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THE LIFE AND WORKS OF JAMES HOWELL STREET

A Dissertation

Presented for the

Doctor of Philosophy

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

John Howard Parker

December 1978

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ABSTRACT

James Street (1903-1954) was a colorful and animated personality with a vital interest in the people and events he lived with, particularly those of the South. As he grew up in Jones County, Mississippi, he received the influences which history and geography had fostered there, particularly as they related to the Negro. And later as a journalist and novelist he looked on his home region, with its myths, prejudices, and virtues, both analytically and affectionately.

Although he knew such authors as William Fualkner and Paul Green, Street is not identified with any particular group of writers. As a journalist and fiction writer he relied mainly on his fine talent as a storyteller, weaving colorful and often unusual tales. He did not demonstrate any consistent literary artistry, but in one or two instances he produced novels worthy of mention in the study of serious American creative literature. Had he lived longer, he might have produced more. While he cannot be included among the first-rate authors of the South, he was an accomplished literary craftsman, and his work deserves more serious attention than it has yet received.

Street spent most of his boyhood in Laurel, Mississippi, and surrounding Jones County, the setting of several of his novels. As a young newspaper reporter he witnessed the lynchings and racial prejudices about which he later wrote. In 1923 he married Lucy O'Briant and began a short career as a Baptist preacher, serving churches in St. Charles, Missouri; Lucedale, Mississippi; and Boyles, Alabama.

After determining that he was not suited for the ministry, he returned to reporting, becoming state editor of the Arkansas Gazette in Little Rock in 1927. In the following year he was a roving correspondent in the South for the Associated Press, living in Memphis and later in Atlanta, where he knew Margaret Mitchell.

A feature story which received several votes for a Pulitzer prize brought Street a transfer to New York in 1933, where he accepted an offer by William Randolph Hearst to work for the New York American. He was acquainted with such reporters as Damon Runyan and Dorothy Kilgallen and covered several important stories, including the Lindbergh kidnapping trial. At Runyan's suggestion he wrote his first book, Look Away! (1936), a series of sketches about the South.

After working briefly for the New York World Telegram, Street retired from journalism and published his first short story. Later stories appeared in Collier's, American Magazine, and Saturday Evening Post. His first novel, Oh, Promised Land (1940), was the initial book of a series of historical novels about several generations of the fictional Dabney family of Mississippi. In 1940 he moved to Natchez, Mississippi, where he wrote In My Father's House, perhaps his best novel, the story of a Jones County farm boy whose father is sent to prison. It and The Biscuit Eater, a dog story, were published in 1941.

Back in New York Street wrote Tap Roots (1942), the second Dabney novel, which is the unusual story of Jones County's rebellion against the Confederacy during the Civil War. Next were By Valour and Arms (1944), the third Dabney book; and The Gauntlet (1945), Street's autobiographical novel about a Baptist preacher.

In 1945 Street moved to Chapel Hill, North Carolina, where he was acquainted with members of the university community as well as other authors. Here he wrote the last two Dabney novels, Tomorrow We Reap (1949) and Mingo Dabney (1950). These were followed by The High Calling (1951), a sequel to The Gauntlet; The Velvet Doublet (1953), a novel about Columbus; and Goodbye, My Lady (1954), another dog story. He died of a heart attack in 1954 at the age of fifty. Three books based on his writings appeared after his death: James Street's South (1955), edited by James Street, Jr., and Captain Little Ax (1956) and Proud Possessor (1960), written by Don Tracy.

PREFACE

That James Street is not an unknown writer today is evidenced by the presence of his books in university and public libraries throughout the country. More than once when I tried to find a particular volume for this study I found that it had been borrowed and had to wait my turn. Nearly all of his novels have made the best-seller lists, some of them going through many printings and being translated into foreign languages. Still, interest in the author has been largely on the popular level, and no full-length study of his works has been made prior to this one, though there have been three master's theses. This dissertation will attempt to show that James Street is deserving of recognition in the study of American literature. It will present the facts of his life, particularly as they pertain to his writing, and especially show his interest in the South. Street studied and portrayed the history, politics, customs, and attitudes of his Southern homeland, and was an early advocate of justice for the Negro. His works present a sharp definition of the South as he knew it.

Street was a skilled storyteller, and at least two of his novels, In My Father's House and Goodbye, My Lady, are worthy of a place in serious American creative literature. In this study are summaries and criticisms of his eleven novels as well as analyses of his feature writing, popular histories, and short stories.

The home of the author was Laurel, Mississippi, located in Jones County in the Piney Woods section of the state. Later he lived

throughout the South and in New York before finally settling in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. He first worked as a newspaper reporter and feature writer in the South, and several of his journalistic works, particularly Look Away! and the essays collected in James Street's South, portray the cities, people, and legends that he encountered while roaming the region. Parts of the history of Mississippi from 1794-1894 are treated in the historical novels about the Dabney family: Oh, Promised Land, Tap Roots, By Valour and Arms, Tomorrow We Reap, and Mingo Dabney. And In My Father's House, The Biscuit Eater, and Goodbye, My Lady also have Southern settings.

Street's other novels reflect interest in history or else suggest his own life experiences. The Velvet Doublet is a story about Christopher Columbus, and The Gauntlet and The High Calling are based on the author's brief experience as a Baptist preacher.

Several factors evidence the accomplishments of Street in addition to those already mentioned. His short stories appeared in the nation's leading general magazines and in significant anthologies, including a collection of Southern stories printed by the University of South Carolina and a collection of dog stories which were written by such authors as James Thurber, Jack London, Thornton Wilder, D. H. Lawrence, O. Henry, Stephen Crane, Thomas Mann, Rudyard Kipling, MacKinlay Kantor, and Robert Lewis Stevenson. In his native state Street has been termed the most significant writer of the Piney Woods region, and I have been invited by the University of Mississippi to write an essay on him to be included in a book on Mississippi authors scheduled for publication in

1979. He wrote for the Associated Press and leading New York newspapers in company with reporters like Damon Runyan and Dorothy Kilgallen, and one of his feature stories received votes for a 1932 Pulitzer Prize. In Chapel Hill he was a member of a literary circle headed by Paul Green, who complimented his storytelling talent, and he was also acquainted with other well-known authors, including William Faulkner, who gives him credit in the preface to A Fable for ideas used in that novel which Faulkner got from reading Look Away!.

Published criticism of Street's works is limited to reviews. Master's theses include "The Literary Career of James Street, 1936-1952," by Cleatis E. Blevins (Mississippi Southern College, 1952); "James Street: A Bio-Bibliography," by Josephine Frazier (Florida State University, 1958); and "A Century of Mississippi History with James Street," by William Marett Jones, Jr. (University of Mississippi, 1969). I am indebted to these theses, especially that of Jones, which gave me a helpful bibliography as well as ideas and information about the author's use of history in the first four Dabney novels. Manuscripts of the novels and of some of the short stories are preserved by the University of North Carolina and by the Mississippi Department of Archives and History. Those institutions also have news clippings about the author, as does the Lauren Rogers Library in Laurel.

Although standard biographical works contain sketches of Street's life, they are limited and often inaccurate. I was therefore fortunate to be able to interview Mrs. James Street and her son Dr. James Street, Jr., in Chapel Hill in July of 1976. Although an invalid at the

time, Mrs. Street was remarkably keen in her memory about her husband's life and lucid in her statements made about him during the several hours that we talked. She died within a few months after I saw her, and so I am fortunate in having obtained her irreplaceable comments. James Street, Jr., has himself been associated with various magazines as an editor, and his expertise as well as his generosity in helping me are largely responsible for my having the information about his father presented here. I express my gratitude to him and also to his brother, Mr. John L. Street, and his sister, Mrs. Ann Street Bowring, for their help. While in Chapel Hill I was hospitably received by several friends of the author, especially Paul Green, who provided incisive commentary on Street and on other Southern writers. My interview with Mr. Green was a highlight of the project, and I am grateful for his help and for that of the others who talked with me.

In addition to the institutions and individuals mentioned above, I express my gratitude to Dr. Allison R. Ensor for allowing me to pursue this study and for giving me his time, help, and encouragement. I also thank Dr. F. DeWolfe Miller, Dr. Allen Richard Penner, Dr. Ralph W. Haskins, and Dr. Robert Drake for their help and suggestions, as well as the University of Tennessee English Department for a grant allowing me to travel to Chapel Hill. I am appreciative too of the help of Dr. James W. Thomas, Mr. and Mrs. Howard D. Parker, Mrs. Emmett H. Roberson, and Miss Vicki Mitchell.

I am grateful to President E. Claude Gardner, Dean David Thomas, and Dr. William Porter King of Freed-Hardeman College for the support

and encouragement which they have provided. My special thanks goes to my wife Jill for traveling, proofreading, typing, advising, and encouraging, but most of all for cheerfully accepting a second dissertation into her life. Finally I thank Dr. Morris P. Landiss, friend and mentor, who gave me the topic of James Street out of the cornucopia of his knowledge of Southern writers.

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CHAPTER I

BIOGRAPHY

Ancestry and Youth

Paulding, Mississippi, is on cotton land, and among those she sent to fight for the Confederacy were the men of the Street family. The war probably changed the Street fortunes, but the family remained in Mississippi. One of their descendants was John Camillus Street, a lawyer, Catholic, and federal judge. John married the fifth daughter of William Thompson Scott, an engineer who helped build the railroad over Lake Pontchartrain. William had longed for a son, but at the birth of the fifth girl he gave up and named her after himself—William Thompson Scott. William was the only one of the Scott daughters to quit school, but she attracted the admiration of John Street and also of future governor Theodore G. Bilbo.[1]

John and William had three children: John, the oldest; James Howell; and Mary. When James (called Jimmy) was born on October 15, 1903, the family lived in Lumberton, Mississippi. Afterwards they moved to Poplarville, where John edited the Poplarville Free Press and worked for the Southern Railroad.[2] He then accepted a law position in

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[1]Interview, James Street, Jr., 5 July 1976.

[2]Ibid.

Hattiesburg,[3] where his son Jimmy got a job selling papers, his first exposure to the newspaper trade he would later follow,[4] and attended a parochial school.[5]

John moved his family to Laurel, Mississippi, around 1912 and became the legal representative of the Eastman-Gardner Lumber Company.[6] Evidently he was a great influence on his son Jimmy, who years later spoke of him as "a liberal Roman Catholic in an ultra-Protestant environment"[7] who was a "leader of a ridiculed religious minority . . . , an intense liberal for his day and age, a man who actually believed in democracy in a section where democracy was not exactly rampant."[8] In addition to James Street's own natural inclinations, his father's example probably led to his holding political and social positions which were considered liberal during his lifetime. Further, John Street's four sisters were all nuns—Sister Ambrose, Sister Mary, Sister Marcelene, and Sister Rachel[9]—and such an overwhelming Catholic

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[3]Interview, Mrs. Lucy Street, 5 July 1976.

[4]Ruth Cooper, "James Street: A Biographical and Bibliographical Study," Notes in Mississippi Writers, ed. Hilton Anderson, 9 (Hattiesburg: University of Southern Mississippi, Spring 1976), 10.

[5]Interview, James Street, Jr., 5 July 1976.

[6]Interview, Mrs. Lucy Street, 5 July 1976.

[7]"Street, James," Twentieth Century Authors, First Supplement, ed. Stanley J. Kunity (New York: The H. W. Wilson Company, 1955), p. 966.

[8]James Street, "Why I Wrote The Gauntlet," Christian Herald, March 1946, p. 34.

[9]Interview, Mrs. Lucy Street, 5 July 1976.

influence exerted pressures on Jimmy that later led to a radical change in his religious thinking.

William Scott Street also contributed to her son's nature. She was constantly befriending those in trouble, such as a boy who had knifed a schoolmate,[10] and following her example Jimmy later helped many unfortunate people, especially alcoholics. He was consistently generous throughout his life, spending much of the fortune he made from his writing.

Jimmy Street as a boy is still remembered in Laurel, especially by Harriet Starke Gibbons, widow of Thomas C. Gibbons, publisher of the Laurel Leader-Call. Mrs. Gibbons herself was once editor of the paper, but when Jimmy lived there she was his elementary school teacher. He was not a good student, Mrs. Gibbons said, and he was inclined to mischief, but he had a "sweet" personality. In an editorial which she wrote at the time of his death she said that he had been "possessed of a lively temper, a confirmed stutter, a loving heart and one of rare understanding . . . ."[11] Mrs. Gibbons' description tallied with almost every other one I have found about Street's personality at all stages of his life. Not everyone in Laurel approved of everything the author wrote about Mississippi, she said, but they were all proud of him.[12]

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[10]Interview, James Street, Jr., 5 July 1976.

[11]Gibbons, Harriet Starke, "Jimmy Street, The Laurel School Boy Who Attained Fame with His Writings, Collapses and Ends Brillian Career," Laurel (Miss.) Leader-Call, 29 Sept. 1954, LRL.

[12]Interview, Mrs. Harriet Starke Gibbons, 18 March 1977.

Over twenty years after he left Laurel, James Street wrote to Mrs. Ruth Giles, who had lived near him, describing his impressions of the town which, along with the surrounding Jones County, was the setting of several of his novels: "Laurel, Mississippi, a little melting pot that didn't melt, an unusual little Southern town, proud of its growing pains; clean and fresh, a bit cocky; a town that missed the blight of reconstruction because it hadn't been born, a community built by Northerners in the piney woods; not carpetbaggers, because most of them brought trunks and stayed; they were never land pirates."[13]

His family lived on the "respectable" side of town, but he later claimed that "respectability shackled . . . and bored me." He found his friends elsewhere: "I preferred the white 'po' folks' and the Negro because they had more fun, and they had more fun because they felt little responsibility to our feudal set-up."[14] His two favorite companions in Laurel were two Negro boys,[15] and he had vivid memories of Aunt Mattie, a Negro cook who was part Indian. She claimed to have been a slave of Greenwood Leflore and to have been born "after the stars fell," a reference to the meteor shower on the South in 1833. Street tells exaggerated stories about Aunt Mattie in Look Away!. The book gave her a grandson named Honey Boy, who was supposed to be the author's

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[13]James Street to Ruth Giles, 2 Oct. 1942, LRL.

[14]James Street, "Why I Wrote The Gauntlet," p. 44.

[15]William Covington Parker, "The Path of Street," Holland's Magazine, March 1949, MDAHc, p. 7.

childhood companion. Honey Boy is partly imaginary, but he probably originated in the Negro boys with whom Jimmy really associated.[16]

At age fourteen Jimmy began newspaper work with the Laurel Daily Leader (now the Leader-Call).[17] His first job was melting type, serving as a printer's devil, and helping with the press, but finally he graduated to reporting, earning $1.25 a week[18] by gathering personal items in interviews with farmers who had come to town on Saturdays.[19] By the time he was fifteen, however, he was reporting full time in the summer at a salary of $5.00 a week, although he did the work mainly because he enjoyed it.[20]

Jimmy attended Laurel High School and at five-feet-five-inches played end on the football team. But at seventeen, after his junior year, he dropped out, partly because of restlessness and rebellion. His parents sent him to Massey Military Academy at Pulaski, Tennessee, while they moved to Hillsdale, Mississippi.[21] But this plan for their son had only limited success, for he left the academy after three months and, in effect, ran away. The author later attributed his desire for escape to the repression which young people suffered in his youth.

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[16]Interview, James Street, Jr., 5 July 1976.

[17]Ibid.

[18]Cooper, p. 11.

[19]Bernadette Hoyle, Tar Heel Writers I Know (Winston-Salem, N.C.: John F. Blair, 1956), p. 193.

[20]Hoyle, pp. 193-194.

[21]James Street to Ruth Giles, LRL.

Denied opportunity to vent their desire for excitement, boys ran away and hoboed around the country.[22] Jimmy went west riding the "blinds" on freight trains, the section between the cars where he could not be seen.[23] He worked in wheat fields and, according to one report, finally made his way to Honolulu before coming back home.[24]

Street was on his own now, and he decided to return to Hattiesburg and accept a job with the Hattiesburg American for $8.00 a week reporting and writing feature articles and a sports column entitled "Snappy Sporting News."[25] Andy Harmon, editor of the American, later recalled how the young reporter typed stories with his short legs wrapped around his typewriter.[26] His first by-line and front-page spread came out of his coverage of a tent revival conducted by evangelist Howard S. Williams,[27] with whom he would later work. Lucy said that he also saw violence while on the American: The lynching of a Negro man in the park and violent railroad strikes made an impression on him that was reflected in his later writing.[28]

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[22]Parker, "The Path of Street," MDAHc, p. 7.

[23]Interview, Mrs. Lucy Street, 5 July 1976.

[24]Cooper, "James Street," p. 11.

[25]Ibid.

[26]Jay Milner, "Sunny Side of Street Shines in his 'South,'" rev. of James Street's South, ed. James Street, Jr., Jackson (Miss.) Clarion Ledger, 22 May 1955, LRL.

[27]Cooper, p. 11.

[28]Interview, Mrs. Lucy Street, 5 July 1976.

One night Street went to a movie in Hattiesburg, and he sat behind a girl who was engaging in distracting conversation with her date. When a friend introduced her as Lucy Nash O'Briant, he said, "It ought to be Lucy Ford, she rattles on so." With a date made later that night he and Lucy began their two-year courtship. The daughter of A. L. O'Briant, a Baptist preacher and founder of the Emmanuel Baptist Church in Hattiesburg, she was a student at Mississippi Woman's College there (now William Carey College).[29]

After almost two years on the American, Jimmy went to New Orleans to work for the Times-Picayune at $15.00 per week.[30] This job did not last long, however. While at Union Station one night he heard the announcer call for passengers traveling to Hattiesburg. Purchasing a clean shirt, he put it on over his dirty one and left to see Lucy without telling the paper. He tried to get her to marry him and come to New Orleans, but fortunately she refused; when he got back he found he had no job. He then returned to the American and also worked for a weekly paper.[31]

Marriage and Ministry

Jimmy and Lucy were married on June 20, 1923, and his salary was raised from $12.00 to $13.00 per week. The incidents which occurred

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[29]Ibid.

[30]Hoyle, p. 194.

[31]Interview, Mrs. Lucy Street, 6 July 1976.

at the time probably had something to do with the unusual twist which the next portion of his life took. His Catholic family objected to his marrying a Protestant: Lucy sardonically recalled that his nun aunts referred to her as a "little b" Baptist.[32] James Street, Jr., adds that John Street persuaded the priest not to allow the couple to marry in a Catholic church.[33] Jimmy rebelled against his family's opposition and finally against the Catholic church itself: suddenly he decided to become a Baptist preacher. He later admitted that he really did not know why he had made this unanticipated decision and said that he had acted partly out of emotion, although his strong ideas about religion had also influenced him. John Street had instilled his beliefs about democracy into his son and pointed out how those with unpopular religious opinions often suffer, and an atheist barber in Laurel had convinced him that Christ was lynched for preaching the importance of humanity.[34] All of these factors, coupled with a bride who was the daughter of a Baptist preacher, led to his forsaking the Catholic church at the age of nineteen to become a Baptist minister and to preach about brotherhood and democracy in religion, especially, as he said, to "the lowly, mostly Negroes, to the 'terrible meek.'"[35]

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[32]Interview, Mrs. Lucy Street, 5 July 1976.

[33]Interview, James Street, Jr., and Mrs. Lucy Street, 5 July 1976.

[34]James Street, "Why I Wrote The Gauntlet," p. 22.

[35]B. Asterlund, "James Street," Wilson Library Bulletin, 20 (Feb. 1946), 396.

Street entered Fort Worth's Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in September of 1923, and Lucy taught art to help provide support.[36] She said that her husband enjoyed his courses, especially homiletics, but other accounts of his experiences there state that "he was not happy in his studies, largely because he was unable to reconcile the idea of a democratic Christ with what he felt to be the superstitions of theology."[37] He himself said that at the seminary he "learned just how intolerant power can be," as his father had warned him.[38]

Jimmy and his wife left at Christmas, partly because she was pregnant and could no longer teach.[39] On February 15, 1924, he accepted a position at the Baptist church in St. Charles, Missouri, where he was ordained[40] and reportedly became the youngest ordained Baptist preacher in the nation at the time.[41] Their experiences at St. Charles were the basis for The Gauntlet, which the author said was "as nearly autobiographical as a novel could be."[42] This affirmation is not to say that the major crisis of The Gauntlet happened to him in just that way;

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[36]Interview, Mrs. Lucy Street, 5 July 1976.

[37]Asterlund, p. 396.

[38]James Street, "Why I Wrote The Gauntlet, p. 34.

[39]Interview, Mrs. Lucy Street, 5 July 1976.

[40]Records of the Southern Baptist Convention, Nashville, Tennessee.

[41]Cooper, "James Street," p. 12.

[42]James Street, "Why I Wrote The Gauntlet," p. 34.

in fact Lucy said that there never was a major crisis there at all.[43] But the characters and events of the book were suggested by the people whom they met at St. Charles and by the experiences which they had there. In the novel, London Wingo and his wife Kathie also leave the seminary when she becomes pregnant, and he is employed as the minister for a Missouri church. Kathie is obviously modeled after Lucy. For example, Lucy wore her hair bobbed in St. Charles and was called "Bobbie"; Kathie's hair causes a similar stir in the novel, and she has other conflicts with the church ladies reminiscent of encounters Lucy had. Lucy's first child, Jim, was born in June of 1924; Kathie has her first child at Linden.

There are also other parallels between The Gauntlet and the author's real experiences. Like the book's Page Musselwhite, Street wanted to become a foreign missionary, and Orville Honeycutt of The Gauntlet was modeled after a man named Wilkinson who got Street his position in St. Charles. The Upjohn family resembles one in Lucedale, Mississippi, where Street later preached, and there also he and Lucy received the "pounding" carried over to the novel, an affair where the congregation brings "pounds" of food gifts to the new minister.[44]

Street denied that he was London Wingo, but said that the character was taken from his own experiences up to London's fight with the

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[43]Interview, Mrs. Lucy Street, 5 July 1976.

[44]Ibid.

deacons. "Thereafter Wingo is the kind of preacher I rather wish I could have been."[45] Like London, he was unorthodox in his habits, spending the money from a revival to buy Lucy a black negligee, and using her fancy tea towels at baptisms. He also had at least one run-in with the church deacons comparable to London's when one Sunday afternoon, feeling the boredom of the young people, he and Lucy took them "mixed swimming"—boys and girls together. This was not an accepted practice, and the church was convened over the matter.[46] Street, like Wingo, was a good speaker, although he had a different style. He later said, "I wasn't really a preacher. I was a pulpit storyteller. But folks came to hear me. It frightened me. I was a loud little showman, a rabble-rouser, and it frightened me that people would listen to me, even believe me."[47] He also differed in that his religion was of an emotional, "spiritual" nature, while London's is more intellectual, although the author also opposed the formalism and traditions of contemporary religion.[48]

On December 7, 1924, after less than a year at St. Charles, Street moved to Lucedale, Mississippi, in order to serve the Baptist church there and, probably, in order to live in the area of his and Lucy's home and family. He had not been there long before he decided to return

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[45]James Street, "Why I Wrote The Gauntlet," p. 44.

[46]Interview, Mrs. Lucy Street, 5 July 1976.

[47]James Street, "Why I Wrote The Gauntlet," p. 44.

[48]Interview, James Street, Jr., 5 July 1976.

to college. He later said, "I was determined that if I was going to be a preacher I at least would know something about what I was preaching.[49] Lucy said that he always felt that there should be more scholarship in the Baptist church.[50] He attended Howard College (now a part of Samford University) in Birmingham, Alabama, and served the Baptist church in nearby Boyles. After a few months, however, he decided to quit preaching altogether; he was frightened by the way people were listening to him, mainly because he felt that he did not know what he was talking about. James Street, Jr., explains that both as a preacher and as a reporter his father believed that he had to know that he was right, since his job was to tell the public what was true.[51] Another reason for quitting was that he could not accept the attitudes of the people he was working with: "I couldn't reconcile the widow's mite to the deacon's might." He also thought he saw himself in Harold Frederic's The Damnation of Theron Ware, a novel about a young minister who loses his faith. When he finally quit preaching, Street said, "Nobody wept."[52] His last sermon was entitled "The First Million Years of Creation" and advocated that if Christ returned today he would be lynched as a radical.[53]

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[49]James Street, "Why I Wrote The Gauntlet," p. 44.

[50]Interview, Mrs. Lucy Street, 5 July 1976.

[51]Interview, James Street, Jr., 5 July 1976.

[52]James Street, "Why I Wrote The Gauntlet," pp. 43-44.

[53]"Street, James Howell," Current Biography, 1946 (New York: The H. W. Wilson Co., 1947), pp. 43-44.

Newspaper Career

In 1926, at age twenty-three, Street had to choose a new career. He first decided to follow his father and become a lawyer, and so he went to Poplarville to study with him while Lucy, expecting their second child, waited with her parents in Hattiesburg. This project, however, lasted only two months.[54] Theordore G. Bilbo was then preparing for the gubernatorial race of 1927, and probably because he knew John Street he offered Jimmy a job as a press agent. He accepted and moved to Jackson, Mississippi. James Street was then and continued to be a Democrat and a progressive, and thus far he could fit into the Bilbo camp; but he was also a proponent of civil rights for the Negro, and this stance soon caused him to sever his connection with Bilbo and to say later that he loathed everything that Bilbo stood for.[55] Afterwards he served briefly as a press agent for Huey P. Long,[56] with whose philosophy he was probably more comfortable.

Finances were short during these days; Street pawned his wedding ring and never got it back. Finally he took a job as a public relations agent for Howard S. Williams, former owner of the Hattiesburg American turned crusading evangelist. He began working with Williams in

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[54]Interview, Mrs. Lucy Street, 5 July 1976.

[55]Carol Leii, "Story by 'Unmusical' Author Street Is Idea for Broadway Musical Comedy," [Newspaper unidentified], 1952, UNCNBc.

[56]Cooper, "James Street," p. 13.

Pensacola, Florida, where Lucy joined him after the birth of their son John in March of 1926.[57]

But soon the Pensacola Journal offered Street a reporting job, and at last he found himself in a position with which he was comfortable. Lucy affirmed that her husband was a good reporter and that he remembered everything that he ever saw.[58] Certainly he was not afraid to go after a story; he once asked Huey Long if he wanted to be a dictator. (Long said that he did not.)[59] He did often have trouble with his employers, however; he believed in labor unions and often tried to organize the employees wherever he worked. His independent attitude also led to disagreements.[60]

A colleague on the Journal was Oliver KinCannon, who had been the best man at Jimmy and Lucy's wedding. One day an offer came to Street to work for the Baltimore Sun, and the same day KinCannon received an invitation to move to the Arkansas Gazette. Since KinCannon had a girl friend in Baltimore and Street wanted to work for the Gazette, the two simply traded offers.[61] Street went to Little Rock, where he became state editor in 1927, a position of which he was proud, for he considered the Gazette, along with the Atlanta Constitution and the Louisville

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[57]Interview, Mrs. Lucy Street, 5 July 1976.

[58]Ibid.

[59]"When a Prophet Spoke," Greensboro (N.C.) News, 22 June 1954.

[60]Cyril Clemens, "James Street: Some Personal Memories," Hobbies 60 (March 1955), 106.

[61]Interview, Mrs. Lucy Street, 5 July 1976.

Courier-Journal, to be among the best newspapers in the South and indeed the country.[62] He learned much about writing from the Gazette's editor, John Heiskel, and became acquainted with journalist Hodding Carter and radio commentator Morgan Beatty.[63]

While in Little Rock Street covered some of the sensational flood and murder stories that he wrote about in Look Away!. He reported on Lindbergh's return home and wrote a series on truck drivers after making two long-haul trips,[64] experience which was background for a series of trucking stories that he later worte for the Saturday Evening Post.

The day before Street's first vacation was to start, the Associated Press offered him a job in Memphis. He accepted and moved there in 1928, and for the next six years he was a roving correspondent in the South.[65] In Memphis he covered the city and the Mississippi River scene before being transferred to Nashville, then back briefly to Memphis, and then to Atlanta in 1929.[66] There he continued the feature reporting which was becoming his specialty. He interviewed Bobby Jones, was on duty with the Lindbergh kidnapping story broke in 1932, and covered the Miami assassination of Chicago mayor Anton Cermak in 1933. He and Lucy also became close friends with Margaret Mitchell and her husband

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[62]Interview, James Street, Jr., 5 July 1976.

[63]Interview, James Street, Jr., and Mrs. Lucy Street, 5 July 1976.

[64]Interview, Mrs. Lucy Street, 6 July 1976.

[65]"Novel by Chapel Hill Man Selected by Literary Guild," [Newspaper unidentified], 1945, UNCNBc.

[66]Interview, Mrs. Lucy Street, 6 July 1976.

John Marsh. Lucy said that although Street read the finished manuscript of Gone with the Wind, he had no professional communications with Mrs. Mitchell.[67] However, one of her friends was named Dabney, and he took a liking to the name; later he would write five novels about the Sam Dabney family.[68]

A daughter, Ann, was born to James and Lucy Street in 1933. He later said that they were all ready to pay the hospital bill in cash, and then the bank which had their money was closed.[69]

Occasionally things became dull in the AP office, and during these times Street would file off-beat stories over the wire. This practice was expensive, and Kent Cooper, general manager of the Associated Press in New York, sent orders for it to stop. But one night a routine story was received saying that the famous Chicago-to-New Orleans train, the Panama Limited, was being retired by the Illinois Central Railroad. Jimmy, acquainted with the train's reputation, wrote a feature on the occasion and sent it over the wire. He expected to be fired, and he was, but 1,400 papers picked up the story, and he was reinstated.[70] The feature also won him a transfer to New York and honorable mention

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[67]Interview, Mrs. Lucy Street, 5 July 1976.

[68]Interview, Mrs. Lucy Street, 6 July 1976.

[69]James Street to Ruth Giles, LRL.

[70]Interview, James Street, Jr., 5 July 1976.

in the Pulitzer Prize awards of 1932.[71] He later said that this incident "really started me to writing."[72]

Street arrived in New York in 1933 with one dime and wearing an over-large topcoat borrowed from his Atlanta chief, leaving Lucy in Atlanta to arrange moving. He now became the first full-time feature writer for the Associated Press, filing stories about the World Series and other New York events. He quickly made his way into the main stream of the metropolis, and when Lucy arrived by boat he met her with a gift of Rudy Vallee's autograph. That he had already gained some notoriety in the city became apparent when Walter Winchell called him "the mouth of the South."[73]

Within six months after coming to New York, Street left the Associated Press. Early in 1934 he wrote a story about the "Sligo Slasher," a bartender who had once been a prize-fighter, and it was read by William Randolph Hearst, who then called Street and offered him a large salary to work for the New York American. He accepted, despite Kent Cooper's asking Lucy to get him to stay. Jimmy said he would rather work for the aggressive Hearst: "you can see Hearst's pistols."[74]

While working on the American Street had perhaps his most exciting and colorful experiences. His assignment included the waterfront as a

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[71]Parker, "The Path of Street," MDAHc, p. 13.

[72]James Street to Ruth Giles, LRL.

[73]Interview, James Street, Jr., 5 July 1976.

[74]Interview, Mrs. Lucy Street, 6 July 1976.

ship reporter, and he had his own column with picture. He covered such stories as the tragic sinking of a cruise ship and the arrival and departure of celebrities like Lady Furness, sister of Gloria Vanderbilt, who had come to testify in the trial to give Gloria custody of her daughter.[75] He reported the voyages of the Normandie and Queen Mary, and witnessed still more floods.[76] When he did a series of stories on unusual professions, he tried each one himself to get firsthand information. These jobs led to his climbing the Brooklyn Bridge as a painter; serving as a professional dancer at Roseland; sweeping the streets as a sanitation worker; going to barber college; driving a chariot in the Barnum and Bailey Circus at Madison Square Garden; and being a lion tamer for Clyde Beatty.[77]

More serious stories were the murder cases and electrocutions—difficult assignments for Street because of his emotional nature. Four small girls in Pennsylvania were found dead on a blanket, placed there by their mother and her paramour. Lucy remembered sitting on the steps of Sing Sing prison with the children of an Italian woman being electrocuted for murdering her husband and his lover. She recalled that the lights dimmed when the switch was thrown, and that at five o'clock that morning she and Jimmy met Dorothy Kilgallen at an oyster bar.[78] Some of the executions took bizarre turns. Eva Coo was

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[75]Ibid.

[76]Parker, "The Path of Street," MDAHc, p. 13.

[77]Interview, Mrs. Lucy Street, 6 July 1976.

[78]Ibid.

convicted of feeding her chauffeur ground glass and then running over him several times with her car. She got to know the reporters well, and even sent Lucy recipes. When she was put in the electric chair, just before the hood was placed over her head, she looked at Street and said, "Good-bye Jimmy Street; I'll be seeing you."[79]

The largest story Street covered broke during the Vanderbilt custody trial. While in the court room he saw a reporter from the New York Daily News leave; he returned and called out Grace Robinson of that paper; then another reporter left. Street knew that something big had happened and reasoned it could only be that the police had caught the Lindbergh kidnapper. When the trial of Bruno Hauptmann opened in January of 1935 at Flemington, New Jersey, Street and Damon Runyan alternately covered it for the American's morning and afternoon editions. Street thought others were connected in the crime, but that Hauptmann had killed the child. He interviewed Lindbergh, who resented reporters,[80] and was present at Hauptmann's execution.[81]

But the Lindbergh trial was more important to Street as a writer than as a reporter, because while there he got the suggestion for writing a book. During the off-hours he told fellow reporters tales about the South—legends, accounts of lynchings, fables. Runyan suggested that he put them in a book,[82] and so in 1935 he produced his

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[79]Ibid.

[80]Ibid.

[81]Interview, James Street, Jr., 6 July 1976.

[82]Letter to Ruth Giles, 2 Oct. 1942, p. 5.

first full-length work, Look Away! A Dixie Notebook. Some reports say that he wrote Look Away! during the month-long Hauptmann trial, though this is probably exaggeration. Lucy said that he wrote it in their Long Island apartment in the fall of 1935, dictating most of it to a young boy from Laurel, Charles "Cubby" Beers.[83] According to James Street, Jr., the editor of Viking Press encouraged his father to complete Look Away!,[84] and Viking published it in February of 1936. Critical response was not particularly favorable, and Street later regretted writing it. He was fond of saying that "the book was entitled Look Away! and that's just what people did."[85] This response is confirmed by Harriet Starke Gibbons, who says that people in Laurel did not much like it,[86] and Lucy recalled that one lady from Mississippi said, "You know the garbage is there, but you don't have to tell everybody; you don't have to put it in the living room."[87]

Still, Look Away! was a beginning, and Street's writing skills were now drawing attention. Columnist O. O. McIntyre would later say of him: "He chips his words from the rainbow."[88] Hearst urged Street to go with him and Marian Davies on a year's cruise on the ship Rex to write about

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[83]Interview, Mrs. Lucy Street, 6 July 1976.

[84]Interview, James Street, Jr., 5 July 1976.

[85]Interview, Mrs. Lucy Street, 6 July 1976.

[86]Interview, Mrs. Harriet Starke Gibbons, 18 March 1977.

[87]Interview, Mrs. Lucy Street, 6 July 1976.

[88]Interview, Mrs. Lucy Street, 5 July 1976.

the voyage, offering a handsome salary, a new wardrobe for Lucy, and schooling for Jim and Jack in England. Jimmy declined, but the incident shows the recognition has writing was achieving.[89]

Street stayed with the American until 1937 and then left because of conflict over his trying to establish a newspaper guild. Lucy recalled that he came home with the money from his last pay sticking out of his pockets and that they had a party.[90] For a while they lived on the proceeds from Look Away! and a winning bet on a horse named Cavalcade. When the money ran out he took a position with the New York World Telegram as assistant city editor[91] and also began to write feature stories for Radio Guide, Holiday, Collier's, Cosmopolitan, and the Saturday Evening Post. On the Telegram he formed a celebrated partnership with another writer and reporter, H. Allen Smith, who was the author of several books, notably Low Man on a Totem Pole. Their families lived near each other in Jackson Heights, Long Island, and enjoyed playing games together.[92] Street and Smith were also companions in writing and drinking. Smith told of being in a bar and warning some bullies who were bothering him that his friend was coming and would thrash them. When diminuitive Jimmy walked in, one of the men

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[89]Interview, Mrs. Lucy Street, 6 July 1976.

[90]Ibid.

[91]James Street to Ruth Giles, LRL.

[92]Interview, Mrs. Lucy Street, 6 July 1976.

exclaimed, "What! That little squirt!" Jimmy attacked and was soundly drubbed.[93]

Street was not entirely happy in his position with the World Telegram. He was piqued when after writing a satire about doctors, "I've Never Lost a Father," and selling it to the Telegram for $35 and a by-line, he learned that the story was published widely elsewhere. He felt that he should have made more money: "I made up my mind then that the fellow who does the basic work—the fellow who writes it—that that fellow is entitled to some of the fat . . . . A writer is entitled to as many comforts as the printer, the publishers, the salesman—all those who live off his brain."[94] After only a few months he resigned near the end of 1937 and ended his newspaper career. He would never again work in a regular salaried position—nor would ne need to. But he was well remembered in the business. James Street, Jr., who worked with Harold Matson for a time as a literary agent, recalls a party at New York's Twenty-One Club in June of 1958 where one of his clients, Bob Sylvester, got many of Street's friends together to swap James Street stories. They included A. J. Liebling of the World Telegram; Walter Kerr of the New York Herald Tribune; and Abe Wyler and Tommy Thompson of the New York Times. Sylvester told of Hearst's coming one day into the offices of the American and asking for Street. When Sylvester told him that he had gone out for dinner with one of the

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[93]"Tar Heel of the Week: James H. Street," Raleigh (N.C.) News and Observer, 22 Jan. 1950, UNCNBc.

[94]Hoyle, p. 195.

other reporters, Hearst, undeceived, said, "Young man, for a teetotaler I suffer more from acute alcoholism than any publisher in the business."[95] Unfortunately, the acute alcoholism would soon become all too real.

James Street: Author

Street's next move was significant—he decided to write a short story. There is some confusion as to whether this was before or after he left the Telegram. By one account he said he left the paper because the story sold and he could afford to leave;[96] elsewhere he implies that he left before the story sold and wrote it because he could not get a job, was drinking, and needed money.[97] Probably he had already resigned. He gave this account of how he wrote his first story, "A Letter to the Editor:"

> I not only hadn't ever written a short story—I hadn't read 20 in my life. But I decided to write one. I walked down to the corner newsstand—Lucy (Mrs. Street) and I were living on Long Island then—and bought a Cosmopolitan because that was on top of the pile of magazines. I took it home and counted the words of every short story in it. Then I carried my typewriter to the roof and sat down and wrote a short story the right length.
>
> I mailed the manuscript to Collier's—the only copy I had, no agent, no return stamped envelope. I was an ignorant boy and it never entered my mind that they wouldn't accept it.
>
> I figured they'd pay $100 or $150 and Lucy and I could live on that if I could turn out one a week.
>
> When a reply came back and a check for $750, I wasn't surprised they'd accepted it. I just figured with that amount we'd get along on one a month.[98]

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[95]Interview, James Street, Jr., 6 July 1976.

[96]Hoyle, p. 195.

[97]Leii, "Story by 'Unmusical' Author," UNCNBc.

[98]Ibid.

The story is of an Arkansas girl who dupes a big-city newspaper into giving her a free trip to New York by a letter claiming that she is dying from radium poisoning contracted at the watch factory where she works. Street had covered a radium poisoning story while on the American.[99] According to Lucy, a literary agent named Roy Horne actually sold the story for Street to Cosmopolitan for $750 and subsequently David Selznick bought it for $5,000 to film it as "Nothing Sacred," starring Carole Lombard and Frederick March. Some time later Street was playing poker at the home of his neighbor in company with New York literary agent Harold Matson. The sale of the story to Selznick was discussed, and Matson, not knowing Street had written it, said that the author could have gotten much more for it. The next day Street left Horne and allied himself with Matson, who remained his agent for the rest of his life.[100] "A Letter to the Editor" was subsequently made into the musical "Hazel Flagg" and another picture, "Living It Up."[101] Street also wrote two more stories for Collier's in 1937, "Arkansas Traveler," a trucking story, and "Bayou Man," set in the Southern swamps. And a selection from Look Away! appeared in Reader's Digest.

Street was ready to quit newspaper work anyway, for he wanted to try free-lance writing and the money from "Nothing Sacred" gave him a chance. In 1938 he moved from Long Island to Old Lyme, Connecticut,

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[99]Interview, Mrs. Lucy Street, 5 July 1976.

[100]Ibid.

[101]Hoyle, p. 195.

and a two-hundred-year-old house which he called "The Barricades." The barricade was supposed to be against Yankees: he continued to insist that he was a Southerner. He was happy at Old Lyme, writing and raising plants and a large collection of pets. During that year he wrote several articles and a short story. The articles were feature portraits of Edward Hull Crump, mayor of Memphis; Judge Camille Kelley of the Juvenile Court of Memphis; and Grover A. Whalen, boss of the New York World Fair. American Magazine also sent him to Nebraska to write a piece on the state's tax system. The short story was "That Lonesome Road," another trucking tale.

In 1939 Street wrote three short stories: "To the Bottom and Back," "The Biscuit Eater," and "The Crusaders." "The Biscuit Eater" was the first of his boy-and-dog stories, and it became one of his most famous creations. A young boy takes a dog in which no one else has confidence and almost wins a field trials event with him. While living in Tennessee, Street had attended the national field trials at Grand Junction, which probably suggested the setting.[102] Because of the success of the story he later expanded it into a novel in 1941. Ultimately The Biscuit Eater became his best seller abroad, was translated into twenty-seven languages,[103] and was made into two motion pictures.

Perhaps the single most important year in James Street's writing career was 1940. He continued to draw on his deep-South background and

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[102]Interview, Mrs. Lucy Street, 6 July 1976.

[103]Hoyle, p. 196.

his talent for stories about children in producing short stories for the Saturday Evening Post and American Magazine: "Buck and Fo'-Bits," "Pudd'n and Tayme," and "Proud Possessor." But this year was especially eventful because it saw him write his first novel, Oh, Promised Land, and the genre of the novel would become that in which he would be most artistically and financially successful. Money was scarce in that year, and Matson and Street considered his doing a potboiler about the New York Police Department. Instead he decided to try a novel. At the time he was ghost-writing a book about Nazi spies in the United States for an American government agent named Leon Torreau, but when Matson told him that the time had come to write his own book he saw an opportunity to produce a series of romantic historical novels on Mississippi from 1795-1933, a project he had long wanted to try. He chose to begin with a character based on Sam Dale, Mississippi adventurer and explorer who settled the area around Jones County.[104]

James Street read widely and ultimately acquired a library of several thousand volumes, many of them histories of the South from 1650 to contemporary times. He admired Faulkner greatly, appreciated Hemingway and Wolfe, and once said that he read Huckleberry Finn every year.[105] He also enjoyed Zane Grey and Luke Short westerns and Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, and Agatha Christie mysteries.[106]

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[104]James Street to Ruth Giles, LRL.

[105]Clemens, "Personal Memories," p. 109.

[106]Interview, James Street, Jr., and Mrs. Lucy Street, 6 July 1976.

But he did not rely on his reading to obtain models of how to write, and his first novel was a massive historical narrative written in a journalist's style and forged out of his own study of history and Mississippi legend. Oh, Promised Land is the story of Sam Dabney and his adventures culminating in his settlement of the area of Jones County. Street of course knew a great deal about Sam Dale from local history, and to this knowledge he added the results of a large amount of historical reading. Unfortunately he was unwilling to discard any of the information which he had gathered,[107] and the book is an eight-hundred-page saga involving Sam Dabney with an incredible number of important Southern persons and events in the early nineteenth century. The author said that he had originally intended to write the life of Dale, but that he could not believe Dale's own accounts or those written about him; hence he created a fictional character like Dale whom he could treat as he wished.[108] Indian lore about Tecumseh, the Prophet, and Sequoyah he used for creating his character Tishomingo. Some of his sources were histories by Bernard de Voto; a book on Indians by Lucius Quintus Cincinnatus Lamar, Mississippi statesman; Indian information published by the state of Mississippi and the Smithsonian Institute,[109] and probably the works of Mississippi historian J. F. H. Claiborne.

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[107]Interview, James Street, Jr., 6 July 1976.

[108]"Street is Mississippi Boy," Jackson (Miss.) Clarion Ledger, 19 Feb. 1940, MDAHc.

[109]Interview, James Street, Jr., 6 July 1976.

Street wrote the novel quickly once he started. Actually, because of poor eyesight, he first composed his works mentally and then dictated them to a typist. Hence once he started dictating he would finish even a long novel very quickly; Oh, Promised Land was completed in three months.[110] He originally intended to call his first novel Blood on the Moon, but a book by Linton Wells came out with that title. Street suggested Harvest of Hate, but the editors at Dial said that a novel with the word "hate" on the cover would not sell. He finally got his title after hearing a dance orchestra play "O, Promise Me."[111] Critics were favorable toward his first book, and eventually it was to run through seventeen printings.

In the winter of 1940 Street returned to the South to live in Natchez, Mississippi. He was planning Tap Roots, the next in the sequence of novels about the Dabney clan, and Natchez would provide inspiration as well as information about Southerners who opposed the Confederacy, the plot idea for Tap Roots.[112] But other writing projects intervened before he returned to the Dabney saga. Lucy's father, A. L. O'Briant, was then a chaplain at Mississippi's Parchman Prison, located near Greenwood and renowned as the place of incarceration for such Mississippi folk heroes as Kinnie Waggoner. Probably after

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[110]Jennie B. Gardner, "Book Ends," Memphis Commercial Appeal, 12 July 1942, MDAHc.

[111]Josephine Frazier, "James Street: A Bio-Bibliography," M.A. Thesis, Florida State University, 1952, p. 16.

[112]Frazier, p. 17.

visiting there Street got the idea for In My Father's House, which he wrote in Natchez in the spring of 1941. It was published the same year, and he always considered it his best novel.[113] The story is of a boy named Hob Abernathy whose father is sent to Parchman for killing Woody Martin, the fiancé of Hob's sister Teenie. Teenie had become pregnant, and a fight broke out when Hob Abernathy, Sr., learned of her condition when Little Hob unwittingly revealed the truth to his father. In My Father's House is also filled with local color phrases and practices which Street knew from his boyhood. Most critics responded favorably to the novel, though the author said it was "a flop in America and a sensation in Europe."[114]

The Biscuit Eater was also published in 1941, as well as another successful story about a boy and dog. While in a bar in Natchez Street was shown a picture of a Basenji—an African dog known for its hunting ability and strange bark. He then wrote "Good-Bye, My Lady," a short story about a boy named Skeeter who finds a valuable lost Basenji in the Mississippi swamps. In 1954 he would expand the story into his last novel. He loved dogs and at various times owned a miscellany of breeds.[115]

Other short stories from 1941 were "Tough as Whitleather," set at the Battle of New Orleans; "River Feud"; "Crazy Folks Are Fun";

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[113]Interview, Mrs. Lucy Street, 6 July 1976.

[114]Pauley Dewitt, "Street Writes New Book: Doesn't Rest on Laurels," [Newspaper unidentified], 22 Dec. 1945, UNCBNc.

[115]Interview, Mrs. Lucy Street, 6-7 July 1976.

"In Full Glory Reflected," the first of a series of patriotic stories which Street wrote during the war; and "They Know How." This last began a series about Captain Alexander Xerxes Trowbridge (called "Little Ax") an eighteen-year-old boy who after being rejected by the Confederate army forms his own company of young marauders. He is short and cocky, and one suspects that the author was putting much of himself into the character. The Civil War fascinated him, and while living in Natchez he had opportunity to do extensive research on the battle of Vicksburg and the short career of the Confederate ironclad Arkansas, acquiring material which he used in 1944 to write By Valour and Arms, the third book in the Dabney series. Some aspects of living in Natchez appealed to Street, particularly its history and old buildings like Goat Castle. But he resented the Confederate balls and other projects capitalizing on the Civil War era, feeling that the people involved had no real concept of the significance of the historical events which had occurred there.[116]

While in Natchez Street began to meet other Southern writers. When he addressed the American Library Association in Baton Rouge, he was introduced to Roark Bradford and Lyle Saxon, and later he met William Faulkner, Eudora Welty, and Shelby Foote. Lucy said that he felt insecure around such people, largely because of his lack of education.[117]

Eventually, however, Street's editors decided that the author was running dry in Natchez. Nothing on Tap Roots had yet appeared, and

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[116]Interview, James Street, Jr., 6 July 1976.

[117]Interview, Mrs. Lucy Street, 5 July 1976.

finally Max Wilkinson of the Dial company came to Natchez to persuade him to return to New York. He needed to live closer to Harold Matson, and in New York he would have better opportunity to publish in the magazines, which were paying $750 to $1,000 per piece—a possible $15,000-$20,000 a year in 1941—money which could help subsidize his novels.[118] And so in May Street left the South again and returned to Jackson Heights, Long Island.[119]

Back in New York Street continued to write short stories and articles. World War II was well under way, and many of his pieces were in the war vein. He also contracted to collaborate on a screenplay about Mark Twain with Howard Koch, who had earlier produced "Sergeant York," starring Gary Cooper.[120] But this project failed to materialize, as did a plan for a motion picture about the Boy Scouts for which he made a trip to Hollywood.[121]

Street tried to get into the war effort himself. He and H. Allen Smith volunteered to be bakers' helpers for the Merchant Marine, but were not accepted and so served as air raid wardens instead.[122] His sons both saw action, however. Jim, a sergeant, was wounded twice in Europe; John served as a lieutenant in the Pacific.[123]

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[118]Interview, James Street, Jr., 6 July 1976.

[119]Interview, Mrs. Lucy Street, 6 July 1976.

[120][Title missing], New Orleans Times-Picayune, 3 Sept. 1941, LRL.

[121]Interview, Mrs. Lucy Street, 6 July 1976.

[122]Interview, James Street, Jr., 6 July 1976.

[123]"Novel by Chapel Hill Man," UNCNBc.

During 1942 Street wrote three more Little Ax stories: "Road to Gettysburg," "The Yanks Were Coming," and "All Out with Sherman." He also did an article called "What You Don't Know about the Infantry," and a short story entitled "The Thunder of Silence" about Tennessee country people and their attitude toward the war. And he wrote "Please Come Home, My Lady" in order to give a happier ending to the story of Skeeter and the Basenji.

Street now returned to the Dabney saga and wrote Tap Roots. The characters in the story are the children, grandchildren, and surviving friends of Sam and Honoria Dabney, and the plot is based on the fabled rebellion of Jones County, Mississippi, against the Confederacy. The author had grown up in Laurel with the legend of the "Republic of Jones." Newt Knight, a farmer in neighboring Jasper County at the time of the Civil War, did not support secession and supposedly he formed a new state in Jones County, seceded from the Confederacy, and waged war against it. John K. Bettersworth in his Mississippi: A History says that this is mostly exaggeration and fiction. Knight did oppose the war, like many other dirt farmers without cotton or slaves, and when after being drafted he heard that the Confederate conscription was taking supplies from his family back home, he and several others deserted, formed a company of their own, and refused further service. The Confederacy sent troops after them, and some of the men were caught and hanged. When all of this was publicized, the legend of the Republic of Jones began. Actually, Bettersworth says, most Jones County people supported the Southern cause, and there was no republic or secession

from the Confederacy, although Knight and his men did raid Confederate supplies.[124]

Still, it all made a good tale, and Street used it well in a story of how Hoab Dabney's clan defies the Confederate army. They are aided by Keith Alexander, who is taken from Alexander Keith McClung, dashing Mississippi orator, soldier, and gallant. The author got information about McClung from a history of that family by Craddock Goins.[125]

Street also worked into the Dabney novels the miscegenation scandal which plagued the Knight family. Reportedly, Newt Knight's daughter Molly had married Jeff Knight, son of Rachel Knight, a woman who was befriended by Newt and who was said to be a full-blooded Negro. All of this came out in a locally famous trial in 1948 when Rachel's great-grandson was convicted of miscegenation and sentenced to five years in prison for marrying a white girl.[126] Street has Sam Dabney's descendent Bruce marry a girl with Negro blood. The Knight case was covered for the St. Louis Post-Dispatch by F. A. Behymer, who later filed a fascinating feature story on his interview with the Knight family in the Soso Region of Jasper Country, where he reported that they were about as self-isolated as they had been in 1860.[127]

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[124]John K. Bettersworth, Mississippi: A History (Austin: The Steck Company, 1959), pp. 301-303.

[125]Interview, James Street, Jr., 6 July 1976.

[126]F. A. Behymer, [Title missing], Everyday Magazine of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, 9 Jan. 1949, LRL.

[127]F. A. Behymer, "The Remote No-Man's Land of Soso," Everyday Magazine of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, 10 Jan. 1949, LRL.

Sources for Tap Roots in addition to local Laurel traditions included Street's Civil War library, which contained copies of the War Department's official records of the Civil War. He also read such books as Hinton Roland Helper's The Impending Crisis and the writings of Cassius Clay.[128] Tap Roots became one of Street's most famous novels and was a Book League of America selection.[129]

Street was busy during the war years; Lucy said that he would write all night if he was going well. He had a succession of secretaries to whom he dictated, including a Hungarian who had amusing difficulties with Street's idioms.[130] Another had frost-bitten heels, and he complained he could not look at them and write romantic scenes.[131] James Street, Jr., and John Street affirm that their father was not adept at love scenes anyway, and was disturbed by off-color stories.[132]

Friends and acquaintances of the period included Philip Stong, author of State Fair; William Bradford Huie; William Saroyan; and H. Allen Smith. Street also knew and visited William Faulkner, whom he considered to be the South's best writer. Faulkner sent congratulatory letters on the publications of Oh, Promised Land and Tap Roots, and in the preface to A Fable he said that he had obtained two ideas used in

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[128]Interview, James Street, Jr., 6 July 1976.

[129]"Novel by Chapel Hill Man," UNCNBc.

[130]Gardner, "Bookends," MDAHc.

[131]Interview, Mrs. Lucy Street, 6 July 1976.

[132]Interview, James Street, Jr., 6 July 1976; John L. Street, Letter to John H. Parker, 6 June 1978.

the novel while reading Look Away!.[133] James Street, Jr., tells of meeting Faulkner on 44th Street one morning in New York and introducing himself as Street's son. Faulkner replied, "If you are, you can tell me where I can find a drink this time of day."[134]

By the early 1940's Street's alcoholism had become a major problem. At first his drinking had produced some amusing anecdotes; he later told of hiring a cab to drive him from New York to Denver for a steak at the Buck Horn cafe,[135] and of crossing the Delaware River at the spot where Washington did and renting a white horse to ride to Trenton.[136] Soon, however, the involvement with alcohol would cease to have any amusing aspects. For long periods he would be unable to write, and a diary kept at the time contained entries of "no work," signifying stays in hospitals for the treatment of alcoholism.[137] Eventually he would be treated in twenty-seven different hospitals.[138] Finally, however, he learned to cope with the problem, and in North Carolina he became a leader in the Alcoholics Anonymous program.[139]

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[133]William Faulkner, A Fable (New York: Random House, Inc., 1950), p. iii.

[134]Interview, James Street, Jr., 5 July 1976.

[135]"Chapel Hill Man," Holiday, 16(July 1954), 33.

[136]"Tar Heel of the Week," UNCNBc.

[137]Interview, James Street, Jr., 6 July 1976.

[138]"Tar Heel of the Week," UNCNBc.

[139]DeWitt, "Street Writes New Book," UNCNBc.

Of the seven short stories which Street wrote in 1943, six had a war-time setting. The stories were "Sort of a Old Song," about a short air-raid warden; "Yellow Shoes"; "Lay Your Bible Down," the fourth Little Ax story; "The Old Gordon Place"; "Set the Wild Echoes Flying"; "Ole Holy Joe"; and "Three Hundred Miles of Christmas." "Set the Wild Echoes Flying," the story of an Irish-American soldier who dies leading an assault while playing an Irish war-pipe, was one of his most successful short stories.

In 1944 the author wrote the third novel in the Dabney series and entitled it By Valour and Arms, the motto on the seal of the state of Mississippi. The plot is partly concerned with the activities of the Confederate ironclad Arkansas at the battle of Vicksburg. While living in Natchez Street had done extensive research at Vicksburg, at the Mississippi Department of Archives and History in Jackson, and in his own library. He read biographies of generals and admirals, as well as histories such as Fletcher Pratt's The Navy—A History, and also corresponded with historians, including Bruce Catton. Still, he was a storyteller, not an historian, and most of By Valour and Arms is fictional; for example he added a Confederate ship, the D. A. Elliot, named after his brother-in-law.[140] Street's writing experience and practice were now beginning to work in his favor. His plots were more unified and precise, and he was capitalizing on his strengths. The reviews of By Valour and Arms were almost all favorable.

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[140]Interview, James Street, Jr., 6 July 1976.

Two short stories appeared in 1944, "The Golden Key" and "The House," the latter an obviously autobiographical account of the author's reporting and writing career. The narrator is the son of a newspaper man who becomes a writer of short stories and novels. Beginning in Nashville, the rambling plot tells of the father's failures and successes in getting published, the family's moving from town to town, and their search for a place to build the house they dreamed of. Street always wanted a large white house on a hill. The father, Charles Lawrence, follows the author's habits—he buys his wife a black silk negligee, he writes up on the roof with no shirt, he types his drafts, and after writing for a New York paper, he decides to free-lance. He sees a place in Mississippi which he describes as comparable to Moses' "promised land," but finally moves to Connecticut. And when Hollywood buys Lawrence's book, he finds a place in North Carolina to build his dream house. This last detail is significant, for it shows that in 1944 Street was already considering moving to North Carolina.

In 1945 Street wrote The Gauntlet, an autobiographical novel and his best selling book. He later said that when he first started free-lance writing he had "scorned churches," but had still wanted to write a novel about a church entitled Doxology. He was surprised to find himself putting religion into his other stories, and finally when Harold Matson told him that Doubleday wanted a book about a Protestant minister he wrote The Gauntlet. Street lamented that in the novel he had been detected at his "weakest point—my fear that I, myself, will learn that fundamentally I am a religious man, and I don't want to

be."[141] James Street, Jr., and Lucy Street insisted that he remained very much attached to the Christian religion. Eventually he became Episcopalian, though his son John believes that he "remained more of a Catholic."[142]

The Gauntlet sold over 750,000 copies before publication,[143] and as a Literary Guild selection it sold over one million copies.[144] Street once said that the whole project amounted to six million dollars in printing, advertising, sales, and movie rights.[145] Paramount bought the motion picture rights for $75,000 on the same day that another producer bought the rights for Oh, Promised Land for an identical figure.[146] There were some repercussions from The Gauntlet's appearance. Street reported that Baptist book stores would not sell it because they thought it presented their denomination in an unfavorable light.[147] Time magazine also suffered some inconvenience: one of the characters in the novel had cut holes in a Time subscription card as a gesture of

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[141]James Street, "Why I Wrote The Gauntlet," p. 34.

[142]Interview, James Street, Jr., 5 July 1976; John L. Street, Letter to John H. Parker, 6 June 1978.

[143]"James Street, Famed Magnolia State Author, Dies," Jackson (Miss.) Daily News, 29 Sept. 1954, LRL.

[144]Interview, Mrs. Lucy Street, 6 July 1976.

[145]"Street Talks to Kiwanians in Chapel Hill," [Newspaper unidentified], 1946, UNCNBc.

[146]DeWitt, "Street Writes New Book," UNCNBc.

[147]Charles F. Hudson, "James Street Urges Understanding between United States and Russia," [Newspaper unidentified], 1946, UNCNBc.

protest, and subsequently Time received a host of similarly mutilated cards.[148]

Another book of 1945 was Short Stories, a collection of tales which feature children. Part of the motivation of this project was twelve-year-old Ann's insistence that her father dedicate a book to her, since he had dedicated earlier novels to her older brothers.[149]

In a September 1945 article Street was quoted as saying that he planned to move from New York back to Jones County and settle "among the pines and mud and mortgages and mules where I was reared";[150] instead he moved to Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Now financially secure, he wanted to settle down; he claimed to have moved nineteen times in twenty-two years.[151] He went back to the South because it was still the place he loved, and he probably chose Chapel Hill for a variety of reasons. An important one was that there he could send his children to the University of North Carolina. Another was that Lucy told him that if he moved back to Mississippi the people there would ride him out of town on a rail.[152] James Street, Jr., explains that in 1945 one could live in the deep South and be a champion of Negro rights if he were Hodding Carter, but if he were living by writing fiction he had to sell he could

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[148]Interview, James Street, Jr., 6 July 1976.

[149]Cooper, "James Street," p. 14.

[150]"Jimmy Street Coming South," Memphis Commercial Appeal, 12 Sept. 1936, LRL.

[151]Asterlund, p. 396.

[152]Interview, Mrs. Lucy Street, 5 July 1976.

not.[153] Street called Chapel Hill the "southern part of heaven."[154] Fulfilling his long-cherished dream, he bought a white house on a hill in the Westwood section, as well as a farm six miles away.

Between 1944, the year of By Valour and Arms, and 1949, the year of Tomorrow We Reap, Street published only five short works and no full-length books. The short works were "A New Year's Prayer" (1946), "Prayer for a Future President" (1947), and two short stories entitled "Symphony in Siler City" (1947) and "I Am Not a Stranger" (1948). This dearth in production came because he found living in Chapel Hill and working on pet projects more appealing than writing.

He was famous and successful when he came to North Carolina and moved into the large white house, and for the first time he could relax, work on his farm and hobbies (he collected pipes, rare cacti, walking sticks), and generally do as he pleased while still having enough time to write.

Life was pleasant at Westwood. James Street, Jr., recalled lively discussions at the dinner table lasting two or three hours, with religion and politics often the topics, and how Street insisted on having coffee, tea, water, and buttermilk all at his plate. Guests were frequent and plentiful, and supper was often served in the yard. Lucy remembered how Street laughed hysterically when an opossum fell from a tree into her lap. The house was filled with people and pets, all of

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[153]Interview, James Street, Jr., 5 July 1976.

[154]Portrait, Nation's Business, June 1952, MDAHc.

them welcome, including the alcoholics whom the author befriended. He was very generous, and invited Lucy's parents to come and live with them.[155]

Street was impressed with the intellectuals in Chapel Hill such as his neighbor Rupert Vance, sociologist and author of Exploring the South. He felt insecure about his education and talent, though he finally realized the worth of his own contributions.[156] Eventually he made many friends among the university faculty, including C. D. Van Cleave, professor of anatomy. Ironically, Street was the one who introduced Van Cleave to several faculty members.[157]

James Street is remembered most by his friends for his personality—his energy, enthusiasm, wit, and conversation. These people sought his company, and many of them were interesting themselves: C. D. Van Cleave; Walter Spearman, of the university's journalism department; William Friday, later president of the university; Alexander Heard, later chancellor of Vanderbilt University; playwright Paul Green; Charlotte publisher Harry Golden; author Betty Smith; and many other newspaper and literary people. He also made friends with colorful figures like Chapel Hill's Dr. Brack Lloyd. Street helped give a party after Lloyd delivered his two-thousandth Negro baby.[158]

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[155]Interview, James Street, Jr., and Mrs. Lucy Street, 5-6 July 1976.

[156]Interview, James Street, Jr., 7 July 1976.

[157]Interview, C. D. Van Cleave, 7 July 1976.

[158]Interview, James Street, Jr., and Mrs. Lucy Street, 6 July 1976.

Van Cleave remembers especially the author's "incredibly interesting newspaper stories" and calls him an extraordinary conversationalist.[159] Usually he led the discussions; his friend Adelaide Walters said that at a party he would only yield this attention to Harry Golden.[160] To Paul Green, Street's enthusiasm was most memorable. He recalled how eager and "keen" Street was in discussions and how excited he would get about what he was doing. He once proudly presented Green with two lamentable hams from his farm. The Greens' excellent cook later pronounced them inedible, but the playwright told her to brag on them anyway.[161]

Paul Flowers, staff writer for the Memphis Commercial Appeal, wrote the following about Street after the author visited that city in 1944: "Paradoxical chap. Dramatically tender one moment, violently assertive the next. Wondering what it's all about, dreaming of a never-never Holy Grail or Golden Fleece in one breath, proclaiming the masterfulness of Jimmy Street in the next. Yearning for his Southern homeland, and rushing like mad back to the fleshpots of his Egypt along the Hudson. Whatever judgment is passed on Jimmy Street, no man will ever accuse him of being dull.[162]

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[159]Interview, C. D. Van Cleave, 7 July 1976.

[160]Interview, Mrs. Adelaide Walters, 8 July 1976.

[161]Interview, Paul Green, 6 July 1976.

[162]Paul Flowers, "Paul Flowers' Greenhouse," Memphis Commercial Appeal, 6 Oct. 1944, LRL.

Street loved to attract attention, and often he would dress in a T-shirt and dungarees to shock people who knew he was famous. He wore odd clothes anyway, for he was color blind and his tailor could sell him nearly anything. He was also given to dramatic displays in behavior. Sometimes he and his barber, Y. Z. Canon (so named because he was the last child), would get into political arguments—Y. Z. was a Republican. One day Street stormed out of Y. Z.'s shop and loudly inquired at another until he found a Democrat barber.[163]

Yet at times, Lucy said, Street could be difficult to live with. He became moody and depressed, and was even hospitalized for a nervous condition.[164] Paul Green remembered an occasion when Street was one of a company that presented a cultural program in Dunn, North Carolina. He made a good talk, but on the way back was dejected, saying he had done terribly. By early the next morning he was in a very depressed emotional condition.[165]

Street was involved with several civic and social programs while living in Chapel Hill, serving as a national councilman with the Boy Scouts of America and working with Alcoholics Anonymous. He often spoke at AA meetings and was active in promoting the concept of treating alcoholism as a disease by using group therapy and spiritual therapy.[166]

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[163]Interview, Mrs. Lucy Street, 6 July 1976.

[164]Interview, Mrs. Lucy Street, 6 July 1976.

[165]Interview, Paul Green, 6 July 1976.

[166]"Tar Heel of the Week," UNCNBc.

Frequently he was called by alcoholics for help, and on one occasion he encountered a drunkard on the streets, took him to a city jail for lodging, and spent the night there with him.[167]

A favorite project of the author was his 130-acre organic farm. This idea came from an honors paper written by James Street, Jr., who had returned from the war and was now a graduate student at the University of North Carolina. He had read Virgil's theories in the Georgics about farming with the use of crop rotation, legumes, seed treatment, shallow plowing, organic soil treatment, rock mulching, and other techniques.[168] All of this agreed with Street's thinking that chemical fertilizers were bad for the soil as well as for the people who ate produce from chemical farming, and so he decided to try returning only natural compost to the soil with the aid of imported earthworms.[169] He also corresponded with Lewis Bromfield, author of The Rains Came, about organic farming.[170] He invested much effort and money on the project and enjoyed reasonable success, obtaining sixty bushels of corn per acre from land that formerly had produced fifteen.

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[167]"No Hospital Available, Author Beds Drunkard in Local Constabulary," Chapel Hill (N.C.) Daily Tar Heel. 31 July 1946, UNCNBc.

[168]"Jim Street Farms as Virgil Said," [Newspaper unidentified], 1949, UNCNBc.

[169]"Tar Heel of the Week," UNCNBc.

[170]Interview, James Street, Jr., 6 July 1976.

He also stocked it with poultry, bees, fruit trees, and fish,[171] and at one time he had six hundred hogs there.[172]

Another purpose which Street had for the farm was to prove that a Negro, given the same advantage as a white man, will succeed as well financially. He employed a Negro man as manager, paying him a salary until the project was under way and then working with him on a share-crop basis.[173] But this aspect of the project was disappointing. According to Lucy, the employee exceeded his privileges with the facilities while Street was ill.[174] When additional trouble came because a boy drowned in the fish lake, Street finally lost interest in the farm.[175]

Still, Street persisted in his opinion that the Negro should receive political and social justice, as was illustrated by an incident in 1948 in Meridian, Mississippi. Although the motion picture version of Tap Roots, starring Van Heflin as Keith Alexander and Susan Hayward as Morna, had been filed in Asheville, North Carolina, the premiere was held in Laurel on August 20, and Street agreed to attend.[176] On the way there he landed at Meridian, where the Thurman-Wright ticket of the

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[171]"Jim Street Farms as Virgil Said," UNCNBc.

[172]"Tar Heel of the Week," UNCNBc.

[173]Tom MacCaughelty, "Still Radical When It Comes to Farming, Street Swings to Right on Negro Issue," Durham (N.C.) Morning Herald, 12 Sept. 1948, UNCNBc.

[174]Interview, Mrs. Lucy Street, 6 July 1976.

[175]Interview, James Street, Jr., 7 July 1976.

[176]"'Tap Roots' Will Be Shown in Laurel: James Street to Be Present," Jackson (Miss.) Clarion Ledger, 20 Aug. 1948, MDAHc.

Dixiecrat party was in the news, and during an interview a reporter asked him what he thought of it. He replied, "States' Rights Democratic platform stinks . . . . The Dixiecrats will not even carry Mississippi." He added that he though Mississippi politics "never gets the educated people."[177]

In reaction to these statements, A. L. Royal, owner of the Meridian theatre which was to show "Tap Roots," announced, "His remarks were adverse to our traditions, our beliefs, and our way of life, and on the basis of this attitude by Mr. Street, I have canceled the showing of his picture in my theatre."[178] Later Royal agreed to show the film and donate all net proceeds to the States' Rights cause. Oliver Emmerich McComp, Meridian publisher, spoke at a States' Rights dinner at the theatre and said of Street that the ability to write a book "does not imply the wisdom to protect the liberties of the people." McComp said that the author was indeed talented at fiction to make such a remark, and that on November 2, 1948, he would be recognized as a talented writer but "a complete washout" as a political prophet.[179]

Street often angered people by his remarks about the South and its social and political creeds. He felt that the region was being sold out just as it had been in 1861 by leaders who were determined to

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[177]Joe Carson, "Meridian Won't See 'Tap Roots,' Street's Statements Not Liked," Memphis Commercial Appeal, 21 Aug. 1948, MDAHc.

[178]Ibid.

[179]Joe Carson [?], "Publisher Denounces Street as a Poor Political Prophet," Memphis Commercial Appeal, 14 Sept. 1948, CA1.

preserve the status quo.[180] Such movements as the Dixiecrats would only preserve the closed-mind attitude that created what he called a political vacuum. The Democratic politicians could continue to take the South for granted, and the Republican party would not try to work with it.[181]

Street felt that the South should move ahead, not dwell on the past with such moonlight-and-magnolia events as the Natchez pilgrimage and talk about the old South. Shortly before his death in 1954 he urged a group of North Carolina feature writers to write less about the past and more about issues of the present, especially civil rights.[182] The Negro should be helped, he thought, and this problem should be entrusted neither to "the New York crowd or to the Dixiecrats."[183] In 1946 he declared, "Unless we people in North Carolina solve our Negro problem it will be solved for us."[184] He felt that blacks should be allowed in labor unions, arguing that if they made more money the economy would improve.[185] The Southern prejudice toward blacks, as well as the traditional Southern matriarchy, restricted growth and caused needed

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[180]"Mr. Street and the Civil War," rev. of The Civil War, Greensboro (N.C.) Daily News, 29 Nov. 1953, UNCNBc.

[181]A. G. Weems, "Street's Positive on South—In Negative Sort of Way," Memphis Commercial Appeal, 24 Aug. 1948, MDAHc.

[182]"One Way Street," High Point (N.C.) Enterprise, 13 Sept. 1954, UNCNBc.

[183]Weems, "Street's Positive," MDAHc.

[184]"James Street Urges Understanding," UNCNBc.

[185]Interview, James Street, Jr., 5 July 1976.

people to leave.[186] Perhaps these liberal ideas were one reason for Street's love of the University of North Carolina, which he regarded as the "bulwark of liberalism in the South."[187]

Street was strongly in favor of education. Having missed obtaining even a high school diploma, he wanted his children to have the most training possible, and they attended both public schools and elite private institutions. Jack went to Iowa State University to become an insurance actuary, while Jim attended the university at Chapel Hill. His father was especially proud when Jim received his Ph.D. degree in history there.[188]

In 1949 Street decided to put the remainder of the Dabney story in a new novel. But he had not written a book in several years, and feeling that this time he needed help he decided to collaborate on the project with his friend James Childers. Childers, book editor for the Birmingham News-Age-Herald,[189] seemed to be a natural for an adventure novel. Phi Beta Kappa and a Rhodes Scholar, he had served in the U.S. Air Force in World War I, in the Intelligence division of the Air Force in World War II, had taught English at Birmingham Southern University, and had authored several travel books, including Sailing South American Skies and From Siam to Suez.

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[186]Interview, James Street, Jr., 7 July 1976.

[187]"Tar Heel of the Week," UNCNBc.

[188]Interview, Mrs. Lucy Street, 6 July 1976.

[189]P[aul] F[lowers], "The Fabulous Dabneys Return, but Their Creator Has Helper," Memphis Commercial Appeal, 3 July 1949, MDAHc.

The remaining story called for Mingo Dabney to go to Cuba, and Street and Childers went there for a month to gather background material. They also got information at the University of North Carolina from Professor Federico G. Gil of the Institute of Latin American Studies and Professor Nicolson B. Adams of the Department of Spanish.[190] In writing the novel they tried the method used by Charles Nordhoff and James Hall for Mutiny on the Bounty: each would write a different chapter and then let the other rewrite it. But the project did not work well. James Street, Jr., explains that as a travel writer Childers did not have the novelist's touch, and finally the Dial editors decided that Street should complete the work alone.[191] The manuscript which the two authors had produced contained the stories of both Tomorrow We Reap and Mingo Dabney. Street rewrote it so that the first part of the story appeared separately as Tomorrow We Reap, but this was the portion which Childers had been most instrumental in writing, and the attempt to consolidate the ideas of two writers was unsatisfactory. James Street, Jr., says that this novel was the only one of his father's which did not make the major best-seller lists.[192] It deals with the Dabneys in the lumber business in the Jones County area, which is located in the Piney Woods section of southeast Mississippi. Street's father had served as attorney for a northern lumber company similar to the one in the novel.

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[190]Interview, James Street, Jr., 7 July 1976.

[191]Interview, James Street, Jr., 7 July 1976.

[192]Ibid.

Tomorrow We Reap was published in 1949, and with it the author returned to a full-time writing career. Street placed writers into three categories: the artists, such as Faulkner and Wolfe; the literary craftsmen or storytellers; and finally those who wrote solely for money. He thought of himself as a craftsman or storyteller, and on the whole his self-analysis was correct. He was not an artist, though some passages of In My Father's House and Good-Bye, My Lady might raise him to that level, and though some of his writing received favorable attention from those he called artists and of those who study artists. Wilbur Daniel Steele admired his short stories,[193] and the University of South Carolina included his "I Am Not a Stranger" in an anthology of Southern stories. Street himself said shortly before his death that the books he was planning for the future would be of a more serious nature than those which he had already written. Still, he once said, "I will never write the great American novel for one reason—I can't."[194]

Certainly Street was much more than a mercenary, though he did write for profit. He complained that he did not like to write, that it was hard work,[195] and he was fond of quoting Samuel Johnson: "No man but a fool ever wrote except to make money."[196] Street made money by writing, but he wrote also because he either had a point to make or,

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[193]Interview, James Street, Jr., 6-7 July 1976.

[194]"Chapel Hill Man," p. 33.

[195]Gardner, "Book Ends," MDAHc.

[196]Clemens, "Personal Memories," p. 109.

more often, because he loved to tell a story. He was a literary craftsman, and he made his place in American letters by storytelling.

While visiting Chapel Hill to talk with Lucy Street and James Street, Jr., I interviewed Paul Green, author of In Abraham's Bosom, winner of the 1927 Pulitzer Prize for drama. After a splendid fried-chicken dinner in his country home, I talked with Mr. Green in his library about his friend James Street and about Southern authors, and he gave this analysis of Mississippi writers which explains and specifies Street's contributions:

> It is interesting that that blind, narrow-minded city and state—Oxford and other cities—produced such a good group of writers: Stark Young, William Faulkner, Eudora Welty, Tennessee Williams, Jimmy Street, and many others. In some ways that state has been more prolific in writers than any Southern state. All of those men that I mentioned are story-tellers. After the age of the statesmen—Washington, Jefferson, any of those fellows—we passed on to the age of frustration, and our statesmen after the Civil War became more and more demagogues: the Bilbos, the Huey Longs, the Herman Talmadges. [Out of] these orators—they were oratorical fellows—and [out of] the word men and the telling of stories, and out of the violence and frustration somehow the South became more people talking, either on a rostrum, or telling stories, or from word of mouth. Out of this South which had the African heritage through the slave, the Fundamentalist religion—the fellows with the dire story about heaven and hell, drawing pictures of their red-light days and how they had repented and the Lord had saved them—out of all this the people talked and told. Take Joel Chandler Harris down in Georgia. In the North and Middle West [there were] more engineers and inventions and traders and businessmen. In the South [people were] . . . more full of myth, this myth thing in the South. Somehow the South became more—well, making up lies. They made lies about themselves. When I was a little boy, I was raised on the truth that the South was the only right: we were right, the Yankees were wrong, and that one Southerner could whup three Yankees; and the reason we lost the war was that something had happened wrong—maybe their cannon had gotten mired up or there came a big rain. So in justifying herself the South created these myths. So we've been a storytelling people,

> and making up things. And so in the middle of the most Southern [region] of all there was the most myth-making in Mississippi. Now in Puritan New England there was a storytelling time—Hawthorne and so on: a different kind, almost purely moralistic—right and wrong things—the Puritans. But down here it was more of a pagan, pure invention. So Jimmy's right in the Southern tradition as a storyteller. Down here, due to our frustration and so on, we justified ourselves greatly through the stories we made up. I don't think we were terribly keen on storytelling until the Civil War came along. (197)

Street was a genuine professional, Green said, and he could read a piece of writing and spot an amateur. He did not like works with too strong a message; with him the story came first, then the characterization, and only then any message which the author had in mind. Green also thought that the single best writing trait Street had was his simplicity and directness; he could weave words, but not like Wolfe or Faulkner could. He admired their ability, but he was more concerned in his own writing with getting on with the story: "For a straight storyteller, I guess Jimmy was about as good as any of them."[198]

James Street, Jr., says that his father did not talk much to others about his writing, for he felt that if he got to talking about it he would not do it. He was also reluctant to read other's stories, fearing that he would be influenced and lose his originality.[199] But he was very energetic and persistent in seeking information. He said he lived in Chapel Hill because he was close to the library whose books

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[197]Interview, Paul Green, 6 July 1976. The writer has edited the taped conversation with Mr. Green, and this quotation is consequently not verbatim.

[198]Ibid.

[199]Interview, James Street, Jr., 5-6 July 1976.

furnished him with plots.[200] There are several accounts of his traveling to get background material, notably the trips to Natchez and Cuba already mentioned, as well as a journey to Guatamala in 1952.[201] He once spent a month tracking down the occasion of a single statement by General Sherman.[202]

Following a theory reminiscent of Poe's, Street always wrote his short stories in one sitting.[203] He described his writing method as follows:

> How do I work? Well, when I am doing a novel, I plot ahead of time. I get an idea, then plot it. I start one or two or three persons at Point A and then take them to Point Z via Points C, R, F, and so forth. I tell what happens to them on the way, the folks they meet and the things that they do. That's all. All this I have in my mind before I start . . . . I dictate my books. Have to. Bad eyes. I just sit down and start talking to my secretary . . . . She takes it down. I talk until I get tired. I never write in longhand—can't read my own handwriting.
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> I go to work at 8:30. That is, dictating. I get up around 7:00 and walk around the house, poking at flowers, but I am plotting for the day. Then when . . . my secretary arrives, I start talking about what I've been thinking about. I dictate about three hours. Then we knock off. I read what she has taken down. I don't revise. I edit a bit—a word here and there, squeeze out adjectives and all that, and it's done. In other words, I usually know what I aim to do before I do it.[204]

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[200]Burton, "Variety of Subjects," UNCNBc.

[201]Leii, "Story by an 'Unmusical' Author," UNCNBc.

[202]H. Allen Smith, "Belated Scoop," St. Louis Post Dispatch, 3 Nov. 1941, MDAHc.

[203]"James Street," Unpublished report, MDAHc.

[204]Hoyle, pp. 196-197.

Occasionally Street would analyze his writing. He acknowledged that he was often unkind to women but said he did not know why.[205] When chided for including sex and profanity in his novels, his defense was that he did not include these elements to sell books ("A 'sweet' book always will outsell an 'earthy' book") but that his characters realistically would behave and speak as he had them do and he was striving for honesty.[206] He evidently thought such elements were relative. In 1946, addressing the University of North Carolina Faculty Club, he said of a novel which he considered salacious, "such sexy books . . . wouldn't have such a tremendous sale if the reading public took the stand it wouldn't read such stuff."[207] Evidently he did not include his own novels in that category.

When Street moved to Chapel Hill he became a member of a writer's group formed by Paul Green which also included James Childers; Betty Smith (A Tree Grows in Brooklyn); Street's friend Noel Houston; Harlan Hatcher, later president of the University of Michigan; and others. Street would sometimes read at the meetings, and he was also a part of various writing and cultural programs at Chapel Hill, such as a taped radio series also involving Robert Penn Warren, Archibald McLeish, Wilbur Daniel Steele, and Robert Frost. In addition to performing among

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[205]Gardner, "Book Ends," MDAHc.

[206]James Street to Ruth Giles, LRL.

[207]"Author Says Good Books Will Await Popular Demand," [Newspaper unidentified], 1946, UNCNBc.

this illustrious company, he helped with a family enrichment program called "Culture and Collards."[208]

In January of 1950 Dial published Mingo Dabney, the story of Mingo's aiding Cuban revolutionaries in their revolt against the Spanish. The following month The Biscuit Eater was republished. In addition Street wrote two pieces for the Saturday Evening Post—one short-story, "Carnival Queen," and a feature article on "Cities of America." The latter was the beginning of a series of articles he would write on American cities and localities, most of them appearing in Holiday magazine.

LeBaron R. Barker, executive director of Doubleday, visited Street in Chapel Hill and persuaded him to write a sequel to The Gauntlet.[209] The result was The High Calling, published in 1951, which has a matured London Wingo supervising the formation of a new Baptist church some twenty years after the time of The Gauntlet.

The following year was devoted to pieces for magazines. One short story appeared in the Saturday Evening Post, "Is the Girl Worth the Gamble?"—a story about a North Carolina tobacco grower who uses a high-risk method to get a crop valuable enough for him to marry from the proceeds. Street got the idea from a remark by one of Ann's friends.[210] The rest of his works that year were articles, including a feature of

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[208]Interview, Paul Green, 6 July 1976.

[209]Interview, Mrs. Lucy Street, 7 July 1976.

[210]Interview, Mrs. Lucy Street, 6 July 1976.

Laurence F. Lee, recently-elected president of the Chamber of Commerce of the United States. Others were written for Holiday: "Jubilee Town," featuring Mobile; "Louisiana"; and "Houston, U.S.A."

These travel features were continued in 1953 with "Heart of Florida" and Dazzling Dallas," and Cosmopolitan also reprinted "Nothing Sacred." Perhaps Street's most unusual production in 1953 was an article prompted by Harry Sions of Holiday called "The Civil War," which led to a book published by Dial that year entitled The Civil War: An Unvarnished Account of Its Late but Still Lively Hostilities, a light, satirical, sometimes sarcastic attempt to debunk myths about the war. In it Street indulged his passion for what James Street, Jr., called the "double reverse," affirming the opposite of what most people would believe to be true. For example, the author states that Mrs. Grant owned slaves, that "Dixie" was written by a Yankee and "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" by a Southerner, that Lincoln thought the same way as most Southerners, etc. Street often employed such tactics in conversation, and now he put them to use in an amusing if unimportant history. The following year he would publish a similar account of the Revolutionary War, and at the time of his death he was working on the War of 1812. He intended to add the Spanish-American War[211] and to publish all these books together.[212]

The most significant work of 1953 was The Velvet Doublet, a novel about Columbus. The narrator of the story is Juan Rodrigo Bermejo,

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[211]Interview, James Street, Jr., 7 July 1976.

[212]Cooper, "James Street," p. 18.

the sailor who actually first saw land on the voyage to the new world and whom Columbus allegedly cheated out of his reward of a velvet doublet and his credit for the sighting. Much of the book is about Judaism in Spain in the fifteenth century and the persecution of its followers, an idea which grew out of Street's friendship with Harry Golden, Charlotte publisher of The Carolina Israelite. Street believed that Columbus himself was a secret adherent to the Jewish faith.[213] He also stated in 1952 that the explorer was "a complete fraud, a near idiot, a liar, and a double-crosser."[214] Information on Columbus came from the works of Samuel Eliot Morison, and information on Judaism from Jewish anthologies and encyclopedias as well as from Golden.[215]

In 1954, the year of his death, Street wrote two articles for Holiday, "The American Revolution" and "South." The former he expanded into The Revolutionary War: Being a Demythed Account of How the Thirteen Colonies Turned a World Upside Down, a work of the same debunking approach as its predecessor, The Civil War.

As early as 1945 Street had been planning a novel entitled Wire, Briar, Limberlock.[216] Now the idea led to an expansion of his 1941 short story "Weep No More, My Lady" into full-length form, with the

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[213]Interview, James Street, Jr., 7 July 1976.

[214]Burton, "Variety of Subjects," UNCNBc.

[215]Interview, James Street, Jr., 7 July 1976.

[216]Paul Flowers, "About Street and Roark," Memphis Commercial Appeal, 1 July 1945, MDAHc.

title Good-Bye My Lady.[217] It was to be the last of his novels and one of his best. The style is lean and to the point, the descriptive passages are vivid, and the characterization is clear and poignant. His talent and experience were bringing him to increasingly higher levels of writing. Unfortunately, he did not live to see Good-Bye, My Lady in print. His last completed work was a short story, "The Grains of Paradise," which the Saturday Evening Post received two days after he died.[218]

Street went to the Carolina Inn in Chapel Hill on the evening of September 28, 1954, to present awards at a meeting of the North Carolina Associated Press. Also present was Scott Jarrett, a Chapel Hill radio commentator, who described in his broadcast the next day what happened at the meeting. The speaker for the occasion was a reporter from the Pentagon, and he made several political remarks which angered Street. Jarrett gives this account of what occurred when the author was introduced next to present awards:

> As he bounds from his chair, Mr. Street explodes. It is not a considered statement he is making . . . he has no notes . . . he simply and purely explodes. Before he gets on with the business of these awards, he says, he must ask for lenience as he makes a few remarks about the Reporter's speech. He uses a cuss word a couple of times, because, as I say, he is in the process of exploding and it just seems to fit. It doesn't take very long, this combustion fired by the mind and will and convictions of a talented writer, but it is spectacular while it lasts. And it lasts long enough for the Reporter and his audience to get the idea that Mr. Street is not in

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[217] DeWitt, "Street Writes New Book," UNCNBc.

[218] "About the Author," SEP, 227 (14 May 1955). 20.

> accord with the master plan from the Pentagon . . . . The explosion over—or at least under control—Mr. James Street proceeded to fulfill his mission of living the part of a unique and vital human being. Although I have not had the privilege of observing him in action prior to last night, I am positive James Street was at his wittiest if not his most uninhibited. Having demostrated that the primary right of an American is to rear up on his hind legs and howl when he runs into something he considers wrong—. . . having made use of the world's most important freedom—freedom of speech—the James Street charm and repartee as he presented awards to various members of the radio industry in North Carolina was a treat to behold in operation. Never at a loss for the right word at the right time . . . his eyes sparkling and his shock of white hair gleaming like a banner . . . James Street cleared the atmosphere like a summer storm. As the recipients approached for their certificates they were met by a warm handclasp and a friendly smile. His sincerity warmed you like sunlight. You felt he was even happier to present you with the award than you were happy to receive it. Standing with him to be photographed was more than an honor . . . it was fun. When a news commentator challenged him on the position he had taken during his opening remarks, he gaily offered to meet the man in open debate any place, any time. Mr. Street was gay when he said that—but you knew he meant it. The commentator knew it too. And when one recipient took occasion to salute James Street as the greatest living writer . . . he replied, "I would consider myself great if I could write only one line by Faulkner." These, then, are the things I remember about last night. After a brief business meeting, we adjourned. As I stood by the door chatting I mentioned my desire to ask Mr. Street to autograph our picture when it comes out—glancing toward the end of the room as I said it. James Street's head was lying on the table like a child's when it's tired.[219]

Street had suffered a heart attack, probably brought on in part by his anger and excitement. He was taken to the North Carolina Memorial Hospital, where his wife Lucy and daughter Ann were with him when he died at 10:50 p.m.

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[219]Scott Jarrett, Radio script delivered at Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 29 Sept. 1954.

Death prevented Street from completing several writing projects which he had begun or planned, including an article on the Kentucky Derby for Sports Illustrated,[220] a biography of Jefferson Davis, a series on the American wars, another preacher novel called The Love Offering,[221] a book on Spain and Guatemala entitled La Sin Ventura, and a novel about Hillel called The Pharisee for which he was planning to visit Israel, Rome, and Athens in 1955.[222] He had also planned to write the Little Ax stories into a novel, and this project was completed by Don Tracy in 1956 with the publication of Captain Little Ax. In 1960 Tracy also combined the short stories "Pud'n and Tayme" and "Proud Possessor" to produce Pride of Possession.[223] And in 1955 James Street, Jr., compiled several of the travel articles and some selections from Look Away! into James Street's South.

James Street involved himself with many places, events, and people in his fifty years. He wrote fifteen books, nearly all best-sellers, and a large number of articles and short stories. The impact made by his personality is suggested by a statement of his friend, C. D. Van Cleave. Gazing out the window of his Chapel Hill home, he paused and said, "I still think every once in a while of Jimmy; that is I—I did enjoy that man."[224]

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[220]Interview, Mrs. Lucy Street, 5 July 1976.

[221]"James Street—Writer," Charlotte (N.C.) News, 29 Sept. 1954, UNCNBc.

[222]Hoyle, p. 196.

[223]Cooper, "James Street," p. 16.

[224]Interview, C. D. Van Cleave, 7 July 1976.

CHAPTER II

FEATURE WRITING

James Street's son once told me that his father could remember in vivid detail every gunshot cabin on every Southern road he had been down, including the honeysuckle on the outside walls. Probably this keen eye for detail and nearly photographic memory, along with the natural interest he took in the usual and unusual, were largely responsible for Street's success as a feature writer for the nation's leading magazines. From childhood he sought to hear and remember thoroughly stories and legends from the South. He took careful note of its customs and techniques of living—working and playing, healing and killing. By age fifteen he was following lynch mobs and reporting trials. All the while he was storing material which at the time he did not know he would ever use or would be of interest to anyone else. And he was developing the thoroughness and interest in detail which would enrich his journalistic and writing careers. Ultimately these talents and interests led to his becoming a feature writer, first for the Associated Press, New York American, and New York World-Telegram, but more importantly for general interest magazines including Holiday and the Saturday Evening Post.

Street's first feature writing to appear in hardback form was his first book, Look Away! A Dixie Notebook, which he wrote in 1935 at the suggestion made by Damon Runyan during the Lindbergh kidnapping trial.[1]

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[1]James H. Street, Look Away! A Dixie Notebook (New York: The Viking Press, 1936). All subsequent references will appear parenthetically in the text.

In the foreword Street writes

> Much of this story I grew up with. The rest I lived as a reporter in the South . . . . My father told me much of it. About once a month during my boyhood he would relate some amazing story he had heard or some incident he had encountered as a lawyer and later as a judge in Mississippi . . . . Some of it was told me by Aunt Mattie, a flabby old Negro woman who nursed me through childhood and who amused me with bedtime stories of her adventures as a slave and as a voodoo woman.
>
> The rest of this book I lived as a reporter. A casual visitor to the South never would see such events. Most of my adventures were experienced only because I am a reporter and not because I am a native Southerner. (LA, p. v.)

Street later regretted publishing Look Away! and wished he had the stories back to use in a different, less journalistic form. Critical response to this first book was mixed and evoked a revealing northern opinion from reviewer Carl Carmer: "It is unfortunate that Mr. Street has chosen to tell his stories in a kind of journalistic English which some newspaper editors, particularly those in the South, call 'good reporting.'"[2] James Street, Jr., also wrote that his father regretted the violence he put in Look Away!, but that he often included such elements because "his reporter's instincts made him describe the physical background of his spiritual world."[3]

The book is one of the best examples of Street's personality, talent, and direction of interest. It has faults, such as a very awkward device of splicing the chapters by artificially introducing

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[2]Carl Carmer, rev. of Look Away!, Books, 23 Feb. 1936, p. 6, as excerpted in Book Review Digest, 1936 ed., s.v. "Street, James Howell."

[3]James Street, Jr., ed., James Street's South (Garden City: Doubleday and Company, 1955), p. 9. All subsequent references will appear parenthetically in the text.

into the end of one chapter the subject of the next. But it reveals Street's broad exposure to Southern life, his imagination, and most importantly his ability to tell a story.

Street realized that success in feature writing depends on two factors: a subject that is intrinsically interesting, and then an attractive delivery. He selected the items in Look Away! largely for their interest value. The sum total of the book certainly does not give a balanced picture of Southern life. Rather it is a collection of unusual events and of practices unique to the region. But each chapter is highly interesting in itself, not just in the manner Street tells it. One of the most incredible stories is of Street's helping capture a "wild man" and his mate in the swamps. The man had been a biology student from Indiana who had gone mad while living alone in the wilderness. His mate was a retarded girl who had wandered into the swamps and fallen onto a bear trap which caught her left breast and severed it. They lived together in the swamps for three years. Both were naked when discovered, and the man had lost his power of speech. They had lived on catfish which he caught with his hands out of holes in the riverbank. Street describes how he and a farmer caught the wild man with a bait of two chickens tied to a rail fence (LA, pp. 44-51).

Critics of Look Away! complained that Street was stretching his tales pretty far, and the wild man story tends to make one agree with the charge. Robert Van Gelder, who was to review most of Street's books for the New York Times over the next twenty years, observed wryly that "the reader may discover in himself a tendency to believe that sometimes

Mr. Street stretches a fairly long bow."[4] But exaggeration, of course, is part of storytelling.

Ways of life in his rural South also drew Street's attention. He describes how boys got drunk on molasses skimmings, how wild hogs were hunted, and how wounds were treated by burning the bone with a hot poker. A favorite pastime was "shooting anvils" by putting gunpowder in one, setting another on top of it, and igniting the powder (LA, pp. 56-59, 61, 131-132, 134). Religious habits included barking and tongue-speaking (LA, p. 122).

The social classes of the South, broadly divided along black and white racial lines, are clearly delineated. Subgroups are described as having their own private societies created by social or geographical factors. One of these is the Shanty-Boat Folks, a group of people living in the indefinable swamps and creeks created by the ever-changing course of the Mississippi. Street describes them as feudal people, for the changes in the river made it impossible to determine what legal jurisdiction they lived under.

> Most of them are lanky, furrowed-face fellows, dirty, unkempt, ignorant. Their women-folks are washed out and sullen. The women do most of the work. An "outlander" who makes eyes at shanty-boat girls is as good as dead.
>
> The law almost ignores the clans. Sometimes bodies are found in drifts along the river and nothing much ever comes of it. The sheriffs will shrug their shoulders and know it's a feud of the shanty-boat folks. In spite of the bitter hatreds that are bred among the clans, no "river

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[4]Robert Van Gelder, rev. of Look Away!, NYTBR, 23 Feb. 1936, p. 14, as excerpted in Book Review Digest, 1936 ed., s. v. "Street, James Howell."

> rat" will testify against his enemy. He just kills him. It saves the taxpayers a lot of money as it's hard to convict shanty-boat killers. The big trouble is establishing jurisdiction. (LA, pp. 81-83)

Other such groups described in Look Away! include the Ozark hillbillies or "stump-jumpers."

Street also tells of his newspaper coverage of natural disasters, particularly of floods and tornadoes. He once traveled from Nashville to Rye Cove, Virginia, forty miles from Bristol, to report the story of a tornado's destroying a schoolhouse and killing sixty children. He spent the night with the parents of two of them and watched the father building coffins.

> I sat with my back to a tree and tried to comfort the father as he hammered and sawed in the flickering light of that smoky lantern.
>
> The mountaineer looked at me as I talked, and when I finished my little piece he said:
>
> "What's that between you and me, stranger? The Lord gives and the Lord takes away, don't He? My job now is to bury those young-uns. The Lord can't do that—at least He don't."
>
> The two bodies were in a lean-to beside the cabin. The mother sat near by. There were no tears in her eyes. She just sat there in the darkness and looked at her children. (LA, p. 96)

Burial customs are unique in the South. Street writes that burial of adults sometimes included the custom of having a stranger eat bread and salt off the dead man's chest to take his sins away (LA, pp. 134-135).

Several chapters are devoted to the origin of ballads about famous folk heroes, including Casey Jones, John Henry, and Steamboat Bill. Street was familiar with the various and sometimes conflicting accounts of how such ballads got started and evaluates them to determine the most credible (LA, pp. 107-115, 125-131).

The most fascinating picture drawn in Look Away! is of a Feast of the Willowness, a voodoo ceremony to heal a sick person when orthodox methods have failed. Street tells how he watched Aunt Mattie cure her grandson at such a meeting. The incident is likely fiction, but it is probably similar to an actual Feast of the Willowness that Street attended as an adult.

> Brother Saul passed the word along there would be a Feast of the Willowness. The white folks were not told, for the rites are forbidden, but Aunt Mattie no longer was a God-fearing Christian. She was a voodoo woman, with faith in the charms of her tribe.
>
> I went to Mount Zion church that night. I was not welcome, but I knew none would bother me.
>
> Only one lantern gleamed in the little structure and it was high in the rafters. The church was supposed to represent the wilderness. Aunt Mattie called it "willowness" and so there were weeping willow branches along the walls. Brother Saul had taken some white paint and spread it down his cheeks. He was bare to the waist and his chest was daubed with red paint. He had dyed his teeth black and he stood before the dias, clapping his hands.
>
> Aunt Mattie was dressed in a flaming red-and-white gown. She stood directly in front of Saul, her eyes closed, her fists clenched as though in a trance. There was no one else in the church.
>
> Suddenly Brother Saul shouted:
>
> "Heah come de ten virgins!"
>
> And ten Negro girls walked in. They wore lace-curtain dresses. One by one they took their seats. Then other worshipers of the strange rites were admitted.
>
> Aunt Mattie stomped her feet about six times and spoke in a strange tongue. The congregation echoed, a mumbled, jumbled echo. Aunt Mattie flung her hands toward heaven and beat her bosom. The worshipers aped every move. She twisted and squirmed and rubbed her palms over her low-hanging bare breasts.
>
> For hours it seemed she did that, never varying. It was a call to the god of the Congo, a prayer to the voodoo. It was nerve-racking. It was heartbreaking. The Negroes became like strange black animals, swaying and snorting and mumbling.
>
> Aunt Mattie, with a fierce bellow, threw her head back and roared:
>
> "De hour is come to break dis cunju'. The blind will see and the lame will walk. See you dat I fear no evil."

She reached to the floor and lifted a basket. She stuck her hand within, and withdrew a deadly cotton-mouth moccasin.

She let the snake strike her arm.

Then she held the snake in both hands and broke its back with her teeth.

She hurled the squirming thing from her and walked with steady tread out of the church.

The worshipers fell to the floor and moaned. Aunt Mattie went straight to the swamp. She took a dried gourd and filled it with water from a rotting stump. She went to the cabin where Honey Boy was burning alive with fever and washed his brow with the water. She brewed a tea from sassafras roots she had gathered in a graveyard at midnight, and she poured the warm liquid down his throat. She took the dried gut of a catamount and wrapped it around his throat. She laid a buckeye on one of Honey Boy's closed eyes. She took a skin a snake had shed and put it on his pillow. She rubbed his chest with skunk oil, grease she had cooked from a polecat. And she sat by his bed and waited.

The venom from the snake had no effect on her apparently. The snake, she thought, was the cause of Honey Boy's illness, and in her simple faith she believed when the reptile bit her it poured the boy's sickness into her blood.

Hour after hour, until dawn, she sat by Honey Boy, wetting his head with stump water and mumbling the strange chants of the voodoo woman.

It is an old remedy. It was old when God made the sons of Ham. It was old when Jacob went down into Egypt. It was old when the Congo tribes called their devil men for just such services, and it was old long before Johaan Dixie's Krumen ever sang such a new ballad in an old land.

By noon Honey Boy's fever was broken. (LA, pp. 228-231)

Throughout Look Away! Street describes and often attacks the South's attitudes about the Negro and its treatment of him. Often he concerns himself with the lynching of a Negro suspected of a crime, especially the rape of a white woman. Such was the occasion of the first lynching that he witnessed, that of a hotel porter named John who had raped the hotel's white telephone operator. Instead of calling the sheriff, her family called the neighbors and brought bloodhounds. Street describes the hunt and how the man was shot, hanged, and burned (LA, pp. 15-17, 27-29, 35-38). He says of such incidents:

> Lynchings, like liquor and Negroes, are divided into two classes. It's a good lynching or a bad lynching. He's a "good niggah" or a "bad niggah." A good lynching means that a small mob takes a Negro and kills him without benefit of jury or clergy. A bad lynching means a burning . . . .
>
> Generally, the decent element of the South never participates in such horrors. Dixie, deep in its heart, trembles at the stark madness of marathon murders. Just to be just, we should remember the lynching citizenry of the South usually is the ignorant, hot-blooded trash, the leavings of the collapse of the South's old culture mixed with the scum of the North that migrated to a conquered and defenseless land after the Civil War. Anyone who will question mob members can learn that many lynchers are children of northern brethren who adopted our land because the stealing was good. (LA, pp. 62-75)

Street distinguished these mobs from night riders.

> A group of night riders is not a mob. There is nothing hysterical about night riders and they have not the cruelties of the mob. They will kill if necessary, but they seldom do. Night riders are not the Ku-Klux type. They make no distinction in creeds and they do not hide their faces. They simply are a group of neighbors who use their guns and own minds and own horses to avenge what they consider a wrong. If a man steals, the night riders may call on him. They will thrash him. If a man commits adultery, the night riders will tar and feather him. If a man commits rape, the night riders will kill him if he is a Negro or make him marry the girl if he is white.
>
> Of course, if the girl is a Negro and the man is white, that doesn't count, and the night riders do not get up from bed to avenge virtue. (LA, p. 212)

Street's father-in-law was a chaplain at Parchman Prison where most of the convicts were Negroes. Street describes the beatings to keep order and how every fifth Sunday of a month a train called the "Midnight Special" brought the prisoners' wives and girlfriends for visits. He claims this was the origin of the blues song "Midnight Special" (LA, pp. 69-71).

Street's resentment of the black man's treatment shows through in his discussion of the Jim Crow laws as they applied to Negro voting.

> A party has the right to make its own rules. So the Democrats merely hold a "white" primary. That automatically bars a Negro. And since the Republican and other parties seldom, if ever, hold a primary, the Negroes have no chance to vote for nominees. General elections, therefore, have only Democratic nominees on the tickets. The poll tax stops many Negroes from voting in the general election. The tax is two dollars in Mississippi. A Negro won't pay two dollars to vote in Mississippi. If he could pay the tax on the installment plan or get credit for the money he might do it—that is, if they made the tax sixteen bits instead of two dollars, which means the same, but lacks the lure to Negroes. Remember, I'm mentioning only Mississippi. Negroes do vote in some other southern states, but they are herded to the polls and are voted like sheep. (LA, p. 138)

Street witnessed several scenes of violence as a reporter, some of which are recorded in Look Away! A sensitive man, his feelings of revulsion are evident in his descriptions:

> A group of white men gathered. Soon a mob was formed. Word that the Negro would be lynched reached Little Rock. But nothing was done by officers. The mob took the Negro to a big tree, tied a rope around his neck, and threw the rope over a limb. They made him stand on the top of an automobile. They told him to pray.
>
> They drove the car out from under him and he was strangled to death. Several policemen were seen on the outskirts of the mob. Then the mob got out of hand. All the emotions that the flood had pent up were released. The mob members were no longer men, they were wild creatures.
>
> They cut the Negro's body down, tied it to the back of an automobile, and started for Little Rock. The body bounced along the highway and the mob screamed. Through the main streets of "the City of Roses" that mutilated evidence of white man's fury was dragged, bouncing like a sack of rubber over the streets. They took the body to the intersection of two streets in "niggah town."
>
> They poured gasoline on it and set it afire. A cavalcade of automobiles sped by filled with women and children. Negroes fled indoors and barred their windows. The governor was out of town, by accident and not by design. The governor was a courageous man and, had he been there, I believe he would have stopped the orgy. (LA, pp. 174-175)

In regard to newspaper coverage of such incidents, Street was insistent on directness.

> The Associated Press, with a large southern membership, forbade me calling a mob a mob. It must be a posse. I used to argue with wire editors that a posse is an organized group and that a thousand screaming mobbers couldn't be called a posse. But I lost. Also, the word "rape" was barred from our southern AP report. A woman who had been raped was "attacked." The fact that "attack" might mean she was only slapped wasn't considered. The association was shy about the word lynch and sometimes when a mob would burn a Negro the story had to read "A posse killed a Negro who had attacked a white woman."
>
> Of course, we couldn't use the name of the victim of rape in many states. It's against the law.
>
> I do not mean to imply that all southern papers are pussyfooters. The South, in my opinion and through observation, has the most liberal press in America, possibly excepting the Mid-West. Where one big paper deliberately will keep information from the public, a hundred small papers will tell the story without fear and let the chips fall. That's why many of our editors are bankrupt. The sly little journalist trick of making news fit policies and giving the readers only what the editor thinks they need and not what they want is not a southern invention. (LA, pp. 150-151)

Street had two peculiar interests that consistently show up in his writings, both journalism and fiction. He liked to give explanations, many of them spurious, about the origin of familiar names and legends, and he especially enjoyed the "double reverse," a statement that flatly contradicts some popular opinion.

An example of both of these techniques combined is the first chapter of Look Away!, which describes the origin of the term "Dixie." The double reverse is that Dixie was Johaan Dixie, a farmer in Manhattan. He sold his slaves south, and they chanted in the tobacco fields about how "I wish I wuz back on Dixie's lan'." According to Street a Yankee musician heard the ballad sung while touring the South and wrote the familiar version in a New York rooming house. Street discredits the theories that the term came from the Mason-Dixon line or the ten-dollar bills of Louisiana with "Dix" written on them (LA, pp. 3-8).

Other attractive stories tell of how plantation owner Greenwood Leflore protested the Confederacy by wrapping himself in an American flag and walking into a burning barn, and of how the rebel yell grew out of the enthusiasm at the Montgomery secession convention when "Dixie" was first played (LA, pp. 9, 67).

Although, as Paul Green observes, Street was more interested in the story than in weaving words, he does often inject the lyrical into his prose. Personification is one of Street's favorite devices, and he especially likes to apply it to rivers, as in these descriptions of the Mississippi:

> The Delta is a tier of counties in the northwestern section of the state. It's a thirsty land, hot and sticky, and stolen from the Mississippi River back when man dared snatch a patch of black dirt from "de Ol' Man" as he slumbered peacefully in his muddy bed.
>
> The larceny was simple. During the gaunt days when the mighty stream was sluggish and timid, his banks stretched for miles over the alluvial soil. It is his custom to sleep during July and August and he leaves his bed, wrinkled and wet, exposed to land thieves. The early planters caught "de Ol' Man" (those who know him call him that, never "Ol' Man River") in a gentle humor, ran a string of levees along the edge of his couch, and took his treasures while he slept. He never got over the shame of having his own cradle robbed, so even now he often gets full of northern rains and comes staggering home to track up the place with mud. Folks in the Delta expect him to go on an annual spree and gobble back some of the precious dirt that really is his. . . .
>
> De Ol' Man is the head of the river clan and his family is loyal. But each of his sons is as different from the other as cypress is from pine.
>
> That's the reason "de Ol' Man" is so complex. Sometimes he is gentle like the Ohio, which is one of his big sons. Sometimes he is crafty and sneaking like the Missouri. Other times he is full of fun like the Arkansas, always ready to play. Then again he is merry like the White, or gloomy like the St. Francis, or romantic like the Tennessee.
>
> But when "de Ol' Man" calls his sons to bring their burdens to him, they bring them without objection. When he wants help

> to curb the stealing planters, he sends catfish up his tributaries and the tributaries send back floods. (LA pp. 39, 187)

In such passages as these Street began to develop the style that he would later use in his novels.

A virtue in Street's writing was his careful detail. In a description of a mountain funeral, details add to the effectiveness.

> Dawn came fast. We put the little bodies, dressed in homespun shirts and store-bought shoes and pants, on the bed of a spring wagon and headed for the burying grounds. A stumbling old horse pulled our hearse. Two miles down the road we met the circuit-riding preacher. He was a Methodist, a big man, and he rode a big horse. He dismounted and walked beside me as our caravan picked its way over the jagged trail. The preacher asked me many questions. He was hungry for news from beyond the hills. He had given his life for these mountain folks, riding through the gorges, baptizing the children, marrying the young and burying the dead. He carried a Bible, a Methodist hymnal, a bottle of castor oil, pills, and a pistol in his saddle bags. He was a graduate of Yale. (LA, pp. 96-97)

This early concern for detail enriched Street's later feature articles on American cities, regions, and individuals. The ability to present specifics couched in colorful language is shown in passages such as this one from "Vicksburg":

> The United States Army spent a year trying to raze this citadel because it was a vault door to the Confederacy, then spent fifty years to save it because it is a key to the watershed that handles 41 percent of the nation's rainfall and robs the nation every year of 400,000,000 tons of soil, constantly sloughing America's skin and sinews. And yet Vicksburg is not on the Mississippi River at all, a phenomenon that must be attributed to an act of God, and not to any act of the Yankees, who tried so hard to separate this place from the river that gave it life. Strangers brace themselves on the hills, stare down at the slough where the port bustles, and scoff, "Is that the Mississippi?"
>
> Nope, brother, it ain't, That's the Yazoo Canal. The Misi Sipi, as the Algonquins named the big sewer, is about a mile down yonder where the bridge crosses and the shanty

> boats rock. There, at flood stage, pass 1,850,000 cubic feet of water per second—more than 115,000,000 pounds in two bats of an eye. That's a lot of water and mud, and a right smart mess of catfish.
>
> Some other ladies, who talk more than the men and perhaps work a bit harder, saw tourists scooting through, heading downriver to Natchez and New Orleans, and decided to collect a little tariff on food and "historical interests." The Yankee guests wanted catfish, hush-puppies, and gumbos laced with good old Mammy myths, and the ladies obliged. At first Vicksburg snickered. It was a corn-bread-and-chicken town. But down at the corner bank, where spiked rails keep loiterers from sitting too long, they sniffed a bonanza, and soon the lowly hush-puppy chased the aristocratic beaten biscuit right off the rosewood sideboard. Surely Mike Fink exploded at the idea of hush-puppies and Scotch whisky in Vicksburg, and Mark Twain must have busted out laughing, but the baritones kept on bellowing "Ol' Man River," and the community banked the take.[5]

This kind of language was perhaps both Street's strength and weakness as a feature writer. The flippant style discourages the reader from regarding the article as a serious scholarly study of the subject, but it also suggests the flavor and personality of the cities and regions Street wrote about and adds to the interest and readability of the piece.

Street's good judgment of what kind of information readers find interesting also enhanced his features. In his article on Atlanta he discusses the Rich family, Coca-Cola, race riots, opera, social classes, food, Sherman's seige, famous crimes, religion, and his friend Margaret Mitchell to give a varied picture of the city.[6]

Street occasionally wrote articles about individuals, the best of which was "Mista Crump Keeps Rollin' Along," featuring Memphis mayor

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[5]James Street, "Vicksburg," SEP, 223 (July 1950) pp. 36, 37.

[6]James Street, "Atlanta," Holiday, January 1951, pp. 27 ff.

Edward Hull Crump, whom he pictures as a benevolent despot.[7] Again there is the equal balance of fact and flavor. In addition to describing Crump's rise to power and techniques of holding it, Street adds such incidents as the origin of the Memphis blues.

> When Crump became mayor he became the Red Snapper, and one of his first visitors was W. C. Handy, a Beale Street musician who had wanted to be a preacher.
>
> "Howdy, Mister Crump," said Handy, baring his head and bowing low.
>
> "Howdy, Bill," said the Red Snapper.
>
> "I've written a little song for you," Handy explained, and in a melancholy, boom-boom chant he sang "Mister Crump don't 'low no easy riders here."
>
> The Memphis Blues it became, the first of the blues, the campaign song of the Red Snapper, the battle anthem of Beale Street. Easy riders are loafers, low-down, no-count trash who spend their days barrel-housing and funning when they should be working on the levees. Handy, incidentally, later wrote the St. Louis Blues and became famous. A drummer in his band was named Jasbow, and he gave the world the new word jazz while Handy was giving us a new rhythm.[8]

And Street again offers his analysis of the South's nature:

> Crump, ever the master politician, resigned the mayor's office. The people loved him for that as only the South can love a sinner brought to repentance. The voters didn't take time to study the law, which said an ousted official could not stand for state office. They only saw the old Red Snapper, the martyr, the persecuted hero, surrendering his office for the good of the city on the eve of a new term.
>
> The next day the ouster was voted, but Ed Crump hadn't been fired—he had quit. Anyway, just for precaution, the law barring ousted officials from the taxpayers' table was repealed. The county next made the Red Snapper trustee by an overwhelming majority. When the folks checked up, they discovered that Crump had an important county office he had always desired, that he had put one of his boys in the mayor's

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[7]James Street, "Mista Crump Keeps Rollin' Along," Collier's, 9 April 1938, pp. 16 ff.

[8]Ibid., p. 26.

office and that he was scanning the horizon for greener pastures.[9]

In 1955 James Street, Jr., collected several of his father's articles in James Street's South. Included were selections from Look Away!, as well as pieces about Louisiana, Houston, Dallas, central Florida, Mobile, Georgia, the Smoky Mountains, and Southern rivers.

In his introduction, Street described something of his father's position on the South.

> To become an inhabitant of James Street's South, the same rules applied for real or imaginary people. You had to love the South. You had to have a sense of honor. A martyr complex helped, and you had to respect the position of women.
>
> A James Street Southerner was a man of feeling about the Negro. Quite a few were Negroes, but they were the exceptions. He didn't ask that his Southerners "love the Negro." He asked only that they be treated fairly. You could live in the South, be for segregation, join the Klan, but to James Street you were not a Southerner.
>
> To him, it contained everything good and big and wonderful in life—the things that made people human. The South was a love he cherished to himself and championed to the nations. For him, it was the measure of life, the temper of men, and the crucible of artistic sensibility. (JSS, pp. 7-8)

The opening chapter of the book is Street's article on the South as a whole, and it best illustrates his attitude. He first insists that most concepts of the South are mistaken and contradictory.

> Folks can't agree if ours is a land of moonlight or moonshine, Tobacco Road or tobacco factories, Texas Cadillacs or oxcarts, Uncle Remus or George Washington Carver, Hugo Black or Claghorn, hydrogen plants or hot air, R.F.D. or TVA, hospitality or hostility, violence or tranquility, Miami or mud, fagots or fish fries, Li'l Abner, Prince Valiant or Pogo.
>
> Really, the South is or has been all of these, but it is national nonsense and neolithic ignorance to accept any one

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[9] Ibid., p. 27.

> of them and say "This is the South," for it's not true what they say about Dixie. It never has been and it never will be so long as we Southerners hold to mores that make us different from all other Americans. (JSS, p. 13)

He observes that all of the South cannot be pictured in a book, any more than Steinbeck's Cannery Row pictured all of the Pacific coast or Sinclair's The Jungle all the Midwest. Nor can the region be defined consistently in political or geographic terms (JSS, p. 15).

Street believed that the South was made unique by the presence and influence of the Negro. Other factors were the absence of immigrants and the unity in defeat that came as a result of the Civil War. He notes that Southerners cannot forget the war because of their countless monuments and markers that recall it. The modern South is a product of the reverence for times that never were and the serious business of modern times. Industrialization had captured the South, and Street's favorite Southern emblem was a "washing machine on the front porch of the little house where the cabin and cotton used to be" (JSS, pp. 17-18, 21-22).

Street closes his analysis with observations about Southern traditions. Southern speech, he says, is Elizabethan English influenced by African dialect. Southern cooking is poor in restaurants and superior in homes. The family is of supreme importance, and usually centers on the matriarch (JSS, pp. 25-29).

Street observes that Southerners mistakenly feel that the South has been neglected in histories of America, especially because of the emphasis given to the Revolutionary War, whose best-known traditional sights are in New England. He notes that many of the famous leaders

of the Revolution were Southerners, but that Americans overlooked this fact because "we see the Revolutionary War as North and South through eyes crossed by the Civil War." Also, the specific exploits and adventures of the Pilgrims and heroes such as Paul Revere are easier to picture in popular stories than the more varied events of the Colonial period in the South (JSS, pp. 29-30).

Most American folk music has come from the South, Street says, stemming in part from it ballads, revival hymns, and spirituals. Also from the South came hillbilly music, as well as blues and jazz as we know it in this country (JSS, pp. 30-33).

Street concedes that the South contains very violent people, though the violence is usually not calculated or cold-blooded.

> Southern violence is, by and large, spontaneous and against neighbors, not strangers, and usually white against white and Negro against Negro. Tell the average Southerner that the homicide rate in the South is about ten times that of New England and three times that of any other section—well, he just won't believe you.
>
> He never sees any crime. Often, he doesn't even lock his front door. When you say crime to him, he thinks of the New York water front, of Murder, Inc., of Chicago gangs, of tough guys who talk out of the sides of their mouths, of big-city race riots. Organized crime is rather rare in the South, so it's hard for the Southerner to believe that the Anglo-Saxon South, actually the Afro-Saxon South, produces the shootingest, cuttingest, killingest, fightingest folks in the country. (JSS, pp. 35-36)

Street says that there is more violence among Negroes than whites, but that this is because of the over-all race problem in America and is not peculiar to the South. The problem of Negro violence, he argues, is more acute in the South only because more Negroes live there.

Street discredits theories that the South's violence stems from its Anglo-Saxon heritage or frontier spirit, observing that other less

violent regions have those elements. He also denies that the Southern code of honor is the cause, since most crimes in the South are committed by those who do not value honor. However, he grants that the Southern belief that a man at times must do his own fighting may be a cause. He also notes that as a farming people Southerners naturally have more guns and knives at hand. He himself has several of each, he says, and he parenthetically recalls that Colonel Robert McCormick of the Chicago Tribune had called him "real old-fashioned Southern white trash" (JSS, pp. 36-38).

Whether or not one agrees with Street's analyses of the people and places about which he wrote feature stories, he can see a thoroughness and an analytical mind which were more a product of interested observation than formal education. These factors, added to his sense of what will interest the reader and his lively, conversational style, made for his success as a feature writer and helped prepare for his career in fiction writing.

CHAPTER III

THE HISTORIES

The Civil War

In the May 1953 edition of Holiday magazine there appeared a feature-length article by James Street on the Civil War.[1] Alice Leed, who was a staff writer for the Greensboro (N.C.) Daily News, later reported that the Holiday editors had first approached "professional historians" to write the piece, but finding the results too prosaic for their purposes, had turned to Street.[2] Whatever else might be said of the result, Street's article and the book which followed it are entertaining; and, as Street continually insisted, entertainment was his primary purpose as a writer. The Civil War: An Unvarnished Account of the Late but Still Lively Hostilities as Told by James Street[3] is, as the description implies, a debunking history designed for the general reader. Street felt that the popular notions about the North and South were often false or inaccurate, and since refuting such ideas was his favorite literary pastime anyway, he took this focus for his popular history. Reviewers of the book correctly noted that it contains

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[1]James Street, "The Civil War," Holiday, 13 (May 1953), 46-57 ff.

[2]Alice Leed, "Mr. Street and the Civil War," Greensboro (N.C.) Daily News, 29 Nov. 1953, UNCNBc.

[3]James Street, The Civil War (New York: The Dial Press, 1953). All further references will be to this edition.

entertainment, some keen observations about the war, interesting material which most readers either had forgotten or never known, and of course the debunking of popular myths.

As Evangeline Davis observes, the phrase "as told by James Street" on the title page hints that the work is mostly for entertainment.[4] Again Street is casting himself in the role of storyteller. The entertainment value lies in the colloquial style and deliberate selection of material not always important but consistently interesting.

Street uses a familiar style, which is illustrated in the opening paragraphs:

> Almost a hundred years after the first shot was fired, we Americans cannot even agree on a name for our Civil War between the States, much less on what caused it or exactly what happened.
>
> It was a lapse into national schizophrenia, a monstrous metamorphosis during which Dr. U. S. Jekyll, a pretty good sort, changed himself into two Mr. Hydes who promptly tried to beat each other to death and who really never have forgiven each other although they have shaken hands and smiled for history's photographers. (CW, p. 3)

Elsewhere Street uses football and boxing metaphors to describe major battles. His flippancy about such serious matters at times seems inappropriate to the reader, but the style does have the zest that Street was after. Also entertaining are the small sidelights which he includes, such as Lincoln's fondness for turnip greens, accounts of war songs, and the story of how Grant became addicted to cigars.

At the end of his book Street gives humorous advice on how to win arguments about the war and lists his choice for various sham honors,

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[4]Evangeline Davis, rev. of The Civil War, by James Street, Greensboro (N.C.) Daily News, 29 Nov. 1953, UNCNBc.

e.g. "The Best General: R. E. Lee, hands down . . . . The Worst Northern General: Don't know. Too much competition" (CW, p. 129).

Street enjoys his favorite technique of debunking myths and giving surprising facts that contradict popular notions. He claims that Mrs. Grant owned slaves; "Dixie" was written by a Yankee and the "Battle Hymn of the Republic" by a Southerner; New England had considered secession itself earlier in the nation's history; Alexander Stephens opposed secession; and Lincoln thought the same way as most Southerners. Also, contrary to tradition, Lincoln really never wanted to know Grant's brand of whiskey so that he could give some to his other generals to rebuff his detractors. Of course Street's favorite debunking story is the one which shows that the South was divided within itself, as illustrated by the rebellion against the Confederacy of such sections as Jones County, Mississippi, Street's home territory.

All of these elements in Street's book are light and even humurous. There are, however, heavier statements in which Street makes what reviewers called "common sense" analyses and "shrewd observations" of the war, and these are at least thought-provoking. Another review printed in the Greensboro News said, "Common sense applied to a subject which has been smothered with romanticism comes as a surprise and gives the effect of comedy; that is why George Bernard Shaw's plays and Jim Street's book on the late unpleasantness are so funny and so illuminating."[5]

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[5]"Civil or Uncivil War?" rev. of The Civil War, Greensboro (N.C.) Daily News, 17 Nov. 1953, MDAHc.

Street accurately points out that most people in the South are ignorant of much about the Confederacy they celebrate. For example they know little about its government, constitution, and court system (CW, p. 4). He also denies that there was much glory in the contest, citing figures of mass slaughter and of Union court martials and suicides. He calls the war our "dirtiest" and "most stupid" hour. Secession, he says, was an "incredible blunder" (CW, pp. 7-8).

Street felt that fear of the Negro was what caused slavery, that the South knew slavery was wrong morally but practiced it to keep the Negroes from taking over and marrying white women. The immediate cause of the war, however, was the economic conflict between Northern industrialists and Southern cotton magnates (CW, pp. 11-13).

The typical Confederate soldier, Street reminds us, was a boy from a small farm with few or no slaves who liked neither the Southern aristocrats nor the Yankees. The typical Yankee soldier was a mill hand who did not like his employer. But neither side understood the other correctly, and thus they were led to fight (CW, pp. 16-17).

Although Street regarded Lincoln as being a great man, he believed that the legends about him are unjustified. He observes that most people of Lincoln's generation were also born in log cabins. Lincoln was elected by back-room politics, but he was determined to save the Union, even though he had to make up his own rules to do so (CW, pp. 18-24).

Jefferson Davis, according to Street, was egocentric and really wanted to be a Southern general. But he was a second-rate fighter, and

the South elected him president instead (CW, pp. 29-33). Street's portrayals and comparisons of these two leaders are clear-cut, but probably over-simplified.

Street felt that the South would ultimately have won the political battle if it had kept calm. But instead it fired the first shot at Fort Sumter, an incident about which Street gives interesting details:

> Confederate officers went out to the fort to accept the surrender and one of these saw a bottle on Major Anderson's desk. The Southerner thought it was whiskey and reached for a swig. It was medicine and contained a trace of poison. This was the first Confederate casualty. A big bellyache. They pumped out his stomach and Major Anderson and his Yankee officers went over to the mainland and had a drink with the Confederate officers. (CW, pp. 39-40)

The South's decision to embargo its only salable product, cotton, until England recognized her was a mistake other warring nations have made, Street says. A nation cannot force another to unite with it. The Confederacy also handled its appeal to the Vatican badly. The South lasted as long as it did, Street claims, because "the South knew what she wanted from the very beginning and meant business while the North couldn't quite make up her mind" (CW, pp. 48-52).

Even though America lost its capital city of Washington to the British in 1812 without being badly harmed, the Northern newspapers thought that seizing Richmond would end the war. Instead the South won at Manassas—not, Street says, because its army was so good, but because the Union army was so poor (CW, pp. 56-57). In his colloquial, sassy style Street writes of how the Rebel soldier got drunk in celebration and then wrote "his Little Lindy Lou":

> The Yanks were whipped and soon he's be home to chop out the cotton and maybe get in a little fishing before picking time. He never got home and old Aunt Lou died a spinster, cursing the Yankees for her loneliness and pouring her bitterness into the young, eager ears of the second and third generations, including me. (CW, p. 60)

Street describes Sherman as the best of the northern generals. He considered both Sherman and Grant as seedy, unsociable men who were good ruthless fighters (CW, pp. 58-59, 64-66). Robert E. Lee was pictured to young Street as a remote, mythical figure: "He was the archangel Michael, away off younder beyond my reach—pure white, godly and cold. I have never gotten over it" (CW, pp. 66-67).

In describing the battles of the war, Street consistently adds fascinating anecdotes and details, such as Union private B. W. Michell's finding Lee's battle orders wrapped around three cigars lost by one of the Confederate generals (CW, p. 69). Street does not name the sources for his humor-laced history, but he does offer rich detail.

Street especially admires Nathan Bedford Forrest. He dispels the myth that Forrest was illiterate and said such things as "git thar fustest." Street claims that Forrest was the best natural soldier in the war (CW, pp. 72-73).

Other interesting discussions in the book concern unsavory figures like Ben Butler, reviled commandant of New Orleans, who, Street says, actually did the city some good. Northern citizens indulged in financial chicanery, such as buying bonds with inflated currency and redeeming them in gold at government expense. The Union's laws allowing the right to hire substitutes to go to war in their places and other

conscription abuses are also revealed (CW, pp. 88-90). Even the Emancipation Proclamation was a political move designed to make the war a crusade for saving the Union:

> As I see it, the Emancipation Proclamation was neither deliberately humanitarian nor military. It wasn't an under-the-table card trick or dirty pool. It was political; the shrewdest political document since King John gave Magna Carta to his nobles and thereby saved his kingdom and maybe his own neck. . . .
>
> The proclamation was released as a trial balloon and it soared so high so fast that, for a spell, nobody could see it and then it exploded into a lightening bolt that set the woods on fire.
>
> "As Christ dies to make men holy, let us die to make men free—"
>
> It turned the Civil War into a crusade. Now that Yankee boy knew why he was dying: to make men free. (CW, pp. 86-87)

There was also corruption and dissension in the South, Street says. Jefferson Davis was hated by some governors; civil law broke down; there were not enough volunteers to supply the need and so bounties were offered; and finally "rebels" had to be conscripted into rebelling, resulting in the usual dodges to avoid the draft. A law exempting large farmers from service in the Confederate army brought charges of "a rich man's war and a poor man's fight," and crooked businessmen made fortunes with war contracts. Rebellion against the Confederacy broke out, notably the Jones County affair which was the subject of Tap Roots (CW, pp. 90-95).

Other topics of interest are discussions of the small Southern navy, the makeshift technique of everyday life in the blockaded South, and even the use of liquor in both armies (CW, pp. 95-99). Street's

feature-writing sense of what the general reader finds interesting and amusing is an asset to the book.

Street offers his analysis and evaluation of the major conflicts of the Civil War. In his usual debunking style, he denies that Gettysburg was the high tide of the Confederacy, that it was of supreme importance, that it was as bloody as several other battles, that the South was destroyed there, that it was a "classic" battle, or that it was the beginning of the final phase of the war. He suggests rather that it was fought in the North. He believes that since the first written accounts of the Civil War came out of the north, and since Gettysburg was the closest to these writers, they seized on it to make it by report the greatest of battles. Also, of course, Lincoln gave his famous speech there (CW, pp. 108-110).

In similar fashion Street analyzes the remainder of the war, while continuing to spice his account with a rich display of feature-interest details. For example he tells how Sgt. Boston Corbitt, the man who shot John Wilkes Booth, later went berserk and fired on the members of the Kansas legislature. Mrs. Abraham Lincoln became insane. Major Henry Rathbone, who was with Lincoln at the assassination, later went mad and killed his wife and himself. Several other prominent men of the time, including Edmund Ruffin, the man who fired the first shot at Fort Sumter, committed suicide. Street concludes, "The last great war between gentlemen started off in the stars and ended in the gutter" (CW, p. 121).

Though Street offers no bibliography, he does recommend Henry Steele Commager's The Blue and the Gray and E. Merton Coulter's The Confederate States of America as histories of the war. He also mentions books written during the war period, particularly Hinton Helper's The Impending Crisis (CW, pp. 136, 143).

As Benjamin P. Thomas observes in the New York Herald Tribune, Street's The Civil War is history "spiced with entertainment."[6] Street makes no attempt to document his work and even refuses to do so unless pressed. In effect, he is telling another story. To do so he evidently did considerable research in his own way, probably in his large personal library about the war. He found and included many of the interesting sidelights that he favored. And many of his observations at least seem to make good common sense.

The Revolutionary War

The year following his history of the Civil War Street published The Revolutionary War: Being a De-Mythed Account of How the Thirteen Colonies Turned a World Upside Down.[7] He employed the same techniques: debunking myths, featuring a rich array of details little known to the general reader, and offering apparently astute analyses of the reasons why the revolution went as it did.

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[6]Benjamin P. Thomas, "Who Says the Civil War was Civil," rev. of The Civil War, NYHTBR, 29 Nov. 1953, MDAHc.

[7]James Street, The Revolutionary War, (New York: The Dial Press, 1954). All further references will appear parenthetically in the text.

Again Street employs a lively, colloquial style:

> . . . a bewildered, hungry David had tripped a stumbling Goliath to launch man's first big-league republic since ancient Rome. . . .
>
> It was a war that commenced as an armed protest against our own Parliament and King, then spread into an armed revolt, swelled into a civil war and wound up in the successful secession of thirteen colonies from the fatherland.
>
> Thirteen sons beside the sea, thirteen bickering, brawling, rough, tough stalwarts three thousand miles from their father's watchful eyes, aimed to go into business for themselves. The old man objected and they kicked his shins. Then the father applied the rod and lost the sons. . . .
>
> Most of those who did the killing and dying were semiliterates or even illiterates. They had vermin in their hair and itch on their skin, but their leaders had brains in their heads. They were Christians and Jews, theists and agnostics, the haves who wanted to keep what they had and the have-nots who wanted to have; conservatives and liberals, right-wingers and radicals, demagogues and demigods, money-lovers and freedom-lovers, gentlemen, rascals and bums. (RW, pp. 3-4)

But the best passages are those written by Street the storyteller. His descriptions of the action of the battles of King's Mountain and Cowpens are serious, exciting, and indicative of the horror of battle:

> Ferguson blew his whistle and waved his sword in his left hand. His Tories fixed bayonets and started down.
>
> That's all the Partisans wanted. They braced themselves and mowed the British like a sickle in a pea patch. The Tories tried to shoot downhill. They were flatland soldiers and didn't know the tricks of mountain fighting. They charged and stumbled and those who fell never got up. They milled around in confusion, then reeled in crazed fear and then huddled in panic. More than two hundred-fifty died in the first hour of fighting. They began tying white cloth to their bayonets and waving for mercy. Their own commander, Pat Ferguson himself, struck down the surrender flags and kept urging them on. . . .
>
> His men, running around like rabbits and screaming as only the doomed can, raised more white flags. The Partisans jeered them and kept shooting. Tarleton had set the pattern down in the low country. He had shown no mercy and now no mercy was given. (RW, p. 136)

As he had done in The Civil War, Street includes generous portions of debunking. Some of his stones are cast at familiar Revolutionary War legends:

> It gave us legends that are entrenched in our lore: the same Paul, son of Apollos Revoire, dashing across the countryside to arouse the farmers. (Oh, well, we are not the first people to confuse poetry and history and we happily have forgotten that Paul Revere was convicted of cowardice.)
> Then that plow-in-field-and-off-to-fight fable of Israel Putnam that we picked up from Rome's Cincinnatus, the Liberty Bell cracking while pealing the news that the Declaration of Independence had been signed, a cozy picture of a handsome woman making the first American flag, and a weird picture of a commanding general standing in a small boat while crossing a river in a snowstorm and flying a flag that hadn't been designed. That one was painted by the same German who gave us Westward Ho. And don't let them kid you—George Washington was not a man of towering intellect or gaudy imaginations, but he had too much sense as a farm boy to cut down a good cherry tree and much too much sense as a man to stand up in a small boat to cross a river. (RW, pp. 6-7)

Of such notions that Alexander Hamilton was the illegitimate son of George Washington, Street says: "This is in keeping with our myth-making. We either hoist our heroes to clouds or try to stomp them in the mire. . . . We are never half-way people. Our great men must be saints or devils; we can't let them be just human beings" (RW, p. 58).

Interesting sidelights and details are included, such as Street's account of the origin of the terms "Tory" (originally an Irish outlaw) and "Whig" (originally a yokel) (RW, p. 13). Street describes how in Philadelphia in 1776 the mosquitoes were bad, pins were sold for four pennies each, wigs were out of fashion, and the ladies wore flared hoopskirts. Most Colonials ate with a knife and few even owned forks (RW, pp. 96-97).

One British plan for winning the war failed because a minister neglected to deliver General Howe his orders, which were found in a pigeonhole in a desk several years after the war (RW, p. 117). Some of the first log cabins in America were built at Valley Forge, and the structure did not become common in America until after the Revolution (RW, p. 118). Paul Revere was not an especially outstanding soldier and was not celebrated until after Longfellow's poem. After that his silver sold for inflated prices and myths spread about him (RW, p. 37). These and other small but interesting details, including General Howe's affair with a Mrs. Loring, add the flavor Street felt to be important to a history aimed at the general public.

Street made no claim to be a career historian, but he does offer his analyses of the causes and results of the war, and again his comments seem sensible. He points out that America returned goods to England if not much money, and that Americans before the war enjoyed a high standard of living. He gives a capable summary of the social, professional, and religious groups which made up the colonies (RW, pp. 18-25).

Street explains that the Boston Tea Party was at least in part the result of colonial middleman in the tea trade being cut out by an attempt of the East India Company to ship tea itself to the colonies and sell it directly to the retailers. American tea merchants protested, and the patriot leaders capitalized on their displeasure to stir up the famous incident (RW, pp. 49-50).

One of Street's best talents was an ability to condense historical events of wide scope into a brief and readable account and yet spice it

with the ever-interesting feature details that were his specialty. This he does in his account of the war in his own Southland, writing exciting narratives of Francis Marion, Bonaster Tarleton, Dan Morgan, and other fighters and battles. Included also are such details as young Andrew Jackson's capture and the ceremonies at Yorktown.

Analyses of individuals in the war are also plentiful and competent. The tribute to Thomas Jefferson is unreservedly laudatory. Usually, however, Street tries to picture our heroes as less than olympic. He says of Sam Adams:

> This is the man who, as much as any other, nudged and nagged us into revolt. George Washington has been called the Father of his Country. All right. I prefer to think of him as wetnursing this republic rather than siring it. But if Washington was the Father of his Country, Sam Adams was the Father of the Revolution. Our Revolutionary War was the seed of this wild and wily little man. And he didn't amount to shucks after it was won. He was an agitator and had no talents as a statesman. He was a buzzing gnat that drove men into exasperation, not an eagle to inspire them. His fame and usefulness petered out after the war started and he died in "honorable poverty."
>
> Sam Adams was not a great man in the sense that Benjamin Franklin was great, or Thomas Jefferson. Greatness was not thrust upon him as on Washington. But he slipped his hand into Fate's hind pocket and snitched himself a fistful of greatness. (RW, pp. 35-46)

Street's love of the colloquial metaphor leads him into unfortunate excesses. On one page he mixes metaphors of roadblocks and traffic cops, American hash and English cold cuts, and accounts of how James Otis jumped "from a Tory convertible over to a Whig truck and had started off in high gear, then switched to low and ground his gears and almost stripped them" (RW, p. 32). And at the battle of Monmonth he drags in a football metaphor with "Quarterback Washington" and "halfback Charles Lee" (RW, p. 123).

Street is somewhat freer about revealing his sources for The Revolutionary War than for The Civil War. They include The Navy of the American Revolution, by Charles Oscar Paullin; Harry Golden, Street's good friend and editor of The Carolina Israelite of Charlotte, North Carolina; The Cambridge History of American Literature; Lost Men of American History, by Stewart H. Holbrook; and Dr. Hugh Lefler, professor of history at the University of North Carolina, who, Street says, "read this manuscript, cringed a bit and pulled me back from some big pits" (RW, p. 180).

Like its predecessor, The Revolutionary War is popular history written probably with an equal view toward entertainment and informativeness. Its debunking approach and colloquial style discourage any claims that it adds significantly to scholarship. As a review printed in the Times-Picayune observed at the time, "It offers nothing that modern historians and research scholars do not know."[8] But it is interesting as one man's opinion, and the opinion comes from a concerned and alert citizen who read widely for his research and enjoyed stating his own mind about his conclusions.

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[8]"Picturesque Description of War for Independence," rev. of The Revolutionary War, New Orleans Times-Picayune, 25 Nov. 1954, LRL.

CHAPTER IV

THE SHORT STORIES

James Street began his fiction-writing career with a short story, "Nothing Sacred," in 1937, and he published short stories consistently for the remainder of his life. The Saturday Evening Post, Cosmopolitan, Collier's, and other general magazines published a total of thirty-seven of Street's stories between 1937 and 1955. They range from the series of Civil War adventures of Captain Alexander Xerxes Trowbridge, to the boy-and-dog stories which became The Biscuit Eater and Goodbye, My Lady, to "I Am Not a Stranger," a well-told Southern love story. Many of the stories about children were published in Street's Short Stories in 1945. As Street gained experience in fiction writing, his skill in characterization and plot construction improved, and he learned to portray regional people and events with increasing conservatism and unity. Below is an analysis of several of his better stories.

"Bayou Man," published in 1937, demonstrates some of the same strengths and weaknesses which Street exhibited in all his writing.[1] An early attempt in his career, it has the lack of unity and the awkwardness of a novice writer, but also the feel for regional color and action which were Street's.

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[1]James Street, "Bayou Man," Collier's 100(7 August 1937), 22 ff.

C. V. Terry of the New York Times praised Street's ability to engage the reader's affection for a character in his opening paragraph,[2] and Street does that in connecting Cyrus McNeil, an Irish woodcutter, with the Louisiana bayous. The affinity of Southern people for the land remained a favorite theme with Street. He also employs his storyteller's description of setting and action in the story. Only near the end of his writing career would he learn to develop consistently unified plots, but from the first he could portray vivid scenes of action—particularly violence—as well as lyrical descriptions of place.

"Bayou Man" tells how big Cy McNeil, deserted as a child and raised by Aunt Charity, a Negro servant woman, meets and marries a girl named Susan, also a friendless wanderer. Jailed for thrashing a man who tries to force himself on Susan, Cyrus returns to help save the land and his family from a flood.

Street tries to cram too much into the story, with the result that it breaks into several pieces. It also covers too long a span of time for a short story. He has to resort to an unrealistically abrupt resolution of one part so that he can go on to the next. Aunt Charity's decision for Susan to stay with her and Cy, and Cy's quick analysis of his legal position after cutting Susan's attacker with a knife are too quickly made. Coincidence also plays too large a role, particularly in Cy's being brought with a gang of convicts back to his home to stop the flood.

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[2]C. V. Terry, "Southern Comfort," rev. of Short Stories, NYTBR, 17 June 1945, p. 12.

Another flaw typical of Street's early writing which appears in this story is his weakness for including irrelevant contradictions of popular beliefs. Street enjoyed making such points, and he often has a character give voice to them when they add nothing to the story. Still, Street maneuvers several characters fairly well in "Bayou Man," and he draws each with creditable skill. Though the plot is poor, the parts are good.

By 1941, Street's stories had improved in the fundamentals of writing, as illustrated in an unusual character story, "Tough as Whitleather," about a gruff New England trapper who joins the Battle of New Orleans to get revenge for the destruction of his pelts by the British.[3] Again the best parts are Street's descriptions of action, as in his opening detailed account of Whitlock Plunkett's sniper killing of British soldiers. The style is simple and clear, remotely resembling Hemingway's.

The structure of the story is simple and effective. After picturing the central character in action, it moves to a straightforward explanation of his history. This exposition is simpler and more direct than that in Street's earlier stories. He avoids trying to present his exposition indirectly through his characters, a technique for which he does not yet have adequate skill. The summary of Plunkett's history is also clearly and concisely written.

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[3]James Street, "Tough as Whitleather," Collier's 107(18 January 1941), 11 ff.

"Tough as Whitleather" is one of Street's early historical fiction pieces. It reveals his concern for authenticity, and especially his interest in colorful sidelights such as the Choctaw Indians and the pirates of Jean Lafitte who aided Jackson. Generally Street succeeds well in working his main characters into accounts of actual people and events, though he strains himself here by having Plunkett actually talk with Andrew Jackson. And again he drags in some material just for its own sake, as in his account of Plunkett's killing the British officer whose body was preserved in a barrel of rum.

"Tough as Whitleather" also depicts another early weakness of Street's, his inability to end a story strongly. This one ends with Jackson uttering trite phrases of patriotism. It does, however, show a much improved ability to unify story elements, even when they occur over a considerable length of time.

In March of 1941, Collier's published "They Know How," the first of five short stories which Street wrote featuring his invented character Captain Alexander Xerxes Trowbridge, nicknamed Little Ax, youthful leader of a marauding band of teenage Confederates.[4] Trowbridge is short and cocky, like his creator, and again demonstrates Street's knack for devising unusual characters and events as subjects for fiction.

Most of the stories in this series turn on Trowbridge's cleverness in plaguing or escaping the enemy and demonstrate Street's quickness in

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[4]James Street, "They Know How," Collier's, 107(1 March 1941), 15 ff. The other four Little Ax stories, all published by Collier's, are "Road to Gettysburg," (Feb. 1942), "The Yanks Were Coming," (July 1942), "All Out with Sherman," (Dec. 1942), and "Lay Your Bibles Down," (Oct. 1943).

devising such plots. "They Know How" tells of a battle of wits between Trowbridge and a Union officer over the undermining of a trench. Street builds the suspense well to his climax. Other stories in the series show Trowbridge rescuing civilians, detecting spies, and skirmishing behind enemy lines.

All of these could have turned into routine war adventure stories, but several elements save them. For one, Street does not present Trowbridge as being consistently heroic and victorious. In fact he loses the battle described in "They Know How." His vanity and occasional lack of good judgment are also displayed, so that his shortness of stature becomes an index to his weaknesses and failings. Again Street has his very good descriptions of violent action, somewhat like Stephen Crane's, as in this passage from "All Out with Sherman":

> An officer raised his arm, lowered it and the cannon bellowed in unison. Yellow and red flames belched, burning grass and drying the ground, while a tornado of flying chains and slugs combed the woods.
>
> The blast threw Little Ax to his face and when he struggled to his feet, he saw Jim, his left arm dangling and his cheeks bleeding. Jim was as black as if he had been in a furnace. His clothes had been singed to the roots.
>
> A few other Confeds stirred, but most of them were still. Ax couldn't even recognize them. Dazed and half-blinded, he called to his comrades and they ran for high ground. The Yanks reloaded calmly and hurled another bolt into the woods. Trees were sliced as though by a saw and even big timber was chewed to bits. Again the gunners fired. Then all was still. Even the birds were dead, killed by concussion, and in the river, thousands of fish floated to the surface, their bellies to the sky. (Collier's, 110:75)

Such passages also reflect Street's belief that war is horrible and destructive, inglorious and brutal. In "Road to Gettysburg" Trowbridge is baffled by his men's questions about why the South is fighting. One

of them points out that only two men in his county in Alabama own any slaves at all. Street also emphasized this theme in Tap Roots.

In the stories about Trowbridge Street began to concentrate on unity of time and action. His exposition is straightforward and concise, usually placed in his openings, consistent strong points in his stories. Although he still admits trite, melodramatic elements in the form of assertions about regional traits and customs, his plot structure is improving.

One of Street's best short stories is "Set the Wild Echoes Flying," written in 1943.[5] It tells of Cleburne Ronayne Mulvaney, an Irish-American from Mississippi who dies leading a charge in World War II while playing an Irish war pipe, and who leaves his Mississippi farm to a Scotch girl. Street brings together his favorite story elements: a main character from the South devoted to the Confederacy; an unusual historical feature, the Irish war pipe, which gives him a chance to show the distinction between it and a regular bagpipe as well as to explode other popular beliefs; a romance; and a war background against which he can describe scenes of action.

Again, Street has a strong opening, describing Mulvaney as a powerful, moody man with mysterious habits and tastes. He succeeds again in relating his main character to the land: "In the tempestuous, muddy land where blues and jazz and boogie-woogie were born, Cleburne Ronayne Mulvaney insisted on playing his bagpipe every night, although

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[5]James Street, "Set the Wild Echoes Flying," SEP, 216(13 Nov. 1943), 14 ff.

his neighbors never listened to him, partly because they didn't understand his music, but mostly because he was a man of extreme moods, cantankerous and belligerent, and often downright ornery" (SEP, 216:14).

The exposition is also good, deftly describing Mulvaney's family background growing out of the Civil War and how he came to be the moody, lonely man he is, partly because of his humiliation at a school oratorical program.

The plot is unfortunately piecemeal, but it contains several good incidents. Mulvaney volunteers for the army and end up in a Scottish regiment. He quarrels with the other soldiers who are skeptical of the reports about him and his land holdings, but he meets a Scottish girl who sells tickets at a movie house (Street met his own wife at a movie). Later, fighting in Africa, he wills the girl his farm the day before he is killed leading a charge with bagpipes. Street's protrayal of the sensitive Irishman and the Scottish girl is delicate and well done. And he succeeds in giving Mulvaney a kind of legendary aura.

James Street's best short story, "I Am Not a Stranger," appeared in the Christmas issue of the Saturday Evening Post in 1948.[6] Later it was included in a collection published by the University of South Carolina.[7] This time the narrative is told in the first person, a technique which Street employed only in his later writing and which generally was very successful for him.

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[6]James Street, "I Am Not a Stranger," SEP, 221 (25 Dec. 1948), 20 ff.

[7]New Confederate Short Stories, ed. Katherine M. Jones (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1954).

The central character is Laren Winton McCall, a New York teacher writing a thesis on how Southern myths affect those believing in them. While passing through Lystra, North Carolina, he notices the absence of the usual Confederate monument. On inquiry he learns that the whole town is a monument, since all of the young men from the town who rode away to fight for the Confederacy were said to have been killed.

McCall meets Leah Beth Morgan, whose great-great-aunt was the lover of one of the lost soldiers. In the process of McCall's falling in love with Leah Beth and deciding to marry her, she tells him that her aunt's lover was named Laren Winton Culpepper. Curious, McCall calls his father in New York and learns that Culpepper had not been killed after all, but had settled in Watertown, New York, instead of returning to Leah Beth's aunt. Thus McCall, Culpepper's great-grandson and his namesake, has now returned to marry the great-great-niece of the jilted aunt. The breach of honor is rectified, and, since McCall keeps his knowledge a secret, the legend of Lystra's total loss of her sons is preserved.

The improbable possible is suspect in fiction, but "I Am Not a Stranger" is a charming story, and the kind of tale that was Street's forté. Nearly every aspect is well executed. Laren McCall's comments are much more restrained than James Street's, and a coolness and reserve is given to the story which enhance it greatly. The exposition of who McCall is and how he came to arrive in Lystra is efficiently given and sounds credible in spite of the large coincidence.

The characterization is sharp, and Street blends it well with the plot. McCall reveals much about himself in the first paragraph:

"A drizzling rain was falling and I had driven about a mile beyond the village before I realized that something was strange about the place and I slowed down, debating whether to turn back and satisfy my curiosity. The debate merely was to appease a sense of logic that taunts me, but seldom influences my behavior" (SEP, 221:20). This matter of his deciding whether to listen to logic is the key both to McCall's nature and to the plot, and is thus a neat accomplishment of fiction, especially since Street manages to achieve it from his opening paragraph.

McCall has an ironical, mildly self-depracating nature, yet beneath the mild cynicism lies a yen for the romantic. He reveals these traits when he first sees Leah Beth:

> She glanced up and smiled as though we were old friends. I am a young man and have black hair and, although I wear glasses, young women, particularly students who face examinations without preparation, sometimes smile at me. However, no girl ever had smiled at me as this girl did; a warm challenge, a drama, a book. I considered her smile flirtatious, even amorous, and then I was ashamed of myself for thinking so. She was only being friendly. I smiled at her and she tilted her head and laughed. I instinctively thought of the Irish myth of the rain nymph. (SEP 221:21)

Leah Beth Morgan is one of Street's most attractive female characters. He depicts her as having a free, open personality and a frank desire for innocently pleasant experiences, such as sitting under a tree in the rain and believing in the legend of Lystra. By moonlight she shows McCall a blade stuck in a tree in the family garden, supposed to be the sword which McCall's great-grandfather had left there as a pledge of his return. The next morning she laughs impishly when he discovers it to be an old farming scythe:

> "It's an old scythe," I said.
> "Is it? she said. "We thought it was a sword."
> "Why, it's plainly a scythe."
> Leah Beth still was smiling. "You are a mommick [destroyer], aren't you? Knowledge must be a wonderful thing. It must be great to know the difference between a sword and a scythe, between bitter truth and beautiful illusion." (SEP, 221:68)

The minor characters are also clearly depicted, such as Mr. Culpepper, the cheerful and fat proprietor of the town hotel. Leah Beth's mother possesses "the tyranny of sweetness and longsuffering" which Street associated with the Southern matriarchy.

Street builds suspense consistently. From the first he focuses on the myth of the total loss of Lystra's young men, a myth that would be shattered if McCall's discovery were made known. Street evenly reveals the story of the sword, the identical expressions used by the people of Lystra and McCall's mother in New York, and finally that McCall's great-grandfather had a Southern accent and rode a large white horse. Faced with these revelations McCall has to choose between research and a Quixotic belief in romance. He chooses the latter, even referring to his car as Rozinante, but the calm recognition by Leah Beth of the value of harmless illusion prevents the story from becoming maudlin, and McCall's closing remarks are an acceptable conclusion: "The door to the realm of play-like is closed to no man, not even a professor. So let the scythe be a sword. And when it rains, let it rain. I am no mommick" (SEP, 221:69)

"The Grains of Paradise," Street's last story, was received by Post editors two days after his death and published in May of

1955.[8] It features a contest between a Mexican restaurateur and the narrator, an agricultural agent named Cordell Hoyle. The contest is to see which of them can eat the hottest peppers (the title refers to the seeds of a very hot variety). Such an odd plot is one which would appeal to Street, and once the reader manages to overcome the feeling that the main plot incident is absurd, he finds the story interesting.

Street again uses the first person technique, and the result is quite satisfactory. Hoyle has a half-cynical, half-lyrical voice similar to that of Robert Penn Warren's Jack Burden, and he moves through the story with good pace and detail.

The theme is honor. Hoyle meets a young Mexican named Tio who loves the daughter of the restaurateur. Though Tio is of a higher social class, the father rejects his suit. However, when Tio's new friend Hoyle engages the father in the pepper-eating contest and deliberately loses, the father wins honor and consequently looks on Hoyle and Tio with favor, giving his approval of the marriage.

All of these social differences and the offbeat pepper duel give Street the opportunity he savors to explain distinctions and write unusual descriptions:

> Nena brought out some spiced meat and two bowls of ground pepper. One of plain black pepper which is the dried fruit of Piper nigrum, picked green. This is the pepper of antiquity, of Malabar and Travancore. This is the pepper that sent men venturing in the days of Soloman and Sheba. Rome paid ransom to Alaric in Piper nigrum. It is romantic, but tame. The other bowl contained white pepper, which is Piper nigrum prepared from the ripe fruits. (SEP, 227:127)

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[8] James Street, "The Grains of Paradise," SEP, 227(14 May 1955), 20 ff.

There is also a subtlety of feeling between Tio, the girl Nena, and her father that is finely suggested. And, as in "I Am Not a Stranger," there is a consistent unity of time and action that shows Street's improvement over his earlier stories.

Two of Street's short stories, "The Biscuit Eater" and "Good-Bye, My Lady" were expanded into novels. These will be discussed in a later chapter.

C. V. Terry said of the pieces in Street's Short Stories that in spite of their being cast in a mold of popular magazines which requires the happy ending, they still win the reader's admiration.[9] And Surrey Thomas of the Saturday Review commented, "It would not have taken much inspiration—just a little—to make these stories great instead of very good, which they are."[10] Perhaps more than a little inspiration would have been needed, but indeed some of the stories are good pieces of literary craftsmanship. Principally a storyteller, Street was comfortable and successful in the genre.

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[9]Terry, p. 33.

[10]Surrey Thomas, "Stories by Street," rev. of Short Stories, 28(23 June 1945), 33.

CHAPTER V

THE DABNEY NOVELS

James Street's first novel, Oh, Promised Land, began a series of five novels about the Dabney family. Big Sam Dabney helps settle the South during the pioneer days of the turn of the eighteenth century, and he finally settles in the Lebanon Valley, actually Street's Jones County in southeast Mississippi. Here, Sam and his descendants live for a century, experiencing the conflict of the Civil War, the burden of reconstruction, and the coming of the lumber industry. The Dabneys are proud, handsome, and spirited; some are honorable and refined, others are not. Their story as a family continues through Tomorrow We Reap, until Mingo Dabney rides away to Cuba to fight in the revolution of 1894, the story of the last novel, Mingo Dabney. Street had originally planned to carry the Dabney saga up to contemporary times, but he finally closed the project with Mingo's story.

In the Dabney series, Street was able to combine several of his interests. First was the South, especially Mississippi and the region of Jones County. He recounts the history of the region from its settlement through the nineteenth century, and pictures its customs, attitudes, social classes, and way of life. Another related interest was famous men and leaders of this period. Either appearing as themselves or else in a fictional prototype are Andrew Jackson, Sam Dale, Tecumseh, Sequoyah, Alexander Keith McClung, and other historical figures of greater or lesser note. Two of the novels are set in the Civil War, the

dominant event in Mississippi history and in Street's interest. And into the Dabney story Street injects the theme of the relation between the black and white races. His liberal philosophy of acceptance of the Negro into the mainstream of life in the South is apparent.

The five novels were written over a span of ten years, 1940-1950. They are of uneven quality, the best ones being Tap Roots and By Valour and Arms, the second and third in the series. Yet each of them reveals an important aspect of James Street as a writer.

Following is a genealogical chart of the Dabney family (Figure 1).

Oh, Promised Land

Oh, Promised Land,[1] Street's first novel, is the 816-page saga of Big Sam Dabney—frontiersman, Indian fighter, leader of the settlers of Georgia and Mississippi, and patriarch of the Dabney family whose story is told in the five Dabney novels. The action of this first book in the Dabney series covers from 1794 through the battle of New Orleans in 1814. The story begins with Sam and Honoria burying their parents, killed in a Creek raid, in the Chatahoochee country near what is now the border between Georgia and Alabama. Sam, twenty-six years old, is large, strong, and physically capable, as well as keen, ambitious, and self-centered. He is basically of good character, though not above rather unscrupulous behavior in fighting and trading. Honoria, at sixteen, is beautiful, shrewd, and immoral, though she is devoted to Sam.

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[1]James Street, Oh, Promised Land (New York: The Dial Press, 1940). All further references will appear parenthetically in the text.

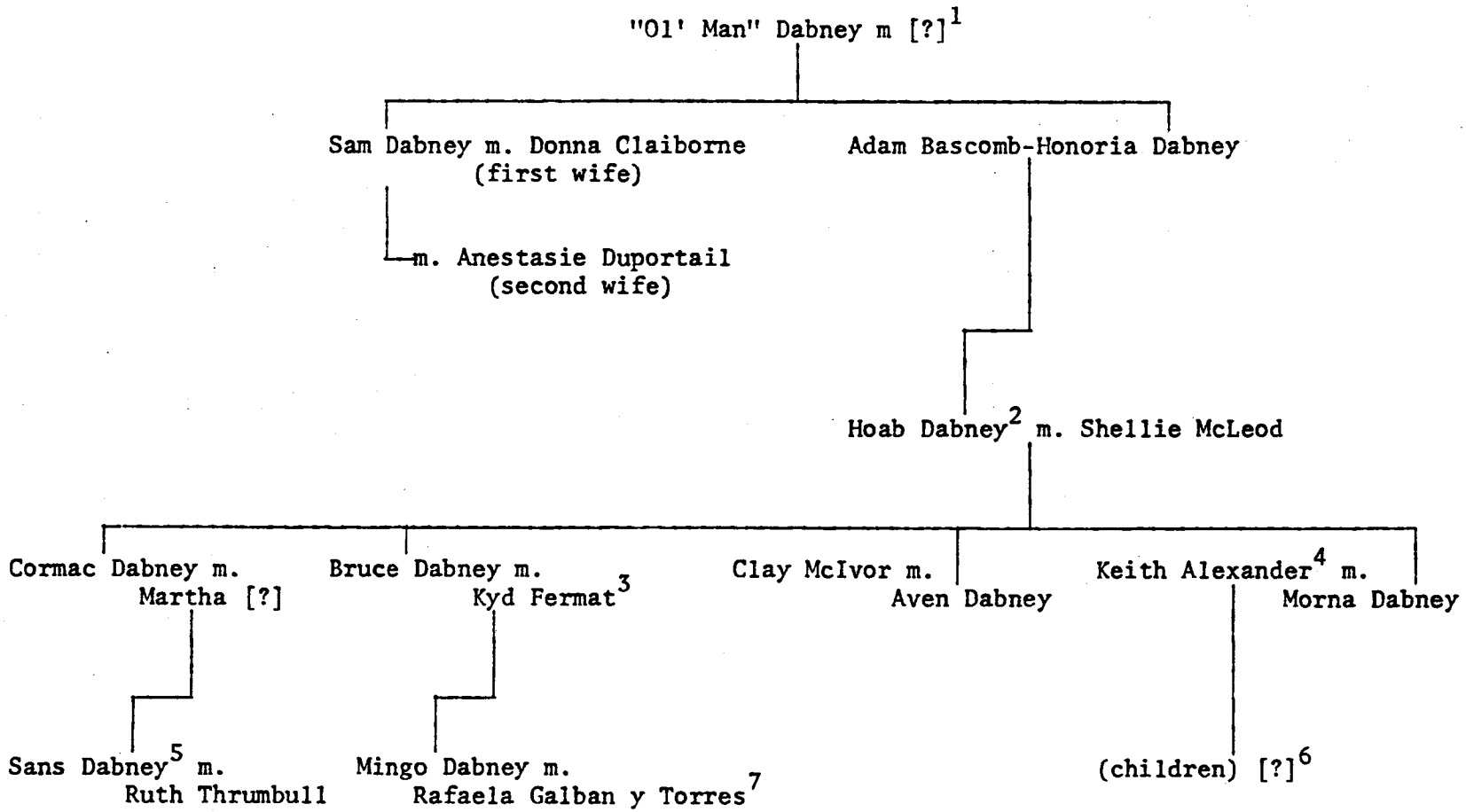

Figure 1

The Dabney Family*

*Footnotes on following page.

Footnotes to "The Dabney Family"

[1]Neither the given name nor maiden name of "Ol' Man" Dabney's wife is stated.

[2]Hoab is the illegitimate son of Honoria Dabney and Adam Bascomb, a frontier scout. Bascomb intended to marry Honoria but was killed before he could do so. No one knew about Honoria's being pregnant except her and Sam and Donna Dabney. When Donna's baby is born dead, Sam secretly adopts Honoria's child, born about the same time, and pretends that it is his and Donna's baby. Hoab, whose name is formed from the names of his real father and mother, never knows that he is not the natural son of Sam Dabney. Nor does anyone else except Sam's friends Tishomingo and Keith Alexander, who discover the truth by accident. Ironically, then, the Dabney family never knows that they are not really descended from Sam Dabney, whom they regard as their patriarch.

[3]Kyd, a Cajun, is one-thirty-second Negro, a fact which neither she nor any of the Dabney family except Sam and Sans knows. Hoab's illegitimacy and the Negro heritage of Kyd and her son Mingo are important themes in the story of the heritage-conscious Dabneys.

[4]Keith Alexander is the illegitimate son of an aristocratic Kentucky woman and a nationally prominent Virginia statesman.

[5]Sans is the posthumous son of Cormac Dabney. His mother Martha dies in childbirth; hence he is sans father and mother. He is adopted by Bruce and Kyd Dabney. Street does not actually state that Sans and Ruth Thrumbull marry, since he leaves their story before the event can take place, but the presumption is there.

[6]Keith and Morna Alexander are said to have children, but they are not named.

[7]Rafaela Galban is a Cuban revolutionary.

Figure 1 (continued)

Leaving Honoria as a bound servant with a Jewish trader, Sam signs on with the U.S. military as a scout and is assigned to guide a white party across the Creek and Choctaw country to Natchez. He also allies himself with Tishomingo, nephew of the Choctaw chief Pushmataha. Tishomingo soon becomes Sam's life-long friend. Sam also meets and marries Donna Claiborne, an aristocratic member of his party. He saves her and the rest of his charges from the Creeks after a chase to the Tombigbee River, borderline between the Creeks and Choctaws, and arrives in Natchez. On this journey he has blazed the trail later known as the Three-Chopped way.

Earlier Sam had heard much about the new frontier country and the developments which were affecting it. Both Spain and Georgia claim the territory, and France and England have designs on it. The Indians, of course, control much of it. Sam finds that practically all the land will go to the strong and shrewd, and he settles on the Pearl River and begins multifold trade in shipping, growing and ginning cotton (he had earlier obtained a copy of the plans for Whitney's new machine), postal service, slave trading, transporting new settlers, and other ventures. He keeps informed of the progress of the international jockeying for control of the new territory, and hears much about the famous people connected with it. Antagonism against Spain grows. In the treaty of San Lorenzo of 1795, America wins virtual control of the Mississippi River, and by 1798 Mississippi has become a territory of the United States. Jefferson is elected in 1800 and purchases the Louisiana Territory in 1803. Sam is instrumental in gaining new land to the

north for the Mississippi territory. He also hears of the activities of such diverse figures as Andrew Jackson, Philip Nolan, Winthrop Sargent, W. C. C. Claiborne, Micajah and Wiley Harpe, Aaron Burr, and many others.

Sam's personal affairs become troubled. His business does not go well, Donna becomes terminally ill with lung fever, and her son, the only natural child Sam is to have, is born dead. He and Donna then adopt Honoria's illegitimate son by a scout named Adam Bascomb, who has been killed on the Natchez Trace. The child is named Hoab, and no one knows that he is not Sam's child except for Sam, Donna, and Honoria. Soon afterwards Honoria, to Sam's disgrace, marries Lake Flournoy, a kinsman of Josephine Bonaparte, who is part French and part Indian. Flournoy is a wealthy planter, is unscrupulous and ruthless, and is Tishomingo's mortal enemy. In spite of these troubles, however, Sam always excels in the one thing he does best—fighting Indians. In a fierce canoe fight against the Creeks he and Tishomingo alone kill eleven Indians.

After 1800 Sam regains prosperity in trade until his overland transport business is ruined by Robert Fulton's steamboat and his cotton speculation fails because of Jefferson's Embargo of 1807. But he is soon involved with political and revolutionary activity, including invasions into West Florida, Texas, and Mobile. Primarily, however, Sam is a central figure in the war against the Creeks beginning in 1811. The Shawnee chiefs Tecumseh and the Prophet attempt to unite the Choctaws, Chicasaws, Creeks, and Seminoles with the English against the Americans. Sam and Tishomingo attend the great Indian council of 1811 at which Tecumseh and Pushmataha debate whether the Creeks should join

with Tecumseh. On their way there they witness a great earthquake and shower of stars. Pushmataha wins the debate by predicting, on information supplied by Tishomingo, when a comet will appear, and thus convinces the Indians that the god Aba Inki is with him.

Sam is given command of Fort Madison and sends Donna to Fort Mims. Soon afterwards he learns of her death in the terrible massacre of Fort Mims, which Street describes in gory detail.

After the battle Sam returns to his plantation. Earlier he had fallen into debt to Lake Flournoy, whom Tishomingo has since killed. Honoria, now Flournoy's widow, holds the notes, and Sam decides to leave the whole place to her and begin life anew in a virgin territory through which he had ridden on his way to New Orleans. With his new wife, Anestasie Duportail, widow of a friend killed by the Creeks, Sam, his family, and his slaves move to a new land called Bogue Homa as the novel ends.

Oh, Promised Land is taken from the life history of Sam Dale, frontier hero of the Mississippi territory, and from accounts of the history and customs of the times. Undoubtedly Street got the bulk of information about Dale from two works of J. F. H. Claiborne, Mississippi historian and a member of the Claiborne family which was prominent in the formation of the state. Claiborne authored Life and Times of Gen. Sam Dale[2] and Mississippi as a Province, Territory and

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[2]J. F. H. Claiborne, Life and Times of Gen. Sam Dale (New York: Harper and Bros., 1860). All further references will appear parenthetically in the text.

State.[3] The former book was written from statements made by Dale himself to Claiborne and others about his experiences on the frontier, and is a remarkable account of adventure in that new land. Unfortunately the original manuscripts of Dale's recollections were lost when a Mississippi steamboat carrying them sank, and so Claiborne had to write much from his own recollections (Dale, p. i.). In the latter book Claiborne of course gives a broader view of these years on the frontier, and includes long and detailed observations by Dale concerning the customs of the Indians. From this book Street may have obtained many of the details of the times which he included, sometimes tediously, in Oh, Promised Land.

Street's Sam Dabney seems to portray Dale's activities more than his character. Claiborne says of Dale that he was a man of "singular modesty" and a "man of truth." He also says that Dale was " . . . patient, frugal, full of religious faith, proud of his country, remorseless in battle, yet prompt to forgive, and ever ready to jeopard his own safety for the helpless and oppressed—a race of men such as no other country has produced—wholly American" (Dale, pp. i-ii). Although Sam Dabney is certainly no scoundrel, the only one of the above compliments which could unequivocally be applied to him is "remorseless in battle." Dabney is at times boastful, deceptive, impatient, prodigal, agnostic, and self-seeking. Indeed most of the principal characters of Oh,

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[3]J. F. H. Claiborne, Mississippi as a Province, Territory and State (Jackson, Mississippi: Power and Barksdale, Publishers and Printers, 1880; rpt. by the Louisiana State University Press for the Mississippi Historical Society, 1964).

Promised Land are similarly flawed. In his 1941 review of the book William B. Hamilton commented that Street was then working on a sequel and hoped that it would include "at least one character who is not utterly lecherous, unprincipled, and unscrupulous."[4] Indeed Street does go overboard in his attempt to portray the raw nature of life on the frontier.

But the physical traits and the events in the lives of the two men are closely parallel. Claiborne says that "General Dale was six feet two inches, erect, square shouldered, raw-boned, and muscular, noted particularly for great length and strength of arm" (Dale, pp. 231-232). Street says of Sam Dabney: "He stood six feet two and weighed two hundred pounds. . . . His shoulders were massive and his muscles rippled under his shirt of home spun—string muscles, never knotty. His legs were so long and his hips so narrow that he looked somewhat like an oaken bean supported by a lithe sapling" (OPL, p. 15). Sam Dale's parents both died within a week of each other on the Georgia frontier, leaving him in charge of his younger siblings. Dale describes how he prayed at their grave and came away determined to succeed (Dale, pp. 32-36). Dabney's parents are both killed in a Creek raid, leaving him to care for Honoria. Although he is uncertain of the existence of God, he attempts a prayer, and he and Honoria are very determined to succeed (OPL, pp. 11-14).

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[4]William B. Hamilton, rev. of Oh, Promised Land, Journal of Mississippi History, 3 (Jan., 1941), 57-58.

As does Sam Dabney, Dale signed on with the military as a scout to help protect the frontier. Both engage in fights with the Indians, and Dale provides excellently detailed accounts of such encounters which Street must have found inspiring (Dale, pp. 47-48, 73-78).

After leaving military service Dale embarked on trade with the Creeks and a waggoning business, as well as conveying families through the Creek and Choctaw country and bringing back Indian goods to Savannah (Dale, 45 ff.). All of this is very similar to Dabney's multifold business ventures.

In 1808 Dale built a set of mills on a tract of land which he had obtained on Commissioner's Creek in Jones County, "which was for several years my home" (Dale, p. 50). Dabney's first settlement is on the Pearl River, but eventually he too settles in Street's home country, which he calls Bogue Homa.

Other characters in Oh, Promised Land are also based on actual historical figures described by Claiborne and others. Tishomingo really was a Choctaw chief, though he was not a nephew of Pushamataha and was not a companion of Sam Dale.[5] Fred T. Marsh of the New York Herald Tribune believes that Tishomingo embodies three or four famous Indians of the day, particularly Sequoya who, like Tishomingo, worked on an alphabet for his people.[6]

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[5]See W. A. Evans, "The Trial of Tishomingo," Journal of Mississippi History, 2 (July 1940), 147-155.

[6]Fred T. Marsh, "'Old Man' Dabney's Brats' in a Wild Land," rev. of Oh, Promised Land, NYHTBR, 9 (21 April 1940), 5.

Another character in the novel is Lake Flournoy, who is taken from Greenwood LeFleur, a resident of the territory, described by Claiborne as the son of Louis LeFleur, a Canadian Frenchman, and a Choctaw woman.[7] Street changes his name to Flournoy, which was also the name of a general in the U.S. Infantry.[8] Robert Van Gelder notes that Street has changed the character of LeFleur to that of the unscrupulous "semi-villain" Flournoy, as well as the time of the construction of LeFleur's famous house on the Natchez Trace, Malmaison. Street retains the name of the mansion.[9]

The closest parallels between Sam Dale and Sam Dabney begin with Dale's attendance at the great Took-a-batcha Indian conference in October of 1811 where Tecumseh of the Shawnees tried to persuade the Creeks to join him in fighting the whites and was prevented by the speech of Pushmataha of the Choctaws. Dale vividly described the magnetism of Tecumseh:

> I have heard many great orators, but I never saw one with the vocal powers of Tecumseh, or the same command of the muscles of his face. Had I been deaf, the play of his countenance would have told me what he said. Its effect on that wild, superstitious, untutored, and warlike assemblage may be conceived: not a word was said, but stern warriors, the "stoics of the woods," shook with emotion, and a thousand tomahawks were brandished in the air. . . . When he resumed his seat the northern pipe was again passed around in solemn silence. The Shawnees then simultaneously leaped up with one appalling yell, and danced their tribal war-dance, going through the evolutions of battle, the scout, the ambush, the

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[7]Claiborne, Mississippi, p. 515.

[8]Ibid., p. 328.

[9]Robert Van Gelder, "A Lusty Tale of the Frontier," rev. of Oh, Promised Land, NYTBR, 28 April 1940, p. 4.

> final struggle, brandishing their war-clubs, and screaming in terrific concert an infernal harmony fit only for the regions of the damned. (Dale, pp. 56, 61-62)

Street decided to enhance the scene even further by having the great meteor shower of 1833 fall at the same time as the conference (OPL, pp. 632-633).

In 1813 Dale was involved in the battle of Burnt Corn Creek. Prior to the battle he encountered a haughty officer who foolishly provoked fighting. Dale was also wounded in the side during the skirmish (Dale, pp. 72-78). Dabney also meets a party of whites and vainly tries to persuade them not to march on the Creeks. And he also receives a wound in his side (OPL, pp. 682-684).

Dale assumed command of Fort Madison after being wounded and was able to defend it with a small force by means of his ingenuity. He planted illumination poles to prevent secret attack and had the women wear men's clothes to give the appearance that he had more men (Dale, pp. 116-117). Sam Dabney also lights torches and has his people march around and make noise to give the appearance of a large force (OPL, p. 689).

Claiborne interrupts Dale's narrative to describe the massacre at Fort Mims on August 30, 1814. He gives the basic facts of the event and refers the reader to Pickett's History of Alabama for a "most minute and thrilling narrative of this tragedy" (Dale, p. 107). Then he picks up Dale's story again.

Similarly Street, for the only time in his novel, leaves the account of Sam Dabney and devotes a chapter to Fort Mims. He is not as charitable

as Claiborne in his portrait of Major Dan Beasley, the commander of the fort who underestimated the danger and left the gate open and died trying to close it. Street, who is strong in describing action scenes, draws a detailed and gory picture of the massacre and tells how the dying Donna is mercifully killed by her attendant slave before the Indians can reach her, and how Sam's friend Hosea Thomas dies fighting (OPL, pp. 697-714).

The most famous incident of Dale's Indian-fighting career was a canoe fight on November 13, 1813, at Randons Landing, Alabama, in which Dale and two comrades fought and killed eleven creeks. Dale himself killed at least eight of the Indians by clubbing them with his gun and using his bayonet (Dale, pp. 121-127).

Street moves the fight to an earlier stage of Dabney's career, and makes Tishomingo his companion in the fray. A sample of Street's use of Dale's account may be seen by comparing the two following selections from Life and Times of Gen. Sam Dale and Oh, Promised Land.

> Finding myself unable to keep the two canoes in juxtaposition, I resolved to bring matters to an issue, and leaped into the Indian boat. My pirogue, with Jerry, Jim, and Caesar, floated off. Jim fired, and slightly wounded the Indian next to me. I now stood in the centre of their canoe—two dead at my feet —a wounded savage in the stern, who had been snapping his piece at me during the fight, and four powerful warriors in front. The first one directed a furious blow at me with his rifle; it glanced upon the barrel of my musket, and I staved the bayonet through his body. As he fell the next one repeated the attack. A shot from Jerry Austill pierced his heart. Striding over them, the next sprung at me with his tomahawk. I killed him with the bayonet, and his corpse lay between me and the last of the party. I knew him well—Tar-cha-chee, a noted wrestler, and the most famous ball-player of his clan. He paused a moment in expectation of my attack, but finding me motionless, he stepped backward to the bow of the canoe, shook

himself, gave the war-whoop of his tribe, and cried out, "Sam tholocco Iana dahmaska, ia-lanestha—lipso—lipso—lanestha. Big Sam! I am a man—I am coming—come on!" As he said this, with a terrific yell he bounded over the dead body of his comrade, and directed a blow at my head with his rifle, which dislocated my left shoulder. I dashed the bayonet into him. It glanced around his ribs, and the point hitching to his back-bone, I pressed him down. As I pulled the weapon out, he put his hands upon the sides of the canoe and endeavored to rise, crying out, "Tar-cha-chee is a man. He is not afraid to die!" I drove my bayonet through his heart. I then turned to the wounded villain in the stern, who snapped his rifle at me as I advanced, and had been snapping during the whole conflict. He gave the war-whoop, and, in tones of hatred and defiance, exclaimed, "I am a warrior—I am not afraid to die!" As he uttered the words I pinned him down with my bayonet, and he followed his eleven comrades to the land of spirits. (Dale, pp. 124-126)

Sam's canoe was sinking rapidly as he swung along-side the Creeks'. The instant his craft ground against the other boat, he leaped to his feet, balanced himself in the bow, and jumped among his enemies.

Only five men were on their feet and they crouched in the rear of the canoe, too amazed for immediate action. Sam hurled his tomahawk at the nearest man. The hatchet head was buried in the side of a Red Stick, and the handle protruded grotesquely. The Indian's mouth flew open and he stared down at his side. Then he screamed, not in agony, but in rage. He grasped the handle with both hands and pulled out the tomahawk, ripping his flesh as he collapsed. His blood spurted on to his comrades, and his death added to the Creeks' confusion. They tried to balance themselves, each to get by the other and reach Sam. They clawed at one another and fell in a heap when Sam rocked the boat quickly.

Two wounded Creeks squirmed at his feet. Sam heard them groan and glanced down at them. He put his right foot on the throat of one of the men and pressed down savagely until he felt the man's breath die away. He smashed the other Creek's head with the butt of his gun.

One warrior managed to get past his comrades and bore down upon Sam, waving his knife. Sam drove the end of his rifle into the man's stomach, bowled him over against his fellows and crushed his nead with the stock of his gun.

He grasped his rifle tightly by the barrel and swung again, breaking the back of a Creek who had stooped over to attack him in a crouch. Suddenly Sam began humming again, "Over the Hills and Far Away. . . ." A look of dread spread over the faces of the Creeks, and even the dying Indians looked up at him and mumbled, "Big Sam, Il-le-hi-ah!"

Big Sam Dabney, the messenger of death!

> What manner of man was this who sang while he killed, whose flesh oozed sweat and whose hair was matted with the blood and brains of his enemies? The Creeks shuddered and mumbled their prayers to Aba Inki, but did not ask mercy of man.
>
> Dirty Horse pushed one of his comrades aside and rushed at Sam, but he tripped over the body of another Creek and sprawled at Sam's feet. Sam lay his gun down and took out his knife. He held Dirty Horse by his scalp lock and calmly cut his throat. He pushed the man from him, so his blood would not drench him, and straightened up, then laughed at the last Creek, cowering in the stern of the boat, half hidden by the bodies of his friends.
>
> "I am Big Sam Dabney!" Sam yelled. "I am a man!"
>
> The taunt enraged the Red Stick so he forgot his fear. He stood up. "Our powder was wet or you would not have lived to boast."
>
> "My powder's wet, too," Sam mocked him. "You're a Creek, but you're not a man. Why don't you rush me?"
>
> "And slip over the bodies of my comrades?" the Red Stick muttered. "That's what the others did."
>
> Sam straddled one of the bodies, "Then come on. We'll fight man to man with our knives."
>
> "I'll fight you alone," the leader shouted. "In the middle of the boat where there's room. I am Tar-cha-chee!" He slipped past his comrades and advanced upon Sam, waving his knife. Sam braced himself and waited until he could smell the sweet odor of the Red Stick. He shifted quickly to the left, kicked the man viciously in the groin and, as the Red Stick bent doubled in pain, Sam drove his big knife into the enemy's stomach. He clung to his knife as the Indian stumbled. Then he yanked it to the right, laying open the man's belly. He pulled his knife out as the Red Stick fell, and wiped it on the sides of the boat. (OPL, pp. 438-440)

Dabney's war song, "Over the Hills and Far Away," also comes from Dale's biography (Dale, p. 140).

In January of 1814 Dale participated with General W. P. C. Claiborne and an army of Tennessee volunteers in the Battle of Holy Ground against the Creeks (Dale, pp. 137-142). Street has Dabney participate in the Battle of Horseshoe Bend instead (OPL, pp. 746-752).

In September of 1814, Sam Dale joined Gen. Andrew Jackson near Pensacola to fight the Creeks. Jackson there authorized a money claim

by Dale for payment by the U.S. Quartermaster, simply writing "Settle with Dale" on it (Dale, p. 148). Street also uses the incident (OPL, p. 742).

Another celebrated feat of Dale's imitated by Sam Dabney was his ride from an Indian agency in Georgia to New Orleans with dispatches to Gen. Jackson from the war department. He made the journey through the wilderness and hostile Indians in seven and a half days on a horse named Paddy and arrived on January 8 in the middle of the battle:

> An inhospitable wilderness and a perfidious and revengeful people lay on the route, but I accepted the trust. Mounted on a compactly-built horse, noted for his wind and muscle, which I purchased at the Agency for the trip, I set out the same night, taking with me only a blanket, my flint and steel, my pistols, and a wallet of Indian flour for myself and horse. In seven days and a half I reached Madisonville, on the Tchefoncta River, and forthwith engaged a fishing-smack to carry me across Lake Pontchartrain. Landing at Fort St. John, I found Quarter-master-general Piatt, who put me on a fine horse, and directed me to head-quarters, under charge of an orderly. At head-quarters, on Royal Street, I learned that the general was below, with the army, in front of the British, on the plains of Chalmette. Galloping through the city, down the river side, I heard the roar of artillery. The battle was in full blast. I gave my horse to the orderly, and rushed to the intrenchments. It was a magnificent vision. On each side our men stood silent and resolute. The enemy were advancing in columns with loud cheers. Their martial approach to the American lines—the fearful recoil, as whole detachments were swept away by the discharge from our works and the broadsides of the Carolina, then anchored on our right—the heroism of their officers, who rushed to the front, waving their swords, and rallied their men into the very jaws of death, and, cheering, died—was a spectacle so sublime, that it silenced for a moment the clamor of the battlefield, and inspired every one with awe and admiration. There was a simultaneous pause in our ranks; for several minutes a dreadful stillness prevailed; not a gun was discharged; not a shout was heard; and then there burst forth, along our whole line, a blaze of fire, a crash of small arms, a deafening roar of artillery, and when the gun smoke rolled away, the field was covered with dead and wounded, and the British columns were in

> full retreat—not flying ingloriously, but staggering back, like men reeling under unexpected and over-powering blows.
>
> The terrible grandeur of the scene impressed the veteran soldiers of Napoleon, a number of whom were in the American ranks; and you may imagine its effect upon me, trained from boyhood to the ambuscades of the wilderness, and to the hand-to-hand rencounters of the frontier, where a reeking scalp is often the only evidence of the fight. (Dale, pp. 149-151)

Dale quotes verbatim his conversation with Jackson and comments on the general's colorful language. Jackson asked him to return to Georgia immediately, and the next morning Dale left, again riding Paddy, and made the return journey, almost freezing to death (Dale, pp. 152-157).

Oh, Promised Land ends shortly after the battle of New Orleans, and so the remainder of Claiborne's biography is not reflected in the novel but for a few exceptions. Dale goes to Washington and meets women different from those whom he had earlier known: "The ladies of Washington struck me, who had so long been accustomed to the sunburned maidens of the woods, as very fair and beautiful, very fascinating and refined." Dabney is similarly enchanted with sophisticated ladies like Donna Claiborne and Anestasie Duportail.

As will be illustrated below, Oh, Promised Land has many weaknesses. But as he was later to do in The Velvet Doublet, Street made a fine selection of a central character by choosing Sam Dale as a prototype. He brought a focus to an early American leader that the public should find very interesting. And he drew a colorful if romanticized picture of a region of the country whose colonial period has not often been treated in fiction.

Oh, Promised Land is filled with frontier and Indian lore, probably borrowed from historians like Claiborne. For example, Sam Dabney

encounters the grisly bone-picker, an old Indian with long fingernails who cleans the bones of the cremated dead. Claiborne described this phenomenon in his history.[10]

As interesting as many of these kinds of details are, Street's fondness for them, coupled with his lack of experience in writing novels, causes him to include too much historical trivia. The reader is told about holy rollers, funeral customs (white and Indian), cures for bullet wounds and yaws, and passenger pigeons; techniques of fighting, hunting, and fishing; the origin of the terms stogie, Smoky Mountains, Georgia cracker, bootlegger, and bushwhacker; Indian ball games, corn whiskey, various kinds of religion, and the invention of suspenders (by Sam Dabney). And historical figures from Robert Fulton to Roosevelt's ancestors are mentioned or make cameo appearances. Fred Marsh says:

> Mr. Street shares the fault, so common among less experienced writers than he, of trying to get in everything he has dug out of his research. No sooner do his people line up against the bar for a drink, right in the midst of action, but one or another gives us a monologue. They go in for soliloquies and asides, too. And from time to time Mr. Street himself interrupts the drama to step before the curtain and deliver himself of a Greek chorus. In that way we get a lot of information, much of it very interesting, things you and I never knew before as well as things we knew and things we don't believe and things we have reason to believe are not so.

As evidence of Street's expressiveness Marsh points to Sam Dabney's encountering the families of Jefferson Davis and Abraham Lincoln and his hopes that they would grow up to be successful. Marsh labels Street's technique of having his characters mingle familiarly with

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[10]Claiborne, Mississippi, pp. 489, 493.

actual historical people a "cheap liberty."[11] This charge is justified, though one should remember that Sam Dale did indeed encounter such people as Andrew Jackson.

The most carefully drawn character in the novel besides Sam is Honoria. Street was adept at creating women who are less than completely honorable, pure, and good, and Honoria is the first of them. Honoria frankly wants the attentions of men and the luxuries of life. Even her prayers consist only of requests for herself. She is not criminal—she does not steal or kill for what she wants—but she does use her beauty to get her desires and pleasures. Honoria rarely cries. She is possessive of Sam and bitter toward his wife Donna for coming between them, though she really wishes her no harm.

Marsh believes the relationship between Sam and Honoria to be the best feature of the book: "In this main thread of his tale Mr. Street proves himself a novelist."[12] Sam's tie to Honoria is the most consistently recurring element of the plot. They are close at the beginning, and even the bitterness between them over Sam's marriage to Donna and Honoria's to Lake Flournoy does not destroy their family tie. Only at the end of the novel when Honoria shows that she would defile Tishomingo, whom she loves, and seize Sam's property because of his debts to Flournoy does he turn away from her.

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[11]Marsh, p. 5.

[12]Ibid.

Tishomingo's mixed nature of savage and civilized man gives him distinctiveness also. As a somber prince of his people he intercedes to prevent war, and he works on an alphabet for the Choctaws. He also provides stability and wisdom for Sam. But as a savage he burns for revenge on Lake Flournoy for an old wrong and finally lashes him to death with a whip.

Donna's nobility provides a contrast to the earthiness of Honoria, and her gradual wasting away from the effects of disease and seemingly from the effects of the country itself is fairly well handled. Anestasie, however, is inconsistently drawn, first shown as a spoiled and weak woman who goes literally insane with fright, and then later appearing cool and strong to take Donna's place in Sam's life.

Other characters of note include Hosea Cincinnatus Thomas, a pudgy lawyer who informs Sam of new developments in the nation and protects his interests. There is a very good scene between Thomas and Tishomingo where even the stoic Indian is awed by Thomas' courage, justice, and dangerous skill with a pistol (OPL, pp. 553-557).

Oh, Promised Land is an uneven novel stylistically, with some strong features and several weak ones. As he was consistently to do in all of his novels, Street writes fine action scenes. The description of Sam Dabney cooly scalping an Indian (OPL, 59ff.), the famous canoe fight (OPL, 433ff.), the massacre of Fort Mims (OPL, 702ff.), the Battle of Horseshoe Bend (OPL, 747ff.), and the battle of New Orleans (OPL, 784ff.) are exciting, detailed, and rather gory narratives.

Occasionally Street attempts lyrical prose, but more often than not the results are unsatisfactory. His later novels were to be improvements in this kind of writing. One device that he does bring off well, however, is the careful preparation for Donna's death by means of foreshadowing details about her.

The novel suffers most from a simple lack of unity. Covering twenty years of history over the entire South, it has to move too fast too often. Sometimes characters are shown engaging in two different conversations in two different locations on one page. Several incidents are also awkwardly or incongruously handled, such as Anestasie's going mad from a fear of snakes.

Street introduces a theme into Oh, Promised Land that he will carry through all of the Dabney novels, that of racially mixed blood. Tishomingo is part white and part Indian, and Lake Flournoy part Indian and part French. A similar matter is the illegitimacy of Hoab, whom Sam takes for his son. This development will play an important part in the following novel, Tap Roots.

Street's first novel, then, is long, exciting, brawling, and laden with faults. But as Marsh says, in Oh, Promised Land Street demonstrates the storyteller's art.[13] And the favorable reception even this flawed effort received indicated the success that his fiction was to enjoy.

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[13]Ibid.

Tap Roots

Tap Roots opens in 1858 in the Lebanon Valley of southern Mississippi (actually Jones County), where Sam Dabney had come with Anestasie and his family and slaves over forty years before.[14] Mississippi and Alabama have become states, events in which Sam has participated, and the Dabney family controls the valley. Anestasia died in 1841. Hoab and Shellie McLeod were married in 1824 and now have four children: Cormac, Morna, Aven, and Bruce. The latter two, sixteen-year-old twins, are the youngest children. Morna is in her twenties and engaged to Clay McIvor, a cavalry officer and son of Douglas McIvor, the only slaveholder in the valley. Cormac, the oldest, is married and a storekeeper.

Sam Dabney is dying of cancer, and he entrusts to the aged Tishomingo a sealed letter which tells Hoab that he is really the illegitimate son of Honoria. Sam is concerned by the growing love between Bruce and Kyd Fermat, a Cajan girl who Sam knows is one-thirty-second Negro. Sam loves the girl and wants no harm to come to her, so he tells Tishomingo to give Hoab the letter should he find out about Kyd and try to harm her happiness. After dividing his property, Sam dies and is buried with a Choctaw funeral.

Soon afterwards Lebanon is visited by Keith Alexander, dashing and morose newspaper editor and famous duelist who has killed seventeen men for inquiring too closely into his origin. Alexander is the illegitimate

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[14]James Street, Tap Roots (New York: The Dial Press, 1942). All further references will appear parenthetically in the text.

son of an aristocratic Kentucky woman and a Virginia statesman. He begins paying attention to Morna, angering Clay McIvor.

Politics and the impending Civil War soon enter the story. The Dabneys refuse to endorse slavery out of concern for both principle and business. Hoab, now leader of the Dabneys, has no sympathy with the Confederate position and wants the Union to stay intact so that his people will be left alone. He allies with Alexander in a Southern abolition movement and later in business ventures in cotton.

The first crisis in the book comes when Morna is struck by polio. Gradually she and Clay drift apart, and Clay falls in love with Aven. Keith and Morna engage in a troubled love affair, and gradually Morna's crippled leg heals.

When the Secession Convention of 1861 is called, Hoab instructs Douglas McIvor, who is to represent Lebanon, to vote against secession. When McIvor betrays his trust and votes for separation, Hoab swears to kill him if he ever returns to the valley.

Foiled in his attempt to keep Mississippi in the Union, Hoab conceives the main plot element of Tap Roots, the secession of the valley of Lebanon from Mississippi. He fortifies the valley, declares himself its leader, and proclaims the Republic of Lebanon.

The remainder of the novel is the story of this rebellion. Hoab, Alexander, Bruce, and their followers resist all attempts of the Confederacy to enlist them. Word of their resistance spreads, and soon other Southerners who do not favor the Confederacy come to Lebanon. Hoab has trouble organizing this motley assembly into a military force,

but with the aid of Keith and Bruce he forges an army. Finally, Confederate troops under the command of Clay McIvor are sent against the five hundred defenders of Lebanon. The valley is caught by surprise, and Morna goes to Clay and holds him with her charms, giving Hoab time to prepare. Tishomingo is killed trying to stop her.

Clay leads the charge on the valley and Keith shoots him with his dueling pistols. There follows a long and bloody battle in which the defenders slaughter twelve hundred Confederates but are eventually nearly annihilated. Cormac is killed, but the remainder of the Dabney party survives. The Confederate troops leave, and the valley people know that they will not be bothered again. Bruce plans to marry Kyd and rebuild his lumber industry, and Keith takes Morna to New Orleans to marry her. Hoab never learns of his illegitimacy, nor do Bruce and Kyd know of her Negro blood.

James Street learned much from having written one novel, for Tap Roots is probably the best of the Dabney series. Much of the improvement is because of his recognition of the value of unity. The time period covers only four years, the place is mostly limited to the Valley of Lebanon, and the action is centered on Hoab's defiance of the Confederacy and the various affairs of the people connected with him. Also the shadow of Sam Dabney is always present, and this provides an identity and unity with the events of Oh, Promised Land and conveys a sense of heritage.

The characters of Tap Roots are also more slowly and distinctly drawn. The central figure, after Sam Dabney's death, is Hoab. Street

says of him: "Converted to Methodism in his youth by the indomitable Lorenzo Dow, Hoab's religious fervor found a natural outlet, first in prohibition societies, then in the abolition movement" (TR, p. 30). Hoab is both zealot and businessman. He opposes slavery on principle, and he also calculates the business advantage of having what would amount to an independent nation to clear goods between Mississippi and the north after Mississippi has seceded from the Union (TR, pp. 276-277). Sam Dabney doubted his son's charitableness in such matters as accepting Kyd's Negro blood, but Hoab proves himself more reasonable than his father thought him to be.

But when Douglas McIvor betrays him, Hoab's prophet-like wrath is aroused: "Instead of weakening him, it strengthened him, for there is no wrath like the wrath of a righteous man, there's no hatred like the hatred of a just man who has been treated unjustly, and there's no fury like the fury of a zealot" (TR, p. 262).

Hoab's children are all different. Cormac is slow, plodding, and well meaning. Aven is delicately beautiful, rather shallow, selfish, and affected. But her twin brother, Bruce, is Sam Dabney's grandson. Bruce is reckless and short-tempered, quick to defend his honor, and rash in his speech. But he is a natural soldier and strategist, and it is Bruce who fortifies the valley against the Confederate troops. He also first recognizes the potential for lumbering in the valley, which in time becomes its primary industry.

Morna is a beauty with red hair and is forthright, brave, and frankly sensuous. Frequently she is likened to her grandmother,

Honoria. She is infatuated with Keith Alexander but retains her love for Clay McIvor even after hostilities are declared. Clay draws away from her after her polio attack leaves her crippled, and she pities herself and is difficult. But with Tishomingo's help she recovers both her health and spirit, although in the process she goes through an artificial religious fervor. When the valley is threatened she uses herself to hold back Clay's attack and then returns to Keith Alexander. Again Street has created a leading woman character who has as many foibles as virtues.

Sam Dabney's and Tishomingo's characters remain fairly consistent with what they were in Oh, Promised Land, especially Tishomingo's. The old Indian still serves as principal advisor and protector for Sam and his family, administering cold justice with his whip. Reverend Bruce Kirkland, a Methodist minister and ardent abolitionist, also concerns himself with the Dabneys' welfare.

The most intriguing character of Tap Roots is Keith Alexander, who is taken from Alexander Keith McClung, Mississippi lawyer, editor, and duelist (TR, pp. ii-iii). Mississippi historian Dunbar Rowland says that McClung was the son of a sister of Chief Justice John Marshall, and by his silence regarding McClung's father gives tacit testimony to his reputed illegitimacy. "He was reared in Kentucky and educated for the navy, in which he served some time, . . . fighting several duels. When he came to Mississippi in 1832 he was an exceedingly handsome young gentleman of twenty-three years, with aristocratic tastes but no great financial resources. . . . He belonged to the aristocratic lineage of

Kentucky." McClung was a lawyer and writer who edited Whig papers. He also served with distinction under Jefferson Davis at Monterey. Later he was defeated in an election for congress, and Rowland quotes Reuben Davis as saying that "Very possibly it is from this defeat, which he took much to heart, that we may date the first symptoms of that deep melancholy which afterward clouded the noble spirit of McClung, and which culminated in the awful tragedy of his self-inflicted death."[15]

In a separate article, Rowland says of McClung that "The blood of the Breckenridges of Kentucky and the Marshalls of Virginia flowed in his veins."[16] Street got some of his information on McClung from Craddock Goins, whose information suggests that McClung's mother was the daughter of John Marshall, though Street knows of no confirmation of this and adds, "Neither is there any evidence that there was any stain on McClung's name." Other information Street obtained said that McClung "resented questions about his family," killed between fourteen and twenty men in duels, drank much, was a "morose melancholiac, and unbelievably handsome." He hated Jefferson Davis, though they never fought, and was "a flowery speaker and a writer of sentimental verse" (TR, p. iii).

Keith Alexander follows the above descriptions fairly consistently. Street emphasizes his deadly marksmanship, fastidious dress and manners,

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[15]Dunbar Rowland, Mississippi (Atlanta: Southern Historical Publishing Association, 1907), II, 184-185.

[16]Dunbar Rowland, "Alexander K. McClung," Publications of the Mississippi Historical Society, 4(1901), 377.

and prowess with women. His father is said to be a Virginia statesman and a bachelor. Keith has killed seventeen men for asking about his birth. His worst enemy is Jefferson Davis, but Keith fears Davis' saber and Davis fears Keith's pistols, so neither challenges the other to duel. At Sam Dabney's suggestion Keith had become editor of a Whig newspaper, in which he published flowery quotations and poems (TR, pp. 90-96).

Keith opposes slavery mainly to resist Davis and his slaveholding father, and thus he falls in with Hoab Dabney. He also shrewdly sees the profits that will lie in cotton smuggling during the approaching war, and he uses Lebanon lumber to build secret wharves in the swamps.

Keith's personality is one of bitterness, aloofness, and contempt for man and woman. But he falls in love with Morna Dabney and courts her in what one reviewer called "the oddly bitter romance of Keith and Morna, which somehow suits the bitter mood of the novel."[17] Although Morna's love for Clay McIvor persists, by the end of the novel she is ready to become Keith's wife.

Keith's fighting ability provides some exciting action scenes in the novel, particularly when he shoots Clay McIvor to open the battle for the Lebanon valley. With bitter irony he discovers that Hoab, leader of the proud Dabney family, is nameless like himself, but he keeps his knowledge secret.

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[17]Margaret Wallace, "Dixie Free State," rev. of Tap Roots, by James Street, in NYTBR, 5 July 1942, p. 7.

Tap Roots is stronger than its predecessor in that its style is more natural and contains few awkward scenes. Paul Engle observes that "The prose, while not distinguished, is rapid and deft and appropriate to the quick turn and movement of event."[18] This time Street simply gives the exposition about the national affairs himself rather than try to route it through the mouth of one of his characters. Also by limiting himself to a few characters he can more tightly control their individual roles and their relationships.

Street uses a unifying symbol fairly well, the tree on which Sam Dabney had carved his land claim when he first settled the valley in 1815. He is buried beneath it with Donna and Anestasie, and even when it is cut down the stump is left in the belief that the living tap root will continue to grow. Thus the tree is a symbol of the Dabney family (TR, pp. 15, 86, 549, 585).

There are several particularly good scenes in the novel, including Sam's discussing his approaching death with his friends, the gathering of his family in his room, and his death and Choctaw funeral (TR, pp. 42ff., 66ff., 73ff.). Also effective is the meeting of the settlers of the valley to hear Hoab's plans for secession from Mississippi (TR, p. 402ff.). Consistently good again are the scenes involving action. Primary among these is the forty-page account of the battle which is the climax of the novel. Twelve hundred of the twenty-five hundred

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[18]Paul Engle, "Street . . . ," rev. of Tap Roots, SRL, 25 (1 Aug. 1942), 15.

Confederates are killed, and 480 of Hoab's five hundred troops die (TR, pp. 513-557). One of the best scenes is that at the Secession Convention where Alexander confronts Douglas McIvor and is treacherously wounded (TR, pp. 258-261).

The foundation idea for Tap Roots was Street's observation that many people in the South did not want war or secession. Throughout Tap Roots, he analyzes the stormy political situation which led to the war and injects his proof of its unpopularity with many Southerners. Street's historical view is the subject of a study by William Marett Jones at the University of Mississippi.[19]

Street has Sam Dabney head a commission which discovered that only one-fifth of the families of the South owned any slaves at all, and most of these owned only a few (TR, pp. 29-30). Charles Sydnor, in his Slavery in Mississippi, observes that slightly less than half of the white population of the state were members of slave-holding families in 1860.[20] In his foreword to Tap Roots Street says: "It may surprise some of you to read that the South had many Unionists, Abolitionists, and slavery haters. As a matter of fact, few Southerners owned slaves, and the South had its shares of appeasers, copperheads and draft-dodgers. The idea that the South rose to a man to defend Dixie is a stirring legend . . . and nothing more" (TR, p. i.).

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[19]William Marett Jones, Jr., A Century of Mississippi History with James Street," Thesis, the University of Mississippi, 1969.

[20]Charles Sackett Sydnor, Slavery in Mississippi (Gloucester, Mass., 1965), pp. 192-193.

Street grew up in Jones County in the southeastern piney woods section of Mississippi, a country which in 1860 consisted of small farmers who owned few slaves and opposed secession. This opposition and the actions taken because of it, as well as the legends and stories that came out of it, are the origins of Street's novel. And in telling his story he injects his own viewpoint concerning men and events of the times.

In his later book The Civil War, Street made much of revealing the contradictions and exploding the myths concerning the conflict, and many of these he includes in Tap Roots. He observes for example that Lincoln was ignorant of many of the forces and causes of the turmoil and succeeded rather out of humanitarian concern, common sense, and shrewd political maneuvers. Eventually he forced the South to start hostilities so that he could appeal for volunteers to defend the Union (TR, pp. 237-245, 300-304). Street also says that the South was a mass of contradictions, especially in its bizarre constitution. Ultimately he sees the war as an economic conflict involving a new breed of men far different from those who founded the Union. Street has Keith Alexander point out that the western states are running the United States and the new southern states are running the Confederacy (TR, pp. 298-299).

But in the South there was a considerable segment which did not favor the Confederacy, including Jones County, and the conflict between the two factions came into focus on the issue of slavery. Such men as

Hinton Helper, author of The Impending Crisis of the South, mentioned in Tap Roots, strongly condemned the institution.[21]

Street says in his foreword that "the South had many Unionists, Abolitionists and slavery haters," and that several sections of the South either limited their support of the Confederacy or openly opposed it. He then says, "Perhaps the most famous Free State, however, was Jones County, Mississippi, where I was reared" (TR, p. i.). John K. Bettersworth gives some confirmation to this statement in his history of Mississippi.

> Among the dirt farmers there were some who objected to secession and war; and it was only they who did anything about it. Here was a class which grew almost no cotton, had scarcely a slave to its name, and was satisfied enough with the Union and did not care to leave it. In several of the hill counties, the dirt farmers offered active opposition to the Confederacy. In none was it so well publicized as in Jones County, in the heart of the Piney Woods.
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> Jones County was a poor county in 1860 and was sparsely settled. Here only 633 bales of cotton were produced in that year; slaves were almost non-existent; and, whether the people loved the Union or not, they just plain did not want to be meddled with![22]

In 1904 Goode Montgomery, a graduate of the University of Mississippi and a school teacher at Ellisville in Jones County, wrote an article for the Publications of the Mississippi Historical Society which perhaps gives the most cogent and accurate account of the strange events which

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[21]Hinton Rowan Helper, The Impending Crisis of the South: How to Meet It (New York: Burdich Brothers, 1857; rpt. in 1970 by Negro Universities Press, a division of Greenwood Press, Inc., Westport, Connecticut).

[22]Bettersworth, Mississippi, pp. 301-302.

transpired in the county during the war.[23] Montgomery had talked to older Jones County citizens and gathered what records he could to try to sift the truth from the various accounts that he had heard and read.

When the western part of Mississippi opened up in the first part of the nineteenth century Goode says, Jones County was left "well-nigh depopulated." As a result there was little government and little need of it. The people became independent in politics and even in matters of dress and decorum. "They went to church barefooted, dressed in any way they saw fit, and carrying their guns to use in case any game might cross their path."[24]

When the issue of secession arose, the people "were almost a unit against it." They elected J. D. Powell their candidate to the Secession Convention of 1861, expecting him to vote against secession. However Powell surprised them by voting for the measure. He was hanged in effigy and did not come home for a long time. However Jones County did send a large number of troops to fight for the Confederacy, and most of them served for the duration.[25]

But a few did not, principally Newt Knight. Bettersworth says that "Knight was a home-loving farmer, house-builder, and shoemaker, well-liked by his neighbors" and a Hardshell Baptist. Knight refused to serve in combat when the Confederacy drafted him, and so he was given

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[23]Goode Montgomery, "Alleged Secession of Jones County," Publications of the Mississippi Historical Society, 8 (1904), 13-22.

[24]Ibid., pp. 13-14.

[25]Ibid., p. 14.

hospital duty. "Soon he became convinced that this was a rich man's war and a poor man's fight."[26] Goode says that Knight's followers especially resented the "Twenty Negro Law."[27] Bettersworth adds that Newt was also enraged at news that the Confederate cavalry had seized goods and animals from Jones County, including "his old mother's one and only mule."[28] What happened next supplied the main plot idea for Street's Tap Roots:

> In the latter part of 1862, the famous "Newt Knight Company" was formed, with Newt Knight as captain, Jasper Collins First Lieutenant, and W. W. Sumrall Second Lieutenant. Several of those who deserted from the Confederate army joined this company, which numbered when it was organized about sixty men, but later was increased to about one hundred and twenty-five. Its members came from various parts of the country. Knight was from Jasper county, while others were from other counties and even from other states. They had their headquarters on an island in Leaf river near the present town of Soso. From this place they made their raids, which greatly annoyed the local Confederate authorities, and to it they retreated when pursued by an enemy. . . . They had some communications with the Union officers at Memphis and Vicksburg. . . . This Company fought several battles with the Confederate forces, one, on Tallagala Creek, near where Laurel now is; another, in Ellisville, and a third near their headquarters on Leaf river.[29]

Soon the word spread that Newt Knight and his men had formed the "Republic of Jones" or the "Free State of Jones." They had seceded from Mississippi and formed an independent state with Knight as president. In 1886 G. Norton Galloway, a former Union soldier and historian,

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[26]Bettersworth, Mississippi, p. 302.

[27]Goode, p. 14.

[28]Bettersworth, Mississippi, pp. 302-303.

[29]Montgomery, pp. 14-15.

published an article in the Magazine of American History entitled "A Confederacy within a Confederacy." In it he said that in 1862 the people of Jones County assembled at Ellisville and formally seceded from Mississippi. Galloway even gave the exact wording of the declaration. He said that the population of the county grew from three thousand to over twenty thousand and that Knight's army numbered ten thousand.[30]

Montgomery says of Galloway's article that "The only source which the writer gave and which I have been able to find, is his own fertile imagination." Montgomery, who lived in Jones County, thoroughly investigated the secession story among many of the people and records most closely concerned with events of the war and pronounced it patently false. There never was a Republic of Jones; in fact he says that "The county government was never interrupted, but went from the Union to the Confederacy and back to the Union without a hitch. The officers scarcely knew the difference." Furthermore, Knight's band numbered at most 125 men.[31] Bettersworth, probably basing his opinion in part on Montgomery's investigations and perhaps on those set forth in a briefer study by Professor A. L. Bondurant of the University of Mississippi,[32] agrees that the secession story is fiction and says that Knight and his men simply deserted the army and raided both Confederates and Yankees.[33]

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[30]Ibid., pp. 16-18.

[31]Ibid., pp. 15-22.

[32]Alexander L. Bondurant, "Did Jones County Secede?" Publications of the Mississippi Historical Society, 1 (1898), 104-106.

[33]Bettersworth, Mississippi, p. 303.

However, Carleton Beals, in his book War within a War: The Confederacy against Itself, gives information that tends to support the theory that there was some formal organization to Knight's rebellion:

> South of the open country, in the longleaf pine region, where the soil is so poor it will grow only a fourth a bale of cotton per acre, where people had lived by floating an occasional log down the river or peddling peanuts in Mobile, where they went to church barefoot but were fiercely independent, Confederate authority crumbled. Whether there ever really was a "Free State of Jonesia" is still a matter of hot dispute. If it existed, one witness said, it was set up "by eighty men in a swamp." But there was enough authority apparently to issue paroles written on tree bark, and to raid Confederate supplies in Jason County and give them to poor families whose sons had refused to fight. They caused great terror among loyal Confederate farmers. It was said one band even raised the American flag over the Ellisville courthouse. Colonel Robert Lowrey, C.S.A., came in with bloodhounds and cavalry to hunt them down, but the local people fed the animals red pepper, destroying their powers of scent. Lowrey in desperation rounded up a few old men and boys and put them in jail, threatening to kill them. A man named Newton Knight had one of the most daring and best disciplined anti-Confederate bands in the state operating in this area.[34]

Dunbar Roland in his history of Mississippi states that after the war the October 1865 Mississippi legislature received a petition from 106 citizens of Jones County, who stated that they

> "would respectfully represent that from occurrences that have transpired within the past two years the name of our county beyond its limits has become notorious if not infamous, at least to sensitive ears and the public spirit, the reproaches and vulgar comparisons are mortifying to those who occasionally travel beyond its limits, and have sacrificed much to sustain a higher reputation. We therefore would petition your honorable body to change the name of the county to that of Davis, and that of our county seat, Ellisville, to Leesburgh," hoping that this would begin a new history, "and that its past history

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[34]Carleton Beals, War within a War: The Confederacy within Itself (New York: Clinton Books, 1965), pp. 117-118.

> may be obliterated and buried so deep that the hand of time may never resurrect it, but if by chance posterity should learn that there was a Jones and the back part of its history," the petitioners asked that their names be spread on the journal to witness their non-participation "in any of its dark deeds." (House Journal, 1865, p. 351)

The act passed, but the constitutional convention of 1868 restored the original names.[35]

So much for the facts and educated guesses. Bettersworth calls James Street "Perhaps the most famous writer from the Piney Woods," but he laments Tap Roots' inaccuracy.[36] But Street grew up with the Newt Knight story, the fictions as well as the facts, and he saw in it the stuff of a good yarn—the kind of storytelling which his friend Paul Green says Jimmy could do with the best.

In his foreword Street implies that there was a secession, but he adds many qualifiers. He confesses that he has "taken many liberties," says that the character of Hoab Dabney does not portray Newt Knight but was only suggested by him, and grants that historical accounts of the Jones County events which stemmed from the writings of a Union soldier are exaggerations (he evidently refers to Galloway). "But," he says, "we are lovers of legends and myths" (TR, pp. i-ii).

Among the major liberties which Street takes is the injection of his Dabney family into the story of Newt Knight. And he has his prototype of Alexander Keith McClung also participate. Street does not go as far

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[35]Dunbar Rowland, "Jones County 'Secession,'" Encyclopedia of Mississippi History (Madison, Wisconsin: Selwyn A. Brant, 1907), I, 976.

[36]Bettersworth, Mississippi, p. 303.

as Galloway in swelling the numbers of Newt's army, but he does increase it to five hundred. And of course he does have Hoab declare the Free State of Lebanon on July 4, 1862 (TR, p. 392).

William Jones in his study of Street's use of Mississippi history finds that Street followed the actual proceedings of the Secession Convention in 1861 fairly closely. Jones examined the journal of the convention to see how the delegate from Jones County voted and discovered that while he did finally vote for secession he also previously voted for amendments to have a referendum. Street does not allow Douglas McIvor that mitigating concession.[37]

A theme that was undoubtedly suggested to Street by the story of Newt Knight and which he injects into his saga of the Dabney family is miscegenation. Not until 1948, seven years after Tap Roots was written, did the story of mixed racial blood among Newt Knight's descendants become wide-spread because of the miscegenation trial of Davis Knight, a descendant of Newt Knight through his daughter. But the mixed blood in the Knight family had been known in Jones County since the last part of the nineteenth century, and Street surely knew it well.

Anne Sanders of the Laurel (Miss.) Leader-Call wrote a feature article on Newt Knight in 1967. She states that Knight's wife was the former Serena Turner.[38] Also of Newt's household, however, were a

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[37]Jones, pp. 43-44.

[38]Anne Sanders, "Captain Knight's Life Remains Controversy," Laurel (Miss.) Leader-Call, 21 Oct. 1967, p. 9, LRL.

Negro servant woman named Rachel and her daughter, Georgia Ann. According to a report given to F. A. Behymer, staff correspondent for the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, trouble arose in the Knight house over Georgia Ann, and Serena was expelled to live with her son, Tom.[39]

Because Rachel "belonged" to Newt Knight she took his surname. Rachel's son Jeff, said to be a mulatto, married Molly Knight, Newt's daughter by Serena. From their marriage was born Otho Knight, and he became the father of four girls and a son, Davis Knight. Davis married Junie Lee Spradley, a white girl, in 1946. Whites in Jones County were aware of mixed blood among some of the Knight family, and soon Davis was arrested on a charge of miscegenation.[40] The charge was made because Davis was supposed to be one-eighth Negro. At the time Section 263 of the Constitution of the State of Mississippi read: "The marriage of a white person with a Negro or a mulatto or person who shall have one-eighth or more Negro blood, shall be unlawful and void."[41] The punishment for such a violation was a maximum of ten years in prison.

There was much debate at the trial as to whether Rachel was a full-blooded Negro, some contending that she was part Indian. If this were true Davis would be less than one-eighth Negro. Among those affirming that Rachel was fully Negro was eighty-eight-year-old Tom

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[39]Behymer, "Remote No-Man's Land," LRL.

[40]Behymer, Everyday Magazine, 9 Jan. 1949, LRL.

[41]"Miscegenation Case Before Court in Ellisville Goes Back to the Days of Newt Knight in History," Laurel (Miss.) Leader-Call, 17 Dec. 1948, p. 15, LRL.

Knight, Newt's son, who, according to Behymer, "was there . . . to stand up for the white strain of Knights against any and all pretensions of what he calls 'Nigger Knights,' willing and eager to help the state keep any Knights of mixed descent from crossing over and finding a place among the white Knights." Davis Knight was convicted and sentenced to five years in prison, but the case was appealed.[42]

Again, all of this happened after Tap Roots was published, but Street, probably out of his knowledge of Newt Knight's family, works the issue of mixed blood into the novel, and the circumstances resemble those brought out in the Davis Knight trial. Hoab Dabney, the prototype of Newt Knight, has his son Bruce marry Kyd Fermat, who is one-thirty-second Negro. Ironically Bruce early in the novel expresses sentiments similar to those voiced at Davis Knight's trial. Bruce says that he "will never accept tainted blood as the equal of my blood" (TR, p. 118). Both Sam and Hoab, however, take a more liberal view of the matter. And, as with the Knight family, intermarriage with Indian blood is considered honorable among the Dabney family.

The theme of Kyd's mixed blood is never a major one in Tap Roots or the sequels By Valour and Arms and Mingo Dabney. But interestingly it is a theme which was soon remembered when I talked with Mississippians about James Street's novels.

The articles by Anne Sanders and F. A. Behymer on Newt Knight and his clan mention some other facts which Street possibly could have used

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[42]Behymer, Everyday Magazine, 9 Jan. 1949, LRL.

in his Dabney novels. Sanders describes Newt's gun "Sal," a long double-barrel shotgun still existent in 1967 and owned by a friend of the Knight family.[43] Possibly it could have suggested Sam Dabney's unusual double-barrel rifle.

Behymer tells of the remote and self-sufficient region of Soso in Jasper County where Newt Knight's clan dwelled and where Newt himself lived in the "big house." The remoteness of the region and the domination by the Knight family suggests Lebanon and the Dabneys. Behymer also tells of Newt's death at age ninety-three: "He went over to Georgia Ann's cabin and up on the gallery and cut a jig step and said he never felt better in his life. Then he sat down there on the gallery, for the day was warm, and died."[44] No one dies this way in Street's novels, but the spirit is very much reminiscent of Big Sam Dabney.

Tap Roots, then, was a historical sequel to Oh, Promised Land and dealt with local events and legends familiar to Street from his childhood. In these he found his favorite material for a story, a little known piece of history from the South which he knew would be interesting and surprising to his readers. And he enriched his story with some of his fully drawn characters and his exciting descriptions of action scenes.

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[43]Sanders, p. 9

[44]Behymer, "Remote No-Man's Land," LRL.

By Valour and Arms

By Valour and Arms is set in the events concerning the siege of Vicksburg in 1862-1863.[45] The principal character is Wyeth Woodward, a gunner in the Confederate navy assigned to the ironclad Arkansas. In Natchez, which is controlled by the Union forces, Wyeth poses as a cotton speculator while secretly making contact with the Confederate underground which is attempting to gather iron and other materials for building the Arkansas. He first meets Sharon Weatherford, an agent for the underground and cousin to Vespasian Gillivray, Wyeth's friend and shipmate. Sharon loves Simeon St. Leger Granville, an English soldier of fortune who is a gunner with Wyeth and Ves. Later Wyeth meets Wall MacKenzie, leader of the underground, and his daughter Laurel. Soon Wyeth and Laurel are lovers.

Wyeth is involved in a dangerous maneuver in which he leads genuine cotton speculators into a trap. He also meets Mort Kincaid and Gar Rivers, who carry out guerrila warfare against the Yankees. When Mort is killed by the Union guerrilas, Gar, a Negro, methodically avenges his death by killing the men one at a time.

Soon Wyeth and his friends join Lt. Isaac N. Brown at Yazoo City to build the Arkansas. Street tells how the Arkansas was built and in July of 1862 floated down the Yazoo River, the "Old River" channel, and

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[45] James Street, By Valour and Arms (New York: Dial Press, 1944). All further references will appear parenthetically in the text. The title is a translation of "Virtute et armis," the motto of the state of Mississippi.

into the Mississippi, engaging and defeating several boats of the Union fleet under Admiral Farragut beseiging Vicksburg.

Soon the Arkansas is ordered to Baton Rouge, and on the way encounters other enemy ships. When her engines break down and the ship is in danger of being captured, Lt. Henry Stevens has her blown up.

In Natchez Keith Alexander is speculating in cotton and also working as a civilian for the Union in trying to destroy the Confederate underground. Wyeth encounters Morna, now Alexander's wife; he nearly has a love affair with her but ultimately remains true to Laurel. Keith discovers the secret workshop of the underground and brings about its destruction.

The story now shifts to the siege of Vicksburg, where Wyeth joins Ves and Granville to resist the Union forces. Street recounts Grant's various campaigns against the city and how he finally got positioned east of it and with the Union fleet on the river blasted and starved it into surrender on July 4, 1863. Wyeth escapes and leaves with Laurel to be married and to move to Hoab Dabney's Valley of Lebanon.

Street did his basic research for By Valour and Arms while living in Natchez in 1940-1941. He received valuable help from Miss Charlotte Capers at the Mississippi Department of Archives and History at Jackson. The week before the book was published, he sent a letter to Mississippi Governor Thomas Bailey commending the Archives department. He stated that in consulting the Department of the Navy and other sources he found that "History has virtually forgotten the 'Arkansas' and none of the

standard histories are trustworthy." However he found what he needed at the Archives.[46]

The book does include a large amount of historical data about the Arkansas and the battle of Vicksburg, and Street is usually accurate in his detailed portrayal. Most of the events he describes actually occurred, and many of them happened much as he pictures them although he sometimes condenses events or transfers them to another time and set of circumstances.

The Arkansas was a Confederate ironclad saved from the capture of Memphis where she was under construction and moved to Greenwood, Mississippi. There Lt. Isaac N. Brown assumed its command and moved it to Yazoo City on the Yazoo River, where he could have better facilities even though it put him within fifty miles of the Union fleet near Vicksburg. One of the sources Street undoubtedly used was Brown's own account of his history with the Arkansas written after the war.[47] Other primary sources which Street may have located are cited in William N. Still's Iron Afloat.[48]

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[46]Frederick Sullens, "James Street's New Book," rev. of By Valour and Arms, Jackson (Miss.) Daily News, 22 Sept. 1944, p. 4, MDAHc. Sullens includes statements from this article in his review of By Valour and Arms in the Journal of Mississippi History, 6 (Oct. 1944), 252-253.

[47]Isaac N. Brown, Captain, C.S.N., "The Confederate Gun-Boat 'Arkansas'," Battles and Leaders of the Civil War, ed. Thomas Yoseloff (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, Inc., 1956), III, 572-579.

[48]William N. Still, Iron Afloat (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1971).

Street tells how Brown arrived to find the ship in dismantled disarray, but managed to get workers and materials to complete her construction under the hot summer sun. His details of the ship's guns are similar to those given by Brown[49] (VA, p. 162).

On July 12 Brown took aboard sixty Missourians who had never fought on a ship and gave one day to training them.[50] Street gives an amusing account of this incident (VA, pp. 178-180). On July 14 Brown left Satartia Bar in the Yazoo River and headed for Vicksburg. His orders were to attack the Union fleet north of the city and proceed to Mobile.[51] On the way he was delayed by running aground and having to dry out powder made wet by steam[52] (VA, pp. 185-187). Street also reports how two Confederate deserters told Farragut of the Arkansas' approach. Farragut ignored them[53] (VA, pp. 187-188).

On July 15 the Arkansas encountered three Union ships, the Carondelet, Tyler, and Queen of the West. Street's exciting account of the ensuing battle does not correspond to Brown's in every detail, but the gist is the same[54] (VA, pp. 189-193). This and other encounters in By Valour and Arms are some of his best action descriptions. That Street chose a worthy historical figure in Brown for his exciting novel is suggested by this perhaps tongue-in-cheek statement in the commander's account: "I received a severe contusion on the head, but this gave me no concern after I had failed to find any brains mixed with the handfull

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[49] Brown, p. 572.

[50] Ibid., pp. 572-573.

[51] Still, pp. 66-67.

[52] Brown, pp. 573-574.

[53] Ibid., p. 573

[54] Brown, pp. 574-575.

of clotted blood which I drew from the wound and examined."[55] Brown also quotes the reactions of his Missourians and shows that Street's picture of their backwoods but courageous behavior is also true. Brown says, "Under the ordinary circumstances of war we had just got through with a fair hour's work; but knowing what was ahead of us, we had to regard it in the same light as our Missouri militia did, as a 'pretty smart skirmish.'"[56]

Brown reports his sighting of the Union fleet graphically:

> Aided by the current of the Mississippi, we soon approached the Federal fleet—a forest of masts and smoke-stacks—ships, rams, iron-clads, and other gun-boats on the left side, and ordinary river steamers and bomb-vessels along the right. To anyone having a real ram at command the genious [sic] of havoc could not have offered a finer view, the panoramic effect of which was intensified by the city of men spread out with innumerable tents opposite on the right bank. We were not yet in sight of Vicksburg, but in every direction, except the stern, our eyes rested on enemies. I had long known the most of these as valued friends, and if I now had any doubts of the success of the Arkansas they were inspired by this general knowledge rather than from any awe of a particular name. It seemed at a glance as if a whole navy had come to keep me away from the heroic city,—six or seven rams, four or five iron-clads, without including one accounted for an hour ago, and the fleet of Farragut generally, behind or inside of this fleet. The rams seemed to have been held in reserve, to come out between the intervals. Seeing this, as we neared the head of the line I said to our pilot, "Brady, shave that line of men-of-war as close as you can, so that the rams will not have room to gather head-way in coming out to strike us." In this way we ran so near to the wooden ships that each may have expected the blow which, if I could avoid it, I did not intend to deliver to any, and probably the rams running out at slow speed across the line of our advance received in the smoke and fury of the fight more damage from the guns of their own men-of-war than from those of the Arkansas.[57]

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[55]Ibid., p. 574.

[56]Ibid., p. 575.

[57]Ibid., pp. 575-576.

In By Valour and Arms Brown shouts, "Shave that line of men-of-war, Jim, so the rams will not have time to gain headway. Then dead ahead. Right down the middle. We'll run the gauntlet" (VA, p. 195).

The gore of the Arkansas' exchange with the Union fleet is illustrated in these paragraphs by Street:

> The single shot was the signal for a salvo and two hundred guns roared from ships and shore. One shot crashed through the sheet iron covering and exploded under the rear gun of the starboard broadside. The gun toppled from its carriage and fell across a seaman. He shrieked, then the shriek trailed into a gurgle. The other men drew back and covered their faces, for the heavy gun was across his stomach and the sight was sickening. A surgeon severed all flesh above and below the gun, hacked through the bones and lifted the body in two parts. Ves cringed and began babbling. Wyeth vomited and Granville turned away.
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> Another seaman went stark mad when he saw the operation. He grabbed a smoldering greased rope that was used as a slow match and began running around the deck. The men tried to hold him, but he jerked away and waved his match over the powder sacks. Granville picked up his revolver from beside the Dolly and shot the man. Ves lugged the body to the end of the gundeck and covered it with powder sacks. . . .
>
> Mangled bodies were spread about the deck and rivulets of blood flowed away from them. The live men slipped in the blood and stumbled over the bodies. Brains, hair, legs and arms were scattered about and in the sick bay sixty men were suffering the agonies of wounds and heat. (VA, pp. 196, 200)

That there is less exaggeration here than the reader might think is proved by these statements of eyewitnesses of the battle recorded by Still:

"The Captain of the gun standing at my right was knocked down by the concussion and so great was the shock that he lost his mind and never recovered."

Another said of the Arkansas' crew after the battle: "The smoke was still rolling around; the survivors of the crew, stripped to the

waist and blackened with gunpowder, were just beginning to clean decks, and altogether it was the most frightful scene of war that was ever presented to my eyes."

An officer reported: "Her stairways were so bloody and slippery that we had to sift cinders from the ash pan to keep from slipping . . ." There were "blood and brains bespattered every [where] whilst arms, legs, and several headless trunks were strewn about."[58]

Street says that the encounter with the Arkansas effectively dispirited and confused the Union fleet, which had trouble seeing the ship because its unpainted rust sides blended with the riverbank (VA, pp. 203-205). This report generally agrees with Brown's statement.[59]

On August 3 the Arkansas left for Baton Rouge on orders of Confederate General Van Dorn, contrary to the wishes of Lt. Brown who was absent because of illness. Lt. Stevens started downstream, while Brown, although still ill, attempted to return to the ship. Several engine failures disabled the Arkansas again, the last as she encountered the Union ship Essex. Stevens ordered the crew to abandon ship, then he set charges, fired the boat, and swam ashore himself. The Arkansas drifted for some time, and the fire discharged some of her guns. Finally she blew up.[60] Street also gives a romantic but accurate description of these events (VA, pp. 251-269).

A review of Peter Parish's account of the Vicksburg campaign in his The American Civil War shows that Street's portrayal of Grant's maneuvers

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[58]Still, pp. 70-71.

[59]Brown, p. 577.

[60]Still, pp. 75-78.

against the city is also fundamentally accurate. Having failed to penetrate Mississippi from the north by an overland route in 1862, Grant tried various ingenious tactics of trying to cut canals and make or find routes from west of the Mississippi River to get around and behind Vicksburg. None of these were successful, though they did keep Gen. Pemberton, commander of the Confederate forces at Vicksburg, confused and pressured.

Finally Grant devised a dangerous solution. He ordered diversionary attacks by Sherman and a cavalry raid through central Mississippi by Col. Benjamin Grierson. He then took his army down the west bank of the Mississippi below Vicksburg to Bruinsburg. The Union fleet ran past the Vicksburg batteries, suffering heavy damages, and ferried the army across the river. Grant then cut himself off from all supplies and swept east around Jackson and back due west to attack Vicksburg's rear. During this time he successfully fought off attacks by Gen. Joe Johnston and fed his army from the land itself. Pemberton retreated back into the city, and with the Union fleet on the west and Grant on the east Vicksburg was under siege. She finally surrendered on July 4, 1863.[61]

Street describes Grant as being in a "brown study" during his first unsuccessful attempts to approach Vicksburg. He puts great emphasis on Grant's discovery that Southerners would not destroy their homes and

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[61]Peter J. Parish, The American Civil War (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, Inc., 1975), pp. 270-275, 281, 282, 291-292.

crops to prevent him from using them. In a dramatic and suspenseful style Street tells of Grierson's secret orders for his raid.

> Grant was out of his brown study now. His bottle of rye and his brandy were forgotten. He scattered his army as a queen bee scatters her workers after the swarm. There was a diversion in Arkansas, and the South wondered. A part of Sherman's Corps was ordered to feint up the Yazoo and make a demonstration against Haynes Bluff. Pemberton, never too brilliant and now in a daze, assumed the Federals would strike his right flank and made ready. Already, however, Grant's engineers, perhaps the cream of both armies, were laying out corduroy roads from Miliken's Bend around through Louisiana to New Carthage. As fast as the road was constructed, Grant moved the bulk of his army down, circling Vicksburg from across the river. (VA, p. 474)

Street also seized on the unusual but true story of how Grant was told by a black man about a "forgotten road" from Bruinsburg to Port Gibson on the river.

> Many of Grant's officers begged him not to heed the stranger, but Grant questioned the Negro personally and decided to trust his army to an unknown black man. Grant never learned the Negro's name. It was he, however, an unidentified Negro in a Mississippi swamp, who showed Grant the way to Vicksburg, the short cut, the muddy trail that helped save the Union and free such men as the hero whose name history never bothered to record. (VA, p. 474)

Street describes Grant's impatience in throwing assaults on Vicksburg in May which resulted in hundreds of Union casualties. When these failed, he says, Grant moved the arc of his army around the south and north of the city, and the Union fleet moved to the west (VA, p. 497). Street describes the living conditions during the siege, how people lived in caves and children learned to shout over the noise of the constant bombardment. Finally, he says, famine drove them to surrender (VA, p. 499).

Through these historical events Street moves his fictional characters, and the result is more satisfactory than in Tap Roots and much more than in Oh, Promised Land. Robert Van Gelder has observed that even though Sam Dale really did the things which Street has Sam Dabney do, the reader still has difficulty accepting Street's accounts.[62] But the inclusion of Wyeth, Ves, and Granville on the Arkansas' crew and in the battle of Vicksburg does not seem strained.

Wyeth is not a dominating central figure but rather more of a unifying element. And Street makes him the more believable for his weaknesses as well as his strengths. He is awkward and foolish when he first meets Laurel MacKinzie (VA, pp. 36-37). He is adequately courageous and resourceful, but he is not the fighter his commander Lt. Brown is. Wyeth alternately weeps and laughs during the crisis of battle as a release of tension. And he almost succumbs to the charms of Morna Dabney, a mistake which would have cost him his life had Keith Alexander chosen to duel over it.

> Wyeth felt giddy and was almost entranced. That woman liked him. He knew she did. And he was pleased with himself. He meant no wrong-doing, but he was flattered by the knowledge that he, Wyeth Woodward, a rather prosaic young man, was attractive to the amazing wife of the famous Keith Alexander. (VA, p. 357)

Still Wyeth provides leadership in the Confederate underground and valorous service at Vicksburg. The siege seems to mature him, Street says.

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[62]Van Gelder, "A Lusty Tale," p. 4.

> On his own and away from the influence of Granville, Midshipman Wyeth Woodward changed in those grim June days while Vicksburg groaned and writhed in the last spasm of death. He wasn't aware of the change, for there was no standard of comparison. However, Wyeth grew up. Responsibility aged him. He didn't have Granville to lean on, or Gar and Ves to support him. When he thought of Laurel, as he constantly did, he automatically connected her with responsibility, things to be done for her and for the home he expected to establish. Sometimes he thought of Morna and smiled at his behavior. It all seemed so long ago. He was a calm man and had to do things, and he did them without hesitation. (VA, p. 517)

Wyeth's lover Laurel is also of limited stature, although basically admirable. She is genuinely devoted to Wyeth, but her jealousy of Morna seems petty (VA, p. 386), and the effect is a stereotype.

Sharon Weatherford, on the other hand, is finely drawn. She is part Cajan, and Street obviously admires the type. His discussion of her mixed blood again gives him opportunity to celebrate nonwhites in the South:

> Only Cajans could have produced such a woman. Her eyes proclaimed her Indian blood, the eyes of Sehoy of the Creek Clan of the Wind, a princess of the Alibamu. Her skin showed her Spanish strain, maybe Portuguese, maybe African Moorish. Her hair was her Scotch heritage. . . . No one knew all the blood lines of the Cajans. They had no connections whatsoever with the French Cajans, for they were an isolated people who lived in clans along the rivers of South Alabama and Mississippi. Some thought they sprang from sailors wrecked along the Gulf, or from the buccanneers who fled there from the Spanish Main. However, the Cajans enjoyed a medley of breeding and freedom, and every so often a brown child appeared. They were never accepted into Southern society, and never wanted to be. (VA, p. 7)

Sharon's cousin Ves is very sensitive about her honor, and there is tension over Granville's love affair with her until it is clear that he will marry her. She assumes leadership of the underground and plays a delicate role with Keith and Morna Alexander to divert Keith's campaign against it. For herself she simply wants a life with Granville.

Granville and Ves are two of Street's better minor characters, in part because of their startling contrast. Granville is a sophisticated man-of-the-world Englishman, Ves a crude but likable Cajan. Together with Woodward they form an ingriguing party throughout the novel.

Finally there are Keith and Morna Alexander, who provide the connection with the other Dabney novels. The characterization of the two has changed somewhat since Tap Roots. Neither is quite as admirable, but each is consistently interesting. Keith's arrogance occasionally degenerates into conceit, and Morna's boldness with men at times becomes plain philandering. But the two together are an attractive pair, and Street neatly builds suspense over whether Morna's flirtation with Wyeth Woodward will lead to a confrontation with Alexander's pistols.

The behavior of Morna compels reader interest as she dangerously pays attention to Wyeth yet still genuinely loves Alexander above all others, a devotion which saves her from coming across as a profligate. Her cat fight with Sharon and willingness to sacrifice Wyeth to save herself are somehow made acceptable by the terms of her relation to Alexander.

By Valour and Arms marks a significant point in the Dabney series because with it Street changes from treating the black man in terms of slavery to considering him in terms of race. The white's attitude toward the Negro is reflected in Mort, who likes Negroes as individuals but hates them as a race, and in Woodward, who is only mildly "contemptuous" of the race. He grudgingly agrees that the time will come that the white man in the South will have to deal with the Negro's economic and educational plight and position (VA, pp. 51, 72).

By Valour and Arms is a stylistic and structural advancement for Street. The plot is compact and unified; the characters are even, though some of them are stereotypes; and the pace is swift. The action scenes are very exciting and graphic, some of the best which Street wrote. Oddly the other novel with action descriptions equal to those in this one is In My Father's House, which Street also wrote while living in Natchez.

Critics generally were favorable in their comments. William DuBois of the New York Times complimented Street's use of history, though he felt that the statistics and obscure battles were "excess baggage."[63] In the South, Frederick Sullens of the Jackson (Miss.) Daily News was especially complimentary and said, "James Street has written such a rarely interesting historic story of life in Mississippi during the Civil War that By Valour and Arms ought to be adopted for required reading in the public schools of our state."[64] At least in his native state, then, Street was firmly established as a competent novelist in 1944.

Tomorrow We Reap

Tomorrow We Reap opens in 1893 back in the Lebanon Valley.[65] Bruce Dabney is now the patriarch of the Dabney family, and he assembles his

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[63]William DuBois, "Vicksburg," rev. of By Valour and Arms, by James Street, NYTBR, 24 Sept. 1944, p. 7.

[64]Sullens, pp. 252-253.

[65]James Street, Tomorrow We Reap (New York: The Dial Press, Inc., 1949). All further references will appear parenthetically in the text.

family to discuss the new threat to their heritage, the incursion of the Peninsula Lumber Company into Lebanon. The company wants to buy a right of way through the north entrance to the valley, and the family is divided over whether to sell it the privilege.

Shellie is too feeble to determine the issue. Sans, posthumous son of Cormac who was adopted by Bruce and Kyd at Martha's death, opposes the sale because he fears that the company will take all the trees and destroy the valley and the family. Mingo, son of Bruce and Kyd, wants to sell for the profit, believing the trees will grow back. Bruce finally divides the timber land and the family holdings, giving Mingo the family store and Sans the house. In the midst of this turmoil, the family is also troubled by the return of Aven McIvor, who has come to claim the McIvor land in the valley.

Despite the threat of Peninsula, and of drought and a financial panic, Sans continues to operate the lumbering business while courting Louisa Woodward, daughter of Wyeth Woodward, now a Lebanon attorney. G. T. Thrumbull, agent of the Peninsula Company in Lebanon, tries to convince Sans to sell. Sans refuses, but while visiting Thrumbull he meets his daughter, Ruth, and soon becomes infatuated with her. Meanwhile other less scrupulous agents of Peninsula ally with Cephus Hill, an unsavory Southern lawyer, and plot to have him elected judge so that he can use his influence for them.

One day drummer Elmo Batson brings into the valley Jose Marti and Rafaela Galban y Torres, Cuban revolutionaries trying to raise men and money to fight Spain. Mingo Dabney is entranced by the strange and

beautiful girl, and soon men from Lebanon are leaving for Cuba as volunteers.

Peninsula continues to encroach on the Dabney business in the valley. The company builds its own store and damages some of Sans' timber. Louisa Woodward works in Mingo's store for a time, but her relationship with Sans having cooled, she traitorously starts to work for Peninsula and makes shady agreements with Cephus Hill.

Hill wins the election by lying to the valley people about the Dabneys. He implies that they favor Negroes and thus brings in a racial red herring. Other economic and social pressures are brought to bear by Peninsula, and finally the company attempts to build a railroad through the valley with an illegal writ of eminent domain.

Shellie has Bruce send for Keith Alexander, now a multimillionaire in Chicago. Keith arrives and plans to stop Peninsula with the power of his money, but when he visits Aven McIvor she shoots him to avenge his killing of her husband years before.

Morna Alexander comes to Lebanon and drives Aven out of the valley. She also defeats Louisa's attempt to hold Mingo by saying that Rafaela Galban is part Negro. However in learning that Rafaela is white, Sans also learns that Kyd and Mingo have Negro blood. As the novel ends, Sans plans to marry Ruth Thrumbull and remain in the valley with his heritage, while Mingo rides away from Lebanon forever, heading for Rafaela in Cuba.

Tomorrow We Reap is a mediocre novel. Street wrote in collaboration with James Childers, and the result is unsatisfactory. The principal

problem is that little really happens; the plot does not move forward. The book begins with the Dabneys facing the encroachment of the northern lumber company into the valley, and at the end they are still frustrated by the same problem. In the meantime some old family rancors are resurrected and aired, but not resolved. Mingo Dabney finally turns his back on the stultified scene and rides away. Time magazine's reviewer said, "It is a more orderly and down-to-earth book than its predecessors, its characters more credible, its melodrama more restrained. But it is oddly less interesting for being more plausible, and less convincing for being closer to a recognizable environment."[66]

Set in the 1890's, the novel concerns itself with the lumber industry in Mississippi. Lumber was an important part of the economy of Street's Jones County, located in the Piney Woods section of Mississippi where giant yellow pines grow.[67]

Though the plot is disjointed, some of the characters are well drawn, and there are good individual scenes. But more important and significant is Street's picture of how the South as he knew it came into being.

The older generations of the Dabneys are represented by Shellie, Bruce, Aven, and Morna. Shellie is aged, infirm, and given to periods

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[66]"Dabneys (Contd)," rev. of Tomorrow We Reap by James Street, Time, 53 (27 June 1949), 94.

[67]Discussions of the lumber industry in Jones County and southeastern Mississippi may be found in: Water Watkins, "The Laurel Story," Official Program of the Laurel Diamond Jubilee Corporation (Meridian, Miss.: Gower Printing Co., 1957), pp. 7-66; and Nollie W. Hickman, "The Lumber Industry in South Mississippi, 1890-1915," The Journal of Mississippi History, 20 (Oct. 1958), 211-223.

of mental vacuity during which she lives in the past. Her allegiance to Dabney tradition is still strong, however, and she refuses to forgive or receive her daughter Aven when she returns to Lebanon.

Bruce seems old, though he is in his early fifties. He is still vital, but Street manages to convey in him the tiredness and frustration of the South following the war and several years of reconstruction. As a patriarch of the Dabneys he is of less stature than Sam or Hoab.

Aven McIvor is bitter and petty, and is consistent with the portrait Street drew of her in Tap Roots. One of the problems Street faced in writing his Dabney saga was to show his characters both when they are young and later when they are old and in doing so make the two pictures consistent. Generally he succeeds very well, as here with Aven. She has lived in genteel poverty since Keith Alexander shot her husband Clay in 1862, and she nurses a bitter hatred of Keith which results in her ironic but cheap murder of him in her hotel room.

Keith and Morna Alexander make their final appearances in Tomorrow We Reap, and they are attractive and intriguing to the last. Street gives Keith the same strengths and weaknesses, tempered with age. In his seventies he is still flamboyant, courageous, and powerful, using his money as he once used his pistols. But he tires easily and cannot keep up his show of being the Alexander of yesteryear. He is also too idealistic in thinking that by using his wealth he can maintain the valley as he wants it, and his idealism in part leads to his being ignominiously shot by Aven.

Morna is still attractive and very strong. Like Keith, she does not appear until late in the novel. Then she arrives by special train to dispense punishment to Aven. Morna goes directly to Aven's hotel, destroys her spirit by telling of her tryst with Clay the night before his death, and drives her out of the town and the valley. Then Morna turns her power on Louisa Woodward and destroys her attempt to hold Mingo.

Street also brings two other characters to Lebanon from By Valour and Arms. Wyeth Woodward has settled in the valley as an attorney, and is troubled by his weight in middle age. His wife Laurel is socially ambitious, and his daughter Louisa develops along the lines of Honoria, though she lacks genuine courage. Primly attractive, she is scheming, ambitious, and shrewd in business. Finally she betrays her heritage in Lebanon and allies herself with the Dabneys' enemies.

Gar Rivers, somewhat incongruously, has become a preacher and the leader of the blacks in the valley. He serves as a symbol of judgement and justice in this novel, changing from his role of avenger in By Valour and Arms.

The two central characters of Tomorrow We Reap are Sans and Mingo Dabney. Sans, Street says, is the South of the past. Though he realizes times are changing, he wants to hang on to the traditions of the Dabneys and Lebanon. He resists selling territorial rights to Peninsula, and hopelessly tries to compete against machinery with oxen and muscle. He is provincial and old fashioned in his manners and treatment of Louisa, who for a time is his lover.

Sans parts from Louisa when he sees her plots for rising in business. Ironically he finds a new love in a northern girl, Ruth Thrumbull. Ruth is attractive also, but in addition is practical, strong, and upright; she easily becomes a part of the Dabney family even though she is from the North. In contrasting Louisa and Ruth, Street is probably attempting to explode the myth of the inevitable superiority of the Southern belle.

It is Sans who discovers the truth about Mingo's Negro blood, for it is he who must bear the burden of heritage. He must remain in the South and struggle for its survival. Part of his struggle, in Street's mind, could be learning to accept the Negro as his brother, in this case literally. And intermarrying with the North would also break down walls that imprisoned the South.

Mingo is different from Sans. Romantic and ambitious, he wants to sell to Peninsula for the money and progress the venture will bring. Street has Mingo see fox fire in the woods and wild geese flying south, symbols of his own yearning for leaving the old for the new, the same spirit that motivated Sam Dabney himself to come to Lebanon:

> He was leaving his valley, his home and heritage; he was the young South going away, stepping out of the furrow, turning his back on the land—the fruitful and the barren, the scarred and brutal land. From a thousand valleys, a thousand hollows, ten thousand of the young were leaving the land, all on a quest. A quest for anything; anything to be out of the endless furrow, the furrow stretching from dawn to daydown, and only sweat and a day older to divide dawn from daydown. He was the South, washing out to sea with the land, the strength flowing away. To Cuba where men died. And Indian Territory, the treeless land. To Chicago where the pot was melting. To New York where they begged for men they could not breed. The South's blood was draining away with her land. (TWR, p. 382)

Street uses other symbols of the Dabney's Southern heritage. The Tree is again mentioned, and Keith Alexander is buried there with the Dabney dead. This time, however, there is an element of decay and forgotten times mingled with the sense of heritage. The emphasis is no longer on the greatness of the Dabney past, but rather is on the plans for the future. Sam Dabney, Donna, Anestasie, Cormac, and Keith Alexander are no longer to be considered. Yet the novel closes with a hunting scene that recalls the noble wilderness of the South: "High on the ridge above the valley, the hounds bayed. They were running a fox. Old Sooner was leading the pack" (TWR, p. 384).

Other good scenes in the novel include a brutal fight between the woods bosses of Peninsula and Sans, pictures of the glum and colorless lumbering town of New Hebron, and descriptions of the old and new methods of lumbering. These are mixed, however, with passages which drag and merely mark time.

Perhaps the most significant feature of Tomorrow We Reap is its illustration of Street's theories about how the South as he knew it came to be. For example, storekeeper Charlie Owens explains to Ruth Thrumbull the doctrine of the Southern matriarchy. The first pioneers into the South needed sons, he says, and so they valued the few women in the land so highly that they surrendered control to them. Hence women like Kyd Dabney really control Southern affairs (TWR, pp. 237-240).

A more serious matter is the incursion of northern businessmen and politicians into the South and its reaction to them. Bruce Dabney is weary after thirty years of reconstruction and carpetbaggers. By the

1890's the nation was expanding to the West and South, and the lumbering industry came to Lebanon: "They plucked up forests by the roots, bringing an industrial revolution to a people who understood a rifle trigger and a fishing pole, but gaped in awe at the gadgets of progress, then frowned, then scowled" (TWR, pp. 11-12).

The kind of people the northerners met are exemplified by Sans Dabney:

> Sans Dabney, being a Southerner, was a phenomenon and a paradox, an agrarian with the prejudices of a ravished land where defeat still was gall, but where the vanquished hills, of black bottom land, of yellow rivers rolling slow forever; the rope to hang and the same rope for a plow line, the fagot to burn in fury, the same fagot to warm a friend. He was the sensitive South, angry in defense of her own sins, aware of her sins and ashamed, but haughty in the face of critics. . . . (TWR, p. 49)

Peninsula, not understanding the customs and ways of the Southerners, blunders into insulting their heritage and disrupting their life style. Then the company cannot comprehend their resentment and complaints:

> The people had Peninsula's hard money in their pockets, but they were sullen, blaming the company's dam for the parched, cracked banks of Bogue Homa, the dead fish among the reeds; and they cursed the company. Most of Peninsula's executives were baffled. They were paying money to poor people, yet the people didn't respect them, wouldn't come to work when the whistle blew. The people loafed when they needed cash and the company needed labor. Peninsula's executives, wrangling around a table in Chicago, couldn't comprehend that Lebanon's lanky, red-necked poor were men of dignity, sentimental about a vague heritage, and stubbornly suspicious of any effort to change them. (TWR, p. 85)

Things are made worse when the company opens a store and issues its own scrip to be spent there. The people are used to credit and resent not having it. They want the luxuries the store offers and

blame the company for their not being able to buy them (TWR, pp. 245-247). Into this problem comes one of Street's most interesting characters, although he is clearly a stereotype. Cephus "Windy" Hill is a Southern lawyer, and is sly, mean, fawning, and ambitious. He secretly allies with Peninsula, dictating his own terms because he shows that he can handle the ignorant Southern people for a price. He gets himself elected judge by spending Peninsula money and mounting a "dirty tricks" campaign. Pretending to oppose Peninsula, he publicly accuses the company of taking advantage of the people of the valley and "Playing up to 'Koons, Kikes, and Katholics'" (TWR, p. 247).

Hill knows an important truth about the Southerners, Street says:

> The red-neck, the man at the fork of the creek, he of the barren life and quick resentment, was a rebel at heart, a revolutionist. His father never owned a slave, never lived in a white house. The poets and the romanticists had lied. The Southerner always had been poor. He had a stooped back instead of a slave, but it stooped over a heart flaming revolt. He was a rebel against all things, except one: He wanted no change, he would tolerate no change, in the relationship between himself and the Negro. His one claim to superiority was his belief in white supremacy. (TWR, p. 257)

Hill feels the hatred of his audiences, condemning the Dabneys for fighting the Confederacy and saying that they are allied with Peninsula: "Them nigger-loving, aristocratic, Yankified Dabneys are hand in glove with them rich, nigger-loving, Yankees of Peninsula" (TWR, p. 258).

Street portrays Hill as the forerunner of the politicians who bred decades of misery and hatred in the South. The lawyers of Peninsula marvel at him:

> Irving and Lewiston exchanged glances and the truth slowly emerged, shaking their Yankee assurance and threatening to

> strangle it. They were dealing with a new, a raw South without grace, slyly licking its lips in secret, but seeking sympathy by openly licking old wounds and ostentatiously vaunting its legendary pride. This was the new and cunning South, patiently waiting for the North to blunder, as the North always did. Irving and Lewiston suddenly hated Hill and feared him; but they had to have him. (TWR, p. 205)

Street knew that prejudice against the Negro was in the heart of even the noble men of the South. Sans goes to Gar Rivers to ask about Rafaela's heritage:

> Sans Dabney reached out and touched Gar, touching the withered right arm and his touch was sealed to the black arm, welded there by two hundred years, by the fetid ships of the slave traders, the auction block, the long furrow that began in pride and power and ended in spiritual degradation. . . .
>
> "I am a Southerner!" The words poured from his lips, bitter, sickening him as they boiled from the cauldron of two hundred years. "I am a Southerner. My mind cries out that there is a brotherhood. But my heart and my heritage hold back. I am not yet ready to face the truth. I can't face the truth. I can't. I admit to you that I do not want my brother to go to Rafaela Galban if she is part Negro. I can't help it. I'm a Southerner—"
>
> "I am a Southerner, too." Gar reached his left hand across his chest and found the white man's hand. "And I understand what you say. I understand better than you and your people will ever believe. . . . Your generation is not ready. Maybe the next, or the next. The worms still are crawling in the breast of the South, in the loins of the nation. The truth is hidden behind the fears of your people; under the ignorance and fears of mine. A lie is still the master and the truth has not been freed." (TWR, p. 376)

Thus while Tomorrow We Reap is not one of Street's best novels and not even a good one at all, it does voice in a powerful way his view of the South. Street saw the period following the war as the beginning place of the race-conscious Southern politicians, the lynchings, and the turmoil which he himself witnessed as a reporter and which he felt were still threatening in 1949.

Mingo Dabney

Mingo Dabney, the last of the Dabney novels, was published in 1950.[68] Mingo is riding away from Lebanon forever in 1895, heading for Mobile to find Rafaela Galban y Torres, called La Entorcha Blanca, symbol of the Cuban revolution of that year against Spain. In Mobile he finds his friend Elmo Batson, a trader who is raising supplies for the revolution, and Capt. Joseph Fry, who is to sail the supplies to Cuba on the Virginius.

They go to Pensacola and find Rafaela and Jose Marti, poet and revolutionary, who is the moving force behind the revolution. They also hear of the leading generals of the Cubans, Antonio Maceo and Maximo Gomez, as well as the cruel Spanish commander Leopold Sagaldo.

Mingo returns to Mobile, and Rafaela goes to Guatemala to raise recruits. But soon they hear that the call to arms has sounded in Baire. Mingo and Capt. Fry go to Jamaica to meet the Virginius, and there they find Maceo and Rafaela, his ward. Suddenly word comes that Jose Marti has been betrayed and killed in Cuba, and Rafaela and Maceo immediately go there.

Mingo sails with Fry on the Virginius with a cargo of arms for the revolution. They are captured by the Spanish warship Tornado, and Fry and half of his crew are executed. Mingo is spared because as a paying passenger he is protected by international law.

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[68]James Street, Mingo Dabney (New York: The Dial Press, 1950). All further references will appear parenthetically in the text.

Despite Maceo's fear of the growing love between Rafaela and Mingo, the young American joins Maceo's army and assumes command of the Grillos, Maceo's lawless band of impedimenta who provide supplies by their talent for stealing. Mingo is careful not to compromise Rafaela's status as the symbol of the revolution, but it is evident that their love will not long be denied.

The last half of the novel is the true story of Maceo's lightning march from the Oriente mountains of east Cuba, where the revolution started, through the Spanish-held western half of the island. Mingo hits on the idea of having his Grillos loot and burn sugar mills when Maceo encounters the Spanish, since Sagaldo is under orders to protect the mills and has to divide his force when Mingo attacks one, leaving Maceo easy conquests.

Finally Maceo's beleaguered army reaches the western end of the island, and he and the other leaders, including Mingo and Rafaela, have to leave to join Gomez. While trying to find a way for Rafaela through the Spanish lines, Mingo discovers a long-deserted valley of pines and determines to settle there after the revolution. At the end of the novel, Maceo is killed in December of 1895 in an ambush, and Mingo and Rafaela bury him before going to join Gomez.

Mingo Dabney is as much the story of the Cuban revolution of 1895 as the story of the title character. Again Street employs the technique of making his hero a right-hand man of an actual historical figure, this time Gen. Antonio Maceo, leader of one of the armies of the revolution.

Street did considerable research on the revolution, including making a trip to Cuba. Among those he consulted were Dr. Fredrico Gil and Dr. Nicholson B. Adams of the University of North Carolina; Dr. Louis A. Baralt of the University of Havana; Col. Cosme de la Torriente of the staff of Gen. Calixto Garcia; and Emilio Bacardi, who served as aide-de-camp for Gen. Maceo (MD, p. 7).

Street was naturally attracted to Jose Marti, the small, fiery poet and agitator who helped start the revolution. Hugh Thomas gives Marti's history in his Cuba: The Pursuit of Freedom.[69] First exiled from Cuba by the Spanish authorities in 1871 at the age of eighteen, Marti began writing articles, poems, and plays suggesting national independence. Finally ending up in the United States, Marti spent several years organizing juntas and making contacts with Cuban military leaders, particularly Maximo Gomez and Antonio Maceo.[70]

Shortly after meeting with these two generals in Cuba in May of 1895, Marti was shot in a skirmish with the Spanish. Thomas says:

> Had he lived he would doubtless have been the first president of an independent Cuba, and it is impossible to believe that Cuban history would have been the same thereafter. But his death gave the Cubans a martyr. . . .
>
> His extraordinary appeal among Cubans is explained by his great energy, his organizing ability, his sensuous proclamation of Cuban identity apart from that of the U.S. and by the belief that, despite his pure European origin and his long residence in North America, he was a true "son of the tropics," the most Cuban of Cubans. . . . He was an ardent and generous soul, though full of contradictions and unclear in his political aims.[71]

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[69]Hugh Thomas, Cuba: The Pursuit of Freedom (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1971), p. 295.

[70]Ibid., pp. 293-309.

[71]Ibid., pp. 316-317.

Street, somewhat fiery himself, draws a romantic picture of Marti, and enhances it by providing as his companion the beautiful and mystical Rafaela Galban, La Entorcha Blanca. Rafaela's family had been butchered by Sagaldo in the revolution of 1868-1878, and when Maceo found her in a ditch, thunder sounded across the clear sky. From then on she of the white hair became the symbol of Cuban freedom (MD, p. 53). Rafaela is fiction, though she may have been suggested by one or more of several women with whom Marti was associated, including Rafael Maria Mendive, "a romantic poet, cosmopolitan and backer of Cuban independence."[72] At first an almost sacred symbol of the Cuban revolution, Rafaela increasingly is overcome by her love for Mingo, and as her revolutionary fervor diminishes she correspondingly becomes less effective as a symbol: "there was mist in her eyes where fire should be," Mingo is told (MD, p. 342).

Street shifts an incident which occurred in the revolution of 1868-1878 to that of 1895, so that he can involve Mingo Dabney in it. A New York junta purchased a ship named the Virginius, and the rebels tried to run it to Cuba with supplies while flying a U.S. flag. The Spanish captured it and executed all persons on board. Among these were several U.S. citizens, including the captain, and several British citizens. A British frigate arrived to prevent further violence, and Spain later apologized and paid indemnity.[73]

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[72]Ibid., p. 295.

[73]Ibid., pp. 262-263.

Street places Mingo Dabney on the Virginius. He is arrested along with the crew and condemned to death, but is saved by his having a receipt which proves that he was a paying passenger and thus protected by international law. Mingo's fear of his approaching death and his reprieve by the efforts of a junior American official make for one of the best scenes in the novel. The gory execution of the Virginius' crew again illustrates Street's abilities in action description (MD, pp. 119-152).

The details of the revolution, particularly the raiding drive west by the army of Gen. Maceo, constitute much of the novel, and these have an authentic ring, though one reviewer complained about how Street "shifts events, dates, facts, anything else to suit the mood of his romantic adventure."[74] Antonio Maceo was, Thomas says, a "dashing mulatto" (giving Street opportunity again for commentary on race relations), and he indeed had the "dash, audacity, willingness to take all risks, and pleasure in danger," that Street gives to him.[75] Street describes in detail Maceo's nine hundred mile march to the west, burning and skirmishing with the numerically superior Spanish forces under Leopold Sagaldo.

The United States was watching all of this, of course, preparatory to entering the conflict in 1898. Street emphasizes that the interest of America was economic, but his judgment does not seem very severe.

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[74]"The Dabneys Continued," rev. of Mingo Dabney, Jackson (Miss.) Clarion Leader, 9 April 1950, MDAHc.

[75]Thomas, p. 255.

Mingo Dabney is the continuing story of the Dabney family. Street has Mingo leave the valley of Lebanon because the South which the Dabneys knew and helped build was gone. Elmo Batson says, "There's no room in the South any more for men who ride white horses. . . . The South is bowing down to money same as Yankees do. It ain't who you are any more. It's how much you got. The South is hanging a mail order necktie around its red neck" (MD, p. 214).

Mingo leaves behind his heritage when he sees his companions on the Virginius slaughtered, and for a time he lives only for vengeance. But he decides to remain in Cuba, and while searching for a passage through the Spanish lines he discovers the valley of pines that will become his home. This is a dramatic incident, for it takes the reader back to the end of Oh, Promised Land where Sam Dabney discovered the Lebanon Valley:

> Mingo Dabney caught his breath and stared at the sky and the land around him, an awe suddenly upon him in the infinite silence, in a revelation.
>
> There lay the valley, stretching from the savanna at his back to the swamp ahead. A stream flowed out of the swamp and down the valley, vanishing in the muck of the savanna.
>
> It could have been the valley of Lebanon.
>
> It could have been because he wanted it to be, and a man's imagination is an architect, and his hope is a builder. There were the slopes down to the stream and there were the pines trooping down, teetering to the pranks of the wind.
>
> He rode up the bank of the stream and already was calling in the East Fork, like back home. It came out of the swamp about two miles from the savanna, cutting through the marsh, offering a passage through the barrier.
>
> There, on the slope of the creek, he would build his house, first of logs; then a small sawmill to cut timber for his big house and lumber for people to buy. Drain the savanna and build a road. (MD, pp. 371-372)

Thus the Dabney family has come full cycle, and the descendant of Sam Dabney has gone on to found his own clan. Although Street is trite in styling Mingo a "pilgrim," this event provides satisfying unity and conclusion to the Dabney series.

Critical reviews of Mingo Dabney indicated that it was time for the series to end. One writer said, "It is an exciting tale and visually quite graphic. The pity is that it has no depth at all, that it is all words and movement, as flat as the screen upon which it could have its most representative existence."[76] Another quotes Street as saying of the Dabneys, "I've lived with them so long, I'm worn out with them."[77]

So probably it was good for Street to close his saga of Big Sam Dabney's family. All of the novels had faults, such as the wooden characters in Mingo Dabney, and the stories were diminishing in strength. But also in them are strong passages, where Street's experience as a writer and his storytelling skills make for good fiction. And especially the continuing story of a vibrant family carried over four generations conveys the same sense of time and heritage that has more recently been evoked by other authors writing about the history of family and country.

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[76]Rev. of Mingo Dabney, by James Street, SRL, 33 (18 March 1950, 30.

[77]"Dabneys Continued," MDAHc.

CHAPTER VI

IN MY FATHER'S HOUSE

Street wrote In My Father's House while living in Natchez, Mississippi, and it was published in 1941.[1] The novel is narrated by "Little Hob" Abernathy and is about the recent trouble experienced by his family. They live on their cotton farm near Street's home town of Laurel, Mississippi, and Little Hob, about thirteen years old, is telling Street of what happened there.

Little Hob described the happiness that he, his father "Big Hob," his mother Vini, and his older sister Teenie shared on the farm. His story is filled with local color details of their work, play, and religion. In fact a large part of the novel is taken up with these details, matters that would be especially important to a boy, but which also give a sensitive and close-up picture of the family. Little Hob tells of his pets, his Negro friend Kink and Kink's mother Aunt Tunia, and of their other friends, particularly the Ben Martins.

Ben's son Woody is courting Teenie, and the couple want to get married soon. Hob Abernathy approves of Woody, but Teenie is only sixteen and Abernathy wants her to attend a vocational school at least for a while. He resists the idea of an immediate marriage.

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[1]James Street, In My Father's House (New York: The Dial Press, 1941). All further references will be made parenthetically in the text.

Without seeming to realize their significance, Little Hob innocently reveals the events which led up to the tragedy which has come on his family. One night Woody and Teenie arrive very late at the church singing. Some time later Little Hob hears a strange statement about Woody, that he has "planted a crop without building a fence." Unfortunately Little Hob takes the euphemism literally and tells his father.

Abernathy tries to hold his temper, and he waits for the Martins to come home. Ben and Woody arrive in the company of the deputy sheriff, who takes Hob's guns and leaves the men to settle the matter. The Martins agree that Woody will certainly marry Teenie, but there is disagreement as to when the marriage should occur, and the argument leads to angry words and then to a fight. Hob Abernathy happens to find Little Hob's .22 rifle in the midst of the fight, and he kills Woody.

Abernathy is taken to jail to await trial, and the family is innocently polite to a host of curious idlers and reporters before realizing their intent. Through the intervention of lawyer Stone Walters and deputy sheriff Martin, a feud between the Abernathys and Martins is prevented. Abernathy pleads guilty to manslaughter and is sentenced to fourteen years in Parchman prison.

Little Hob and his family try to carry on the farm and succeed in getting by. Soon Teenie's pregnancy is confirmed. Vini plans to tell Hob on their first visit to him at Parchman, but when she sees him she realizes that he is being mentally affected by being locked up and

decides against it. However Little Hob and Teenie think that their father knows about Teenie's condition, and the boy mentions it in a letter to him. The day he receives the letter Abernathy suddenly begins to run away from the convict work line and is killed by a guard. The Abernathys and Martins are reconciled at the funeral, and Little Hob's family is planning for the future as the novel ends.

Many of James Street's novels, such as the Dabney books, are only well-told stories. They frequently contain elements of good writing, but their total effect depends largely on the incidents of the plot. With In My Father's House, however, Street wrote a work of literature, a genuine criticism of human life. He often said that it was the one really good book he had written. While many of his other works are sound pieces of journalism and fiction, this one is his finest accomplishment as an American author.

This achievement is the result of his characterization of Little Hob Abernathy, the narrator of the story, and his maturation from boyhood to manhood in response to his encountering fundamental human institutions and experiences—family, religion, social codes, violence, death, and responsibility.

To provide a setting for these serious themes, Street fills the early pages of the novel with a wealth of local color details drawn from his own boyhood experiences in Laurel. These include both simple life details and more serious attitudes prevailing in the region. For example, Hob is proud of his lore of dogs, snakes, horses, trees, and farming. He says, "A moccasin can't bite you in the water. Some folks

say that's because if he opened his mouth he'd drown, but that ain't so. Snakes can't strike you unless they coil, and they can't coil in the water on account of they've got to stretch out to swim" (FH, p. 39). A A colorful section of the book is the description of "cotton summer," the brief hot time when the cotton must be worked thoroughly to make it produce well:

> I toted water for Papa and Mama. One of the men poured water down his shirt front to get cool. His mules smelled the water and turned their heads and looked at him. They wanted water, too, but they were too hot to drink. At high noon we knocked off just long enough to eat, then went back and worked 'til it was plum' dark.
>
> The men didn't even tell Papa good night. They just left their plows in the field, put their mules in our barn and went home, dog tired. Me and Papa and Kink saw to the stock. We rubbed the mules by the light of a lantern so they wouldn't be stiff. We shoveled the oats to 'em. Mama milked and we had milk and mush and cold corn bread for supper. (FH, pp. 180-181)

Small details unerringly suggest to the reader the daily customs of the South, such as leaving the noon leftovers on the dinner table covered by a cloth. Special occasions are also described, including the Fourth of July celebration in Laurel. Perhaps most authentic is the Sacred Harp sing at the Baptist church:

> I looked around, too, just to see who was there. Sometimes folks drove down from Laurel to visit our sings. Our folks have been singing the Sacred Harp more than a hundred years, and once I heard a preacher say that we still sing just like folks did in England when Sir Walter Raleigh and Queen Elizabeth and all were alive.
>
> All the children around here have to go to singing school up at the church-house and learn tone lengths and tone shapes. The Sacred Harp is not part of the regular church doings. We have regular church on fifth Sundays and a preacher comes down from Laurel and lays it out to us. But we have Sunday school ever' Sunday during the summer. We use the old-fashioned shape notes at our sings—circles, triangles and

> squares—and before a beginner can be a sure-'nuff member of the school, he must know ever' song in the five hundred pages of the Sacred Harp. (FH, pp. 83-84)

The vocabulary of Little Hob and his family and acquaintances contains many colloquialisms: day-bust, long shadow time, stretch out, mosey around, poke around, joreeing, teacake, rooster supper. A boy is considered a man when he is asked to "say the blessing" at the dinner table. And "thanks for the biscuits" is the polite form of request.

More serious commentary on the South's ways is made in statements about the Negro. Little Hob says,

> Kink is a colored boy, just my age. Most folks call colored folks nigger, but we don't. Papa told us not to. They don't like to be called niggers. I don't see why. I'd rather be called a nigger than colored, if I was a nigger. One time I called Kink a nigger and he called me a white cracker. That made me mad and I promised I never would call him a nigger again and I never have. (FH, pp. 43-44)

Little Hob credits the black race with possessing knowledge denied to whites and being able to find out news before they do, but even his well-meaning compliments reflect prejudice. He has trouble explaining to Kink why they cannot sit together at the Laurel movie house.

In the opening pages of the novel rude tourists from Connecticut come to take pictures of the Abernathy home, and they pronounce it Tobacco Road. The picture Street draws of the family suggests how mistaken and unjust such a view is, and he makes the point that such incidents as he is about to describe occur among the decent common people of the South as a result of a concern for honor, rather than out of a tendency to immorality and violence.

Several motives may have prompted Street to tell his story through a thirteen-year-old boy. Perhaps he felt a boy would more naturally dwell on the local color details described above, details that reveal to the reader the true situation. More importantly, the boy is not as affected by traditions, prejudices, and previous events in his life as an adult would be; thus he can view the somber events of the story with a kind of innocent objectivity and reveal them with simplicity and directness. Critics especially praised these qualities in the novel. And Little Hob's maturation as a result of what happens is itself a part of the story.

All of these considerations inevitably remind the reader of Huckleberry Finn. Street said that he read Mark Twain's novel once a year, and the reader of In My Father's House suspects Twain's influence. Like Huck, Little Hob is above all else good-hearted. His love for his family and pride in them and in his home in south Mississippi is warmly proclaimed, and the reader feels that Little Hob is trying to win his friendship as well as make him understand what has happened. He seems anxious to please and entertain as he tells how happy his family was and shares what information he has about his rural world, most of which he learned from his father. Even the foibles of his family are revealed with affection; the spirit he conveys is reflected in this minor but typical scene:

> Even Papa laughed. Aunt 'Tunia busted out laughing. That set ol' Kink off and he got to actin' smart, dancing around and cuttin' up. The more we laughed at him the more he cut up. That got Papa in a guying humor and he started teasing Mama.

> He asked her, "What you rather do or go a'fishin'?"
> Mama said, "What are you talkin' about?"
> Me and Kink laughed fit to kill. Of course, it was just a saying and didn't mean nothin' but Papa pulling it like that made it funny. We all had fun. Mama went in and got some teacakes and we sang a song about "It ain't a'goin' to rain no more." We usta have fun over nothing. (FH, p. 118)

Most of all Little Hob admires his father and wants to be like him. He boasts inoffensively of Abernathy's knowledge and skills, as well as of his mother's domestic skills and Teenie's beauty.

But, also like Huckleberry Finn, Little Hob is very keen in analyzing people's motives and in determining the nature of the various situations which he encounters. He reports the small victories and defeats, the vanities and hypocrisies of his family and acquaintances, and even when he does not fully realize the significance of an event or remark, he can sense the mood of the adults trying to hide something from him. He describes the reaction of Stone Walters and Murdo Martin when he repeats to them the remark he has heard about Woody's "planting his crop before he built his fence." "Lawyer Walters was drinking a Coca Cola. His mouth flew open and then snapped together like a steel trap. . . . He and Mr. Murdo looked at each other again and I knew I'd said something bad" (FH, p. 213). Beatrice Sherman of the New York Times observes that there is a discrepancy between Little Hob's discernment in analyzing people and "his obtuseness in saying the wrong thing at the wrong time."[2] This objection is justified, although such slips in Little Hob are common to most children of incomplete awareness.

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[2]Beatrice Sherman, "A Farm Family," rev. of In My Father's House, 20 April 1941, p. 22.

Faced with tragic events far too serious for his years and with the knowledge that his innocent mistakes helped cause them, Little Hob faces them maturely, and the revelation of feelings in the midst of this turmoil is an exceptional achievement by Street. At the beginning of the novel Little Hob says, "I've never told Mama or Teenie or the preacher, but ever'thing is just as plain as day to me now. I understand a heap of things I usta didn't understand" (FH, p. 16).

Little Hob tells of the day he learned of his father's death:

> I was sitting by a window in the schoolroom when I saw Mr. Murdo drive up and I knew som'n was wrong. I knew he'd come for me. First thing I thought about was Mama and Teenie, and then I thought about Papa. I just sat there at my desk, thinking a jillion things. There was a funny feeling in my throat and stomach, knowing som'n was wrong and not knowing what it was.
>
> The principal came to the door and called my teacher out. While she was out, the kids got to cutting up, but I just sat there, real still, just waiting.
>
> When the teacher came back she was fighting to keep the tears back and she came down and whispered to me that the principal wanted me. All the kids got quiet and looked at me when I walked out.
>
> Mr. Murdo was standing by the door and he put his arm around my shoulder and said, "We'd better go home for a while, son."
>
> "What's wrong?" I said.
>
> He didn't answer me right off, but waited until we got outside. Then he put one foot up on the running board of his car and looked me square in the eyes and told me that Papa was dead.
>
> There ain't no use of going into how I felt. Ever'body who's got a papa knows without me saying any more about it. But I'll tell you this—I didn't cry. I had long since cried out and I was dried up inside. I wanted to cry, but I couldn't and it hurt me when I tried because I was as dry inside as cotton in a compress. . . .
>
> I can't remember ever'thing that I thought about while we were riding home, but I do know that if I hadn't of written that letter and hadn't tried to act like a man that Papa might be alive today. I ain't saying he wouldn't have blown up sooner or later, but maybe he could've stuck it out. Maybe

> Mama could've handled him. She could've told him in her own way. At first I wished I was dead then I got to thinking that if Papa hadn't been a mite peculiar, my letter wouldn't have upset him so. I felt mighty bad about it at first, but I don't feel so bad about it any more.
>
> I sure 'nuff growed up going home that day with Mr. Murdo. Lawyer Walters always says that responsibilities makes a man a man. And I had 'em and I've still got 'em. Seemed like all of a sudden, riding along there, I jumped over that gully that is the bounds between being a boy and being a man. I didn't feel any older, but I was older. I'm the same age Kink is, but I'm older. I can't explain it, but that's how it is.
>
> I was thinking like a man and not like a kid any more. Thinking about the things I had to do, like taking care of Mama and Teenie and the farm, and paying our debts and making a crop. I quit feeling sorry for myself and got to feeling sorry for ever'body else. That showed I was a man. . . .
>
> I understood why Papa killed Woody. I began to understand a heap of things. That showed I was thinking like a man. He had to kill Woody because of what Woody had done and he had to go to Parchman because the law said so. It's funny that men make laws that send 'em to prison or to the old rocking chair for doing the things they have to do. But I understand that, too. You got to have rules. I'm going to stick by the law unless I have to do what Papa had to do. (FH, pp. 329-330; 333-335)

Some of the above passage lacks the subtlety Street might have used if he had written this book ten years later. But Little Hob's direct encounter with death and responsibility is, as John H. Lockhart expressed it, "the essence of living which is the rarest and the priceless ingredient of writing."[3]

Hob Abernathy is a focal point in the novel, for Little Hob's story is really about him. Through the boy's praise of his father the reader grows to admire Abernathy's skills, kindnesses, and gentle consideration

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[3]Jack H. Lockhart, "James Street's Novel Wins Highest Praise," rev. of In My Father's House, Memphis Commercial Appeal, 20 April 1941, LRL.

for his family's welfare and happiness. Ultimately, however, Street skillfully emphasizes Abernathy's pride and independence: "Papa was as independent as a hog on ice. He didn't belong to anything except the Baptist Church and the Democratic Party. Mama wanted him to join the Masons. Mr. Martin was a big Mason. Mama said that being a Mason helped a man. Masons help each other if they get in trouble. Papa said the way to stay out of trouble was not to get in it. He didn't have anything against the Masons, but he just wasn't a j'iner" (FH, pp. 57-58). Little Hob mentions that the Martins are Masons, suggesting the significant differences between the two families.

Abernathy's one fear is of being confined; he will not even cage his animals. Little Hob recognizes that when his father refuses to allow Teenie to marry he is violating this important principle in his nature. One of the fine ironies of the novel is that the mistake by Abernathy leads to his killing Woody and thus to his own confinement at Parchman prison, confinement which affects his mind and brings about his death.

The revelation that Woody has had relations with Teenie is more than Abernathy's restraint can stand: "I looked up and Papa was standing over me. I never had seen Papa look like he looked then. He was breathing out of his nose heavy, and his eyes were almost closed. His fists were doubled up and the veins were sticking out on the back of his hands. I was scared of Papa" (FH, p. 219). Later Abernathy tells his son, "If a man goes in your barn and steals your mule, then the thing to do is lawsuit him. If he steals your plow, lawsuit him. If he kicks

your dog, then you kick him. But if he comes in your house and messes with your wife or your daughter, then you got to kill him" (FH, p. 228). This conviction leads to the final tragedies of the novel.

Vini Abernathy, like her husband, is by nature gentle. She usually caters to Abernathy's wishes, though she deftly registers her disagreement of his opposition to Teenie's marriage. But after Abernathy kills Woody Martin, she becomes callous to save her family, even schooling Little Hob in a lie about how the killing happened in an attempt to prove self-defense. And after Abernathy's death she adopts a no-nonsense policy in attempting to carry on the work of the farm.

In addition to creating good characterization, Street succeeded very well in unifying his story and preparing for the tragic ending. One critic saw it as a story of fate. At least it is a story of consequences that seem very likely to occur if not inevitable.

Inherent in the situation of the novel are philosophies and attitudes out of which the action comes. One attitude is pride of family. Little Hob reveals that his great-grandfather established a homestead on the farm after the Civil War. The first cabin he built was enlarged by succeeding generations to become the house in which the Abernathy's now live. The family still has the ax handle he whittled and uses the cypress well his son built, carefully preserving them (FH, pp. 17, 53-54). Far from being the shiftless people of Tobacco Road, the Abernathys are a proud and decent family, and the incident between Woody and Teenie threatens their good name.

One major theme of the novel is stated in the oft-expressed phrase "That's the way it is." This philosophy accompanies such observations as that animals desire freedom, that a boy becomes a man at twenty-one, and that the youngest in the family is the one that is most bossed about. Later Hob Abernathy tells his son that his pet raccoon will one day run away to the woods to find a mate. When Little Hob hopes that he might stay, Abernathy says, "That ain't the way things are. . . . A coon's got a right to pick out his own mate" (FH, pp. 101-102). Ironically only a few pages later, Woody tells Abernathy that he intends to marry Teenie as soon as he can, despite her father's wishes. Abernathy replies:

> "So that's how it is, eh?"
> "That's how it is, Mr. Abernathy." (FH, pp. 123-124)

When Little Hob's pet raccoon kills his dog and some chickens, the boy assumes the responsibility to shoot it. His father commends him by saying, "There are things that have to be done and I see you ain't one to duck 'em" (FH, p. 191).

This sentiment takes on a darker meaning when Abernathy learns about Woody and Teenie's relationship. Though he tries to restrain himself, his deep-seated belief is that one must kill the man who defiles his daughter. The result is Woody's death and ultimately Abernathy's.

Then a further reality is at hand, for now Little Hob and his mother and sister must face the work of the farm alone, as well as the notoriety brought on them by the killing and by Teenie's baby: "Teenie's

doing pretty good, all in all. Her time's about come and she stays mighty close to the house. The other boys and girls never have anything to do with her, but she ain't mad at 'em. She knows that's just how things are" (FH, p. 347).

For himself, Little Hob also accepts the situation for what it is, and he and his family plan to make their way with dignity and with confidence in their ability: "Oh, there are lots of ways that folks can get by if they set their heads to it and if they got gumption" (FH, p. 348).

As illustrated above, Street uses incidents in Little Hob's life as parallels to the more serious ones in the novel. At first nature seems kind and friendly, as Little Hob is given the wounded raccoon as a pet. The animal learns to play with him and Kink and even with the dog Pup. But when Pup plunges into the creek to play with the raccoon, its basic instincts cause it to turn on its back and rip the dog's belly with its claws. And later Little Hob has to shoot it for killing chickens. In similar fashion the innocent and wholesome love between Woody and Teenie turns into ugliness and leads to the killing, and the Abernathys and Martins turn on each other.

Among the most skillful features of the novel are the foreboding indications which Little Hob gives of something's having happened to his family. The opening paragraph reads: "I knew what they were up to when they stopped their cars near the bend of the road and I wanted to chunk som'n at 'em, but Mama told me not to. She said they didn't mean no harm. Just tourists with a lot of curiosity and nothing much

to do except drive down and stare at our place and at us, if they caught us outside. And take a few pictures, maybe" (FH, p. 13). The grim promise of this beginning is in contrast to the attitude of the well-meaning, friendly narrator. Occasionally and very naturally and directly Little Hob indicates that things have changed in the house he is describing: "Mama keeps her best counterpane on their bed. She sleeps with Teenie now and she never goes in to her bedroom except to dust" (FH, p. 55).

In My Father's House is dedicated to Lucy Street's parents. Her father was a chaplain at Parchman prison, and Street got his idea for the novel while visiting them. He saw many crimes and criminals during his years as a journalist, and those experiences helped prepare him to write the chillingly realistic account of how Hob Abernathy kills Woody Martin. The action is not romantic as in the Dabney stories. Even though it is described by a boy it strikes the reader coldly as being what a shooting would be like if he were to witness it.

Hob Abernathy firmly dispels Little Hob's ignorance by saying, "If it's so, it means Woody and Teenie have been doing like married folks without being married," an indirect way of explaining which is really more explicit than the romanticized love scenes of Street's other novels (FH, p. 220). Abernathy's anger builds within him, and he says, "I'm going to wait tonight for Ben to bring Woody over. I expect him to bring him over before good sun-up. If he don't, I'm going after him" (FH, pp. 227-228).

Abernathy and Little Hob keep a vigil through the night, talking about God, life, family. "We heard a truck coming and Papa stopped and listened until the truck came around the bend. It had only one eye and we knowed it wasn't a Martin truck. The Martins were careful about things like that" (FH, p. 230).

Street aptly portrays the tension when Ben Martin and Woody arrive with Murdo Martin, the deputy sheriff:

> Mr. Murdo got up and leaned against the post. He had only one button on his coat buttoned and he was watching Papa. Papa had both his buttons buttoned. I knew Mr. Murdo was looking at those two buttons because of all a sudden he buttoned his other button. He wasn't trying to hide his pistols no more than Papa was trying to hide his'n, but he buttoned his buttons to show Papa he wasn't aiming to pull unless Papa did.
>
> Mr. Ben started to say som'n and stopped.
>
> Mr. Murdo said, "Go on, Ben."
>
> Mr. Ben said, "Big Hob, we came down to talk to you about som'n."
>
> "I have been expecting you," Papa said.
>
> "When'd you find out about it?"
>
> "Last night," Papa said.
>
> "We didn't know about it until yesterday," Mr. Ben said. "I want you to know that."
>
> Papa said, "I believe you. What you aim to do?"
>
> (FH, pp. 236-237)

Murdo leaves with Abernathy's guns to allow the men to talk out the problem. The jagged feelings of the two fathers show through their words:

> Mr. Ben said, "I don't see why we should hurry."
>
> If I hadn't of been looking at Papa, I wouldn't of known it was him talking. That's how hard his voice was. "I want it done today. That's all right with you, ain't it, Woody?"
>
> "Yes, sir," said Woody. "If it's all right with Papa. I don't see no use of waiting, but I promised Papa I'd let him handle this."
>
> "Then what we waiting for?" said Papa.
>
> Mr. Ben ripped a splinter off the barn door and started chewing it. "I want to be fair," he said.

"I aim for you to be," Papa said.

"I aim to be," said Mr. Ben. "But we got a side to this thing, too. Woody means just as much to us as Teenie does to you. Now, hear me out, Big Hob. Let's use our heads about this thing."

"Woody ain't been using his head," Papa said.

"I ain't denying that," said Mr. Ben, "but Teenie didn't use her head either. It takes two to cause a mess like this."

I didn't like the way things were going a-tall.

(FH, pp. 239-240)

The fighting words come quick and hot, and again there is a sense of inevitability, of what is said being natural and yet wrong. Finally Ben Martin rashly questions Teenie's virtue.

I saw Papa double up his fists and he sort of balanced himself on the balls of his feet, then he braced himself and hit Mr. Ben in the mouth. Mr. Ben staggered and fell, but before he hit the ground Woody jumped at Papa. He swung once and caught Papa on the shoulder and Papa knocked him down with his left fist. I wanted to go out and help Papa but I couldn't move. I was just that scared. I heard Papa breathing deep and saw Woody start to get up. Mr. Ben was moving, too, and Papa reached around, looking for a stick or som'n. After all, it was two against one. I saw his hand reach behind him and my heart jumped in my mouth. My .22 was still on the shelf right behind Papa. He wasn't feeling for that. He was just feeling for anything to fight with. He kept his eyes on Woody and Mr. Ben and I saw his hand touch the shelf. I prayed real quick that he wouldn't feel the gun. But he did. I could tell he was surprised when he felt it. His fingers touched it and then he turned around real quick and glanced at the gun. He snatched off that greasy rag and threw the gun to his shoulder. He was aiming at Woody.

Woody was just getting to his feet and he yelled, "No, Mr. Abernathy! Please don't!"

Mr. Ben yelled something, but I don't remember what it was.

I saw Papa squeeze the gun to his shoulder and fire. The shot hit Woody in the cheek. He put his hand there real quick and Papa shot him again. It hit him in the neck and the blood spurted.

Woody said, "You shot me, Mr. Abernathy! Please don't shoot no more!"

I couldn't look at Woody. But I was watching Papa. His face was as white as a sheet and his lips were blue. I heard him pump another shell into the barrel and saw Woody's face when the shot hit him in the forehead. He tried to stand up.

> He sort of weaved and then he fell. Papa shot three more times. I counted 'em. One-two-three.
>
> Mr. Martin was up by that time and he looked at his boy and then over at Papa. He didn't make a move toward Papa. He knew Papa would've killed him too.
>
> One of Woody's arms was folded under him and he was lying on his stomach. His head was sort of twisted and blood was pumping out of him. Mr. Ben walked over to him, moved his arm out from under him and looked up at Papa. "You've killed my boy, Abernathy."
>
> I didn't know I was standing by Papa. I don't remember coming out of the stall. But there I was standing by him, looking down at Woody. Papa didn't say a word; he just stood there holding the gun. Then I heard Teenie scream and I looked toward the house. Teenie and Mama and Aunt 'Tunia and Kink were running toward the barn. Teenie stopped at the lot gate and then started running around the yard screaming.
>
> I heard Mama tell Aunt 'Tunia, "Go get her and take her in the house." (FH, pp. 243-245)

The factor that most brings out the horror of the scene is its being described by a thirteen-year-old boy.

In My Father's House is a story of rural life, of sweetness, and of violent tragedy. Street carefully told it in a gentle way. Lockhart says, "Faulkner could have snarled this story, and it would have been cruel, grim, powerful. . . . Street tells it with compassion and sympathy. . . ."[4] The elements of a Faulkner story are here. But lacking Faulkner's power and wanting to reveal Mississippi life as he saw it and remembered it, Street told his story with a gentleness and a power of his own.

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[4]Ibid.

CHAPTER VII

THE RELIGIOUS NOVELS

The Gauntlet

The Gauntlet, published in 1945, was one of James Street's best selling novels and perhaps the one for which he was best known.[1] It sold over a million copies and was a selection of the Literary Guild. The book fits into the rather distinct group of American "preacher novels," along with such works as Catherine Marshal's A Man Called Peter. At the time it appeared orthodox Protestant denominations like the Baptist Church held a strong influence in the lives of many Americans, yet the spirit of challenge offered by writers like Sinclair Lewis was also present. Street's novel offered both a spiritual appeal and an attack on babbitry.

The Gauntlet, Street's autobiographical novel, draws on his brief service as a Baptist minister. The central characters, London Wingo and his wife Kathie, are clearly taken from James and Lucy Street and their experiences at St. Charles, Missouri, and other places where Street served as a minister. London is a liberal-minded student at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary when the book opens. He is on a "quest" to discover that service to God is simply service to humanity.

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[1]James H. Street, The Gauntlet (New York: Doubleday, Doran, and Co., Inc., 1945). All subsequent references will appear parenthetically in the text.

Because Kathie is pregnant and because his friend Page Musselwhite advises him to get into the field to solve his personal problems, London leaves school and accepts the ministry of the Baptist Church in Linden, Missouri. The remainder of the novel concerns his struggle against the social and political factions that make up the church. He finds that the members of the congregation are usually more interested in maintaining their power groups than in service to God. Two principal deacons' wives, Josie Moffit and Tama Duckworth, especially set out to make London, Kathie, and their baby Paige conform to their opinions on the proper behavior for a minister and his family. Although London is aided by a few genuine and good-hearted friends, the deacons resist any change which he proposes. Soon, however, London becomes more adept than they at manipulating the congregation. The struggle increases until Kathie, worn out by the vicious and petty struggle, suffers a miscarriage with her second child and dies. London then comes to a crucial decision about the ministry and passes up an opportunity to move to a large city church in order to return to Linden.

Contemporary reviews of the novel were mixed in their judgments, though usually favorable. W. E. Garrison of the Christian Century found London's experience to be on balance a genuinely righ religious one, though perhaps of a different kind than London imagined.[2] He finds the "gauntlet" terminology overdone and the characters perhaps too one dimensional, but he reports that a "Baptist technical advisor"

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[2]W. E. Garrison, "The Ministry—Service or Job?" rev. of The Gauntlet, Christian Century, 16 Jan. 1946, pp. 80-81.

had pronounced Street's strict picture of in-church conflicts an accurate one, at least in the South.

A humorous and imaginative review in Time portrays the Devil's commenting on The Gauntlet to a book critic at a Christmas party.[3] He confesses himself surprised to discover that London is a defender of democracy and that God is humanity.

The Gauntlet is not Street's best piece of fiction, although it does have some very good features. One problem is the hazy and rather contradictory theme. Like James Street the Baptist preacher, London Wingo the Baptist preacher begins his ministry unsure of what he believes. Unfortunately for the novel the reader is never sure of what he believes either, though London is supposed to reach some spiritual plateau after the death of Kathie.

In the overly-direct exposition at the beginning of the story the author says that

> London Wingo was there in the seminary wrestling with the boulders of orthodox theology and gulping in cold, stringy heaps the bleak wisdom of dead philosophers because he was on a quest, a search for spiritual peace, a meeting place for his intellect and intuition, an armistice between his mind and his soul. In those days the young minister never considered the difference between a crusade and a quest. He dreamed of charging into Zion and grasping the Holy Grail from faltering hands, then holding it aloft in its splendor while the world thundered hosannas. He didn't know that the Grail is the troubled heart of mankind and that God is Humanity. (TG, pp. 2-3)

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[3]"The Devil and James Street," rev. of The Gauntlet, Time, 24 Dec. 1945, p. 102.

Street further says that "The ministry of London Wingo was of the mind and not of the spirit." The title of the book is reflected in London's statement to his friend Page:

> "I want to find Truth. It seems to me that at times my mind, my reason, is challenging my spirit, throwing down a gauntlet and daring my spirit to pick it up" (TG, p. 19).

The action of The Gauntlet is the process by which London moves from a theoretical notion that true religion is really only demonstrating love for one's world-stained fellow man to a practical and tried-by-fire version of the same belief. In Linden he finds much of humanity to be petty, jealous, vicious, and mercenary—even in church. Both London and Kathie alternately view this state with charity or lash out against it. When Kathie suffers a fatal miscarriage, brought on largely by her struggle against the slander and acts of their enemies, London wants to repudiate the ministry and even his faith. At his mother's grave, however, her admonitions about service to God and those of his friend Page Musselwhite return to him, and he resolves to go back to his work in Linden.

The problem with this development, as Garrison expressed it, is that "It is not quite clear how this quest for God terminated, if he really made one. A time or two in the course of it he proclaimed himself a humanist, but the declaration is backed by no process of thought."[4] In his turning London seems to end right side up more by a decision based on his experiences in the novel.

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[4]Garrison, p. 81.

Part of the cause of this vagueness in Street's preacher is the author's attempt to work democratic principles into religion—an attempt to blend two philosophies which refuse to dovetail.

In a Mississippi article announcing that The Gauntlet had been selected by the Literary Guild, Street is quoted as saying that his idea of democracy in religion began in his youth when he heard a Baptist minister defend a new sect's right to believe as it chose. Street said, "It made a deep impression on me, and I began to translate democracy into what it really should be—the physical and spiritual rights of man."[5] An independent mind himself, Street was always ready to champion freedom of expression, especially expression which challenged the status quo.

But Street's attempt in his novel to work human concepts of democracy into religion has only an imperfect success. He finds the ancient mystery incompatible with a stylized system. Hence London's final choice of returning to Linden seems to come only out of vague motives.

But if the religious theme of The Gauntlet is lacking in clarity, the portrait of London Wingo as a novice preacher and the analysis of small-town church politics is convincing and often well executed. London, of course, reflects Street's own experiences and presumably some of his attitudes. At any rate London is a religious liberal who

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[5]"Guild Picks Book by James Street on Minister's Faith," Jackson (Miss.) Daily News, 20 September 1945, MDAHc.

finds himself in a tradition-loving and power-conscious denominational church.

As the novel begins, London is a student at Ft. Worth's Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Much of the academic theology he resents, but when he arrives in Linden he irritates the deacons by asserting that Paul may not have written Hebrews, and that Moses did not write the Pentateuch. However London does admire the grass-roots faith of his fellow student Page Musselwhite, a young farmer who had "received the call" while plowing and who despite his ignorance impresses all with his sincere dedication. Oddly, though, when London confides that he first started preaching to counter feelings of guilt about his affair with a girl, Page is almost cavalier about such matters and takes a liberal view of them. The attitude is incongruous to Page's otherwise conservative nature. Such inconsistencies sometimes occur when Street evidently uses his novel as an outlet for expressing his opinions regarding the religious and moral dogmas of the day. At times he interrupts his plot or else obviously manipulates it to give himself a platform.

But in between these polemic passages, and sometimes in conjunction with them, Street writes interesting and detailed scenes. A good example is London's discussion with the Linden church treasurer in his grocery store. London wins the first preacher-deacon skirmish by refusing to fix the parsonage stove himself and insisting that the church do it. This stubbornness over petty things for the sake of principle is an example of the small church give-and-take which Street himself

encountered. London's self-conscious acting as he meets his members and their criteria in sizing up him and Kathie also ring true.

The two principal forces in the church whom London and Kathie must face are Josie Moffit and Tama Duckworth. Street unerringly arouses the reader's ire against them by his protrayal of their crudity, meddling, vicious gossip, and insensitivity. For example, Josie and Tama intrude on London's privacy when he meets Kathie's train, and the reader finds himself as furious as London.

London goes through several experiences common to preachers coming to a new congregation. Street describes his and Kathie's preparations for his journey to Linden and his arrival there—the strangeness and drabness of the town, and the welcome by his appointed host, Orville Honeycutt, the retiring minister. Honeycutt shows him the town and shares trade secrets by giving him the necessary inside information which he will need about the various members.

London begins his trial sermon far too pedantically. But on a hint from Honeycutt he manages to bring himself to the people's level and inspire them. The scene is one of the novel's best. After surviving a cat-and-mouse interview with the deacons, London is "called" by the congregation.

Street neatly balances London's strong points with the problems he faces. His first sermon as the church's new minister mesmerizes the congregation and demonstrates his unusual potential. But minutes after the benediction the deacons are arguing over the recent high school basketball game. Street pictures the people as capable of sincere devotion, but usually concerned with mundane worldly affairs.

Other problems include the congregation's insistence on molding the preacher's private life to their expectations. Josie and Tama begin a campaign to change Kathie's name to Katherine. They resent her bobbed hair and any other predilections on the Wingos' part for modern trends, such as jazz songs and picture shows. Street also portrays the town's tastelesness in such matters as art: the parsonage is decorated with hideous contributions of statuary.

One of the most realistic incidents of the book is London's first funeral. Newt Upjohn, patriarch of a rural clan, comes to London and tells him that his youngest son has been run over by a train. Street portrays the shock that comes to the young minister when he is confronted by real death, not just the thought of it or divinity school discussions of how to handle it.

Before the service, London reflects that he must perform perfectly, because "A funeral is a forum for old folks, and there they watch the preacher, whereas at a wedding they watch the bride, and at a sermon they usually watch one another" (TG, p. 120). He is aided in this ordeal by one of the best-drawn characters in the novel, Cliff Carter, the undertaker. Cliff is a member of London's congregation, and Street carries him over into his sequel, The High Calling. Cliff's professional interest in the dead at first seems somewhat callous and mercenary, but his experience and tact help London through what could have been a disaster for him. When London makes the people uncomfortable by reading an unfamiliar passage from Ecclesiastes, Cliff whispers to him to read the twenty-third Psalm. Then, again at Cliff's suggestion, London

selects for the hymn "Beautiful Isle of Somewhere," a song of mediocre musical merit but one loved by the rural people present.

London panics at the graveside when he realizes that he cannot find any fresh dust on the frozen ground to throw on the coffin. He next discovers that he has been reading an Episcopal burial service for the Baptist boy. Worse he confuses the "dust to dust" quotation and begins to say a profane parody of it which he had heard earlier. Cliff rescues London by remembering to bring a handful of dust and by deftly interrupting him before he goes too far.

> London turned away, sick and disgusted. He dared not look at the people, and was dejected as he walked alone back toward the house. There Minnie Upjohn met him and invited him in to the fire, and Mrs. Upjohn and Newt came to him and thanked him, saying, "You put him away good." He wanted to cry. All the Upjohns shook his hand and expressed their gratitude in dignified silence. (TG, p. 123)

Cliff later tells him that the family did not know the difference in the service and were impressed by London's choice. London's nervousness genuinely reveals the pressure a minister must cope with in an emotional situation.

The major conflict of The Gauntlet is the power struggle between several opposing factions in the church, and London and Kathie Wingos' attempts to deal with it. Street himself speaks close to the surface in the explanation of the principle of church organization: "It . . . was a constant tug of war between the pulpit and the pews, the preacher and the people, the leader and the led. Such is democracy, even in religion." In London's church, he says, the various forces are the pulpit, the deacons, the haves, the have-nots, and the women determined to control Kathie's behavior (TG, p. 150).

The first open conflict between London and the deacons comes when they refuse to endorse his invitation to his friend Page to conduct a revival. London responds by a series of shrewd maneuvers to get for himself more control in the congregation. While London is successful, the reader observes that he too has turned religion into a political power struggle. Eventually the conflict broadens when London thwarts a money-making scheme which the deacons try to promote. Here Street shows his skill as a novelist by combining this controversy with a slander campaign against London which charges him with illicit behavior with Amy Taylor, an attractive widow in the congregation. The author deftly portrays the nebulous forces that make for such an ugly affair. Kathie says, "It will be like fighting shadows. . . . You can't push them back. They just creep in and creep in, and then the next thing you know the sunshine has gone" (TG, pp. 235-236). One of the most sensitive scenes in the novel is that in which Kathie, having challenged London's enemies, humbles herself to them to save her husband. Later the true motive behind Josie Moffit's resentment of Kathie appears when Josie reveals a secret, hopeless, and pitiful love for London.

Street makes money the issue of the climax of the novel. When an outside businessman convinces the deacons to allow him to operate a factory in the church-owned building, proposing to buy the property later, Street sees through the scheme as a tax dodge and warns that it will threaten the welfare of the youth of the congregation who had been using the building for projects. Enraged, he literally throws the man out, and the deacons call a church meeting to vote on London's dismissal.

The church meeting is really a trial, full of hatred and spite—Street's attack on religious Philistia. Ironically, Newt Upjohn, whom London had earlier crossed, swings the vote of confidence in London's favor.

The victory is spoiled, however, for the strain on Kathie causes her to suffer a miscarriage. Josie and Tama put aside animosities to help, but Kathie steadily weakens. The foreshadowing of her death is well done as Street describes her physical decline. The grinding cold of the winter weather complements the despair and inevitability of Kathie's death. All efforts to save her are futile, as are the trite sentiments offered to comfort London. His last visit with her resenbles that of Frederic Henry with Catherine Barkley.

> He felt it was his duty to go over and kiss her, but he couldn't bring himself to do it. Her skin might be cold. So he stood by the foot of the bed, gripping the iron top of the bedstead. He had heard, and even preached, that death could be beautiful. There was nothing beautiful about this, however. The death smile that he had heard about was not on Kathie's face. Her lips were puffed and blistered and her teeth showed between them. Her skin was tight and her eyes were closed. (TG, p. 301)

For a time London is bitter, but while visiting his parents' grave he makes a stirring if vague decision of faith to return to his work at Linden.

Contrary to one reviewer's analysis, The Gauntlet is not superior to Street's historical novels. The kind of action and conflicts which Street was best at describing and which is straining through in this novel is better suited to the Mississippi frontier than to a Missouri church. Still there are fine scenes in London's personal turmoils and in his clash with the deacons. And at least some of the religious message which Street was trying to express does come through.

The High Calling

The sequel to The Gauntlet is The High Calling, published in 1951, six years after the original story of London Wingo.[6] Twenty years have passed since the time of The Gauntlet, and London has become a wise, successful, and famous Baptist minister. He holds a doctorate in divinity and for several years has preached for a large and important congregation in Kansas City. Now, at the request of his old friend Cliff Carter, he is returning to Linden to become the minister for a small suburban congregation which is just being started.

Paige Wingo is now an attractive and headstrong woman, and she leaves a newspaper job to join London in his new work. Under his guidance, the new congregation gets through the difficulties of establishing a new church. The bulk of the novel concerns the personal lives and decisions of a few people close to London. The minister himself finds a new love in Forrest Roberts, a sophisticated yet understanding school teacher. Paige finds employment at the radio station owned by Benton Andrews, a religions skeptic whose son Vance is studying for the ministry. When Paige and Vance elope, Vance's former sweetheart, Mary Upjohn, devotes her life to religious service and sparks an emotional religious revival at the church. Among the consequences of these developments is the decision of Harry Ward, the worldly and mercenary minister at Linden's oldest congregation, to consecrate

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[6]James H. Street, The High Calling (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1951). All subsequent references will appear parenthetically in the text.

his life to genuine service. Cliff Carter dies after seeing his dreams for the new congregation realized, and Benton Andrews shows signs of conversion. London and Forrest plan their wedding as the novel closes.

Herbert F. West of the New York Times pronounced The High Calling "a good novel, over-sweet at times but generally quite palatable."[7] This sentiment is probably the best that can be said of the novel. Despite high praise from religious commentators like Daniel A. Poling,[8] the story is weak and often cloyingly sentimental. Purely religious fervor is difficult to portray without encountering such difficulty, and Street cannot escape it. Scenes in which members of London's congregation suddenly begin to weep or pray with little explained provocation are awkward and even embarrassing.

However, there are passages of good writing, and especially some interesting observations on religion in America. The exposition at the beginning of the novel is economical if somewhat obvious. It is also less polemical than that of The Gauntlet. The dialogue passages are crisp and convincing. Although most of the characters are, as Bryan Haislip puts it, "life-like, but not living,"[9] the portrayal of London himself is good. Street especially does a convincing job in showing him

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[7]Herbert F. West, "Servant of God," rev. of The High Calling, NYTBR, 10 June 1951, p. 22.

[8]Daniel A. Poling, "A Very Present Help," rev. of The High Calling, SRL, 7 July 1951, p. 18.

[9]Bryan Haislip, "Continuing the Story of London Wingo's Career," rev. of The High Calling [Newspaper unidentified], 1951, UNCNBc.

as he would be twenty years after the time of The Gauntlet. There does seem to be about the right amount of mellowing of his faults and character that the reader expects twenty years of experience would bring, or at least could bring. As Haislip says, the novel "has as much of the shrewd wisdom of age as 'The Gauntlet' had of the fiery courage of youth."[10]

Occasionally Street also makes skillful use of physical scenes to comment on his theme. The stone ivy-covered church which London finds on his return is a good symbol of the dignity of simple religion.

The relationship between London and Paige is fairly well portrayed. Street manages to convey the awkwardness between them resulting from the absence of Kathie. London's failure to discipline her is sympathetically treated and prepares for a confrontation between them near the end of the novel when he finally rebukes what selfishness has grown up in her. Her shock and repentance provide good variety in her protrayal.

The most important aspect of The High Calling, and one of the best individual scenes in Street's novels, is that in which London confronts the issue of racial segregation in his new church. Earlier, in discussing denominational factions, he had said, "It is still a tragedy. The army of Christ in scattered camps. Separation is third only to power and ignorance as a breeding place for intolerance and evil" (HC, p. 47). On the night of the church meeting to decide on the

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[10]Ibid.

congregation's official covenant, London senses tension. Forrest Roberts reads the covenant which London has written and most present expect it to be adopted without objection. However London notices the heads of two leading families exchange meaningful glances and knows that they have joined together as forces of opposition, similar to the political factions twenty years before which Street portrayed in The Gauntlet.

Estes Oliphant rises to make a plausible, smiling plea for "Southern Baptist" distinctiveness by including close communion in the covenant. London is bewildered by the out-dated suggestion until Forrest gives him a clue to the presence of a hidden sore. London realizes that back in small-town America he will have to deal with the Negro issue:

> "And so, Brother Oliphant, the sons of Shem are threatened by the sons of Ham? The whites by the blacks?"
> "Yeah. . . . I don't share supper with niggers in my home and I won't share the Lord's Supper with them in my church."

London expresses the weary contempt for such attitudes which Street himself felt:

> "The Negro again." He shook his head sadly. "The same old problem that is harassing Southern Baptists from Maryland to California. There are fifteen million Baptists in the United States and we are divided into tribes that will not march together—Northerners and Southerners, black and white—" He began smiling. "Freewill Baptists and primitive Baptists, Duck River Baptists, General six principle Baptists, and Two-Seed-in-the-Spirit Predestination Baptists. Lord have mercy on us." (HC, pp. 96-97)

Showing a restraint that he would not have possessed twenty years earlier, London demonstrates the fallacy of a Christian's taking

Oliphant's position by pointing out that the ultimate outcome of such a proposal would be to limit not only communion but all other aspects of the church to the white race. He carries his point with the whole congregation, and thus the only serious religious obstacle he faces in the novel is overcome. While The High Calling is one of the least effective of Street's novels, this scene adds an important comment on the racial issue to those made in Street's journalism and in his historical and sociological novels.

CHAPTER VIII

THE VELVET DOUBLET

Street was continually fascinated by prominent men of history, particularly, it seems, those who were dreamers and whose triumphs were mixed with misfortune. Jefferson Davis, for example, was to be the subject of a biography he planned but never wrote. When in 1953, the year before he died, Street wrote his novel about Christopher Columbus, The Velvet Doublet, he was at the top of his form.[1] The great explorer was a choice subject for Street, for he delighted in exploding what he took to be historical myths, and found enough historical evidence to pronounce as false the traditional textbook view of Columbus as a noble hero. He pictures the adverturer as part visionary and part scoundrel—an irritating, complaining, irascible man with an unquenchable dream. Further, Street portrays the theory (largely unshared by authorities on Columbus) that the discoverer of the new world was of Jewish descent and secretly held to the Jewish faith in Isabel and Ferdinand's Catholic Spain. At least Columbus associates with conversos—Jews who accepted Christianity to avoid expulsion from Spain but often secretly observed Jewish worship. And several characters in the novel argue that Columbus himself is a Jew. The narrator recalls his observations of Columbus:

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[1]James Street, The Velvet Doublet (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1953). All subsequent references will appear parenthetically in the text.

> I remembered clearly the characteristics, the mannerisms. His pride in the history of the Jews and his acceptance of the prophet Esdras. The allurement of jewels rather than land, and the urge for barter. His morose silence on the expulsion of the Jews and his insistence to sail on Friday, a day of good omen for Jews albeit the black day for Christians. And, more than all, his affinity for conversos, for Luis de Santangel and others. Then, too, whom did he trust on the voyage? Diego Harana, the brother of his mistress, and Luis de Torres, both of Israel's seed. (VD, p. 241)

Perhaps Street took this approach because it makes for an intriguing if unlikely story, and because of information about the Jews in Spain provided by his friend Harry Golden, publisher of The Carolina Israelite in Charlotte, North Carolina.

As a narrator for his novel, Street made what Thomas C. Chubb of the Saturday Review called "one of the most ingenious choices of a hero that I have seen."[2] The story is told by Juan Rodrigo Bermejo of Triana, who was in fact the sailor on the Pinta who first saw land on October 12, 1492. It is a matter of record that Columbus cheated Rodrigo out of a pension and a new doublet, the reward which had been promised to the man who saw land first. Hence the title of the novel. Columbus claimed to have seen a light from shore the preceding night, although the ships, according to Columbus biographer Samuel Eliot Morison, were at least thirty-five miles off shore, much too far away for one to see a shore light.[3]

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[2]Thomas C. Chubb, "Columbus' Companions," rev. of The Velvet Doublet, SRL, 36(3 Jan. 1953), 12.

[3]Samuel Eliot Morison, Admiral of the Ocean Sea: A Life of Christopher Columbus (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1942), p. 225.

Rodrigo tells his story as an aging man looking back on the events surrounding the discovery. He was born an Andalusian in Triana near Seville in 1469, the year of Ferdinand and Isabel's marriage. Through Rodrigo Street tells of the larger events of the times—the wars against the Moors, the fall of Constantinople to the Turks, and the consequent need of a new access to Cathay and India. The Inquisition was bringing heretics, particularly Jews, to the stake, and many Jews had become conversos.

Rodrigo traces his life from the days of his boyhood in Seville, where he lived with his father, his aunt Ronda, and Mudarra, his father's Moorish helper. With Ronda and Mudarra Street brings in the first of many colorful and varied characters that enrich his tale. Aunt Ronda is scolding and tyrannical, but her partiality for Rodrigo is obvious. Mudarra is well drawn an an indomitable old Mohammedan who has accepted Christianity in form only, so as to be allowed to live in Spain. Street deftly draws his quick temper and spirit through colorful dialogue. Mudarra is also a unifying element in the novel, for Rodrigo will later take his name when he escapes to live in North Africa.

Rodrigo is sent to study with the Dominican Friars under the tutelage of Juan Ruiz de Medina, a powerful enforcer of Isabel's Inquisition, but a kind if stern teacher. Juan is a strange dichotomy—fearful as an enforcer of Catholic law, yet privately open-minded about dreamers like Columbus.

Rodrigo's first love is Maraela Harana, a fictional member of the family of Beatriz Harana, Columbus's mistress. Maraela's father becomes

a business partner with Rodrigo's father. Street's women are not as well drawn as his men, and Maraela comes across at first as the usual vision of loveliness. Later, however, a vindictive streak in her makes her a more distinctive character. Maraela and her father are conversos, and one night Rodrigo unwittingly discovers them secretly Judaizing. They immediately leave the city, and Rodrigo spends the next fifteen years dreaming of her.

While studying with the Dominicans, Rodrigo encounters Benjamin Marino, an actual historical figure who along with Paolo Toscanelli drew maps used by Columbus. Marino's lectures spark Rodrigo's interest in the theories of the westward exploration held by explorers and heads of state. Street enjoys pointing out that most people knew the world was round and the the east could be reached by sailing west. The crucial question was how far one would have to go. Marino correctly argued that there was unknown land between Europe and Asia.

Rodrigo soon leaves home to make his fortune and goes to sea, getting involved in illegal trafficking in aloes. Here some of the most interesting passages appear, as Street describes the trade and cities of fifteenth-century Spain. Chubb praises Street's description of the waterfront, and P. J. Searles of the Herald Tribune credits Street with "a vivid picture of Spanish life, not of the court but of the common people of Seville and the countryside, monastic schooling, medieval metaphysics, boyish escapades, and the bustle and gaiety of a light-hearted though proud race."[4]

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[4]P. J. Searles, "Here the Villain is Christopher Columbus," rev. of The Velvet Doublet, HYHTBR, 4 January 1953, MADHc.

One of the novel's most memorable minor characters is Rodrigo's fellow seaman Gomez Rascon, named "The Rabbit." Rascon is profane and lecherous, perhaps a stereotyped image of a sailor. But his irreverent comments on the passing events add levity and spice to the narrative, and a tinge of grief enters the story when Rodrigo learns that Gomez has been hanged for defending Rodrigo's claim to the reward.

As Richard Walser observed in a review of the novel, "Columbus is hardly more than a minor character in The Velvet Doublet; yet his shadow lies across almost every page there. He is not the Columbus we remember from our school days. He is rascible, scheming, domineering, false (or so it seems to Rodrigo and others), ambitious, adamant, a man aware only of the thing he wants and must do. He is not a likeable figure, and yet his greatness is unmistakable."[5]

According to his son James, Street relied on Samuel Morison's biography for information about Columbus' life and discovery. Just how heavy this reliance was may be seen by comparing passages from Rodrigo's account of Columbus' preparations and voyage with those from Morison. After the text of the king and queen's order to the town of Palos to supply Columbus with ships, Morison says:

> Quite an order! There must have been some long breaths drawn, and significant looks exchanged among the town fathers of Palos when the public scrivener rolled out this royal command in the courtyard of the Church of St. George. And if Columbus imagined that caravels manned and equipped for an ocean voyage would be produced within ten days, he had plenty to learn about

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[5]Richard Walser, "Columbus and the Sailor, A James Street Novel," rev. of The Velvet Doublet, [Newspaper unidentified], 1953, UNCNBc.

the difficulties and delays of fitting out ships in a far from enthusiastic community.[6]

Rodrigo says at this point:

> The functionary squinted at his neighbors when he finished reading, and the Palenos looked at one another, first in rapt amazement and then in devilish amusement. Obviously Don Christopher had approved this document, his nature being such that he must review every word that concerned him, and this document established that the said servant of the said queen was a said fool. (VD, p. 153)

The following passages describing the voyage are also comparable:

Morison:

> Next day, September 20, they ran out of the trades and had to change course: "sailed this day to the W by N and WNW because the winds were very variable." Several birds came aboard—some of them mistaken for warblers—and hopes ran high of an early landfall. In a flat calm Columbus ordered the dipsey lead hove. No bottom at 200 fathoms.[7]

Rodrigo:

> The old moon passed on September 20 and we ran away from the goodly winds and into variables and, to stay under way, we altered course slightly and bore west one quarter of the northwest wind. More birds singed by and some sat our yard-arms and Chico did knock cown one of these birds with a stone, and the same he sneaked from ballast while the ratings' backs were turned.
>
> Our moods and humors were most lively, for we believed that land was nigh. Then came a light calm and Columbus ordered soundings and each ship hove its line and there was no bottom at 200 fathoms. (VD, p. 191)

Morison:

> At sunrise on Sunday, October 7, when the fleet was about 370 miles from the nearest land (Turks Island), came the second false landfall. Nina, ranging ahead of her consorts contrary to Columbus's orders, in the hope of winning the

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[6]Morison, p. 110.

[7]Ibid., p. 205.

reward, broke out a flag at her masthead and fired a gun, the signal for land dead ahead. People aboard the flagship had seen this "land" earlier, but dared not sing out; for the Captain General was so fed up with false landfalls that he gave orders to the effect that anyone who raised another false cry of tierra would be disqualified for the reward, even though he whould sight the true land later. (By the same token, Columbus should later have disqualified himself!)

By sunset, when they had run 67 miles and no land had materialized, Columbus ordered the course to be changed to WSW (one more point westerly than Martin Alonso had recommended) because great flocks of birds were passing overhead to the southwestward.[8]

Rodrigo:

The next day was Sunday and the Nina showed a flag and fired her bombard and this the signal for land. But there was no land, and the admiral was vexed and caused orders to be given that the next man who made a false landfall would disqualify himself for the reward: the pension and the doublet.

Mark that well. The next man who erred was disqualified for the prizes.

Came vespers of that Sunday and we all to prayers and Columbus leading his men and Pinzon leading us, and as we prayed there came flocks of birds winging low and these steady for the southwest. We all saw and marveled, for they were countless and on a bead, fast for the southwest. (VD, p. 195)

Morison, quoting from an inquest into the discovery:

"Also whether you know that the said Martin Alonso said, 'Adelante! Adelante! this is a fleet and mission of such great princes as the Sovereigns our lords of Spain, . . . but if you, sir, wish to turn back I am determined to go on until land is found or never return to Spain,' and that because of his efforts and counsel they went forward?"[9]

Rodrigo:

This was the day Pinzon told us: "If the admiral wishes, let him turn back, but I am determined to go on until land is found or return never to Spain. Adelante!"

Now, mind you, we were as fearful as they, but so bravely spake out Pinzon that we cheered him. "Adelante! Adelante!" (VD, p. 196)

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[8]Ibid., p. 213.

[9]Ibid., p. 217.

Also similar are Rodrigo's accounts of the faltering of the compass, Columbus' "true" and "false" journals, and the account of his sighting of land (VD, pp. 187, 189, and 199).[10] Obviously Street was indebted to Morison for this part of his novel.

On returning home from the sea, Rodrigo learns that his father and Mudarra have been executed for heresy on the accusation of the treacherous Maraela. Renouncing both his faith and his country, Rodrigo finds comfort in a Jewish girl that he names Mita, who proves to be the daughter of Benjamin Marino, the map maker. Perhaps this is too great a coincidence to be credible, but it contributes to the unity which Street was achieving in his later novels.

Rodrigo and Mita flee to Tangier, where Rodrigo assumes the identity of Mudarra's illegitimate son. Their arrival in Africa and their rise to great wealth by means of Rodrigo's experiences and Mita's cleverness are high points in the novel.

Mita is one of Street's best drawn female characters. Alternately passionate, shrewish, jealous, and astute, her moods provide an intriguing variety, and she becomes an important character in the novel even though she first appears very late in its pages.

The climax of the book is Rodrigo's confrontation with Columbus and with Maraela, who has become the admiral's ward. Columbus, in need of money, hears of the wealthy Moor Mudarra and invites him to come to Spain, not knowing that Mudarra is the sailor whom he cheated out of

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[10]Ibid., pp. 173, 199, 203.

the reward for sighting land first. Rodrigo reveals himself and triumphs over both Columbus and Maraela, threatening to reveal his Jewish blood and her illegal Judaizing unless he admits that Rodrigo saw the land first. But in the end Columbus' visionary spirit awes Rodrigo, and his triumph is ashes.

Rodrigo's character, of course, sets the tone of the novel. He claims and exhibits the pride of his Andalusian race. His love of country, woman, and glory is also evident in the poetic stylized speech he uses:

> IN THE NAME OF GOD, THE CLEMENT, THE MERCIFUL!
> I, an Andalusian, born Juan Rodrigo Bermejo of Triana, now known as Mudarra the bastard Moor, was the first Christian to sight the New World, although my own captain, the niggardly Christopher Columbus, tried to cheat me of that honor and did cheat me of his promised rewards: the Queen's pension and a velvet doublet.
> Thus my vengeance was foretold, as no glib Genoese dreamer can trod Andalusian pride without payment for his transgression. (VD, p. 11)

The most negative of the reviews of The Velvet Doublet condemns this stylized language. The Time reviewer said, "Novelist Street has chosen to write in a pretentiously archaic and gaudy style, which sometimes reads like a burlesque of Ernest Hemingway in his pidgin-Spanish phase."[11] The device is very romantic, but it fits well with the adventurous subject matter and times. Selwyn Moore, historical fiction specialist for the New York Times Book Review, called the novel "a heady composition stylistically," and is generally complimentary of

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[11]"Who Saw Land First?," rev. of The Velvet Doublet, Time, 26 Jan. 1953, pp. 100, 102.

the work, as are most of the reviewers. They are cautious in crediting its historical accuracy, however, and Moore reminds his readers that Street had earlier claimed to be "primarily a storyteller and not an historian."[12]

There are faults. Chubb correctly observes that the central part of the book drags.[13] Also, even at this late stage in his career Street still cannot resist pouring in historical data that interested him, and these come glibly from the mouths of common characters in everyday conversation. But he is much more restrained in this fault than in earlier novels like Oh, Promised Land. Most of his exposition passages are direct and smoothly inserted into the narrative.

Strengths of the book are its choice of subject matter, its color, and its pace. Enough factual detail is included to give it the ring of authenticity. And there are the individual scenes which Street draws so well: the secret Jewish worship of Maraela and her father, Columbus at prayer, the discovery, Rodrigo and Mita's arrival in Morocco. These memorable pictures supply the vitality of Street's fiction.

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[12]Selwyn Moore, "Columbus' Lookout," rev. of The Velvet Doublet, NYTBR, 4 Jan. 1953, p. 5.

[13]Chubb, p. 57.

CHAPTER IX

THE DOG NOVELS

The Biscuit Eater

Street wrote his short story "The Biscuit Eater" in 1939[1] and the next year expanded it into a short novel that was to become a favorite with his readers.[2] The story is of a boy named Lonnie McNeil whose father Harve trains champion bird dogs on the Piney Woods plantation of a wealthy Philadelphia sportsman, Mr. Ames. One of the dogs gives birth, and Lonnie is given the runt of the litter as his own. His father warns him, however, that the dog appears to be a biscuit eater, "a 'count hound that isn't good for anything except to hunt his meat and biscuits" (BE, p. 11).

Lonnie and his Negro friend Text work with the dog, which they call Moreover, and soon he develops into a superb albeit unorthodox hunter. Still he has bad habits, including eating eggs. They enter Moreover into the county trials, and eventually the competition narrows to Moreover and Silver Belle, the best of the Ames dogs.

The story's complication now enters. A jest by Mr. Ames that he might fire Harve McNeil if Moreover defeats Silver Belle is mistaken by the servants as being a serious threat. Lonnie and Text hear the story

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[1]James Street, "The Biscuit Eater," SEP, 211(13 May 1939), 10 ff.

[2]James Street, The Biscuit Eater (New York: The Dial Press, 1941). All further references will be made parenthetically in the text.

and think that they must choose between deliberately losing the trials competition and causing Lonnie's father to be discharged. When Moreover is about to win the finals, Lonnie purposely calls him a biscuit eater, a name that the dog has come to fear, and thereby makes him behave badly and lose. Shortly thereafter Moreover eats some poisoned eggs and dies. The boys are saddened, of course, but Mr. Ames explains about the mistaken story, justifies Moreover, and hires them to help Harve McNeil train his dogs.

The Biscuit Eater is a tender and sentimental story in the boy-and-his-dog tradition, and these qualities led to its being made into two motion pictures. The sweetness is genuine and not maudlin, and the story's popularity is understandable.

As a piece of writing, however, the novel is at best a learning exercise. The exposition and the passages explaining the situation are too obvious and awkward, and every character in the book is a stereotype, including the dog. Occasionally Street quotes songs and boyhood charms verbatim to show that this book is supposed to be something of a hymn to boyhood in the vein of Tom Sawyer. Jumps in time and events are also awkwardly handled. And even in this simple story Street cannot resist saying how "The dog had wiped away all class and race barriers between Lonnie and Text, and they were friends in a way that grown-ups never understand" (BE, p. 34).

The Biscuit Eater would be best left to the class of juvenile fiction, an opinion which the Dial editors may have shared as evidenced by the large type which they used in printing the book. Still it

provided the reading public with a tenderly enjoyable story, and Street with experience that served him very well a dozen years later when he wrote his second dog novel.

Goodbye, My Lady

In 1941 Street published another short story about a dog entitled "Weep No More, My Lady,"[3] which was followed by a sequel, "Please Come Home, My Lady."[4] In 1954 he expanded the original story into his last novel, Goodbye, My Lady.[5]

Jesse Jackson and his fourteen-year-old nephew Skeeter live alone in the Pascagoula swamps, for the most part isolated from the influences of society. Skeeter hears a strange sound in the swamps, and he finds an unusual dog that makes a chuckling sound instead of barking. He adopts the dog as his own and names her Lady. Soon a close bond grows between them.

Lady is disparaged as a hunter by Cash Evans, a friend of his uncle and owner of a fine bird dog, but soon Skeeter and Jesse discover that Lady has an uncanny ability to point birds from fifty yards away. Skeeter has difficulty breaking her bad habits, but eventually Lady is trained to hunt. She outmatches Evans' dog, and soon word gets around about the unusual animal.

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[3]James Street, "Weep No More, My Lady," SEP, 214(6 Dec. 1941), 12 ff.

[4]James Street, "Please Come Home, My Lady," SEP, 214(11 April 1942), 12 ff.

[5]James Street, Goodbye, My Lady (New York: J. P. Lippincott Co., 1954). All further references will appear parenthetically in the text.

This notoriety results in Evans' learning that Lady is a valuable Basenji, an ancient breed of hunting dogs from Egypt. He finds an advertisement placed by the dog's northern owner, and Skeeter is told. The boy's conscience leads him to notify the owner, and he and Lady are parted as the novel ends.

The tenderness with which Street could write a story about a boy and a dog is still present in this novel, but also reflected in it is the experience which Street had gained in writing eight novels since The Biscuit Eater. It is a well-told, unified, unique story comparable to Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings' The Yearling.

The novel opens smoothly and directly with one of its descriptions of the swamp:

> The swamp was sleeping the night away, but the boy was wide awake as he sat on the steps of the cabin and listened to the moonlight rhythm of things—the swish of the river around the cypress knees, the hum of insects, the low rumblings of the bullfrogs and the high cries of the wildcats.
>
> A bull alligator bellowed up beyond the bend of the river and another answered from the sand-bar down the river and the boy judged their hiding places, for they were things to be hunted and sold.
>
> Then he heard what he was waiting for: a haunting laugh that echoed across the bog and startled all the night creatures into silence, and then the swamp lay as still as unborn time and brooded resentment that its symphony had been interrupted by a sound that did not belong there at all. (GML, pp. 11-12)

After Skeeter and Jesse first see the dog and return to their cabin, Street naturally works in his exposition of who they are and defines the relationship between them. The characterizations of young Skeeter and his eccentric uncle are the heart of the book. Jesse hunts and saws wood for what little money they need, but spends most of his time teaching the boy about the swamp. He is not concerned that Skeeter

misses school often, but he is careful to develop within him a sense of character and responsibility. He fears the day when the growing boy will leave him: "Soon his voice would go deeper into his throat and his lean arms would bunch into muscles at his shoulders and the cabin would be too small for him, and maybe the swamp, and then he would run to the wing and fly away as the sandpiper had done. Some day this would happen, some day soon, and the thought of it made the old man sad" (GML, pp. 26-27).

But Street wisely avoids making Jesse either omniscient or of great stature. In fact he tends toward laziness. He is sensitive about his illiteracy, and Skeeter delicately avoids embarrassing him or letting anyone discover his lack. Jesse has no teeth, and he often fantasizes about what he will eat when he gets his "Roebuckers," though he never really expects to have enough money for them.

Skeeter, like Little Hob Abernathy, is growing up and is anxious to participate in the privileges of adults. He works hard to earn praise from Jesse and Evans, and he stakes his pride on Lady's performance against Evans' dog. Skeeter matures from the experience with the dog, making his first solo journey through the swamps to find it, then training it alone, then facing the moral crisis of relinquishing it to its owner. Jesse, despite his peculiarities, carefully guides the boy through these stages of growth.

One major advantage of Goodbye, My Lady is the simplicity inherent in the situation. Skeeter and Jesse live alone in the swamp and for the most part are visited only by Cash Evans. Hence there is a single

location and only three major characters. This allows a tightness of plot and purity of characterization that is quite satisfying. Street was almost free of his earlier faults of putting in too much trivia and of making irrelevant side points. From the opening sentence the novel focuses on the story of Skeeter and his uncle and the strange dog.

The Basenji, with its rareness and unique hunting ability, provides an element which makes the story different from others about dogs. Street enjoyed the unusual, and he does well here with descriptions of the dog's behavior and of Skeeter's training it.

However the best feature of Goodbye, My Lady is the writing. Street had now attained a natural, attractive, and unpretentions style as well as a leanness of plot and unity of construction. He was writing well, and he had already planned other novels which would probably have been his best. Unfortunately his premature death denied him the time to write them.

CHAPTER X

CONCLUSION: THE SOUTH'S JAMES STREET

James Street has received relatively little notice from literary scholars. Most of the attention that he attracted when he was living came from the general public, and while his books are still read today, inevitably their former popularity has receded. A feature writer and teller of romantic stories, he rarely attempted the serious criticism of life which is the province of more important American authors.

Yet the preceding study indicates that Street deserves more recognition as a contributor to American letters than he has yet received. An extremely energetic and inquisitive man, he traveled the South as a reporter and observed its people, its institutions, its generosity and prejudices, its codes, its geography, and its leaders. These he presented in lucid, detailed, lively feature articles such as those in James Street's South. A man of outspoken convictions, Street was an advocate of Negro rights during an era when such a position was neither popular nor safe.

Street's historical fiction is largely in the romantic vein, and much of it contains melodrama and historical trivia. Yet it is unique in its treatment of interesting and unusual people and regions seldom if ever treated before in fiction. Particularly in the Dabney novels, with their focus on Sam Dale, Newt Knight and his rebellion against the Confederacy, the morose duellist Alexander Keith McClung, and the remarkable Confederate ironclad Arkansas, Street selected and portrayed

unique subjects from Southern history. Voluminous research also allowed him to provide a sense of authenticity.

Street associated with several journalists and authors who achieved much greater fame than he, and some of these indicated that he was deserving of a place among American writers. Three books especially should earn him this recognition. Look Away!, though somewhat exaggerated, is a valuable compendium of Southern folklore. In one novel, In My Father's House, Street combined his talent as a storyteller with a sensitive protrayal of human feeling in the midst of conflict to produce a creditable work of serious literature. And his last novel, Goodbye, My Lady, demonstrated a maturity of style that promised well for a future that was denied him.

Street's own personality, his energy, vitality, wit, and enthusiasm for people and events, themselves make him a suitable subject for study. Twenty years after his death those who knew him energetically try to convey the excitement, humor, and controversy that he provoked among them. Perhaps here is a key to characterizing both Street and his work. In his life as in his writing there was zest and vitality, and for the people with whom he lived and whom he observed, especially those of the South, there was challenge and affection.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX

ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Newspaper or Journal
NYHTBR	New York Herald Tribune Book Review
NYTBR	New York Times Book Review
SEP	Saturday Evening Post
SRL	Saturday Review of Literature

Abbreviation	Street's Works
BE	The Biscuit Eater
CW	The Civil War
FH	In My Father's House
GML	Goodbye, My Lady
HC	The High Calling
JSS	James Street's South
LA	Look Away!
MD	Mingo Dabney
OPL	Oh, Promised Land
RW	The Revolutionary War
TG	The Gauntlet
TR	Tap Roots
TWR	Tomorrow We Reap
VA	By Valour and Arms
VD	The Velvet Doublet

Abbreviation	Library Collection
LRL	Lauren Rogers Library Laurel, Mississippi
MDAHc	Clippings File Mississippi Department of Archives and History Jackson, Mississippi
UNCNBc	News Bureau Clippings File University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, North Carolina

VITA

John Howard Parker was born to Howard and Mamie Parker on February 23, 1946, in Jackson, Tennessee, and subsequently lived in Columbia, Tennessee; Roanoke, Virginia; Birmingham, Alabama; Chattanooga, Tennessee; and Lynchburg, Virginia. He received the A.A. degree in 1966 from Freed-Hardeman College in Henderson, Tennessee; the B.A. degree in 1968 from David Lipscomb College in Nashville, Tennessee; and the M.A. degree in 1969 from the University of Tennessee in Knoxville. In 1969, he assumed his present position as an instructor in the Department of Languages and Literature at Freed-Hardeman College. Since then he has done further graduate study at Harding Graduate School of Religion in Memphis, Tennessee; at Vanderbilt University in Nashville; and at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, where this dissertation was accepted on July 28, 1978. He is married to the former Jill Sharon Roberson of Nashville.