cattle and the house and land," Graves tells us. "What I wanted, and what I did, was to flee back home . . . where I could have a drink beside a fire of liveoak logs and consider the Loser's alien sandy-land troubles with equanimity from afar" (228). Contrasting with traditional tragedy, there is no cathartic release of emotions related to identification with the tragic figure. Instead lingering doubts and brooding remain to emphasize the continuous fragility of existence and the limitations of human endeavors.

Graves's utilization of "The Loser" to present the forced displacement of small landowners from their holdings illustrates a southern use of pastoral dispossession as an instrument of ideology. It demonstrates the "proper purpose" of the story, which is moving the reader, along with the narrator, "from the simple emotion of pity to the complex one of meditation . . . the process that transforms human tragedy into peace of mind—for its interpreter" (Patterson 276). As in Wordsworthian pastoral, Graves's story suggests that natural forces have contributed to bringing the farmer to ruin, as when he mentions the "low-pitched mirth of the land against mere human effort." But there remains as well the implication of the modern system, of a "free market" wherein, as Berry says, the freest are the richest. The story's portrayal of displacement reverts back to Virgil's first eclogue and the displaced Meliboeus, but in Graves's version, Tityrius is not at restful ease. Rather Graves as Tityrius senses the encroaching power of the "city," the modern values of unchecked industrial/capitalism that the Agrarians attacked, threatening his own well-being. Thus Graves's little story fulfills Marx's requirement for complex pastoral, which is pastoral that brings irony to bear on the illusion of peace in the garden. For Graves and other southerners, the threat to rural satisfaction was more than a metaphor for their reluctance to embrace the modern values of the twentieth century. The illusion of peace had already long been absent. What they sought was a stable foothold against chaos itself.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 5

1. See George Sessions Perry's Hold Autumn in Your Hand for a novel set in Texas dealing with southern themes and georgic values; Lee notes that the movie version of this novel was titled The Southerner. William Humphrey's The Ordways depicts postbellum southern life in Texas through the 1920s. William Owens's This Stubborn Soil and A Season of Weathering are autobiographical works that provide a sense of place and elegy for a vanishing era. Finally, a good deal of Katherine Anne Porter's writing is southern, though not much is set in Texas.
2. See Wendell Berry's The Unsettling of America for his discussion of exploitive cultural and agricultural systems that exceed the natural system, which "to use an economic metaphor, . . . is living off the principal rather than the interest" (47). See also E. F. Schumacher, Small Is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered, particularly Part 1, Chapter 1 "The Problem of Production," in which he writes "the modern industrial system, with all its intellectual sophistication, consumes the very basis on which it has been erected. To use the language of the economists, it lives on irreplaceable capital which it cheerfully treats as income" (21).

CONCLUSION

In a reassessment of John Graves's work in 1996, Don Graham discusses the crucial image at the end of Goodbye to a River, when Graves has emerged from his pastoral journey physically, mentally, and spiritually whetted for the task ahead of him, both as an inhabitant of the middle twentieth century and as an artist. Two women in a general store where Graves has come to use the telephone barely notice the weathered and grizzled sojourner, so intent is their focus on the television program at which they stare, what has to be American Bandstand by Graves's description of a young man's "wide-mouthed face" filling the screen, singing "how the cats was a-rockin'" while the shot cuts to solemn-faced kids in "high school clothing" on the dance floor (Goodbye 299). Graves's lone figure emerging from the river presents a "living rebuke" to television, writes Graham, "the symbol of the new America," while Goodbye to a River offers "a critique of American culture in the late 1950s, similar to that of the young [Larry] McMurtry and the Beats in its celebration of solitude and self-reliance in an era of bloated conformity" (23). Graham adds that "In his own quiet way, Graves was ahead of his time" in addressing what would become key environmental issues in the next two decades (24), and calls Goodbye to a River "the culmination of a long tradition" in its "loving evocation of the past and its prescient critique of the present" (22).

But Graves's cultural critique voiced concerns central to the arguments of the Southern Agrarians in the 1930s, and to traditional writers of pastoral prior to that. Rather

than the neo-Transcendentalist orientation of the Buddhist-inspired Beats, Graves represents a southern and conservative viewpoint, one rooted in a world of georgic values associated with property and hard work. "Saint Henry," Graves calls Thoreau, whom he admittedly admires for his asceticism and the "Thoreauvian idea of simplicity" to which Graves subscribes "without ever having practiced it very purely" (Hard Scrabble 143). But he also admires Charles Goodnight, the famous cattle baron of the upper Brazos, for being a "tough and bright and honorable man in tough not usually honorable times" (Goodbye 62). "They were both ascetics," Graves says of Thoreau and Goodnight, "the one in order to think and feel, the other in order to act" (67-68). It becomes clearer as Graves ages and grapples with the "Ownership Syndrome," that he aligns himself more with men of action, the Charles Goodnights and those who try to do things right "without ever quite succeeding all the way, but in the trying itself becoming a part of the land and the Way it works," than he does with the "intelligent almost noparticipant purity of a Thoreau" (Hard Scrabble 148). Allen Tate refers to this difference in describing a "dialectical mode" of writing requiring twentieth-century southern novelists' rediscovery. "The New England dialectic of the Transcendentalists," Tate writes, "tended to take flight into the synthesis of pure abstraction, in which the inner struggle is resolved in an idea. The Southern dramatic dialectic of our time is being resolved . . . in action" (568). There is a nod toward simplicity and Emersonian self-reliance, but mainly Graves distances himself from Transcendentalists, and from the environmentalists who share their withdrawal from society, their condemnation of human interaction with nature, and their exaltation of nature at the expense of the human (Malvasi "All" 134).

If Graves's cultural critique of the late 1950s and early 1960s is ahead of its time, what, then, of the Agrarians' critique in the 1930s? And what can we make of a perspective that is southern and conservative, retroactive, if you will, in its Romantic evocation of the past, and its ability to serve as "prescient critique"? Donald Davidson, contending Matthew Arnold's assertion that Romantic writers are "premature" largely because of their nonparticipation in a "'current of ideas' or a 'national glow of life and thought' as Sophocles or Pindar enjoyed," argues that rather than premature, Romantic writers are "belated": "Romantic writers, from William Blake to T. S. Eliot, are not so much an advance guard leading the way to new conquests as a rear guard—a survival of happier days when the artist's profession was not so much a separate and special one as it is now" (41). Davidson reasons further that whatever diverse forms of Romanticism inform an artist's work, their common origin stems from what he calls an "artificial or maladjusted relation between the artist and society" (42):

> The artist is no longer with society, as perhaps even Milton, last of classicists, was. He is against or away from society, and the disturbed relation becomes his essential theme, always underlying his work, no matter whether he evades or accepts the treatment of the theme itself. His evasion may consist in nostalgia for a remote past, mediaeval, Elizabethan, Grecian, which he revives imaginatively or whose characteristic modes he appropriates. He has thus the spiritual solace of retreating to a refuge secure against the doubtful implications of his position in contemporary society. His retreat is a psychological

> compensation, but there is also an appeal to something that has survival value. He does not so much rebel against a crystallized tradition . . . as retire more deeply within the body of the tradition to some point where he can utter himself with the greatest consciousness of his dignity as artist. He is like a weaponless warrior who plucks a sword from the tomb of an ancient hero. (43-44)

Davidson's description of the Romantic artist goes a good deal in the direction of explaining Graves's appropriation of pastoral's "characteristic modes" throughout his career. He "retires deeply within the body" of the pastoral tradition, all the way back to Virgil and Hesiod, consistently utilizing fundamental chronotopic features of narrative to underscore his "essential" themes, which offer in Bakhtin's "unity of time" survival value from what Graves calls "times one disagrees with."

Recalling MacKethan's identification of three specifically pastoral motifs utilized by southern writers, we can see all three shaping the work of Graves: the idealization of a golden age associated with childhood, the celebration of the simplicities of a natural order, and the critique of contemporary society compared to earlier standards (4). All three motifs have been apparent in the thematic structure of his major work since the publishing of Goodbye to a River in 1960, although Graves's emphasis has changed as his interests have developed. Initially he employs the pastoral journey and the idyllic chronotope in idealizing a golden age related with his youth, or an interim time as he calls it, recalling a sense of shared history and inherited culture by his use of a technique reminiscent of the greater romantic lyric, and establishing a unity of time and place

linking him to the generations before. Later as he acquires property and attempts to approximate what Marx terms the middle landscape, he transits to the chronotopic features of the agricultural idyll of labor and family, exemplifying celebration of "the Way," his term for the order of nature, as it conflicts with the "Ownership Syndrome." In his striving to reconcile these pastoral oppositions he achieves what he calls "lightness," tantamount to the striving after moral unity of human and nature sought by Romantic theorists. Throughout his writing he offers, as Graham suggests, cogent cultural critique, most often framed in the pastoral dichotomy of agrarian and industrial, a conservative position which privileges standards and values different from those favored of modernity and progressiveness. As with the Agrarians preceding him, this position often entails his condemnation of an increasing predominance of the profit motive, the inhumane effects of unrestrained economic competition, the proliferation of consumerism and material acquisition, a separation of ownership from the control of property, and the continual exploitation of the natural world (Malvasi "Unregenerate" 2). Counter to the dominant paradigm of rootless individualism, the southern thinker has offered rootedness in family, community, civic responsibility, history, and tradition, ideas often denigrated by the tag "blood and soil."

Because many of the qualities Graves values have been expressed in terms associated with southern and conservative thinking, he has always found himself outside the accepted literary establishment, a marginalized writer, if you will, even though as our culture has continued to reassess the relation of human and nature throughout the second half of the twentieth century, writers concerned with nature have enjoyed a continual

increase in status and interest. Perhaps this marginal status results from Graves's predilection for writing about problems related to owning property within a local community and tradition, concerns which are ideologically more conservative than those regarding the preservation of pristine wilderness. Likely it results from his similarity to the traditional southern poet described by Bradford as the "peculiar custodian of . . . memory":

> His glance is backward and outward, not forward and inward. Language, prosody, metaphor, the features of genre, the formal properties of his craft are not simply the appropriate vehicles for the requisite transaction, the passing on. They are themselves part of what must be remembered, preserved, and reproduced . . . Otherwise the discovery of permanence in flux, the universal in the particular, the linking together of the life of generations present, past, and yet unborn . . . is impossible. (Generations 117)

In a century when the word is privileged over the act, Graves represents what he readily admits to being, an anachronism. For even though he acknowledges the importance of words, he celebrates as well the action and the actor. In "His Chapter" of Hard Scrabble the O. F. (then just a F.) and his wife work out an arrangement where she and the girls will stay in town, while he stays on the ranch. "What you like is doing things," she says, "What I want is to be somebody." Graves writes, "Though without saying so, the F. could not see the difference. What you did you were" (130). What Graves does is write good prose about humans and nature based on hard way learning.

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