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THE LITERARY CRITICISM OF E. B. WHITE

by

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A Thesis Submitted to the
Graduate Faculty in Partial Fulfillment of
The Requirements for the Degree of
MASTER OF SCIENCE

Major Subject: English

Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa

1968
INTRODUCTION

E. B. White, farmer, New Yorker writer, and free lancer, has written a great deal about himself and his activities, including his reading. He made no attempt to be a literary critic in any formal sense and did not make a systematic attempt to judge all literature; he simply made comments upon items that struck him as interesting, well-done, badly done, or partly good, partly bad. His view must be gleaned from his writings; he seldom made explicit statements of literary criticism. He writes for an educated reader, but not for an elite audience; his persona is that of an ordinary citizen with some education and some common sense, not as a professional critic. White did not attempt to tell his readers about everything he had read. He simply mentioned books which were pertinent to the topic he was discussing. He had much to say about humor and some comments to make on poets and poetry.
WHITE'S KNOWLEDGE OF LITERATURE

Before going to work at the New Yorker, White edited the Cornell Daily Sun as a college senior. After graduation he wrote features for the Seattle Times, wrote automobile advertising copy, and contributed, to various magazines, pieces not written on assignment. While at the New Yorker he edited the "Talk of the Town" and wrote "Notes & Comment," wrote most of the captions for the column "Slips that Pass in the Type," and contributed stories, essays, and poems to magazines such as the New Yorker, Harper's, and Atlantic Monthly. For a time he wrote a column, "One Man's Meat" for Harper's. His writing was largely of his personal reactions to local, national and international affairs; early in his career he wrote poetry and later fiction, but his better-known books contain chatty pieces with sophisticated scope and awareness.

White's career as a working journalist would have made it necessary for him to be well-read in current publications, and his works make reference to many of these. He also kept abreast of current literary works and read among the classics. Among the literary figures to whom White has made the most frequent reference are Henry David Thoreau and Walt Whitman. Thoreau's ideas and ideals appealed to White, but White was unable to live up to them and teased himself about his failure. Whitman's ideas, style and influence interested White but occasionally irritated him. Other writers to whom he made
occasional or passing reference are Faulkner, Henry James, D. H. Lawrence, Shakespeare, John Donne, and Immanuel Kant. ¹

In Here Is New York, White comments, "I burned with a low steady fever just because I was on the same island with Don Marquis, Heywood Broun, Christopher Morley, Franklin P. Adams, Robert C. Benchley, Frank Sullivan, Dorothy Parker, Alexander Woollcott, Ring Lardner and Stephen Vincent Benét" (p. 31). Many of these people he later managed to meet. Because of his work at the New Yorker he knew James Thurber, Mark Connelly, Harold Ross, Arthur Kober, George Kaufman, Sally Benson, Lois Long, Dorothy Parker, Helen Hokinson, Clarence Day, Frank Sullivan, Leonard Q. Ross, and Peter Arno. It was inevitable that a man with a sense of humor would learn a great deal in association with these people. White became deeply involved in writing and analyzing humor.

Many of White's references and allusions are to humor: its definition, its literary value or status in our society, and the varieties of the sense of humor. He frequently mentions humorists and their work, and he states his admiration for Don Marquis in particular.

Much of White's own literary criticism and general writing is humorous. He makes fun of his oversupply of eggs, his skill with raising rubberplants while his unskilled friend wins a Pulitzer Prize, his ineptness in coping with progress and modern mechanical equipment, and his minority viewpoint in objecting to provincialism or to government

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doles of lime. White has written satires; magazine styles, pretentious authors, empty novels, helpful agencies, progress, and unnecessarily complex blank forms have all felt his sharp wit.

White collaborated with Thurber in writing *Is Sex Necessary?* and with his wife in editing a collection of humorous short pieces, *A Subtreasury of American Humor*. He wrote an admiring and amusing introduction to Don Marquis' *the lives and times of archy and mehitabel*, in which he quotes Marquis as saying (p. xxiv), "'My heart has followed all my days/Something I cannot name....' [He adds] such is the lot of poets. Such was Marquis's lot. Such, probably is the lot of even bad poets. But bad poets can't phrase it so simply." White's tastes in reading include an interest in authors who are able to capture a sense of wonder at life, nature, and the excitement of being alive. He prefers authors whose style is clear. Clarity and a sense of the exhilaration of living a full life are characteristics of White's own writing, and he looks for these same qualities in others.

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3Don Marquis, *the lives and times of archy and mehitabel* (Garden City, New York, 1950).
STYLE

An author's style of communicating his material comes under scrutiny in many of White's essays. He believed in brevity and clarity, following the instructions of his professor from Cornell, William Strunk, Jr. White congratulates authors for viable images, criticizes obscurity of diction, and parodies eccentricities. Some of his comments on style are directed toward the obscurity of poets.

Obscurity is an enemy of White's whether the obscurity of the writers of war-time forms and restrictions, income tax forms, instructions on how to write well, or poetry. The constructors of blanks, of course, make no attempt at being literary, but poets and Rudolph Flesch do.

Flesch comes under a brief but acid attack in The Second Tree from the Corner, pp. 158-159. White objects to writing down to the reader. He objects more strongly to Flesch's expression. "Under the heading 'Think Before You Write,' he wrote, 'The main thing to consider is your purpose in writing. Why are you sitting down to write?" And echo answered: Because, sir, it is more comfortable than standing up." White is concerned that Flesch's method will cause writers to write more and more simply, with less and less content, until they have nothing to communicate. He says "a writer who questions the capacity of the person at the other end is not a writer at all.... The movies long ago
decided that a wider communication could be achieved by a deliberate descent to a lower level, and they walked proudly down until they reached the cellar. Now they are groping for the light switch, hoping to find the way out."

Obscurity, for a poet, is an occupational hazard. In *One Man's Meat* (pp. 103-107), White comments, "A poet dares to be just so clear and no clearer; he approaches lucid ground warily, like a mariner who is determined not to scrape his bottom on anything solid. A poet's pleasure is to withhold a little of his meaning, to intensify by mystification. He unzips the veil from beauty, but does not remove it. A poet utterly clear is a trifle glaring."

There are many kinds of poetic obscurity, White says. There is the obscurity which results from the poet's being mad. This is rare.... Then there is the unintentional obscurity or muddiness which comes from the inability of some writers to express even a simple idea without stirring up the bottom. And there is the obscurity which results when a fairly large thought is crammed into a three- or four-foot line. The function of poetry is concentration; but sometimes overconcentration occurs.... Sometimes a poet becomes so completely absorbed in the lyrical possibilities of certain combinations of sounds that he forgets what he started to say, if anything, and here again a
nasty tangle results.

This essay, "Poetry," begins with an anecdote about cows avoiding an electric fence which has not had the power on for some time, and the essay concludes with a section about people, in a city about to be destroyed, leaving the key at the desk as they go out. The central part of the essay deals with the obscurity of poets, and contains the statement, "I think Americans, perhaps more than other people, are impressed by what they don't understand, and the poets take advantage of this." White is warning the reader to use his own judgment when reading poetry, to realize the electric fence may not have the power on, that if the city is to be destroyed the man at the desk won't need the key, and that the poet, rather than the reader, may be at fault if the poem is obscure.

White had already recommended that the reader use his own judgment as to the value of a poem, in Quo Vadimus? in a tongue-in-cheek essay called "How to Tell a Major Poet from a Minor Poet" (pp. 68-74). In a delightful collection of non-sequiturs, oversimplifications and illogical statements he gives his rules:

Serious verse is written by a major poet; light verse is written by a minor poet.... Any poem starting with "And when" is a serious poem written by a major poet.... Any poem, on the other hand, ending with "And how" comes under
the head of light verse, written by a minor poet.... You will know it is a minor poem because it deals with a trademarked product.... All poems containing the word "rue" as a noun are serious.... All poets who read from their own works are major.... All women poets, dead or alive, who smoke cigars are major.... All poets named Edna St. Vincent Millay are major.... A poet who, in a roomful of people, is noticeably keeping at a little distance and 'seeing into' things is a major poet.

White concludes with his real message. "The truth is, it is fairly easy to tell the two types apart; it is only when one sets about trying to decide whether what they write is any good or not that the thing really becomes complicated." By implication he indicts critics who focus on irrelevancies and trivia.

White suggests ways to recognize good poetry. "A true poem contains the seed of wonder.... Poetry is intensity...." Edgar Guest is a "singer, who, more than any other, gives to Americans the enjoyment of rhyme and meter. Whether he gives also to any of his satisfied readers that blinding, aching emotion which I get from reading certain verses by other writers is a question which interests me very much" (One Man's Meat, p. 104). He is saying that poetry should give "that blinding, aching emotion," and contain that "seed of wonder."
Thoreau is one of the authors White admires, because of his style, because of his content, and because he does convey, especially to young readers, aching emotion and wonder (Points of My Compass, pp. 15-25).

It is of some advantage to encounter the book at a period in one's life when the normal anxieties and enthusiasms and rebellions of youth closely resemble those of Thoreau in that spring.... Thoreau, very likely without knowing quite what he was up to, took man's relation to Nature and man's dilemma in society and man's capacity for elevating his spirit and he beat all these matters together, in a wild free interval of self-justification and delight.... I can reread his invitation with undiminished excitement.

Parody is a possible form of criticism and White has written parodies, many aimed at ideas and social institutions. In "The Family Which Dwelt Apart," he satirizes rescue organizations and the news media. In "A Classic Waits for Me," he criticizes bookclubs and uncritical readers. "A Guide to the Pronunciation of Words in Time" is a parody of magazine style. "Dusk in Fierce Pajamas" is a criticism of the taste and content of Harper's Bazaar's advertisements. Some of these are combined parodies of literary style and of the ideas held by the institutions.
Parody can also be a form of compliment. In his letter to Henry Thoreau, "Walden" (One Man's Meat, pp. 71-78), and in "The Retort Transcendental" (The Second Tree from the Corner, pp. 92-94), White's imitation of Thoreau's style is complimentary. In the letter he says, "My purpose in going to Walden Pond, like yours, was not to live cheaply or to live dearly there, but to transact some private business with the fewest obstacles," and "Before I got to the cove I heard something that seemed to me quite wonderful; I heard your frog, a full, clear troonk, guiding me, still hoarse and solemn, bridging the years as the robins had bridged them in the sweetness of the village evening. But he soon quit, and I came on a couple of young boys throwing stones at him." In this letter, and in "The Retort Transcendental," society, rather than Thoreau, is being criticized. In "Retort" a hostess asks White: "'What would you like to drink?' 'Let me have a draught of undiluted morning air,' I snarl.... Then I slump into my cushion and wait for the clear amber liquor and the residual olive."

One parody aimed principally at the author's style, but also at his content, is White's "Across the Street and into the Grill." Hemingway's Across the River and into the Trees, a book which parodies a contemporary writer, is repetitious, overworking such phrases as "We are having fun,"

Ernest Hemingway, Across the River and into the Trees (New York, 1950).
"I slept soundly and well," and "Pull up the blanket good."
White makes the most of the stylistic defects. Hemingway writes of the officer, remembering wartime caution, who selects in a restaurant "a table in the far corner of the bar, where the Colonel had both his flanks covered" (Across the River and into the Trees, p. 124). Later, in the gondola, a blanket keeps blowing off the lovers. White combines the images into a blanket-covered pair in a restaurant: "'Are both your flanks covered, my dearest?' she asked, plucking at the blanket" (The Second Tree from the Corner, p. 136).

White admires and approves of authors who have something to say and who say it clearly. He criticizes authors whose style is obscure or confused, and he objects to authors who have nothing to say.
CONTENT AND REASONING

E. B. White, though less interested in content and reasoning than in style, nonetheless has criticized authors for their lack of content or for the faulty reasoning in their work. He satirizes Hemingway's *Across the River and into the Trees*, Gladys Hasty Carroll's *As the Earth Turns*, and Charles Allen Smith's *RFD* for lack of content, and criticizes critics for lack of sound reasoning, as in his essay on poetry; and occasionally he has criticized readers for not recognizing quality when it is presented.

The vacuity of condensations is under attack in "Irtmog" (Quo Vadimus?, pp. 44-49), "Distillate came along, a super-digest which condensed a Hemingway novel to the single word 'Bang!'" The reader is also censured: "what readers really craved was not so much the contents of books, magazines, and papers as the assurance that they were not missing anything."

White has attacked an oversimplification of Santayana's, "Animal love is a marvelous force," in *The Fox of Peapack* (pp. 11-12). He makes fun of Hemingway or the reporter who said, "Mr. Hemingway said that he shot only lions that were utter strangers to him" (*The Fox of Peapack*, pp. 25-26). In "Poet" (*The Fox of Peapack*, pp. 13-

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14) White satirized a poet who earned his money by writing of pretended emotion, and in "Critic" (The Lady Is Cold,\textsuperscript{6} p. 51), he reproved a critic who "scarcely saw the play at all/For watching his reaction to it." White is critical of writers who do not say what they mean or mean what they say. One who writes without thinking or who presents an insincere emotional reaction is open to censure.

In his essays "How to Tell a Major Poet" in \textit{Quo Vadimus?} and "Poetry" in One Man's Meat, he has satirized poetry critics who cannot tell trivia from significance. The critics are so concerned with irrelevancies of detail that they forget to consider whether the poem is good as well as obscure, whether it has emotional impact as well as rhythm, and whether it can convey a sense of wonder.

\textsuperscript{6}E. B. White, \textit{The Lady Is Cold} (New York, 1929).
In addition to writing humor, White wrote about humorous pieces by other authors. Most notably he makes comments on humor and humorists in his anthology, *A Subtreasury of American Humor*. He commented on humor in his introduction to the 1950 Doubleday edition of *the lives and times of archy and mehitabel* by Don Marquis and commented occasionally in his other books on humor in relation to lasting, successful works of literature.

*A Subtreasury of American Humor* was first published in 1941. A cut version, also edited by E. B. and Katharine S. White, was published in 1962. The preface to the first edition does not appear in the cut version, but introductory remarks for the sections are unchanged except to reflect the changes in anthologized material. The preface, slightly revised, does appear in *The Second Tree from the Corner* (pp. 165-173). He changed little of what he said in the original preface. 7 He states that much humor cannot be put

7 The version in *The Second Tree from the Corner* is shortened, mostly to make the material general for broader publication. One paragraph (xix; 167) has been omitted, but probably because essentially the same thing was said in *Every Day Is Saturday*, p. 214, rather than because he changed his mind.
into a book: "I never realized how confining a book could be till we got going on this one" (p. xii). Humor ages rapidly, especially humor of daily newspaper stories: "The 'Talk of the Town' pieces, although they had grown whiskers as timely articles do, stood up a little better, we found, than the daily paper pieces, probably because the prime purpose of a daily story is to acquaint you with the facts, whereas the prime purpose of a New Yorker story is to entertain you with the facts" (pp. xiii-xiv).

He objects to dialect humor:

...it occurred to me that a certain basic confusion often exists in the use of tricky or quaint or illiterate spelling to achieve humorous effect... [although] obviously, some of the pieces by the dialect writers seemed funny to us in spite of the handicap of spelling.... I suspect that the popularity of all dialect stuff derives in part from flattery of the reader--giving him a pleasant sensation of superiority which he gets from working out the intricacies of misspelling, and the satisfaction of detecting boorishness or illiteracy in someone else. This is not the whole story, but it has some bearing in the matter.

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Although he performs a certain amount of dissection on humor, White insists,

Humor can be dissected, as a frog can, but the thing dies in the process and the innards are discouraging to any but the pure scientific mind.... Humor won't stand much blowing up, and it won't stand much poking. A human frame convulsed with laughter, and the laughter becoming hysterical and uncontrollable, is as far out of balance as one shaken with the hiccoughs or in the throes of a sneezing fit.

One of the things commonly said about humorists is that they are really very sad people--clowns with a breaking heart. There is some truth in it, but it is badly stated. It would be more accurate, I think, to say that there is a deep vein of melancholy running through everyone's life and that a humorist, perhaps more sensible of it than some others, compensates for it actively and positively.... But, as everyone knows, there is often a rather fine line between laughing and crying, and if a humorous piece of writing brings a person to the point where his emotional responses are untrustworthy and seem likely to break over into the opposite realm, it is because humorous writing, like poetical writing, has an extra content. It plays, like an active child, close to the big hot fire which is Truth. And sometimes the reader feels the heat.
The world likes humor, but it treats it patronizingly.... Writers know this, and ... are at considerable pains never to associate their name with anything funny or flippant or nonsensical or "light." They suspect it would hurt their reputation, and they are right.

General readers, as well as critics, are scolded at times in White's essays. In "Some Remarks on Humor," in The Second Tree from the Corner (pp. 169-170), he says, "The subtleties of satire and burlesque and nonsense and parody and criticism are not to the general taste; they are for the top (or, if you want, for the bottom) layer of intellect. Clarence Day, for example, was relatively inconspicuous when he was oozing his incomparable "Thoughts Without Words," which are his best creations; he became generally known and generally loved only after he had brought Father to life."

Primarily White anthologized material which was contemporary. In the first edition some older material, by authors such as Washington Irving and James Russell Lowell, was used, but this material was omitted in the shortened version. Sections omitted include "History, Politics and Affairs of State," "Folklore and Tall Stories," "The Critics at Work," and "The Reporters at Work." Several other pieces were omitted because the piece, or the material it satirized, was out-of-date.
White says of Don Marquis' book *The Lives and Times of Archy and Mehitabel*, "To interpret humor is as futile as explaining a spider's web in terms of geometry. Marquis was, and is, to me a very funny man, his product rich and satisfying, full of sad beauty, bawdy adventure, political wisdom, and wild surprise; full of pain and jollity, full of exact and inspired writing" (*The Second Tree from the Corner*, p. 177). Marquis satirized the writers of free verse—especially those whose product was "dribble"—and he satirized spiritualism, tavern habitues, and boring aging actors.

A sense of humor can be a handicap, according to White. In *Quo Vadimus?* (p. 117), he says, "Charley says that a man 'has got to be diplomatic, and he's got to have a sense of humor.' I think Charley Calder is ... odd.... Diplomacy and a sense of humor, to my mind, are mutually exclusive qualities. They do not coexist. Sense of humor is just another name for sense of directness; diplomacy means a sense of indirectness, or mild chicanery. I don't see how a man can have both...." Thus, while White says diplomacy and a sense of humor are mutually exclusive, he also says Marquis has humor and political wisdom. White's general statements may fail in specific application.

In *Every Day Is Saturday* (p. 214) White warns that "humor has no social standing in letters. It should be made clear to any student who might be considering a career of humor that after he has written his arm off, for funnier
or for worse, even his best friend will still ask: "When are you going to do something really important?"
SIGNIFICANCE

White has commented from time to time on the durability of the authors he mentioned. He believed that authors who have lasting value are those who consider profound questions of life without heavy-handedness. A writer who had the ability to condense a statement into a quotable phrase, who could write with clarity, capture a sense of wonder at living, or produce "little granules of essential thought" (Every Day Is Saturday, p. 58), was a writer White could admire.

Good writers are not overly self-conscious. "Writing in the pure sense and in the noblest form is neither an occupation nor a profession.... It is the by-product of many occupations and professions, which the writer pursues.... A really pure writer is a man like Conrad, who is first of all a mariner; or Isadora Duncan, a dancer; or Ben Franklin, an inventor and statesman; or Hitler, a scamp.... I think a literary artist has a better chance of producing something great if he spends the first forty years of his life doing something else" (One Man's Meat, pp. 254-255). Of an author who pledged himself, during World War II, "never to write anything that wasn't constructive and significant and liberty-loving," White comments, "A writer must believe in something, obviously, but he shouldn't join a club" (One Man's Meat, p. 37).
White admired Thoreau's *Walden* because "It still seems to me the best youth's companion yet written by an American, for it carries a solemn warning against the loss of one's valuables, it advances a good argument for travelling light and trying new adventures, it rings with the power of positive adoration, it contains religious feeling without religious images, and it steadfastly refuses to record bad news." White is under no misconceptions as to Thoreau's perfection. "He rides into the subject at top speed, shooting in all directions. Many of his shots ricochet and nick him on the rebound, and throughout the melee there is a horrendous cloud of inconsistencies and contradictions.... Thoreau said he required of every writer, first and last, a simple and sincere account of his own life. Having delivered himself of this chesty dictum, he proceeded to ignore it." White quotes a sentence that "A copy-desk man would get a double hernia trying to clean up," comments that the sentence needs no fixing, and that Thoreau's sentences are "as indestructible as they are errant" (*Points of My Compass*, pp. 15-25).

White adds that Thoreau's ideals are "of increasing pertinence" (*One Man's Meat*, p. 71), but are impossible to live up to: "I wince every time I walk into the barn I'm pushing before me" (*Points of My Compass*, p. 25). "Concord hasn't changed much, Henry; the farm implements and the animals still have the upper hand." In spite of Henry's
orders to "Simplify! Simplify! Simplify!" and in spite of the fact that he never uses lap robes, White admits "I have ever been at pains to lock them up" (One Man's Meat, p. 73). Apologizing for spending almost as much on an overnight visit to Walden as Thoreau did in eight months, White points up one of Thoreau's unrealistic facets: "You never had to cope with a short-stop" (One Man's Meat, p. 78). White agrees with Thoreau's "Our life is frittered away by detail" (Walden, p. 82), yet he finds that his attempts at simplification "have usually led to even greater complexity in the long pull" (Points of My Compass, p. 116). One Man's Meat begins with the tale of White's trials in disposing of his furniture, and tells of his failure even to give away a large gold mirror. He adds later in the book, "I don't know whether I came to the country to live the simple life; but I am now engaged in a life vastly more complex than anything the city has to offer" (p. 92). "Pressure! I've been on the trot now for a long time, and don't know whether I'll ever get slowed down" (p. 153). At times White seems to feel that his life has been frittered away by simplicity.

White writes about, and in the style of, Walt Whitman in "Walt Sits Beside Me on the C.P.R." in The Lady is Cold and "A Classic Waits for Me," in The Second Tree from the Corner; Quo Vadimus? is dedicated to Walt Whitman (and Grover

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Whalen), and, in *The Wild Flag*, White approved the fact that the *World-Telegram* had printed Whitman's tribute to Lincoln, "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloomed," on Roosevelt's death. White commented that it was "the ablest report... the perfect account of the President's last journey" (p. 74).

In *One Man's Meat* (pp. 256-257), White has written a salute to Whitman's durability; his praise is not unqualified, however.

Walt Whitman should be around today to see how the boys are regenerating his stuff. For a long time I kept wondering where I had heard all this singing before--the radio programs dramatizing America, the propaganda of democracy, the music in the President's chats, the voices of the poets singing America. Then it came to me. It is all straight Walt.... Listen the next time you have the radio tuned to the theatrics of the air--you will hear the voice of old Walt shouting from Paumanok. If there were any doubt about where he stands in the literary ladder this decade has put an end to it. He is right at the top. He must be good or he wouldn't be heard so clearly in the syllables of our contemporaries.

There is a certain something about this sort of writing which is unmistakable.... You can't miss it when you hear it. Sometimes, when one is jittery or out of whack, it seems as though one heard it too
much--so much that it loses its effect. But Walt unquestionably started it. He was the one who heard America beating on a pan, beating on a carpet, beating on an anvil. He heard what was coming, and he said the words.

White is aware of Whitman's value and influence but finds him occasionally too easy to copy, and feels the style is easily overdone and ineffective. It is worthy of note that White, except in parody, was not one of the copiers of Whitman's style.

Don Marquis was one of White's favorite writers. In him, as in Thoreau, White found humor and wisdom, and in Marquis another writer trying to make a deadline. He says in A Subtreasury of American Humor, p. 467, "Don Marquis satirized human beings by writing poems about a bug and a cat. The archy and mehitabel pieces are perhaps nearer to satire than pure nonsense; yet they are nonsensical, too...."

Of Marquis' wisdom, White comments in One Man's Meat that "Don Marquis was one of the great exponents of the asterisk. The heavy pauses between his paragraphs, could they find a translator, would make a book for the ages.... Don knew how lonely everybody is" (p. 78). In The Wild Flag he comments, "Because he had the soul of a poet and saw things from the under side, archys writings are pertinent today" (p. 163). In an admiring essay on Marquis adapted from his introduction to the lives and times of archy
and mehitabel (reprinted in The Second Tree from the Corner, pp. 174-180) he says, "Among books of humor by American authors, there are only a handful that rest solidly on the shelf. This book ... hammered out at such awful cost by the bug hurling himself at the keys, is one of these books. It is funny, it is wise...." Through the bug and cat Marquis could "be profound without sounding self-important...." Marquis moved easily from one literary form to another. He was parodist, historian, poet, clown, fable writer, satirist, reporter, and teller of tales. He had everything it takes and more." The "device of having a cockroach leave messages in his typewriter in the Sun office was a lucky accident and a happy solution for an acute problem. Marquis did not have the patience to adjust himself easily and comfortably to the rigors of daily columning...." Using Archy, Marquis could "use short (sometimes very, very short) lines, which fill space rapidly...[relieving] Marquis of the toilsome business of capital letters, apostrophes, and quotation marks, those small irritations that slow up all men who are hoping their spirit will soar in time to catch the edition...."

While Archy's invention was a practical solution to some of the problems of writers, an inspiration born of desperation, White says the device of bug-persona also allowed Marquis to make timeless comments without pretense.
CONCLUSION

Thoreau and Marquis capture the sense of wonder, exhilaration, and intuitive communion between man and nature that White felt in himself. They write with wisdom and clarity. They and Whitman feel, as White felt, the pull of "something" they "cannot name." From the vantage point of a college man working for a highly respected literary magazine and associated with great writers of the day, White wrote of writers, and criticized their work, as a common-sense reader, not as a literary critic. Such a reader might be expected to set a high value on clarity and brevity. White admired, and wrote about, authors who had those qualities and others that he himself possessed and who could achieve the effects he strove for in his own writing.
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