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THE DESIGN OF A BOOK:
ETHNOGRAPHIC FORM IN LET US NOW PRAISE FAMOUS MEN

by
JOHN M. ALEXANDER /

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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Preface

My encounter with Let Us Now Praise Famous Men began when I was introduced to the book during an American literature seminar in college. I was intrigued by the book's subject, but even more intrigued by the writing. I had never seen anything quite like it before. Agee's poetry in prose appealed to my literary sense, and his 'honest journalism' appealed to my sense of humanity. I didn't quite know what to make of the book -- lyrical prose, Walker Evans's heart-wrenching photographs, strange ethnographic form (though I had not as yet explored ethnography) -- but I was challenged to develop a thesis.

The more I learned about James Agee, the more I could identify with him. Aside from the coincidental -- we both share a birthday (November 27), a passion for Appalachian folk and classical music, we both lost a father when we were seven years old, Agee named his youngest son, John Alexander -- I had spent years living and writing in Nashville, not far from Agee's Knoxville. Consequently, it was Let Us Now Praise Famous Men that inspired me to pursue the study of American modernism.

My first impression of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men was to discover a work that could be opened to any page and read without thought of a narrative. One could literally focus on any passage and be hypnotized by Agee's style of writing. Whether it was a concrete description of a tenant farmer's

house or clothing, or a philosophical digression on 'beauty,' Agee's writing appealed to the imagination.

For years I carried a dog-eared copy of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men in my brief case and returned to it whenever I needed a respite from day to day reality. It swept me back in time to a less than idyllic America and offered valuable insight and testament to the power of the written word. I had not yet thought of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men in terms of ethnography, but when Angus Fletcher suggested I look at its ethnographic form, I found my subject.

The question became, how does one explain a book that defies explanation? Discovering Agee's motives for the work was the first step, and my dissertation started to fall into place around the design of the book. I must admit that my own frustrations at times seemed to mirror the difficulty Agee experienced in writing Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, but whenever I became anxious, another piece of the puzzle fell into place. Once I began to study the work through the framework of ethnography, the following chapters began to take shape.

Agee's influences in the "Mixed Voices, Mixed Effects" chapter seemed a natural progression explaining Agee's own literary origins. Similarly, a docudrama approach to Let Us Now Praise Famous Men helped to differentiate it from standard thirties documentary. "Mixed Voices" focused on

Agee's early writings as they foreshadowed Let Us Now Praise Famous Men. The docudrama chapter reveals Agee's genuine humanism at a time when simply playing to the emotions could have secured him a best-selling documentary book. He firmly held his ground and refused to conform. Consequently, Let Us Now Praise Famous Men resembles no other book. Though it suffered commercially, it never suffered a loss of credibility.

The unpublished letters from the Houghton Mifflin archives completed my research. They included valuable handwritten correspondence from Agee, Evans, and others detailing the publishing history of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men. Upon securing permission to present these letters in their entirety for the first time, I realized that the reader would gain a new awareness of the place of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men in the history of American letters. Since my dissertation was completed, Belinda Rathbone has published Walker Evans -- A Biography (Houghton Mifflin 1995). This photography-centered study, while detailing Evans's relationship with Agee, does not make use of the publishing correspondence, and hence does not alter any of my conclusions. In a general way Rathbone discovers the same conditions of documentary reporting which I have analyzed in detail.

I experienced my own dilemma while compiling my research -- trying to describe a book I was all too familiar

with yet intimidated by at the same time. Furthermore, I felt an overwhelming sense of ethnographic intrusion -- trying to explain a work Agee preferred not to be the subject of analytic study. This was my predicament, and not until I discovered the letters did I feel at ease with my research. Although Agee himself was a well-known critic, in Let Us Now Praise Famous Men he wrote, "Do I place much value on criticism? I sometimes place value on the criticism of a few whom I respect, in one way or another" (354). I wish I knew how Agee viewed the ethnographic form of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men.

Agee feared that he was violating the privacy of the tenant farmers in Let Us Now Praise Famous Men. He wrote: "it is not likely for any of you, my beloved, whose poor lives I have already so betrayed, and should you see these things so astounded, so destroyed, I dread to dare that I shall ever look into your dear eyes again" (439). I also experienced a series of cathartic moments during the writing of this report, beginning with a fear of violating an American epic, and culminating with a sense of finally feeling comfortable with this complicated subject matter. In relation to other acknowledged works of American modernism, Let Us Now Praise Famous Men remains a kind of underground classic and its publishing history enigmatic. It is not much easier to secure a copy of the book today than it was before. Still, it is certainly worth the

effort, and one hopes that this study of the "Design of a Book" will encourage others to become more acquainted with James Agee and Let Us Now Praise Famous Men.

Acknowledgments

I would like to offer my deepest appreciation to the teachers, friends and family members without whose guidance, inspiration and encouragement this work would not have been possible. Without the combined efforts of the following individuals this dissertation might have remained an unattainable dream.

First I would like to thank Angus Fletcher who led me toward the culmination of my work, when, like Agee, I had no idea what shape or form the finished product would manifest. I especially want to thank Professor Fletcher for suggesting an ethnographic perspective, and suggesting that I research the correspondence of Agee, his friends, and his publishers, concerning Let Us Now Praise Famous Men.

Thank you to William Kelly, whose personal input helped give me the impetus to see this project through to completion, and along with Joseph Wittreich, allowed me the opportunity to persevere within CUNY's exemplary English program.

Thank you to Joan Richardson, whose remarkable course work helped to re-ignite my creative thought processes, and whose guidance was sought and given generously.

Thank you to Alfred Kazin, whose courses helped to enlighten me, and whose conversations always intrigued me; and to Bill Elton, for his knowledge and graciousness.

Also, my heartfelt gratitude to Lynn Kadison for her genuine concern, friendship and advice throughout my career at CUNY; to Nicole Scott, always gracious on the phone and the wonderful faculty in the CUNY Graduate English program.

Thank you to my Mother and Albert, who never lost sight of my abilities and whose faith in me never wavered that I might complete this thesis. And finally to my wife and hero Denise, who afforded me the opportunity to finally settle down and take the time to thoroughly research this project diligently; also for being my right hand and preliminary editor, and whose love and faith helped to make this possible.

One final thank you to John Dunn, teacher, friend and former colleague, who one day happened to hand me a copy of James Agee's Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, not too many long years ago.

I dedicate this to my two beloved daughters Amanda and Samantha.

A Note On Texts

All quotations from James Agee's Let Us Now Praise Famous Men are cited from Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1988. This Houghton Mifflin edition differs from the original 1941 edition in that it adds certain photographs and some preliminary matter, such as remarks by John Hersey and a brief Foreword by Walker Evans (as originally added to the 1960 edition of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men). However, the body of the text exactly reproduces the original text.

All quotations from James Agee's A Death in the Family are cited from A Death in the Family, New York: McDowell, Obolensky, 1957.

All quotations from James Agee's Permit Me Voyage are cited from Permit Me Voyage, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1934.

All letters are heretofore unpublished and belong to the Houghton Mifflin Files (microfilm): Harvard University Library Reproduction Service, Widener Library, Cambridge, Mass., 02138, U.S.A.

Introduction

I'm just a poor wayfaring stranger,
A-traveling through this world of woe;
But there's no sickness, toil or danger,
In that bright world to which I go. (Traditional)

The purpose of returning to James Agee's Let Us Now Praise Famous Men is to examine the ways Agee combined his lyrical and poetical purposes with an amateur practice of ethnography. This dissertation illuminates the achievement of Agee's art from a number of perspectives. Chapter 1 discusses the peculiar sort of ethnography that Agee practices in Let Us Now Praise Famous Men. Chapter 2 explicates the long-overlooked masterpiece in detail, arguing that the quite strange literary form is largely a result of Agee's ethnographic approach. Chapter 3 shows some of Agee's literary debts, since he was as much a literary artist as he was a social scientist and since Let Us Now Praise Famous Men is a self-consciously literary project. An integral part of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men is Walker Evans's famous photographs, and chapter 4 locates Agee and Evans's "docudrama," as I will call it, in the context of similar contemporaneous texts. Hence the dissertation argues that this work presents challenges for its readers, and chapter 5 uses previously unpublished correspondence from the Houghton Mifflin archives to show the difficulties the publishing industry had with Let Us Now

Praise Famous Men. I conclude in chapter 6 by looking at the private and personal aspects of A Death in the Family, as these prolong the achievement of the earlier book.

Ethnographic Form

The story of how Let Us Now Praise Famous Men came to exist is also the story of how it acquired its unusual form. In June, 1936 Agee was commissioned by *Fortune* magazine to write an article on "the daily living and environment of an average white family of tenant farmers" (xiii) in the American south; Walker Evans was to photograph them. Agee and Walker spent a month in Alabama, living with three families. (The subtitle of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men is "Three Tenant Families.") The "verbal and visual record" (xiii) produced by Agee and Evans was submitted to *Fortune* and rejected because it was too impressionistic, too emotional, too poetical. Agee then turned the article into a manuscript which was submitted to Harper and Brothers and ultimately rejected again. An excerpt from the original manuscript was published in 1939 (without Evans's photographs) by *Common Sense* magazine. In the spring of 1940 Houghton Mifflin agreed to publish the work, and Let Us Now Praise Famous Men was finally published in 1941. The Houghton Mifflin edition restored Evans's photographs, gathering them without captions or explanations at the beginning of the volume, and contained odd bibliographic and

literary features of Agee's devising: multiple outlines and tables of contents, lyric poems, prose poems, abrupt shifts in tone and mood, Appalachian folk songs, journalistic passages, stream-of-consciousness prose, pages left blank except for a few lines at the bottom, an "intermission," a "curtain speech," and extensive prefatory material and appendices. The dissertation analyses the various literary gestures of Agee's ethnographic collage and their origin in Agee's experiences in Alabama and in the years following.

The dissertation devotes much time to exploring the incongruities and dislocations of Agee's narrative. Agee conceived in very concrete terms how Let Us Now Praise Famous Men should be presented and printed as a book with many subdivisions and subheadings, as a physical artifact to be looked at and handled and read. On the other hand, Agee in his preface writes that the book should be read out loud, "for variations of tone, pace, shape, and dynamics are here particularly unavailable to the eye alone, and with their loss, a good deal of meaning escapes" (xlvii). Because Let Us Now Praise Famous Men resulted from Agee's immersion in a vivid way of life, the book itself draws on a wide range of literary techniques to reproduce that vividness.

The sociologist James Clifford argues that to practice ethnography is not to write about a culture from the comprehensive perspective of the disengaged, all-knowing outsider, but rather to explore the culture through the

"bursts of 'information' -- the photograph, the newspaper clip" (119) that are available to a semi-knowledgeable participant. The concept of ethnographic form that this dissertation proposes is one of information bursts available to a sympathetic participant observer, who is careful not to overstate his own mastery over the ethnographic (or journalistic or artistic) situation. Agee's ethnography is reflected in the tact of his style. The ethnographic form of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, as I will show, is indebted to Agee's deep respect for the tenant farmers of the rural South. To write ethnography strictly speaking for Agee would have been to write a dispassionate, disengaged account; to write literary ethnography for Agee was to access and at times to invent both his subjects's feelings and his own feelings for his subjects. The various manoeuvres and shifting perspectives of ethnographic form for Agee result from the effort not to contain and normalize the lives he writes about but rather to show their uncontainable grandeur.

Critical Context

Agee occupies a curious place in American literature. He has never received the critical attention of such other chroniclers of rural and small-town life as Sherwood Anderson, Sinclair Lewis and John Steinbeck. Yet Agee's work has been highly praised by Dwight Macdonald, Alfred

Kazin and Robert Fitzgerald. Lionel Trilling called Let Us Now Praise Famous Men "the most realistic and important moral effort of our generation" (102).

More recently, Agee has been the subject of sensitive critical readings. Peter Ohlin's Agee (1966), a brief biographical and critical study, finds that Let Us Now Praise Famous Men is not a book about sharecropping but "a book about the writing of a book about sharecropping" (106). In James Agee: Promise and Fulfillment (1968), Kenneth Seib writes that Let Us Now Praise Famous Men "divides into three parts which correspond to the three acts of a play" (49), and argues that the book is to be seen as a drama replete with its own list of *dramatis personae* at the beginning. The artistry of Agee's prose, seen in terms of Agee's unique blend of non-fiction and fiction, is discussed in Alfred T. Barson's A Way of Seeing: A Critical Study of James Agee (1972).

Victor A. Kramer's James Agee (1975) holds that Agee's poetic sensibility is fundamental to the rich prose style of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men. "Writing about what had been experienced and projecting what was felt became an effort to recapture 'the cruel radiance' of the unimagined" (10). Kramer sees Agee's writing embodying an increasingly precise observation of the ordinary. According to Genevieve Moreau's The Restless Journey of James Agee (1977), the disorder of Agee's life both blossomed into polemical and

compassionate form in Let Us Now Praise Famous Men and also prevented him from developing fully any of his multiple creative gifts. Most critical studies of Agee pay disproportionate attention to questions of biography. An extreme instance is Laurence Bergreen's James Agee: A Life (1985), useful to my dissertation for its investigation of such aspects of Agee's life as his drinking, which as I will argue contributed to the scattered discontinuities of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men. On the other hand, Bergreen's book tends to the gossipy and sensational, and fails to advance a critical perspective on Agee.

William Stott's Documentary Expression and Thirties America (1973) is of special importance to my view of Agee and Evans's work as a docudrama. Stott sees Let Us Now Praise Famous Men as an extraordinary example of the sort of documentary reporting typical of the 1930's, an era when literary figures (including such pioneering women as Margaret Bourke-White and Dorothea Lange) travelled the country "to approach the awful truths of a broken economy" (72). Stott argues that "the Depression stimulated, even compelled a documentary approach" (72) because the nation's crisis engendered a demand for information, visual as well as verbal, about the crisis. Stott discusses Let Us Now Praise Famous Men in the context of other Depression-era documentaries including You Have Seen Their Faces (1937), which represents the collaborative effort of Erskine

Caldwell (writer) and Bourke-White (photographer) and An American Exodus, which represents the collaborative effort of Paul Taylor (writer) and Lange (photographer).

According to Stott, "Documentary is the presentation or representation of actual fact in a way that makes it credible and vivid to people at the time" (14). My dissertation disagrees with Stott and maintains that Let Us Now Praise Famous Men is not a documentary. Agee himself enters in and out of the narrative, not only reporting on "actual fact" but participating in the lives around him and showing his participation through the transports of his prose style. The dissertation posits a distinction between docudrama and documentary. Docudrama differs from documentary in that it seeks neither to represent reality nor to misrepresent reality; it is neither non-fiction nor is it fiction, but rather presents a kind of hallucinatory experience of the real. Further, Let Us Now Praise Famous Men allows the reader much more imaginative leeway than a more typical documentary, which channels or controls reader's responses. This is effected, for instance, by the absence of captions below Evans's photographs and by Agee's often impressionistic prose. The dissertation engages the social dimension of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men by discussing both the social context of its coming into being and the genre conventions Agee was working with and against.

Let Us Now Praise Famous Men is unlike any other

literature, and the photographs by Walker Evans animate the written text by adding a brutal authenticity to Agee's carefully selected words. It is possible to open the book to any page and grasp the basic narrative, while being hypnotized by Agee's lyrical prose. Just as Agee's experience in Alabama exposed a tragic way of life that certain brave individuals managed to survive and endure, Let Us Now Praise Famous Men remains a vital text regardless of what genre or discipline it belongs to. This remarkable work of self-discovery deserves to be rediscovered every now and then, especially today, when Agee's liberal values are under such vicious attack.

Agee's Personal History

James Agee was an idealist with the soul of a poet and the analytical mind of a journalist. He was born November 27, 1909 in Knoxville, Tennessee, the son of Hugh James Agee, a postal worker raised in the mountains just north of Knoxville, and Laura Whitman Tyler, a businessman's daughter who hailed from a distinctly more genteel family.

The critics have failed to examine Let Us Now Praise Famous Men in the context of this struggle. While critics such as William Stott and Robert Coles have revisited the specific locales of Agee's reportage to reinvestigate the plight of the individuals he and Evans knew, in many cases searching for their descendants, none has considered the

idea that the book's place in American literature reflects Agee's search for a lyrical, yet expository documentary style.

Agee projects a will toward formal experimentation. Thanks to the unpublished letters provided to me by Harvard University's Houghton Library, the reader may also gain a better sense of the motivations of author and photographer. Let Us Now Praise Famous Men has been called "a classic, perhaps the only classic, of the whole period, of the whole attempted genre. Photographs and text alike are bitten out by the very juices of the men who made them, and at the same time they have the piteous monumentality of the things and souls represented" (Fitzgerald 49). The book never won any prizes, nor achieved commercial success, yet it remains a proof of Agee's multi-generic creative endeavors, and a testimony to the social conscience of its time. In six chapters I attempt to examine the context and the force of Agee's achievement.

Agee's Choice of Title for His Work

Agee informs the reader in the preface that Let Us Now Praise Famous Men is envisioned to be the beginning of a much larger work under the book's original title "Three Tenant Families." Agee eventually settled on Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, a phrase which derives from the forty-fourth chapter of the Book of Ecclesiasticus. The phrase

appears in the Bible in the following passage, which Agee quotes in full as a kind of summation of many of the themes of his book:

Let us now praise famous men, and our fathers that begat us.

The Lord hath wrought great glory by them through his great power from the beginning.

Such as did bear rule in their kingdoms, men renowned for their power, giving counsel by their understanding, and declaring prophecies:

Leaders of the people by their counsels, and by their knowledge of learning meet for the people, wise and eloquent in their instructions:

Such as found out musical tunes, and recited verses in writing:

Rich men furnished with ability, living peaceably in their habitations:

All these were honoured in their generations, and were the glory of their times.

There be of them, that have left a name behind them, that their praises might be reported.

And some there be which have no memorial; who perished, as though they had never been; and are become as though they had never been born; and their children after them.

But these were merciful men, whose righteousness hath not been forgotten.

With their seed shall continually remain a good inheritance, and their children are within the covenant.

Their seed standeth fast, and their children for their sakes. Their seed shall remain for ever, and their glory shall not be blotted out.

Their bodies are buried in peace; but their name liveth forevermore. (445)

Ecclesiasticus is one of fourteen books of the Septuagint, considered uncanonical by Protestants because they are not part of the Hebrew Scriptures. Eleven of these books are accepted in the Roman Catholic Canon, including the Book of Ecclesiasticus, not Ecclesiastes. Ecclesiasticus is not included in the King James version of the Bible.

The Jerusalem Bible, a Catholic Bible, explains that some editions of the Bible "have not admitted these Deuterocanonical Books (second canon or later books) ... or have included them only as Apocrypha" (The Jerusalem Bible vii). Apocrypha are writings of questionable authorship or authenticity, or concealed writings. Ironically, Agee included a chapter from a radical book of the Bible within the subversive text of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, whose subject was the socially-invisible members of the American culture living in the deep South.

One reason that the Book of Ecclesiasticus -- and especially its "Let Us Now Praise Famous Men" section -- remain controversial is that in them the praise of man takes precedence over the praise of God. In "The Psalms" the praise of man is discouraged in favor of praise of God, in order that mankind remain humble. In "Psalm 146" from The Jerusalem Bible, the scripture reads:

Praise Yahweh, my soul!
I mean to praise Yahweh all my life,
I mean to sing to my God as long as I live.

Do not put your trust in men in power,
or in any mortal man -- he cannot save,
he yields his breath and goes back to the earth he
came from,
and on that day all his schemes perish. (147:3)

Agee uses the title Let Us Now Praise Famous Men to honor the tenant farmer, to portray him as an example of the most humble and unassuming and yet heroic of people. "Agee liked the title's solemnity and the irony of the word Famous"

(Moreau 174). W.M. Frohock speculates that "Let Us Now Praise Famous Men was probably a poor title anyhow, one hardly calculated to attract readers" (218). Yet the title, in all its oddness, is a characteristic instance of Agee's indirect, ironic and poetic homage to the lives of a not at all famous and yet praiseworthy group of people.

Chapter 1: Agee and Ethnography

I was sad and blue, I was downhearted too
It seemed like the whole world was lost
Then I took a chance and we happened to dance
To the tune of the Alabama Waltz. (Hank Williams)

The Problem of Ethnographic Intrusion

The ethnographer, according to Vincent Crapanzano, "provides us with an 'external' vantage point the way the philosophical traveler once did" (5). The International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences explains that "An ethnographer is an anthropologist who attempts -- at least in part of his professional work -- to record and describe the culturally significant behaviors of a particular society" (172). Perhaps the key element in the ethnographer's practice is his descriptive fieldwork,

Ideally, this description, an ethnography, requires a long period of intimate study and residence in a small, well-defined community, knowledge of the spoken language, and the employment of a wide range of observational techniques including prolonged face-to-face contacts with members of the local group, direct participation in some of that group's activities, and a greater emphasis on intensive work with informants than on the use of documentary or survey data. (Sills 172)

Agee fitted all these requirements.

As a journalist and scholar, Agee was suited by temperament and training to be just such a philosophical traveler, to involve himself in, gather information from and broadly reflect upon a culture not his own. He was not a

scientist, however, and thus could write freely and impressionistically. At least initially, Agee approached his subject as an anthropologist would, with an openness, in an attempt to remain free of prejudices and pre-understandings. Yet his attitude was only partly scientific.

Anthropologist Gerald D. Berreman explains the specific nature of ethnography within the social science of anthropology. Anthropology receives its data from the observation of human behavior. The process of making such observations is called ethnography. Berreman writes "'An ethnography' is a written report summarizing the behaviors and the beliefs, understandings, attitudes, and values they imply, of a group of interacting people. Thus, an ethnography is a description of the way of life, or culture, of a society" (Clifton 337).

There has never been a sharp distinction between anthropology and ethnography. The ethnographer focuses his energies on particular ethnic groups. Stephen A. Tyler explains that

Post-modern ethnography foregoes the tale of the past as error and denies the myth of the future as utopia. No one believes anymore in the unconditioned future. The past at least has the advantage of having been. Modernism, like Christianity, taught us to value postponement, to look ahead to a scientific utopia, to devalue the past, and negate the present. In contrast, the post-modern world is in a sense timeless; past, present, and future co-exist in all discourse, and so we may say with equal sense that all repetitions are fictive and all differences are

illusions. We may say that conversation is not of objects but of time. Objects change, but time does not, which makes it reasonable for us to say that when we see the same object twice it is not the same. No thing is the same, just time, which is no thing and not perceivable. (Clifford and Marcus 138-139)

Therefore, modern ethnography is deeply historical and postmodern is "timeless." Postmodern work in the field of anthropology begins to take on a very different character from modern ethnography. It creates a different kind of literature. Tyler argues that a postmodern ethnography is a

cooperatively evolved text consisting of fragments of discourse intended to evoke in the minds of both reader and writer an emergent fantasy of a possible world of commonsense reality, and thus to provoke an aesthetic integration that will have a therapeutic effect. It is, in a word, poetry -- not in its textual form, but in its return to the original context and function of poetry. . . (Clifford and Marcus 125)

What Tyler calls "poetry" raises questions about the rhetorical character and the aesthetic purpose of ethnography today.

What seems to have changed in the course of the complex movement of modernism into postmodernism is a new uncertainty about ethnography's field of interest. It is no longer obvious that ethnographers can be empirically objective. Vincent Crapanzano states that "whatever their objective claims, contextualizations are never neutral" (210). The ethnographer is no longer understood to occupy a privileged position of objective distance. Hence, postmodernists cast considerable doubt on the assumption of

nineteenth and twentieth century modern ethnography, the belief that other cultures could be separated from our own as "alien" or "foreign" or most commonly "primitive," to use Radcliffe-Brown's word.

The advantages of modernist procedure should not be underestimated. There was a certain amount of clarity and definition in the procedures of late nineteenth century and modernist ethnographers, such that when one of the great anthropologists, Edward Burnett Tylor, called his field a "science," he meant to suggest that it would try to follow the example of the physical sciences. A modernist ethnography gives a complete view of the culture and the individuals about whom it is written. The modernist method, its means and ambitions, were positivistic. That is, despite the ambiguities inherent in any and all uses of the "native informant," the ethnographer acted on the assumption that he or she could record and interpret objective data uncovered in the field of research. In Evans-Pritchard's classic work of British anthropology, The Nuer (1940), he "makes strong claims for the power of scientific abstraction to focus research and arrange complex data" (Clifford 32-33). If we think of an amateur like Agee in this context, we shall see that he too shares some of the scientific ideals of the modernists. He wants to know exactly how his sharecroppers made a living or how they were related to each other by marriage.

Recent discussion of anthropological theory has been influenced by the views of Clifford Geertz, who moves away from mere data gathering to postmodernism. Even within the career of Geertz, there is a movement from a modernist procedure to a postmodernist procedure, and this partly explains his appeal to current thinkers. In an early work by Geertz, Peddlers and Princes (1963), Geertz is concerned with the hard fact of what he calls "Social Development and Economic Change in Two Indonesian Towns." Such concerns for actual social conditions seem to be necessary for any serious ethnographic research, but postmodernism reinterprets the methods by which research is to be understood. In some of Geertz's later work the postmodern direction is evident, as when for example he analyzes Balinese rituals in theatrical terms. Thus he can speak in his Negara of what he calls the "theatrical state" of nineteenth century Balli.

With postmodernism the *ideal* of objectivity has been held to be either superficial or counterproductive in the search for a necessary constructed truth. Fundamental modernist terms such as primitive or alien have been deconstructed. According to Berreman, in recent years "there has been increasing emphasis on organizing ethnographic descriptions along lines which represent the organization of the world as seen by the people who live the culture, rather than simply according to the preconceived

notions and categories of the ethnographer" (Clifton 337-338). In many ways the postmodernist ethnographer understands his own complicity in producing hierarchical differences between his own culture and another culture.

In no area does postmodernism discover greater difficulties for ethnography than in the fundamental fact that the ethnographer, as the "grapher," writes his results, comments and conclusions. To write is itself to distort evidence and this perception, so powerful in all areas of postmodernism, produces a new climate for the production of ethnographic knowledge. According to Clifford:

Henceforth neither the experience nor the interpretive activity of the scientific researcher can be considered innocent. It becomes necessary to conceive of ethnography not as the experience and interpretation of a circumscribed "other" reality, but rather as a constructive negotiation involving at least two, and usually more, conscious, politically significant subjects. Paradigms of experience and interpretation are yielding to discursive paradigms of dialogue and polyphony. (41)

The most important change seems to be the loss of innocence, but this sense of complicity is then negotiated as Clifford argues through "constructive negotiation." Clifford points to the major discursive problem here, namely the dialogic relationship "involving at least two and usually more, conscious, politically significant subjects." As Crapanzano shows in a chapter entitled "Dialogue," leaning on the dialogic is no guarantee that ethnography can attain to an adequately complete, fair and insightful account of the

culture under investigation. Clifford's "constructive negotiation" will always be problematic.

In general terms, the postmodernist sees that it is almost impossible to select "the facts" in the earlier manner of objective fact-gathering. Berreman writes that:

there can be no pure observation and no straight description without underlying assumptions -- without a theory or theories -- which determine what will be observed and what will be recorded. There is no day in the life of any people, family, or individual which could be observed or recorded in all its detail. The events and circumstances are simply too manifold. (Clifton 339)

Berreman notes the difficulty for scientific observation:

The point here is that all observation is selective, all recording of observation is selective again, and the published account is selective of the recorded observations, since researchers rarely if ever publish all the records of their field research. (Clifton 339)

The need to handle such stresses in the science of ethnography creates the drama of the change from the modern to the postmodern in that field.

Half a century before postmodern ethnography became fashionable, Agee and Evans were testing the flawed outlines of modern anthropology. Let Us Now Praise Famous Men is a prophetic document in the history of the change from modern to postmodern ethnography. And while it shares this status with other transitional works of its time such as You Have Seen Their Faces and An American Exodus, it is remarkably striking as an example of ethnography being written and being fully conscious of its own *graphic* aspect.

Furthermore, as I argue throughout this study the remarkable, and to this day unequalled, collaboration between Evans and Agee, between photograph and text, between the cold-eyed and the warm-hearted, between the "objectivity" of the camera lens and the "subjectivity" of the poet's pen remains perhaps the most intriguing of all cases in American folklore in which a postmodernist attitude begins to emerge from the fragments of modernist science and aesthetics.

It is evident that in such a context of change the status of the "literary" is destabilized, and therefore, Agee practices a literary ethnography by testing the limits of the power of writing both from the scientific point of view and the poetical point of view. The experimental nature of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men as ethnography derives in large part from Agee's brilliant and well-schooled literary intelligence. Agee would have known exactly why science should take account of Madame Bovary, not to mention the work of his great hero Walt Whitman. With Agee the concerns of documentary oscillate back and forth between an embrace and a separation, combining to form what I am calling literary ethnography. He is fascinated by the problem of the inner nature of the outside world.

If as Marcus and Fischer explain in Anthropology as Cultural Critique (1986), anthropology is the use of cultural observation for self-reflection purposes, then

Agee fully anticipated such a view, long before it became a fashion for students of anthropological method to discern the scientist's personal involvements. Agee was searching for answers to his own questions about the artist's or creator's place in society. Adopting views later codified by Marcus and Fischer, Agee demonstrated his own understanding of the symptoms in people's lives as these were shaped by political, technological and economic forces.

Unlike strict anthropological study which focuses on man in relation to origin and classification of races, physical characteristics, environmental and kinship relations and culture, Agee's more descriptive ethnography advocates the reliance upon personal observation rooted in imagination. Agee was concerned with how the culture of the mid-South differed from American culture as a whole, but he speaks in quite universal terms. He states that Let Us Now Praise Famous Men is essentially

an independent inquiry into certain normal predicaments of human divinity.

The immediate instruments are two: the motionless camera, and the printed word. The governing instrument -- which is also one of the centers of the subject -- is individual, anti-authoritative human consciousness.

Ultimately, it is intended that this record and analysis be exhaustive, with no detail, however trivial it may seem, left untouched, no relevancy avoided, which lies within the power of remembrance to maintain, of the intelligence to perceive, and of the spirit to persist in. (xlvi-xlvii)

The present chapter explores the interpersonal aspect of anthropological research: how do the tenant families

respond to Agee, their observer? What is the basis of the rapport generated between all parties? As the ethnographic outsider entering an alien culture, Agee first tried to establish a working relationship with the tenant families he encountered. His personal involvement with them quickly made itself manifest, and the bonds of friendship and mutual respect finally became the sharpest feature of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men.

It is essential to explore the different views of ethnography in relation to Agee. Specifically, in what sense did Agee as an amateur ethnographer follow the precepts of ethnography? He was aware of the ethnographer's difficulty in positioning himself vis-a-vis the culture he has chosen to study. What might be called Agee's "romantic ethnography" is rooted in his refusal to accept stereotyped images of tenant farmer life. A major goal of Agee's writing was to find a new voice to express his beliefs, tempered by introspective awareness. Like Levi-Strauss in Tristes Tropiques Agee wanted to observe himself in the act of observing, and he wanted the reader to acquire this same ability. It could almost be Agee himself who is asking

Why has he come here? With what hopes or with what objectives? What exactly is the nature of anthropological research? Is it a normal occupation like any other profession . . . or does it result from a more radical choice, which implies that the anthropologist is calling into question the system in which he was born and brought up? (376)

But it is Levi-Strauss.

Anthropologists such as Clifford and Crapanzano have suggested that postmodern skepticism about theory and rhetoric and cultural bias has had the effect of breaking down both the remnants of classical anthropology and classical literary studies. Here the term classical means modernist. As the science evolves its terms no doubt will continue to change. For example, Bronislaw Malinowski, a scientist and mathematician defined the modern ideal of anthropology as the basis for a theory of culture, but at the same time he anticipated the postmodern. He argued that

if anthropology can contribute towards a more scientific outlook on its legitimate subject matter, that is, culture, it will render an indispensable service to other humanities. Culture, as the widest context of human behavior, is as important to the psychologist as to the social student, to the historian as to the linguist. I submit that the linguistics of the future, especially as regards the science of meaning, will become the study of language in the context of culture. (5)

In his book Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology, anthropologist Clifford Geertz furthers this argument when he writes:

The hallmark of modern consciousness, as I have been insisting to the point of obsession, is its enormous multiplicity. For our time and forward, the image of a general orientation, perspective, *Weltanschauung*, growing out of humanistic studies (or, for that matter, out of scientific ones) and shaping the direction of culture is a chimera. (161)

In a major postmodernist study, The Ethnographic Imagination: Textual Constructions of Reality (1990), Paul Atkinson points to a central focus of the new procedure, the

primacy of texts and "the text." He identifies textual understanding with "reflexivity" in the postmodern view of contemporary critical theory and contemporary sociological perspectives.

In principle, the notion of reflexivity recognizes that texts do not simply and transparently report an independent order of reality. Rather, the texts themselves are implicated in the work of reality-construction. This principle applies not only to spoken and written texts that are produced and interpreted by social actors, but to the texts of social analysts as well. From this point of view, therefore, there is no possibility of a neutral text. The text -- the research paper or the monograph, say -- is just as much an artefact of convention and contrivance as is any other cultural product. (Atkinson 6-7)

Once again we note a loss of neutrality, which Clifford had identified as a loss of innocence.

In their book Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography, Clifford and Marcus emphasize the gap between observer and observed. Their summary of the rules of ethnography argue that:

Ethnographic writing is determined in at least six ways: (1) contextually (it draws from and creates meaningful social milieus); (2) rhetorically (it uses and is used by expressive conventions); (3) institutionally (one writes within, and against, specific traditions, disciplines, audiences); (4) generically (an ethnography is usually distinguishable from a novel or a travel account); (5) politically (the authority to represent cultural realities is unequally shared and at times contested); (6) historically (all the above conventions and constraints are changing). These determinations govern the inscription of coherent ethnographic fictions. (6)

These rules underscore the postmodern view that ethnography is constructed and produced. In so far as Let Us Now Praise

Famous Men shares these two properties, it can only be considered a transitional work.

Anthropologists such as Geertz find themselves writing on literary topics while formerly literary people, such as Victor Turner, who began as a student of English literature, find themselves writing on anthropological topics. Both parties prefer the ambiguous interaction of the two fields in question. Paul Atkinson explains the interaction of literature and ethnography:

There is nothing inherent, then, in any text which marks it off as 'factual' or 'fictional'. There are, however, *conventions* which contribute to a text being read as realistic and plausible. To that extent, therefore, factual and fictional accounts are equivalent. There is not one set of conventions for literature and one set for science or scholarship: there may be differences, but they are by no means absolute. On the contrary, science and literature inhabit the same common discourse of textual conventions. (39)

Vincent Crapanzano writing as an anthropologist is fully aware of the postmodern effects of deconstructionist readings, which reveal "hidden rhetoric" (10), but he accepts the ethnographic requirement to describe, to interpret and to theorize (9). Such interpretations are viewed by the postmodernist in almost personal terms, as part of a drama of interaction between the observer and the observed, an interactive connection which is an important topic in the writing of Levi-Strauss, Geertz, and Victor Turner. These anthropologists would empathize with Agee's dilemma as an observer, since the close relationships Agee

formed with the farming families, whose lives he recorded, became the most problematic factor in the creation of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men. Could he maintain his distance? Agee's empathy for these individuals is conveyed throughout the book, most particularly when he narrates incidents in the lives of various family members. Their lives touch him deeply, and he does not shy away from showing how deeply he is touched. In this sense his lack of scientific "objectivity" was paradoxically the mark of his own seriousness as an observer.

Agee would have applauded the view of another postmodern ethnographer Roger Abrahams who writes:

An anthropology of experience might well begin by noting the range of expressive means and affects, techniques and sentiments -- that is, the most common and ordinary activities in the flow of life in the group under observation. And it might then provide a calendar for the events that are already set aside as extraordinary. Finally, an anthropology of experience might look for the ways in which the ordinary and the extraordinary co-exist" (Turner and Bruner 70).

Agee's original inclination had been to follow the principles of modernist ethnography, by being as objective as he possibly could. His initial view of documentary was to accept the classical notion that something or someone could be revealed through 'honest journalism.' By the end of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men Agee's outlook had radically changed and there is no doubt that he anxiously embraced postmodern ideals. As an observer interacting with his informants he had already contaminated the purity of his

determined truth.

This is not to say that Agee was not aware of what impact his intrusion upon the tenant farmers would have. From the very beginning of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, Agee voices his concern for what he and Evans are attempting to achieve in the guise of 'honest journalism.' He writes:

It seems to me curious, not to say obscene and thoroughly terrifying, that it could occur to an association of human beings drawn together through need and chance and for profit into a company, an organ of journalism, to pry intimately into the lives of an undefended and appallingly damaged group of human beings, an ignorant and helpless rural family, for the purpose of parading the nakedness, disadvantage and humiliation of these lives before another group of human beings, in the name of science, of "honest journalism" (whatever that paradox may mean) . . . (7)

According to Alan Holder, Agee's "guilt was intensified by the sense that he was letting his subjects down through inadequacies of presentation, failing to make them seem important" (197-198). Thus, Agee was already experiencing the postmodern ethnographer's sense of invading the lives of others.

Agee wished to protect the privacy of the tenant farmers; he selected pseudonyms to shield the families from further invasion. The Woods, Gudger and Ricketts families that Agee writes of are based on the Fields, Burroughs and Tingle families that he lived with. Agee was able to freely interact with the individuals while confident that he was protecting their identities. Agee remained within the boundaries of accepted methods of ethnographic research.

The report Agee went to Alabama to write was not the same one that he completed, due to the altered relationship between Agee and the Gudger, Ricketts and Woods families. Agee wished to trade his original identity of outsider for the more personal one of trusted friend. However, because first and foremost he was a writer, Agee was anxious with the use he would make of his position as trusted friend. Agee was on assignment and his livelihood depended upon his returning with a publishable piece of prose. He had to transcend the "conscious or unconscious disguises" (Clifford 68) and in some ways exploit the tenant farmers, despite his insistence upon maintaining their dignity. Ironically, Agee was violating and honoring them in the same manner.

Agee struggled with an impulse to rescue the tenant farmers from their misfortune. Finally however, his account is most heavily influenced by a desire to preserve their privacy and dignity. He wrote: "I have said a good deal more here on what ought to be than on what is: but God forbid I should appear to say, 'I know what ought to be, and this is it'" (308). Agee realized that if these individuals believed that he was there to pass judgment on them and their way of life, all research would immediately have come to a halt. He felt compassion for them, yet struggled to remain apart.

During his stay in Alabama Agee underwent what Clifford refers to as the ethnographer's "crisis of self" in his

encounter with a new culture. This was Agee's first encounter with such an extreme poverty. Agee appeared to change from an unaffected journalist into a brooding essayist, concluding Let Us Now Praise Famous Men with "A Definition," a long, rambling catalogue. It begins with a definition of what the word 'tenant' means, and concludes with a hallucinatory catalogue of 'anglosaxon monosyllables':

god, love, loyalty, honor, beauty, duty,
 integrity, art, artist, religion, truth, science,
 poetry, culture, fascism, communism, dialectical-
 materialism, fellow-traveler, anarchist,
 philosophical-anarchist, marx, freud, semantic,
 loyalist, franco, hitler, duce, committee, friend,
 enemy, totalitarian state, statement, education,
 student, teacher, maestro, woman, man, Woman, Man,
 humanity, kidnap, vigilante, sex fiend,
 perversion, normal, genius . . . (456)

The list continues as a stream of consciousness form of word association, linking racial epithets, colloquial expressions, political figures, dictators, religious leaders, revolutionaries, slang, profanity, fruits and vegetables, and so on. This list was in direct contrast to the orderly key chronology of "Persons and Places" which opened the book, simply stating the name and age of the tenant farmers, for example:

Fred Garvin Ricketts	 a two-mule tenant farmer, aged fifty- four.
Sadie (Woods) Ricketts	 his wife, aged forty-nine. (liii)

It is also a departure from Agee's organized catalogue of

names in "Dedication" from Permit Me Voyage, further proof of the catharsis or 'crisis of self' Agee experienced during his research for Let Us Now Praise Famous Men.

Agee in Alabama: Four Examples

Agee's amateur ethnography takes shape during a series of "moments" which serve to effect his purpose in writing Let Us Now Praise Famous Men. From the first days of Agee's experiences in Alabama, Agee began experiencing these cathartic "moments" of illumination, which best display Agee's romantic ethnography. He explains and illustrates his ethnographic approach in the preface when he writes:

Of this ultimate intention the present volume is merely portent and fragment, experiment, dissonant prologue. Since it is intended, among other things, as a swindle, an insult, and a corrective, the reader will be wise to bear the nominal subject, and his expectation of its proper treatment, steadily in mind. For that is the subject with which the authors are dealing, throughout. If complications arise, that is because they are trying to deal with it not as journalists, sociologists, politicians, entertainers, humanitarians, priests, or artists, but seriously. (xlvi)

Agee's great ethnographic anxiety was how he could fit into the lives of the sharecroppers he wrote about without violating their privacy and dignity. In part to safeguard this privacy and dignity, Agee made of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men a formally challenging work open to multiple readings. Agee invites the reader to approach it from a variety of vantage points, much as he refused any single

vantage point in his view of the tenant farmers. Agee's dilemma was rooted in a fear of ethnographic intrusion. He addresses his own feelings of guilt and relates the ethnographic tools he would prefer to use in his interaction with the tenant farmers:

'The communication is not by any means so simple. It seems to me now that to contrive techniques appropriate to it in the first place, and capable of planting it cleanly in others, in the second, would be a matter of years, and I shall probably try none of it or little, and that very tortured and diluted, at present. I realize that, with even so much involvement in explanations as this, I am liable seriously, and perhaps irretrievably, to obscure what would at best be hard enough to give its appropriate clarity and intensity; and what seems to me most important of all: namely, that these I will write of are human beings, living in this world, innocent of such twistings as these which are taking place over their heads; and that they were dwelt among, investigated, spied on, revered, and loved, by other quite monstrously alien human beings, in the employment of still others still more alien; and that they are now being looked into by still others, who have picked up their living as casually as if it were a book, and who were actuated toward this reading by various possible reflexes of sympathy, curiosity, idleness, et cetera, and almost certainly in a lack of consciousness, and conscience, remotely appropriate to the enormity of what they are doing. (12-13)

Agee's constant awareness of the possibly intrusive nature of his involvement with the three families led to some of his most highly charged and emotional scenes. There are four cathartic "moments" Agee represents in Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, which chart the progress of his relations with the families. These scenes begin with his initial awkward interaction with the tenant farmers and culminate

with the realization (perhaps romanticized on his part) that he was finally accepted by them and comfortable with them. These episodes provide insight into Agee's motivation and illumination as to how he succeeded as ethnographer and poet. A central thread of Agee's book presents the history of his increasing closeness to the individuals he writes about. In view of Agee's ethnographic approach to these individuals, and in light of recent ethnographic theory, these moments of "closeness" must themselves be read closely for what they reveal about the successes and limitations of Agee's method.

The first such moment occurs after Agee and Evans view the Southern landscape for the first time, and Agee is made aware of the human condition as it exists between foreman and landlord, and racial conflict. Agee regrets intruding upon the tenant farmers, although everyone is courteous to him and Evans. The camaraderie between foreman and landlord is noted, although the subservience of the foreman is implied. Agee's sympathy for the "Negroes," as he calls them in the language of his day, is as evident as his intolerance for the vulgar, profane actions of the landlord. When three fair-skinned African Americans are summoned by the landlord to sing for Agee and Evans, "to show what nigger music is like" (28), Agee feels

sick in the knowledge that they felt they were here at our demand, mine and Walker's, and that I could communicate nothing otherwise; and now, in a perversion of self-torture, I played my part

through. I gave their leader fifty cents, trying at the same time, through my eyes, to communicate much more, and said I was sorry we had held them up and that I hoped they would not be late; and he thanked me for them in a dead voice, not looking me in the eye, and they went away, putting their white hats on their heads as they walked into the sunlight. (31)

Agee's guilt is shown in his need to apologize to the young men for his playing a part in their humiliating performance. Let Us Now Praise Famous Men shows Agee apologizing again and again to various characters that he encounters, either for problems in their lives he would like to but cannot change or for problems he has caused.

A second moment of ethnographic contact and realization occurs when Agee and Evans, still in the early days of their stay in Alabama, arrive at a country church. Agee describes the church in striking detail -- its architecture, the symbolism of its presence in its locale -- all in a religious context. He catalogues the church's contents as Evans prepares to photograph the building. In his desire to embody and possess the church, he startles a young African-American couple.

While we were wondering whether to force a window, a young negro couple came past up the road. Without appearing to look either longer or less long, or with more or less interest, than a white man might care for, and without altering their pace, they made thorough observation of us, of the car, and of the tripod and camera. We spoke and nodded, smiling as if casually; they spoke and nodded, gravely, as they passed, and glanced back once, not secretly, nor long, nor in amusement. They made us, in spite of our knowledge of our own meanings, ashamed and insecure in our wish to

break into and possess their church, and after a minute or two I decided to go after them and speak to them, and ask them if they knew where we might find a minister or some other person who might let us in, if it would be all right. They were fifty yards or so up the road, walking leisurely, and following them, I watched aspects of them which are less easily seen . . . I was walking more rapidly than they but quietly; before I had gone ten steps they turned their heads (toward each other) and looked at me briefly and impersonally, like horses in a field, and faced front again; and this, I am almost certain, not through having heard sound of me, but through a subtler sense. By this time I raised my hand, they had looked away, and did not see me, though nothing in their looking had been quick with abruptness or surreptition. I walked somewhat faster now, but I was overtaking them a little slowly for my patience; the light would be right by now or very soon; I had no doubt Walker would do what he wanted whether we had 'permission' or not, but I wanted to be on hand, and broke into a trot. At the sound of the twist of my shoe in the gravel, the young woman's whole body was jerked down tight as a fist into a crouch from which immediately, the rear foot skidding in the loose stone so that she nearly fell, like a kicked cow scrambling out of a creek, eyes crazy, chin stretched tight, she sprang forward into the first motions of a running not human but that of a suddenly terrified wild animal . . . I came up to them (not trotting) and stopped a yard short of where they, closely, not touching now, stood, and said, still shaking my head (*No; no; oh, Jesus, no, no, no!*) and looking into their eyes; at the man, who was not knowing what to do, and at the girl, whose eyes were lined with tears, and who was trying so hard to subdue the shaking in her breath, and whose heart I could feel, though not hear, blasting as if it were my whole body... (39-41)

Agee's feelings of guilt are intensified as he wishes desperately to communicate with the young couple and convince them of his good intentions, and to apologize for having frightened them.

I wanted only that they should be restored, and should know I was their friend, and that I might

melt from existence: 'I'm very very sorry! I'm very sorry if I scared you! I didn't mean to scare you at all. I wouldn't have done any such thing for anything.'" (42)

At a time and place when a white man rapidly approaching an African-American couple might well pose a threat, the couple's reaction could be expected. Agee was devastated by the thought of having evoked such a response and could only apologize for having startled them. Agee "turned away from them, and walked down the road without looking back" (43). The episode represents a failure on the part of Agee's anthropological quest to become part of an alien culture, and his constant and almost comic apologizing seems to show a breakdown of his anthropologist's objectivity.

This episode of Agee's frightening the young couple foreshadows the third moment where Agee compromises his anthropological distance by attempting to possess Emma Woods.

In a long passage Agee describes Emma Woods. She is eighteen and has been married for three years to a man her father's age. Agee describes her in physical terms: he sees the shape of her body, the square bob of her haircut, a sensual "dimness of definition in her features." Agee confesses to the "flirtation" that he and Walker Evans both conduct with Emma.

Each of us is attractive to Emma, both in sexual immediacy and as symbols or embodiments of a life she wants and knows she will never have; and each of us is fond of her, and attracted toward her. We are not only strangers to her, but we are

strange, unexplainable, beyond what I can begin yet fully to realize. We have acted toward her with the greatest possible care and shyness and quiet, yet we understand her and like her and care for her almost intimately. She is puzzled by this and yet not at all troubled, but excited; there is nothing to do about it on either side. (61)

The passage on Emma ends with Evans and Agee driving Emma back to her husband, who beats her. Agee ends the passage with the words: "and that is Emma" (69).

In what sense does Agee possess Emma? As an ethnographer, Agee's desire to "tell you anything within the realm of God" is clearly overreaching. James Clifford asks of the cultural ethnographer not to relate "anything within the realm of God" about a given culture, but simply to record those fragments that reach him. What is interesting about Agee is that he wants both to record the fragments of the lives of the three tenant families and to suggest or evoke larger and unfragmented patterns through his art. Agee became involved with these families under one set of principles (not unlike Clifford's ethnographic principles) and then came to practice what might be termed a drunken ethnography. Agee allowed himself to be carried away by his feelings for the families he lived with, so that he was no longer simply a reporter or social scientist. Agee wishes to report on and comprehend all of Emma, even while acknowledging through the details of his prose that he only knows her partially. The dynamic tension between partial and total knowing, partial and total representation, is a

central issue in regard to the demands of ethnographic form. Agee's docudrama exploits this tension, in order to develop the illusion of more complete and accurate representation of objective reality, while at the same time, to a degree, dramatizing and in fact fictionalizing his own inability to maintain scientific distance from the people under observation. Questing the objective, he remains subjective.

Agee's fourth moment of insight into his own position among the people of Alabama takes place in "Part Three: Inductions," amid a discussion of life among the various family members. After quoting the entirety of the 43rd Psalm, Agee asks God for the strength to guide him through his journey. Again, he describes his first impressions upon arriving in Alabama and his initial meeting with Fred Ricketts outside the courthouse as Evans captures the moment on film. Agee nostalgically recalls:

I REMEMBER so well, the first night I spent under one of these roofs:

We knew you already, a little, some of you, most of you . . .

-- And it was here that we first saw most of you, scarcely knowing you by families apart: I can remember it so clearly, as if it were five minutes ago, and we were just drawn away from your company, and were riding the light ridges of the winding road, in the silence before we were able to speak a word of you, when the whole time was like one chord and shock of music . . . " (361-363)

While spending a night at the Gudger's home Agee finally feels he has been accepted by the family. He

examines the Family Bible resting beside the bed, and by way of showing his intimacy includes in Let Us Now Praise Famous Men transcriptions of the pages from the Gudger Family Bible recording births, deaths, marriages and the like. The names and ages of the Gudger family are listed and preserved for posterity. Agee lays down to sleep on the cold sheets, discovering the bedbugs and lice. Later in the night, Agee arises to go outside and relieve himself, simultaneously absorbing the sights of the house and surrounding land, under a minimally lit starry sky.

During this visit Agee undergoes his final cathartic revelation, where, according to the critic Genevieve Moreau, "He suddenly realized that his presence among them created no tension. Without any further hesitation he accepted for the rest of his stay in Alabama the hospitality that was offered that evening" (139). Agee described the moment in his typically romantic and yet oddly reportorial language:

There were a few stars through thin mist, and a wet gray light of darkness everywhere. I went down the steps and out into the yard, feeling the clay slippery and very cold on my feet, and turned round slowly to look at the house. The instant I was out under the sky, I felt much stronger than before, lawless and lustful to be naked, and at the same time weak. I watched the house and felt like a special sort of burglar; but still more I felt as if I trod water in a sea whose floor was drooped unthinkably deep beneath me, and I was unsafely far from the wall of the ship. I looked straight up into the sky, found myself nodding at whatever it was I saw, and came back and scraped my feet on the steps, rubbed them dry with my hands, and, with one more slow look out along the sunken landscape went back into the bedroom. I put on my coat, buttoned my pants outside it, put

my socks on, got into bed, turned out the lamp, turned up my coat collar, wrapped my head in my shirt, stuck my hands under my coat at the chest, and tried to go to sleep. It did not work out well . . . I don't know exactly why anyone should be 'happy' under these circumstances, but there's no use laboring the point." (426-427)

This was Agee's epiphany, finally asserting his acceptance by the people he so desperately wanted to be accepted by. He never entirely overcomes the feelings of being an intruder or 'spy' or 'burglar,' and perhaps the anthropologist never does. James Clifford writes that, for the ethnographer, "Experience evokes a participatory presence, a sensitive contact with the world to be understood, a rapport with its people, a concreteness of perception. It also suggests a cumulative, deepening knowledge." (37) These four moments, occurring at the beginning and end of the book, show Agee evoking a "participatory presence," a "sensitive contact" and a "deepening knowledge" of the culture he had immersed himself in.

Romantic and Scientific Ethnography

Agee relied upon anthropology for its romantic appeal and its scientific logic. The entire discipline of anthropology is rooted in the refusal to accept the conventional, as well as the ability to culturally critique ourselves. Agee's goal was to find a powerful rhetoric that would provoke the reader to reexamine presuppositions.

Through poetic language, Agee attempted to reach both the initiated and uninitiated members of society, by enlightening them to the reality of the tenant farmers.

Agee's greatest concern was how to present his findings without betraying the families who allowed him participation in their lives. Agee writes:

If I could do it, I'd do no writing at all here. It would be photographs; the rest would be fragments of cloth, bits of cotton, lumps of earth, records of speech, pieces of wood and iron, phials of odors, plates of food and of excrement. Booksellers would consider it quite a novelty; critics would murmur, yes, but is it art; and I could trust a majority of you to use it as you would a parlor game. (13)

Agee described himself as "a spy, traveling as a journalist," to unearth new information about the tenant farmers. In "Plans For Work: October 1937" Agee sketches out the curiously non-literary terms in which he saw his project:

The record I want to make of this is not journalistic; nor on the other hand is any of it to be invented. It can perhaps most nearly be described as 'scientific,' but not in a sense acceptable to scientists, only in the sense that it is ultimately skeptical and analytic. It is to be as exhaustive a reproduction and analysis of personal experience, including the phases and problems of memory and recall and revisitation and the problems of writing and of communication, as I am capable of, with constant bearing on two points: to tell everything possible as accurately as possible: and to invent nothing. It involves therefore as total a suspicion of 'creative' and 'artistic' as of 'reportorial' attitudes and methods, and it is likely therefore to involve the development of some more or less new forms of writing and of observation . . . It will likely make use of various traditional forms but it is

anti-artistic, anti-scientific, and anti-journalistic. (Fitzgerald 133)

This 'anti-scientific' record Agee insisted upon would evolve as a direct result of his ethnographic approach to his subject, so that immediately the work was a focus of much ambivalence.

Marcus and Fischer state that:

Ethnography is a research process in which the anthropologist closely observes, records, and engages in the daily life of another culture -- an experience labeled as the fieldwork method -- and then writes accounts of this culture, emphasizing descriptive detail. These accounts are the primary form in which fieldwork procedures, the other culture, and the ethnographer's personal and theoretical reflections are accessible to professionals and other readerships. (18)

Though a country-dweller himself, in early years, Agee found the Alabama people and surroundings to be increasingly strange. Agee was of a middle class family from Knoxville. His father was a postal worker with a Tennessee mountain heritage. Agee could identify with the tenant farmer as a Southerner but not with the poverty he discovered in Alabama. Agee attended St. Andrews boarding school, Exeter Academy, and Harvard, as far removed from the sharecropper's reality as humanly possible.

Before describing the three people sitting on a front porch in the "At the Forks" section, Agee attempts to find a way to explain the individuals and their surroundings. The ethnographic situation as Agee describes it is unusual and tense: three nearly silent Alabamans observing him as he

drives by and attempts to observe them.

Just a little behind us on our left and close on the road was a house, the first we had passed in several miles, and we decided to ask directions of the people on the porch, whom, in the car mirror, I could see still watching us. We backed slowly, stopping the car a little short of the house, and I got slowly out and walked back toward them, watching them quietly and carefully, and preparing my demeanor and my words for the two hundredth time. . . . They [the tenant farmers] were of a kind not safely to be described in an account claiming to be unimaginative or trustworthy, for they had too much and too outlandish beauty not to be legendary. Since, however, they existed quite irrelevant to myth, it will be necessary to tell a little of them. (32-33)

Agee was especially concerned with letting the truth speak for itself in Let Us Now Praise Famous Men. Writing of the difficulty of achieving such a goal regarding the tenant farmer, Agee expresses his desire "to try merely to reproduce and communicate his living as nearly exactly as possible . . . " (233). He further explains:

The same seems to me true of every item in the experience of which I am speaking, and I could say it with equal sincerity of conviction of all human experience. Moreover, and especially if you bear in mind such structures as those of disease and symmetry I sketched out a little, I cannot see how such a piece of work could be small in intensity, 'truth,' complex richness and stature of form and nature, as compared with a work of art. (233)

As a Southerner returning to the South, Agee was greatly shaken by the micro-culture he found. He was deeply affected by the experience and after his stay in Alabama, Agee's drinking accelerated. The impact of the experience weighed heavily upon him. His desire to honor the tenant

farmer and relate his report honestly forced *Fortune* to relinquish the article. This in turn resulted in Agee's drunken ethnography. His prose was affected by the enormity of his challenge -- turning the project into a book. His drinking is seen in his erratic writing: long digressions, stream of consciousness passages, lack of focus, strange textual form.

Three key elements of ethnography that Agee adhered to are: the ability to focus on the person, the self, and the emotion. Specifically, "Such experimental ethnographies are especially interested in theories and constructions of the person, derived from indigenous discourses and commentaries. These contain reflections on human development and the life cycle, on the nature of thought, on gender differences, and on appropriate expressions of emotions -- all seen from within different cultural perspectives" (Marcus and Fischer 46). Agee focused his attention on the tenant farmers's modes of dress, labor and interaction with each other and "on dreams, remembrances, associations, metaphors, distortions and displacements . . . " (Marcus and Fischer 54). Agee reflected on George Gudger:

Gudger, then: conventional, middle-aged unslashed work shoes; three suits of overalls and work shirts, all blue, in more uniformity to begin with and in more distinction apart through what is done with them, than any tailor would or could create; a machinist's cap; a modification of the Leyendecker face, brick red, clean shaven; a medium-height, powerful, football player's body modified into the burlings of oak and into slow square quantities blending those of the lion and

the ox: (273)

Ethnography as a Hybrid Activity

Ethnography has been called a hybrid activity by Clifford, thus appearing "as writing, as collecting, as modernist collage, as imperial power, as subversive critique" (13). Agee incorporated such subversive elements: the Communist manifesto, the questionnaire about American literature, pointed, catty comments about Bourke-White -- and finally reached conclusions that shocked him, while the work's subjectivity contributed to *Fortune's* decision to relinquish the project. What started to be a standard profile of localized rural struggle, transformed into an expose of a segment of American culture focusing on the author's role. Agee specifically called himself subversive, a spy.

He also brought a primitive strain of animism into Let Us Now Praise Famous Men. By supplementing his documentation with uncanny catalogues and photographs, he gave magic properties to the individuals he was researching, as a kind of magic realism. Agee managed to present the living, breathing examples of the perseverance of the human spirit, embodied within the impoverished environment from where the spirit would appear not to have space to flourish. In Let Us Now Praise Famous Men we realize that the spirit flowers and resolutely, because some "famous men" invest the slightest things with magic force.

Magic is in this context a general term for the uncanny powers of the strange. According to Crapanzano "ethnography is also a somewhat provisional way of coming to terms with the foreignness of languages -- of cultures and societies . . . determined by the moment of the ethnographer's encounter with whomever he is studying" (43). It is essential to examine the exchanges between Agee and Evans as observers of "foreigners," among the participants who were the discretely fictionalized Gudger, Ricketts and Woods families.

Agee shows the tenant farmers's inability to become part of the modern day communication network. Radio, newspapers and the telephone were luxuries alien to these families. They were aware of such conveniences, but the necessities of food, clothing and meager shelter were their primary concerns. In Alabama, Agee discovered a culture within a culture, aware of the greater world yet isolated and impoverished within its own identity.

The task of the ethnographer is to amass a corpus of information including texts, artifacts, maps and photographs. Agee included catalogues of personal effects to validate his research. He presented a verbal and visual record of the run down shacks and houses and their furnishings: furniture, beds, chairs, doors, down to the contents of the closets. He succeeded in animating the tenant farmers, making them more than specimens to be viewed under the scientific microscope. Agee also relied upon

Walker Evans's photographs to further corroborate his own findings.

Evans's earliest photographs for the Farm Security Administration "apparently dated from June, July and November of 1935, when he toured the coal-mining towns of West Virginia and the industrial towns of Pennsylvania . . . Evans established the basic style for most of his FSA work - careful, direct, detailed views of people and places, usually taken with the 8x10 camera, but sometimes supplemented by use of a 4x5 and more frequently a 35mm, particularly for studies of people" (Maddox ix-x).

In assessing the importance of the photographer's contribution to ethnographic research, Crapanzano writes: "His aim is to impress his experience of what he has seen so strongly, so vividly, on his readers that they cannot doubt its veracity. It is the visual that gives authority" (50). Lionel Trilling writes: "Evans's pictures are photographic in the sense that people mean when they say 'merely photographic,' they are very direct, they even appear to be literal . . . " (100). Agee himself regarded the photographs as not illustrative but coequal with the text and said this frequently throughout the course of the narrative.

In Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, the photographs *must* be viewed along with the written word. Lionel Trilling writes:

Perhaps the most remarkable picture in this book (I think it is one of the finest objects of any art of our time) is the third, the picture of Mrs. Gudger. It shows a woman with a beautifully bony face, thinning black hair, sunken or perhaps bitten-in mouth and sun-narrowed eyes . . . It is significant that, like all the pictures in the book, this is a portrait; it was 'sat for' and 'posed' and not only does the pose tell more than could be told by unconsciousness of the camera but the sitter gains in dignity when allowed to defend herself against the lens. (100)

Agee's words rely strongly upon Evans's pictures to deliver their message, just as Evans's photographs are enhanced by Agee's lyrical prose. Evans had

perfected a vision that suited his melancholy dignity -- a literal seeing with the camera eye which rebelled against the arty, doctored plates then in fashion, and derived instead from the documentary moodiness of Matthew Brady and the starkness of the world of Chaplin's tramp. (Hersey 75)

The faces in Evans's photographs blend together with the starkly defined images of the sparsely furnished rooms, and the crumbling outer structures of the tenant shacks. The shadows and silhouettes, the use of natural light, the way the pictures are arranged on the page -- all contribute to the book's total effect. Something as fundamental as a kitchen table becomes the subject of Agee's poetry:

The yellow and green checked oilcloth is worn thin and through at the corners and along the edges of the table and along the ridged edges of boards in the table surface, and in one or two places, where elbows have rested a great deal, it is rubbed through in a wide hole. In its intact surfaces it shines prettily and bluntly reflects the window and parts of the objects that are on it, for it has been carefully polished with a wet rag, and it shows also the tracings of this rag. Where it has rubbed through, the wood is sour and greasy, and

there are bread crumbs in the seams and under the edges of the cloth, which smell of mold, and these odors are so mingled with that of the oilcloth that they are in total the classic odor of a tenant eating-table. (180-181)

Dialogue is also a powerful ethnographic tool.

Dialogue, for Crapanzano,

suggests friendship, mutuality, authenticity -- an egalitarian relationship . . . dialogue, so understood, not only describes such relations but can create the illusion of such relations where they do not exist . . . *Dialogue* then not only reveals but often enough conceals the power relations and the desires that lie behind the spoken word, and, in other contexts, the recorded and distributed word. (189)

Agee's dialogue reveals as much about Agee as it does about the tenant farmers. It becomes

a regnant metaphor for describing -- indeed prescribing -- the relationship between the interpreter and the text. The dialogue model evokes the 'mutually' lived experience of textual interpretation (Crapanzano 150)

Dialogue defines how an experience is framed, discussed, understood and interpreted.

The episode with Emma exemplifies this use of language, as does the final scene when Agee talks with George Gudger, spending the night in his home:

Gudger and I exchange our lamps, speaking few words in nearly inaudible voices, while beyond his shoulder I feel the deep dark breathing a soft quiet prostration of bodies: All right in year hain't you? -- Ah, sure, fine. Sure am. -- Annie Mae telled me to say, she's sorry she ain't got no clean sheet, but just have to (oh, no!) make out best way you can. -- Oh, no. No. You tell her I certainly do thank her, but, no, I'll be fine like this, fine like this -- She just don't got none tell she does a warshin. -- Sure; sure; I wouldn't want to dirty up a clean sheet for you,

one night. Thanks a lot. Door, right head a yer
bed, if you want to git out. I look, and nod:

Yeah; thanks

Night:

Night:

The door draws shut. (419-420)

Agee was able to convey through this sort of colloquial exchange some of the texture of the life of the tenant farmers in rural Alabama.

Linguistics became a model for emulation, both because language was seen as central to culture, and because linguistics seemed to have developed a more rigorous way of eliciting culturally patterned phenomena, and of defying these phenomena in terms of so-called deep structures not conscious to speakers. (Marcus and Fischer 28)

Using dialogue to probe their inner lives, Agee had to read between the lines in his conversations with the tenant farmers. Along with the words exchanged, Agee monitored and registered all aspects of his interaction with the tenant farmers. He seemed to feel a deep responsibility to file a comprehensive report, and so had to be conscious of all forms of personal expression, both his own and the tenant farmer's. Ethnography becomes a bridge for understanding between observer and participant. It is "at best conversation across cultural codes" (Marcus and Fischer 29).

Agee followed the same method an ethnographer would to present his research; the only difference being that the ethnographer has to conform to genre restrictions, whereas Agee was free to use his imagination within a literary framework.

Agee defined this "romantic ethnography" thus:

Very roughly I know that to get my own sort of truth out of the experience I must handle it from four planes:

That of recall; of reception, contemplation, in *medias res*: for which I have set up this silence under darkness on this front porch as a sort of fore-stage to which from time to time the action may have occasion to return.

'As it happened': the straight narrative at the prow as from the first to last day it cut unknown water.

By recall and memory from the present: which is a part of the experience: and this includes imagination, which in the other planes I swear myself against.

As I try to write it: problems of recording; which, too, are an organic part of the experience as a whole.

These are, obviously, in strong conflict. So is any piece of human experience. So, then, inevitably, is any even partially accurate attempt too give any experience as a whole. (243)

Agee struggled to enlighten the reader by using detailed records and photographs. Since professional travel was limited during the 1930's, Agee's reporting and Evans's photographs introduced the majority of Americans to the sharecroppers in Alabama. The explorer/traveler of the thirties performed essentially the same service that the television documentary journalist would during the fifties, bringing hidden elements of a culture into closer proximity.

The explorer/traveler has the power to influence the reader by how he relates his experience. According to Levi-Strauss,

Exploration is not so much a matter of covering the ground as of digging beneath the surface: chance fragments of landscape, momentary snatches of life, reflections caught on the wing -- such are the things that alone make it possible for us

to understand and interpret horizons which would otherwise have nothing to offer us. (50)

The total experience, above and below the surface, must be conveyed by the ethnographer. Agee writes,

Here at a center is a creature: it would be our business to show how through every instant of every day of every year of his existence alive he is from all sides streamed inward upon . . . (110)

The ethnographer "strives to know and estimate his fellow-men from a lofty and distant point of vantage . . . Never can he feel himself 'at home' anywhere: he will always be, psychologically speaking, an amputated man" (Levi-Strauss 58). The ethnographer is the perennial outsider, once his work has been completed he will withdraw just as stealthily as he arrived. The notion of the ethnographer as 'amputated man' applies to Agee, who constantly struggles to balance the dual roles of reporter and family member.

The strangeness of his research would remain a problem. Once Agee had completed his research, he was posed with the ultimate challenge of determining how to present the facts. He had to choose language that would best convey his findings. This was a difficult task, and as Levi-Strauss had stated:

Writing is a strange thing. It would seem as if its appearance could not have failed to wreak profound changes in the living conditions of our race, and that these transformations must have been above all intellectual in character. Once men know how to write, they are enormously more able to keep in being a large body of knowledge. (291).

Agee echoed Levi-Strauss' notion that

Writing might, that is to say, be regarded as a form of artificial memory, whose development should be accompanied by a deeper knowledge of the past and, therefore, by a greater ability to organize the present and the future. (291)

The Question of Objectivity

Agee was faced with Levi-Strauss's so-called anthropologist's dilemma:

either the anthropologist clings to the norms of his own group, in which case the others can only inspire in him an ephemeral curiosity in which there is always an element of disapproval; or he makes himself over completely to the objects of his studies, in which case he can never be perfectly objective, because in giving himself to all societies he cannot but refuse himself, wittingly or not, to one among them. He commits, that is to say, the sin with which he reproaches those who question the privileged status of his vocation. (382)

The question of Agee's objectivity must figure into any discussion of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men. Agee was not there to judge or correct the situation, simply to record and relate all that he experienced. He encouraged the reader not to pass judgment on the tenant farmers, and not impose upon them what Levi-Strauss termed the 'rightness' or 'naturalness' of his own societal customs. Agee echoed Levi-Strauss's argument that "We are not alone, and it is not within our control either to remain deaf and blind to the rest of mankind, or to plead guilty, in ourselves, for all humanity" (395). Agee wished to be the reader's conscience.

Even though Agee refused to label Let Us Now Praise Famous Men as documentary journalism, many critics and readers at the time erroneously placed it under just such a heading. According to Marcus and Fischer, American cultural criticism of the nineteen-thirties became ethnographic with a vengeance. Quoting William Stott, they state:

a documentary motive was at work throughout the culture of the times in the rhetoric of the New Deal and the WPA arts projects; in painting, dance, fiction and theater; in the new media of radio and picture magazines; in popular thought, education, and advertising. (Marcus and Fischer 125)

Marcus and Fischer mistakenly cite Let Us Now Praise Famous Men as an example of a picture book experimenting with the photographic medium in order to capture the human experience.

Agee's role ends up by becoming multidimensional, combining ethnographic methods with poetic insight. Through it all he experienced emotional discomfort, mostly at having to disguise his reporting aims. He stated that

the most I can do -- the most I can hope to do -- is to make a number of physical entities as plain and vivid as possible, and to make a few guesses, a few conjectures; and to leave to you much of the burden of realizing in each of them what I have wanted to make clear of them as a whole: how each is itself; and how each is a shapener. (110)

Agee was an observer, instructor, friend and family member at various times throughout the course of his stay in Alabama. His goal was to generalize his personal experience so that readers who had been spared the suffering he

encountered in Alabama, would still be able to experience it vicariously.

**Chapter 2: Ethnographic Form in
Let Us Now Praise Famous Men**

It's hard to see by the coal oil light,
And I turn it off pretty early at night.
'Cause a jug of coal oil costs a dime,
But I stay up late come pickin' time,
Stay up late come pickin' time. (Johnny Cash)

Ethnographic Modernism

Clifford in The Predicament of Culture refers to the "ethnographic modernist" who "searches for the universal in the local, the whole in the part" (4). Ethnographic modernism allowed Agee to experiment within a range of genres by encouraging a latitude of expressiveness. Agee wrote that "it is important that your representation of 'reality' does not sag into, or become one with, naturalism" (238). Ethnographic modernism emphasized the discourse between ethnographer and subject, and encouraged the involvement of the reader in the analysis of the work. Agee questions:

Who are you who will read these words and study these photographs, and through what cause, by what chance, and for what purpose, and by what right do you qualify to, and what will you do about it; and the question, Why we make this book, and set it at large, and by what right, and for what purpose, and to what good end, or none. (9)

During the nineteen-thirties, the idea of posing societal questions became a central theme of anthropological research. The role of the ethnographer became increasingly self-conscious. For the first time, he could research

ecology, economy, politics and religion. Though not a professional ethnographer, Agee was at the forefront of this experimentation. He posed rhetorical and non-rhetorical questions to the reader, based on his personal observations and interviews with the tenant farmers. Agee's experimentation was to be conducted through language.

Agee stretched the essay form in novel ways to relate his experiences in Alabama. Crapanzano states: "The essay enjoys a freedom, a tentativeness, and speculative possibility that do not exist in the insistent paper or the determined article" (1). Agee did not set out to write an 'insistent paper,' although his original aim was to compose a 'determined article.' He allowed Let Us Now Praise Famous Men to shape itself. This chapter highlights some of the many textual features, modes, voices and looks of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men as they contribute to the distinctive modernism of Agee's book.

The book is in many ways like other modernist texts in its experimental design and diverse tonalities. While writers like Eliot, Crane and London are frequently cited as avatars of the American modernist movement, and Faulkner the preeminent figure of Southern modernism, Agee, and Let Us Now Praise Famous Men may well be the movement's most overlooked components. Ruland and Bradbury, authors of From Puritanism to Postmodernism, argue that writers during the 1930's struggled to reinterpret the history of their own

fast-changing culture. These writers took up radical issues and "explored the language of unemployment, bread lines, urban misery, rural decay" (Ruland and Bradbury 332). Agee, as a practitioner of a kind of ethnographic modernism, searched out the universal in the local, the whole in the part resulting in the modernist collage of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men. For example, George Gudger becomes emblematic of all tenant farmers. Agee writes:

George Gudger is a man, et cetera. But obviously, in the effort to tell of him (by example) as truthfully as I can, I am limited. I know him only so far as I know him, and only in those terms in which I know him; and all of that depends as fully on who I am as on who he is . . . The one deeply exciting thing to me about Gudger is that he is actual, he is living, at this instant. He is not some artist's or journalist's or propagandist's invention: he is a human being: and to what degree I am able it is my business to reproduce him as the human being he is; not just to amalgamate him into some invented, literary imitation of a human being. (239-240)

What follows is a section by section analysis of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, meant to illustrate the writerly techniques through which Agee presents his vision.

The Preface

Agee begins Let Us Now Praise Famous Men with a preface admonishing serious readers to proceed to the book proper, after finishing the first section of the preface. If the author's suggestion was to be heeded (and one suspects he knew it would not be), one would pass "Persons and Places" - - the book's character key, "Design of Book Two" -- the

outline, an ode to Walker Evans, and most important, the author's observations. "What Agee seemed to be trying was to keep his reader off-balance by the placement, proportioning, and miscellaneousness of his prefatory and appendix materials, doing his best to prevent Let Us Now Praise Famous Men from being 'only a book', from being even in its physical form what his reader presumably expected to find on opening it" (Holder 193-94).

The preface proper shows how Agee and Evans came to undertake such a 'curious' piece of work. The reader is informed that Agee was simply attempting to fulfill a magazine assignment and that Evans was on loan from the Federal Government, "hired by the Farm Security Administration to record the misery that the Depression had brought to farmers; then he began getting assignments from *Fortune*" (Hersey 75). The project would grow and redefine itself in the process, forcing *Fortune* to reject the completed "article" which Agee had submitted for publication. Initially, however, Agee simply aspired to interact with the 'Three Tenant Families' and present a record of the daily living conditions of 'an average white family of tenant farmers.' Since no one family could provide an accurate representation, Agee and Evans decided to spend time interacting intimately with three different families during their stay, and hence the book is complex.

In the preface Agee acknowledges the equal status of

the photographs and the text, 'mutually independent, and fully collaborative.' For Agee, the camera was the central instrument of his time. Kramer argues that "his immense respect for photography basically stems from the fact that it is 'incapable of recording anything but absolute dry truth'" (90). Of course, the paradox is that the words and pictures are strongly dependent upon each other to present the message Agee desires to convey to his readers, however despite the greatness of the photographs, they are not as great as Agee's prose. They are essential but supplementary. Evans's photographs enhance Agee's lyrical prose, and allow Agee the opportunity to further substantiate his fragmentary lyrical documentary. According to John Hersey, "Agee was entranced by Evans. Jim idealized honest photography and yearned to achieve its merciless exactness in his writing" (75).

Agee concludes the preface by stating that "This is a book only by necessity. More seriously, it is an effort in human actuality . . . " (xlvi). Agee wants the reader to become an active participant; he even encourages the reader to contact the authors or the publishers. He further promises to guarantee the reader's anonymity in such a matter -- in the hopes that this may generate a dialogue regarding the tenant farmers.

Trying to keep the reader on his guard, Agee strategically places a quotation from King Lear, mourning

the "Poor naked wretches, wheresoe'er you are"(xlix). On the facing page is the two-line Marxist slogan:

Workers of the world, unite and fight. You have
nothing to lose but your chains, and a world to
win.

In a footnote Agee dares the reader to misinterpret his intentions, thus challenging the reader pay close attention to the text, so as not to be taken unaware. Agee views this tendency to misinterpret as a common problem affecting even the most intelligent reader. He states: "These words are quoted here to mislead those who will be misled by them . . . these words nor the author are the property of any political party, faith, or faction" (li). Agee's own disillusionment with both Communism and Catholicism becomes evident during the later part of the text.

Book One -- Preliminaries

Agee offers a minimal table of contents simply listing "Book One," "Preliminaries," and "Book Two." "Book One" in its entirety consists of three pages: a table of contents, a page which contains two sections entitled "The Great Ball on Which We Live" and "Food, Shelter, and Clothing," and a list of "Persons and Places." "The Great Ball on Which We Live" begins "The world is our home . . ." and expresses a need for unity among people. "Food, Shelter, and Clothing" meditates on the basic substantive ingredients needed for survival, the depletion of which signifies a troubled and

ailing economic system.

Agee incorporates in "Food, Shelter, and Clothing" a vignette concerning the act of creation wherein we are naked in a field, suffering, cold and hungry, reinforcing Agee's notion of a world gone wrong. This foreshadows Agee's fourth "moment" where he is naked in the field outside the Gudger's house, experiencing his final cathartic revelation. In this section Agee also includes a fairy tale where three wishes may be granted and the ironic notion that 'food, shelter, and clothing' are wished for as opposed to gold or something extravagant. Like Tolstoy, Agee suggests that people live among us whose dreams are meager and certainly not ostentatious; they simply desire sustenance enough to survive. In a footnote Agee says these passages are from a child's third-grade geography textbook, and only a modernist text such as Let Us Now Praise Famous Men would express such sentiments so uncharacteristically.

In "Persons and Places" Agee offers a *dramatis personae* of the tenants he and Evans interacted with. The name, age, and family status of each family member is noted, along with nicknames and other pertinent information. Agee also includes a key to the cities and geographical locations described in the text.

DESIGN OF BOOK TWO*

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* This key is a reproduction of "Design for Book" Two which appears on pages 2 and 3 of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men. The exposition in chapter 2 of this dissertation follows Agee's outline in its entirety.

Design of Book Two

Verses

The table on the preceding page, "Design of Book Two," is a replica of the table which appears after the prefatory material (which Agee called "Book One"). "Verses" consists simply of a poem of Agee's to Walker Evans. In the poem Agee refers to himself and Evans as "Spies, moving delicately among the enemy" (5). Agee is "Constantly suspicious of his own motives, he is in truth a sort of spy: but a spy as God might be, knowing all and loving all" (Cunliffe 11).

Preamble

"Preamble" is a rather tortured statement of Agee's artistic ambivalence about the ethnographic project captured in Let Us Now Praise Famous Men. Agee expresses a persistent theme, the guilt that he feels for having "to pry intimately into the lives of an undefended and appallingly damaged group of human beings . . . " (7). He attempts to gain perspective for this so called 'curious' piece of work by trying to justify his motives for peering into the private lives of these human beings. Agee is greatly disturbed by the fact that he is going to profit from "the humiliation of these lives before another group of human beings, in the name of science, of 'honest journalism' (whatever that paradox may mean), of humanity, of social

fearlessness, for money . . ." (7). Agee notes the irony of his representing a biased media and Evans's working for the government, together traveling 'spies, guardians, and cheats', developing a project that was "curious, obscene, terrifying, and unfathomably mysterious" (8).

Agee describes the unique relationship he and Evans fashioned with the sharecroppers, and recounts the publishing history of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men. He questions: "Who are you who will read these words and study these photographs, and through what cause, by what chance, and for what purpose, and by what right do you qualify to, and what will you do about it . . ." (9). Agee's faith in the camera is reinforced when he calls it "next to unassisted and weaponless consciousness, the central instrument of our time" (11). However, he was also concerned with the misuse of such a powerful instrument of communication, arguing, "I know of less than a dozen alive whose eyes I can trust even so much as my own" (11).

Agee expresses the wish that the reader know the tenant farmers as he and Evans do. He writes: "It is that he exists, in actual being, as you do and as I do, and as no character of the imagination can possibly exist. His great weight, mystery, and dignity are in this fact" (12). He fears that his and Evans's intrusion will affect the reader's "sympathy, curiosity, idleness, et cetera. . . ." (13), being violated by so-called 'spies' as himself and

Evans.

Agee feared that "nothing I might write could make a difference whatever. It would only be a 'book' at the best. If it were a safely dangerous one it would be 'scientific' or 'political' or 'revolutionary.' If it were really dangerous it would be 'literature' or 'religion' or 'mysticism' or 'art', and under one such name or another might in time achieve the emasculation of acceptance" (13). He concludes by stating: "If it were dangerous enough to be of any remote use to the human race it would be merely 'frivolous' or 'pathological,' and that would be the end of that" (13-14). After sharing his hopes, dreams, doubts, and fears Agee presents his ultimate objective -- that Let Us Now Praise Famous Men be a book about 'sharecroppers' written for those who can empathize with such poverty from a distance. Agee concludes the "Preamble" by stating "Above all else: in God's name don't think of it as art" (15).

All Over Alabama

"All Over Alabama," the shortest section of perhaps any "documentary" work, consists in its entirety of these lines:

The house had now descended
All over Alabama the lamps are out

These haunting lines, while alone occupy their own page, are

open to interpretation. Is it evening that Agee is emphasizing, or has the coal oil supply run out that would keep the lamp light flickering? Either way, there is an ominous sense of closure even before we have been properly introduced to the three tenant families in Alabama. This notion foreshadows the darkness we will shortly enter into and the aimless act of groping to reach an adequate understanding of the truth.

(On the Porch: 1

July 1936

In the section "(On the Porch: 1," the curtain rises upon a house in the silence of night under a starry sky. Agee describes a christian pagan creation in language both experimental and mythic. The passage is full of Christ imagery -- "Bone and bone, blood and blood, life and life, disjointed and abandoned" (19-20). Agee is preoccupied with the solitude of sleep and the inevitable awakening to a new reality with the dawn. In a hallucinatory dream passage, Agee writes:

Fish halted on the middle and serene of blind sea
water sleeping lidless lensed; their breathing,
their sleeping subsistence, the effortless nursing
of ignorant plants; entirely silenced, sleepers,
delicate planets, insects, cherished in amber,
mured in night, autumn of action, sorrow's short
winter, water-hole where gather the weak wild
beasts; night; night: sleep; sleep. (20)

The above passage is strange, poetic, surreal and impressionistic, further reinforcing the difficult task of

categorizing Agee's ethnographic modernism. Agee continues with a stream-of-consciousness passage describing a soldier in warfare, a prowler, a whore; which will transform into an illustration of a woman, personified as sky, watching from a distance within the confusion. Only in "Late Sunday Morning" does the reader finally enter reality.

Late Sunday Morning

Agee seems to start Let Us Now Praise Famous Men many times before the text actually begins with "Late Sunday Morning." Until this section the reader is given poetry, epigraphs, introductions and preambles, hallucinatory passages and the like. In "Late Sunday Morning" Agee reminisces about the local townspeople's initial reaction to his and Evans's arrival in Hale County, Alabama. Agee recalls his initial impression of the people; their friendly demeanor, and shabby mode of dress as they stare at him and Evans. T. S. Matthews states: "He (Agee) didn't look much like a *Time* writer. His usual costume was a baggy corduroy suit and a tieless black shirt, and he almost always needed a shave" (22). A man named Harmon befriends them and acts as their guide, along with another fellow who is never identified. Harmon and Evans, and Agee, with the unidentified landowner, separate into pairs.

They drive through the Alabama cotton land, viewing the farms and shacks for the first time, somewhere between

Montgomery and Birmingham. Agee describes the sharecroppers's plight, while learning the fundamentals of the sharecropping system. The shacks line the roadway as they arrive at the nearest four-room house belonging to the foreman. A group of African Americans approach them, as Agee and Evans apologize for the interruption, in a previously referred to cathartic moment. This passage, expressing Agee's guilt, is representative of the dilemma Agee experienced throughout Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, the desire to communicate his good intentions to the tenant farmers and his inability to find a means to do so. This dilemma clearly causes the book to have odd shapes of exposition and narration.

At the Forks

Agee and Evans stopped to ask for directions from a young man, a young woman, and an older man. Agee describes these three figures on the porch, paying particular attention to their eyes. He self-consciously writes: "None of them relieved me for an instant of their eyes . . . The qualities of their eyes did not in the least alter, nor anything visible or audible about them, and their speaking was as if I was almost certainly a spy sent to betray them through trust, whom they would show they had neither trust nor fear of" (34). Agee's predicament was that he "began to think of himself and Evans as 'spies' -- for God, in His

enmity to evil on earth" (Hersey 76).

The hypnotic trance is broken when the older man startles Agee by coming up from behind, and glaring, with "enraged and terrified eyes" (35). There is an archetypal animalism portrayed here, from the surprise of the initial exchange to the base grunting sounds the old man makes when expressing his hunger, then satiation with the cornbread that the woman brings to him. It is a primal scene Agee is witness to. The notion of the young woman speaking for the nonverbal older man and asthmatically broken younger one, reveals that she is the only one capable of communication. Agee is amazed by their acceptance of their situation without bitterness or complaint. The woman admits they rely on the generosity of the Negroes down the road to spare them some corn and peas. She also admits that they have little now, but her faith is strong. The husband offers Agee the farm magazine he was holding as a token of friendship.

Near a Church

The narrative continues in a description of the country church. This scene precedes a written pause, a nearly blank page with only two lines on the bottom continuing onto the following page. Let Us Now Praise Famous Men includes many blank pages separating section headings and photographs, however, this page indicates a respite before Agee continues, and a further example of Agee's ethnographic

modernist design. Agee reiterates his opening mantra "All over Alabama, the lamps are out" (44). In a descriptive long paragraph, he begins to detail the fields and plows, sights and sounds of the countryside, the towns and the houses; summarizing, in a stream of consciousness passage, the enigma of the impoverished region juxtaposed against the vibrancy and richness of a city like New Orleans. Within the deep South, in close proximity, Agee portrays two diametrically opposite extremes -- opulence and poverty.

Part One: A Country Letter

"A Country Letter" is written in the form of a letter to an unspecified "you," as Agee ardently reflects on his own capacity to record his experience in Alabama in words.

I feel that if I can by utter quietness succeed in not disturbing this silence . . . , I can tell you anything within the realm of God, whatsoever it may be, that I wish to tell you, and that what so ever it may be, you will not be able to help but understand it. (51)

Agee sits at a table, facing the wall, staring at the coal oil lamp. His thoughts form as his sight is fixed upon the lamp, concentrating upon the flame -- the flame that harshly breaks the darkness that has settled 'All over Alabama.'

This section is divided into four parts, the first describing Agee's creative process in writing Let Us Now Praise Famous Men. He works in silence, in the confines of night, gathering his thoughts and committing them to paper vowing to reveal all. He describes the room he is in --

where the objects appear to mingle in the flickering haze of the coal oil light. Agee promises to write "in all detail, whatever there is to tell: of where I am; of what I perceive" (52).

Agee includes a verse of an Appalachian mountain ballad to express his notion of the transience of human life, and the true potential for the soul, which lies beyond. In the Judeo-Christian context, it is heaven that waits beyond the horizon, in the eternal hope and promise that "This world is not my home, I'm only passing through / My treasures and my hopes, are all beyond the sky . . . " (53). Agee explains that the poverty and suffering experienced in this life are only momentary. The endurance of the human spirit is brought into focus, as is the regenerative nature of the family unit. He informs the reader that the family unit must take care of itself -- in health and sickness, in order to complete its work cycle. A Whitmanian passage follows focusing upon the individual and "the weaving, of human living: of whose fabric each individual is a part . . . " (56).

Even before he began his observational work, Agee began to reevaluate his assignment. He had a limited time to uncover the details of the sharecroppers's living conditions and was determined to make his four-week stay as productive as possible. Even sleep was an intrusion on his valuable work time. He recorded everything on note pads and scraps

of paper.

Agee introduces the reader to the Gudgers, the first of the three families that Agee and Evans would come to know: George Gudger, 31 year old husband, father and head of the family unit; Annie Mae, George's 27 year old wife; Emma Woods, Annie Mae's 18 year old sister; and the children: Maggie Louise, aged 10; George Jr., aged 8; Burt Westly, aged 4; and Valley Few (Baby Squinchy), aged 20 months. The "Gudgers" are based on the real life Burroughs family, and in all actuality only the names have been changed.

The Gudgers are asleep in the adjoining rooms as Agee writes. The tough, weather-beaten exteriors mask the tenderness within. Agee focuses his attention on the physical characteristics of each family member. The most devastating description is of tiny Baby Squinchy, who is described in harrowing detail as possessing a "shriveled and hopeless, most pitiful body . . . which will not grow" (58). Agee would like to not only understand them, but also to spiritually merge with them. He wishes to enter their very consciousness, their very souls. This is exemplified best in the already discussed "moment" regarding Emma.

Agee admits "I am fond of Emma and very sorry for her . . . " (59). Alfred T. Barson argues that in Agee's description of Emma, he writes "with perfect directness a vast network of jealousy and lust and pride and fear which constitutes the situation. But there is no way he can evoke

it without imagining it, unless he confesses to some of the same sins himself" (100). Whenever Emma escapes, her husband comes to her sister's house searching for her, promising "that he'll take to drink or kill himself if she leaves him . . . " (60). Eventually, Emma always returns to her husband because, in truth, she has nowhere else to go. Agee writes that "this sad comedy has been going on without comment from anyone . . . " (61).

Agee and Evans drive Emma and Annie Mae to their brother's house in Cookstown, where Emma is to meet her husband. Agee is touched by the way she shyly relates to him how much they all like him and Evans, and how comfortable they all feel in his presence. In a moving passage Agee reveals his impulse "to take her large body in my arms and smooth the damp hair back from her forehead and to kiss and comfort and shelter her like a child, and I can swear that I now as then almost believe that in that moment she would have so well understood this, and so purely and quietly met it, that now as then I only wish to God I had done it" (65).

A surreal poem follows -- dream imagery, the earth described as "thou sober-steering ark, quiet stone, thou granule, that finds no ararat" (74). In "Section II," the reader is again introduced to the Gudgers along with two other families -- the Ricketts and the Woods -- who all live on the hill. The Gudgers and Woods live within close

proximity of each other and are intermarried through Annie Mae and George; the Ricketts live further away. Agee offers a panoramic view of the people and landmarks in this region, as he heads to the Ricketts's house, passing woods and cotton fields.

The reader is introduced to the other family members. The Ricketts: Fred Garvin, 54 year old father; Sadie (Woods) Ricketts, 49 year old wife; their children: Margaret, aged 20; Paralee, aged 19; John Garvin, aged 12; Richard, aged 11; Flora Merry Lee, aged 10; Katie, aged 9; and Claire Bell, aged 4. The Woods: Thomas Gallatin (Bud), 59 year old father; Ivy, middle 20's, second wife; Miss-Molly, early 50's, Ivy's mother; and the children: Emma, aged 20; Pearl, aged 8; Thomas, aged 3; and Ellen, aged 20 months.

Agee follows this roll call with a digression on passing time: "if only we might have known. Where lost that bright health of love that knew so surely it would stay; how, how did it sink away, beyond help, beyond hope, beyond desire, beyond remembrance . . . How are these things?" (78). Agee poses a series of questions concerning the entrapment of the tenant farmers: "How were we caught? What, what is it has happened? What is it has been happening that we are living the way we are?" (81). Biblical quotations from the New Testament Gospel of Matthew conclude the section on a hopeful note.

"Section III" begins with a poetic evocation of exotic nature:

Spired Europe is out, up the middle of her
morning, has brought her embossed cities, her
front of country snailed with steel;

the Atlantic globe is burnished, ship-crawled,
pathed and paved of air, brightens to blind;

shoulder clean shoulder from their hanger, Brazil
and Labrador; flash flame;

from stone shore, bluff-browed tree, birds are
drawn sparkling and each plant: erects upon his
root, lifts his head, accepts once more the
summer:

There is a silence that is broken by the nightly "voice of a blond, fat, and craven rooster," (84) waking the whole world with "the brusqueness of an epileptic seizure" (86).

Another rooster answers, breaking the whippoorwill silence, as the cruelties of life are mirrored in the inevitable light of the new day.

Annie Mae Gudger has awakened even before the crowing of the determined rooster. She must prepare breakfast while still functioning in a state of utter tiredness. She must build the fire, cook the eggs, biscuits, meat, and coffee. Upon hearing the noise from the stove, George Gudger awakens and rolls a cigarette, his first smoke of the day. The Gudger children arrive at the table for breakfast and by 6:42 a.m. George has left for work. Agee reminisces about his own boyhood mornings in Knoxville: "I used as a child in the innocence of faith to bring myself out of bed through the cold lucid water of the Cumberland morning and to serve

at the altar at earliest lonely Mass" (89). This section ends with the opening inquiry "(How was it we were caught?)," (91). "Section IV" completes the cycle as a new day dawns and reality filters through.

Colon

"Colon," is defined by Webster as 'a punctuation mark used to introduce a quotation, explanation, example, etc.'. Ohlin argues that this section is "an attempt to outline all the pressures on an individual that form him and try to suggest how they should be presented in a book of this kind" (89). "Colon" functions as a transition into the following section. It initiates a strategic pause, leading to insightful digression concerning the working class structure of the rural South, specifically that of Alabama. Agee recalls his earlier predicament of how he must ethnographically "attempt to record, your warm weird human lives each in relation to its world" (99). He describes the uniqueness of the experience by stating: "each of you is a creature which has never in all time existed before and which shall never in all time exist again . . . " (100).

Agee wonders where he fits into this tangled puzzle of human actuality. He also wonders where the Gudger, Ricketts, and Woods families fit in. He asks, "how am I to speak of you as 'tenant' 'farmers,' as 'representatives' of your 'class,' as social integers in a criminal economy, or

as individuals, fathers, wives, sons, daughters, and as my friends and as I 'know' you?" (100).

Part Two: Some Findings and Comments

Money

"Part Two: Some Findings and Comments" presents an economic breakdown of the basic necessities for the farmers's survival. "Money," Agee opens with a quote from Franklin Delano Roosevelt: "You are farmers; I am a farmer myself" (115). The hollow ringing sound of Roosevelt's attempt to sympathize and identify with the tenant farmers comes off as a futile gesture from a gentleman farmer to the poverty-stricken dirt farmers of the rural South. There is the chilling realization that "Gudger has no home, no land, no mule; none of the more important farming implements" (115). This section outlines the seasonal work schedules of Woods and Ricketts, who labor for Michael and T. Hudson Margraves, who reside in Cookstown:

From March through June, while the cotton is being cultivated, they live on the rations money.

From July through to late August, while the cotton is making, they live however they can.

From late August through October or into November, during the picking and ginning season, they live on the money from their share of the cottonseed.

From then on until March, they live on whatever they have earned in the year; or however they can.

Agee informs the reader that Gudger has worked for the Margraves for three years, and now works for Chester Boles,

and has nothing to show for his manual labors. He is a true sharecropper, ending up with hardly enough food for himself and his family to subsist upon, once he has given the landlord half of all that he grows. Gudger must give the landlord a third of the cotton and a fourth of the corn. All totaled, Gudger, with his family of six, lives off ten dollars or less a month. The Woods family of six survives on eight dollars within the same period, and Ricketts family of nine exists on ten dollars a month during the spring and early summer.

Agee explains that "What is earned at the end of a given year is never to be depended on and, even late in a season, is never predicable" (118). The intricacies of this unfair system are explained in further detail by Agee. The reader is told that the WPA (Works Progress Administration) was not available to these farmers because they were technically employed, and if by chance they could get work through the WPA, the landlords would intervene more likely than not. Further, if a tenant attempted to solicit such work he was placed under disapproval by the landlord.

This situation somehow provides an essential and troubling background to the work of Agee and Evans, in the sense that in retrospect we may be tempted to gloss over the difficulties of administering the WPA. In the case of Agee's informants it is clear that getting real help from the WPA was extremely difficult for them to achieve. In

part this resulted from the massive scope of the program and its difficulty in relating to a sharecropper economy.

In The Great Depression, Robert S. McElvaine explains that the WPA was created by executive order after the huge Emergency Relief Appropriation of 1935. Under the direction of Harry Hopkins, the president divided up five billion dollars, made available by Congress, among several agencies; 1.39 billion went to the new WPA. This money was given to establish jobs to help construct or improve more than twenty thousand playgrounds, schools, hospitals, and air fields. It's purpose was to give the disenfranchised jobs to bolster their spirits. The program proved to be one of the leading examples of government recognition of the values of Depression era America. Its emphasis was on public works and the arts for society as a whole. Its umbrella organization, the FWP (Federal Writers Project), provided funds for writers and artists such as Richard Wright, Saul Bellow, Ralph Ellison, and John Cheever. But when it came to sharecroppers this massive program was much harder to administer usefully.

Shelter

"Shelter" is reminiscent of Thoreau's writing in Walden in its inventories and cataloguing. It lists the contents of the houses of the tenant farmers. "Shelter: An Outline," subdivides the section into chapters. The first,

"A home in its fields" describes the acreage of land Gudger is permitted to work. Barson likens "Shelter" to an epiphany, the essence of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, "for it incorporates the thing seen in its moment to moment variance as well as the mind's changing relationship to and residual effect from it" (92). Barson refers to the chapter "In the Bedroom: The Signal" as a prime example of this notion, because it is illustrative of the core of Agee's way of seeing, "his word-by-word, sentence-by-sentence effort as well as overall concern for form in the work" (92).

"The spring," "The garden," and "The outbuildings" are all perceived as beautiful, not physically, but in their functional value. The distinguishing characteristic of the unpainted wood used for the outbuildings, barns, and houses is described as having "a texture and look like that of weathered bone" (132). The hen roost and the smokehouse are described -- floors, doors, walls, and boards. All things seem to converge in the early morning dawn of the vast Southern countryside. Agee calls the Gudger house in which he stayed an "ordinary house."

In an excerpt from the original manuscript of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, "Three Tenant Families: A Selection," (appendix 5) Agee presents the "Shelter" section in its original form. It is noteworthy due to the change in names of George Gudger, who is referred to as Lloyd Hargraves in the outline, and Chester Boles whose name was

originally spelled Bowles. Otherwise, the draft remains true to the published text, except for a few derivative descriptions and phrasings. Thomas Woods's name remained as first conceived, although Ricketts was originally called Garner.

As the Gudgers tend to their daily chores, Agee is left alone to contemplate the contents of the four-room dwelling. He freely moves about the house, as he cannot when they are there. In his quest to embody the house, Agee personifies it. He traipses gently, so as not to disturb the sleeping house. He views it as a holy tabernacle, with reverence and solemnity. The passage is illustrative, and overtly sexual in parts. Agee approaches the house from various angles, to capture the symmetry of the structure. In a brief digression, he raises his eyes "slowly, in the face of this strength of sun, to look the house in its blind face" (140). The porch, the walls, the beams, and the roof are "put together out of the cheapest available pine lumber" (142).

Agee's narrative voice becomes increasingly more poetic as this chapter unfolds. He is able to more frankly and candidly address his physical surroundings, and his own emotional responses, including his sexual responses. Significantly, emotional openness enables Agee to lose his literary inhibitions -- he becomes lyrical in his style. The sections of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men which describe the houses of the farmers are especially rich in Agee's

brand of poetic description.

The reader is told that "On symmetry: the house is rudimentary as a child's drawing, and of a bareness, cleanness, and sobriety which only Doric architecture, so far as I know, can hope to approach . . . " (144). Agee describes "The room beneath the house" as "a hollow altar, temple, or poor shrine, a human shelter, which for the space of a number of seasons shall hold this shape of earth denatured; yet in whose history this house shall have passed soft and casually as a snowflake fallen on black spring ground, which thaws in touching" (147).

In "Odors; Bareness and space," the reader is informed that "The Gudger's house, being young, only eight years old, smells a little dryer and cleaner, and more distinctly of its wood, than the average white tenant house" (154). Agee explains how the odors intermingle to form one distinct aroma. Among these are the odor of pine lumber, wood smoke, hickory, oak and cedar; fried salt pork and boiled pork lard, along with the odor of cooked corn. The stagnant, stale smell seems to trigger a nostalgic response in Agee, evoking pleasant and unpleasant memories of his own childhood.

Agee continues to describe Gudger's house: "The Front Bedroom," with its fireplace and mantle; "The Furniture," which includes a sewing machine, 'settee' with homemade cushion, bureau; "The altar," fading boxed camera photo of

Emma as a girl aged 12, a calendar and a locket with a colored picture of Jesus inside; "The Tabernacle," among other things a scissored hexagon of newsprint reporting a workers' strike of March 5, 1936, with a caption recalling the violence that erupted between police and strike sympathizers in New York. The reader learns that even in their isolated state, the tenant farmers are not excluded from knowing about world events through newspapers and radio.

Agee enters "The Rear Bedroom" of George and Annie Mae, littered with bare essentials; "The fireplace," described in terms of coldness, ironic for the only staple of warmth in the house; "The mantel," which holds all of the toiletry necessities; "The closet" and its contents. Agee's most revealing commentary is saved for "The beds," for nearly all of the year the entire family lives and sleeps in this one room, where George and Annie Mae "get whatever sexual good they ever have of each other, as noiselessly and with as little movement as possible . . . " (175).

"The Kitchen" has a tin roof which leaks only when the rain is very heavy. The room is small so when it is very hot the heat becomes suffocating. Agee includes an inventory of the kitchen: cupboard, stove, table, forks -- all bent, and no two plates, cups, or glasses the same. The table is set for dinner with a yellow and green checked oilcloth, worn thin, where the food will be served out of

pans. The contents of "The Storeroom" are also listed. Agee completes his inventory of the Gudger house just as Mrs. Gudger and the children return to find him seated on the front porch with his pencil and notebook. They appear to trust him, and never question his motive for being there. The Gudgers consider Agee a member of the family.

Agee devotes the briefest amount of space to "The Woods' House" -- three pages of text. He explains that the house is set far back from the road and faces South. All of the outside and inside structures are recorded, but only as if in passing. The most startling image is of the water in "The Woods' spring," ten feet behind the house, described as warm and having "an ugly, feathery, sickening taste; they believe it is full of fever" (193). The poor condition of the well is attributed to the Negro family who lives down the hill in the hollow. The Woods await the Negroes to come by and throw rocks and chunks of wood at them. Agee notes the irony, stating: "But mainly they know better than to fight back, and try simply to come for their water at times of day when they will be least expected" (193).

"The Ricketts' House" is viewed as superior to the other two houses, because it was built by the man who originally lived in it, not as a tenant shack. The structure is described in detail, and the most striking image is of the drinking and cooking water that "is caught off the roof and routed through crumbled gutter pipes into

storage beneath the porch" (176). The reader is told that "the laundry is almost never done, and beyond their faces and hands the people, and their clothing and bedding, and their pans and dishes, and their house, are generally by standards other than their own insanely or completely dirty, or almost beyond possibility of being dirtier, short of a deliberated or cult-like acquisition of dirtiness" (196-197). This is ironic in contrast to Agee's statement that "The Ricketts are much more actively fond of pretty things than the other families are . . . " (196).

In the following "Notes" section, Agee digresses upon "Beauty," and "Age." Agee appraises the tenant farmers's houses as being beautiful, and warns the reader to not take these dwellings for granted or disregard them for their shortcomings as shelters, because their

esthetic success seems to me even more important than their functional failure . . . The houses are built in the 'stinginess,' 'carelessness,' and traditions of an unpersonal agency; they are of the order of 'company' houses. They are furnished, decorated and used in the starved needs, traditions and naiveties of profoundly simple individuals. (202-203)

In footnote Agee expresses his belief that "The 'sin,' in my present opinion, is in feeling in the least apologetic for perceiving the beauty of the houses" (203). He concludes by calling the Gudger's front bedroom, "a great tragic poem" (204).

Agee compares the tenant houses to the homes of the poorest class of landowning cotton farmers. Agee addresses

the notion that "tenantry is becoming more and more stylish as a focus of 'reform,' and in view of the people who will suffer and be betrayed at the hands of such 'reformers,' there could never be enough effort to pry their eyes open even a little wider" (208).

Agee interviews Mrs. Gudger, the only family member whose words he presents in direct quotation: "Oh, I do *hate* this house *so bad!* Seems like they ain't nothing in the whole world I can do to make it pretty" (210). Her sense of resignation echoes the Ricketts's contention that what is missing from all these lives is a sense of individual 'beauty.' Mrs. Gudger is responding to the frustrating sameness of all the tenant houses. Agee argues that the tenant farmers have grown 'used' to their living environment.

The final pages of this section describe the farm animals that the tenants maintain or own. They are fed and cared for according to their usefulness. Some are given names such as Mooly, the Woods's cow, while other animals appear starved or crazed. Human interaction with the livestock is monitored and the reader is told how the children must take special care around the milking cows, so as not to 'kick their utters' and damage the milk supply. The animal hierarchy on a tenant farm denotes first chance for being fed. It is as follows: cows, mules and hogs first; then the dogs, etc. Cats are generally disliked and

therefore given no food.

(On the Porch: 2

In "(On the Porch: 2" Agee digresses upon sleep, not simply the act of sleeping, but the manner in which the individuals slept. It is described as the difference between life and lifelessness. He returns to the real by describing the surrounding farm land, stating: "Human beings, with the assistance of mules, worked this land so that they might live" (229). Agee focuses on George Gudger as representative of all tenant farmers. He writes: "George Gudger is a human being, a man, not like any other human being so much as he is like himself" (232). More than a work of art, Gudger is "living, right now, in flesh and blood and breathing, in an actual part of a world which also, quite as irrelevant to imagination, you and I are living" (233).

Almost exactly at the center of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men Agee argues the "Who, what, where, when, and why" (234) as the cliché of journalism. Agee questions the accuracy of his own medium. He admits that he has "never yet seen a piece of journalism which conveyed more than the slightest fraction of what any even moderately reflective and sensitive person would mean and intend by those inachievable words . . . " (234). Agee questions the ability of the written word to freely stand alone without any sense of bias or doubt.

This passage is significant because it reveals Agee's complete shift in paradigm. Let Us Now Praise Famous Men was conceived as a journalistic assignment, and here Agee reveals his disillusionment with the genre. Agee writes: "Journalism can within its own limits be 'good' or 'bad,' 'true' or 'false,' but it is not in the nature of journalism even to approach any less relative degree of truth . . . The very blood and semen of journalism, on the contrary, is a broad and successful form of lying. Remove that form of lying and you no longer have journalism" (234-235). Agee "was after the truth, the truth about specific events or things, and the truth about his own impressions and feelings" (Fitzgerald 24).

Agee calls the language of 'reality' "the most beautiful and powerful . . . of all languages" (236). He digresses upon certain reality conscious forms of expression such as 'naturalism' and 'realism', yet refutes their total usefulness to convey a sense of the real. Agee doubts the naturalist's ability to assimilate the power of what music and poetry may achieve. Agee stipulates that "Words could, I believe, be made to do or to tell anything within human conceit. That is more than can be said of the instruments of any other art. But it must be added of words that they are the most inevitably inaccurate of all mediums of record and communication . . . " (235). Agee views this as the ultimate breakdown of the genre, and argues that

"'Description' is a word to suspect . . . Words cannot embody; they can only describe" (238).

For the third time, Agee attempts to describe George Gudger. His description is limited because he may only explain George Gudger as he knows him. He recognizes his inability to paint a more detailed portrait of an individual he has only known for a brief time. He admits that he is under no illusion that he is "wringing this piece of experience dry" (242). Agee can only write about what he has experienced. It is Agee's wish that the reader understand that "The truth about the sharecroppers was what it was; the writer could only distort it at best" (Frohock 219).

Clothing

"Clothing" is the most indicative section Let Us Now Praise Famous Men. Agee catalogues the clothes of the individual family members; the kind of attire they own and in what manner it is worn: daily work overalls, Sunday finery, shoes, hats, women's dresses, etc. Agee begins with George Gudger's Sunday apparel: underwear, wool striped trousers, freshly laundered and starched white shirt, tie, and hat, his one and only pair of socks and a sweater to replace a missing jacket. Gudger will sleep in his underwear this night, and during the rest of the week while his other pair is washed and prepared for next Sunday.

Women's makeup and toiletries are examined, and we learn that no self-respecting Southern country woman in good standing uses rouge or lipstick. The reader is informed that Saturday is the day to go to town, and that Annie Mae Gudger has no real Sunday dresses. Agee discusses the Ricketts's and Woods's Sunday rituals, and carry through to workday Monday morning. A complete itinerary of Gudger's work clothes is included -- "Overalls," "Shoes," and "Hats." "Three women's dresses" examines the women's work clothes, particularly Mrs. Woods's two work dresses made of fertilizer sacks.

Education

Agee next focuses his attention on "Education." Robert Coles argues a Rousseauian connection between this section and Emile. Like Rousseau, Agee has been referred to as a Romantic, "but he had no interest in isolating himself or anyone else from the surrounding society. His Let Us Now Praise Famous Men is a moral document, one of lasting merit . . . the reader becomes overwhelmed by the complexities of character and situation documented" (56).

Agee writes: "In every child who is born, under no matter what circumstances, and of no matter what parents, the potentiality of the human race is born again . . . " (291). This is ironic in light of the tenant farmers's situation. Agee explains the abuses of the educational

system concluding that the system is not completely at fault here, it is the individuals that lack the drive to excel. Agee admits that since school is not in session during his stay in Alabama, his research is inconclusive; although he discovers that the teachers are local women, for the most part, who are teaching due to circumstance rather than desire. These teachers may not be superior within their profession, however, it is still a question of the student's lack of incentive which impairs the education system. It is difficult to stress the importance of an education when there is work to be done and chores to be attended to. Agee states: "Their whole environment is such that the use of the intelligence, of the intellect, and of the emotions is atrophied, and is all but entirely irrelevant to the pressures and needs which involve almost every instant of a tenant's conscious living" (294-295).

Schools open in mid-September and close the first of May. Some children must walk great distances to get to the school bus, which arrives at 7:30 a.m., due to the poor clay terrain which is difficult for the bus to navigate. Agee includes illustrative models of a few educational textbooks. The Ricketts, the reader is told, are very poor students; George Gudger can read, spell and write his own name; Mrs. Gudger can read, write, spell and handle simple arithmetic. Overall, however, the tenant farmers are close to illiterate. Agee writes, "'Literacy' is to some people a

pleasing word: when 'illiteracy' percentages drop, many are pleased who formally were shocked, and think no more of it" (306). The reader is told that the tenant farmers write and spell hesitatingly, much as a child does.

Work

The need to acquire the basic necessities is explained as the reason for the backbreaking work the families must endure. Food, shelter, and clothing are all the farmers ask from a labor which lacks choice and offers few additional returns. In "(Selection from Part I," Agee writes: "The family exists for work. It exists to keep itself alive. It is a cooperative economic unit. The father does one set of tasks; the mother another; the children still a third, with the sons and daughters serving apprenticeship to their father and mother respectively. A family is called a force, without irony; and children come into the world chiefly that they may help with the work and that through their help the family may increase itself" (322). According to Agee, the three stages of work for the tenant farmer are: "First for his parents. Next for himself . . . Third, for himself and his wife and his family, under an employer" (322). The woman's role is that of care-giver, tending to her husband and family.

"Work 2: Cotton" examines the cotton crop, which demands more work from the tenant family and yields less

reward. Cotton is king and all the farmers and their families must serve this unwieldy ruler. It is their duty and obligation to begin plowing the land in February until the first of March, when the actual work commences. Agee recounts the entire process, from the breaking of ground to the anticipated harvest -- "Planting," "Cultivation," and "Picking Season." From the uncertain waiting period after 'laying by' to the backbreaking hot August picking time, Agee describes the entire process as a sexual metaphor, all building up to the resounding climax. Agee follows the 'simple and terrible work' each step of the way throughout the tenants's seasonal cycle.

This notion of sexual heightening seems to pervade the entire scope of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men as Agee progressively shows greater awareness of the truth hidden behind his original journalistic mandate. This truth was a vision of the nature of nobility. There is a definite sense of escalating intuition as Agee attempts to penetrate the surface facade of the tenant farmers, up to the ultimate 'burst' of being made truly aware. This harvest of vision mirrors the farmers's seasonal cycle and further illuminates Agee's passage from modernist ethnographer to postmodernist ethnographer.

Intermission: Conversation in the Lobby

"Intermission: Conversation in the Lobby" is like a

theatrical intermission, since Let Us Now Praise Famous Men functions as drama. According to Kenneth Seib, "the book divides into three parts which correspond to the three acts of a play. Agee even provides, in the opening pages, a cast of characters" (49). The section opens with Agee explaining a questionnaire he received in May 1939 from the *Partisan Review*. In the questionnaire writers are asked their views of American literature. Agee "was so outraged by the hoity-toity tone of the questionnaire that he decided to scald it in his book" (Hersey 77). Agee addresses each question candidly, expressing his views on writing. The section also includes a list of artists, musicians, writers and revolutionaries, much like Agee's "Dedication" to Permit Me Voyage. The manuscript for "Intermission: Conversation in the Lobby" was returned to Agee by Dwight Macdonald upon its original submission to *Fortune*, but that did not stop Agee from including it in Let Us Now Praise Famous Men.

Part Three: Inductions

In "Part Three: Inductions," Agee returns to the narrative, discussing life among the various family members in a section already explained in the preceding chapter as Agee's fourth "moment."

Agee describes his first impression of the Ricketts family: "I think it was that there was so much going on, so richly, and so disturbing: such a strangeness of meaning

and precariousness of balance, which I was wishing so much as never before to make secure; chiefly in one: in you, Mrs. Ricketts" (363). Consequently, Agee focuses on Mrs. Ricketts in the last quarter of the work. Agee wants to approach her, to comfort her, much as he did Emma Woods earlier. He writes: "I shall not forget you soon, your courtesy, your dreadful and unanswerable need; your manure-stained feet and legs as you stood in the path and smiled at us . . . " (363).

Next, Agee addresses Louise Gudger, aged 10, as the embodiment of innocence. She becomes emblematic of the beauty of youth -- a child in a pretty dress, with a ribbon in her hair, demonstrating all the hope and potential that will never have the opportunity to blossom. This precedes Agee's return visit to the Woods family, whom he calls "the shrewdest and the wisest." (370). He addresses Woods familiarly, and wishes to thank him for his hospitality.

"Reversion" finds Agee chanting his mantra: 'I remember so well, the first night I spent under one of these roofs.' The section recalls a Sunday Agee and Evans spent in Birmingham, as a respite from the intensity of the tenant farmer experience. Agee awaits Evans's arrival at the Hotel Tutwiler as he takes in the sights. Agee describes the loneliness of a Sunday morning spent in an unfamiliar place. A stream of consciousness passage recalls his solitary drive through town. Agee stops for lunch at a small eatery, as he

watches three local townspeople observe him. The so-called 'spy' concludes that "They looked at me with immediate and inevitable enmity. I looked back impersonally . . . " (381). In a confused digression, Agee discusses vehicular suicide, mirroring his own father's death, and foreshadowing A Death in the Family.

"Introit" returns Agee to the Gudger's farm, where he relates the thrill of watching an impending summer storm develop. In an impressionistic passage, Agee attempts to capture the entire episode in words; the sound of the wind on the water, the smell of the rain. There is a sense of urgency as George Gudger insists that all seek shelter indoors. Once again, Agee attempts to describe the interior of the house; the hearth, a picture portrait canvas of all the family members, as the storm outside gains intensity. Agee reflects on time past and time present, as he fixes his eye on Louise, who silently stares back at him. He wishes to view things through her eyes. The Gudgers ask Agee to spend the night, but he politely declines their invitation and proceeds to take Ricketts back home.

In "Second Introit" Agee regrets his decision to leave as the car bogs down in the wet clay and mud. Agee and Ricketts walk back to the Gudgers and apologize for disturbing them. Mrs. Gudger prepares dinner for them, as Agee describes the contents of the meal. When a piece of bread would suffice, she sets the table with "warmed-over

biscuit and butter and blackberry jam and a jelly-glass full of buttermilk, and warmed field peas, fried pork, and four fried eggs . . . " (413). Agee is touched by their kindness, as the enormity of the entire experience causes him to lose hold of reality. He writes: "And so in this quiet introit, and in all the time we have stayed in this house, and in all we have sought, and in each detail of it, there is so keen, sad, and precious a nostalgia as I can scarcely otherwise know; a knowledge of brief truancy into the sources of my life, whereto I have no rightful access, having paid no price beyond love and sorrow" (415).

Agee is given a room for the night, and his own tiredness is juxtaposed against the general tiredness of the Gudgers. He describes his thin-walled, skeletal and beautiful surroundings. Before sunrise, Gudger wakes Agee to go check his car which had bogged down in the mud the night before.

How Agee finally chose to present his observations was essential for the success of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men. Agee writes: "All this while we are talking some: short of exact recording, which is beyond my memory, I can hardly say how: the forms of these plainest and most casual actions are the hardest I can conceive of to set down straight as they happen . . . " (417). Agee volleyed between memory and stream of consciousness exposition in his work. He struggled to bridge the two forms of expression, admitting

at one point that "there followed a simple set of transitions which are beautiful in my remembrance and which I can scarcely set down . . . " (419). Agee was determined to present his experience intact, by using the language of 'reality.' Although Agee modestly dispelled his own, or any writer's, ability to work within the constraints of language, he realized the 'deftness, keenness, immediacy, speed and subtlety' of the 'reality' he attempted to reproduce.

Shady Grove Alabama

Two Images

Title Statement

"Shady Grove, Alabama, July, 1936" opens with a description of a graveyard littered with pine headboards. Agee is alone in the cemetery with nobody in sight. The first part of this section's concluding chapter ends with the "Lord's Prayer," in homage to the Christian souls, living and dead, whom Agee had encountered in Alabama. "Two Images" offers a brief description of Baby Squinchy Gudger, Annie Mae Gudger and Ellen Woods, asleep on the front porch. "Title Statement" concludes this chapter, simply stating the book's biblically inspired title in honor of all those who have passed on.

Notes and Appendices

Agee presents his final observations in "Notes and Appendices," which includes references to other books and reviews. This is followed by Agee's reiterating his belief in the value of the photograph. Random thoughts, concepts and definitions appendix the work, followed by a list of aphorisms from Blake's "Marriage of Heaven and Hell," emphasizing the sacred nature of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men. In its wide embrace of a 'doctrine of contraries,' and its radical exposition, like "Marriage of Heaven and Hell," Let Us Now Praise Famous Men is a visionary work in its own right. Agee concludes "Notes and Appendices" with the aphorism "Everything that is is holy" (459).

There may be a number of different ways in which one would call Agee a Blakeian, for instance they both share a Christian vision, they are both prophetic, they are both involved in Romantic vision, they are both extremely lyrical, they are both realists of a kind. However, if Agee anticipates the postmodern, as I believe, it would be illuminating to compare the ways in which Agee favors hybrid literary forms such as Blake used in the "Marriage of Heaven and Hell."

(On the Porch: 3

"(On the Porch: 3" "records the duet of foxes in the woods near the farmers' house. The duet builds and Agee --

rapt, clear, poised -- records it with some of the most powerful writing in the book. But at the climax of the animals' song, this power is diffused . . . Here language becomes effusive and hard to pin down; strong feeling has gotten the better of words" (DeCosse 491). Let Us Now Praise Famous Men ends with a stream of consciousness collage of dream imagery depicting Agee's tiredness -- 'thinking, analyzing, remembering' -- before finally drifting off to sleep.

Final Thoughts on Ethnographic Modernism

Ethnographic modernism allowed Agee the freedom to experiment with language and form. It also defined Let Us Now Praise Famous Men as a modernist text. When the experimentation goes far enough, its modernism begins to fall into ever increasing fragmentation and one could argue that a new, almost postmodern mindset emerges. At the very least we need to focus our attention on the problem of the ethnographer's independence. Alfred Barson argues that:

Agee has created a bifocal persona, a participant in the narration as well as a narrator of the participation, who fills the gap between the experience of the writer and the experience of the reader. Realizing the inadequacy of language and the devices of fiction to truly communicate the constituents of the experience, Agee's persona, eventually the narrator of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, is a moving center besieged by information attempting to account for the consistent variance between the subject and the object. (39)

This 'bifocal persona' comes to define a shift in paradigm.

The James Agee who originally went to Mills Hill in Hale County, Alabama with Walker Evans as an observer to document a family of white tenant farmers, emerges as a full participant in the ethnographic recording of the tenant farmers's story. As usual, Agee was aware of an uncertainty in his observational role. He writes:

I 'conceive of' my work as an effort to be faithful to my perceptions. I am not interested in 'expressing' 'myself' as an 'individual' except when it is suggested that I 'express' someone else. (356)

Let Us Now Praise Famous Men thus becomes

not only a report of the reflective self, but also a transcription of the processes of reflection: on the self, on the objects of its experience, and on its own report . . . The writing and the form of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men is an attempt to represent the 'richness and variety' of Agee's total consciousness of his experience from the time he received the assignment to the moment he read the galley sheets. (Barson 87-88)

This view with which I agree suggests strongly that Agee is a late modernist. I also believe that some of the most experimental passages in the book anticipate the even greater freedoms associated with postmodernism. However it seems most likely that Agee himself felt at home in the modernist world view, and this applies to his understanding of folklore and ethnography.

Conservatively, one can say that the book embodies Agee's struggle to accurately report his experience and succeeds as an example of ethnographic modernism, in Agee's own words, because

short of exact recording, which is beyond my memory, I can hardly say how: the forms of these plainest and most casual actions are the hardest I can conceive of to set down straight as they happen; and each is somewhat more beautiful and more valuable, I feel, than, say, the sonnet form.
(417)

Chapter 3: Mixed Voices, Mixed Effects

You were such a pretty dream, as I remember
You were young and strong and God was on your side
But the vision slowly faded like the wonder from your eyes
And you traded your compassion for your pride.
(Kris Kristofferson)

Agee's Experimentation with Literary Form

Agee entered Harvard's 1928 Fall semester. At Harvard he threw himself into writing, and was appointed to a position on the University's student newspaper. In 1929, his poem "Ann Garner" was published in the *Hound and Horn*, a prestigious Cambridge journal. It was his first work published outside of student publications. The poem received a favorable review, and was later included in Permit Me Voyage, Agee's 1934 collection of poetry.

While in college Agee contemplated a career in motion pictures. At Harvard he composed an essay regarding the end of the silent film era and the coming of 'talkies.' Alongside his literary idols, Agee began searching for, and finding, heroes behind the scenes in Hollywood. He admired Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton, and in 1949 he researched silent film comedians for a *Life* magazine article entitled "Comedy's Greatest Era." His love of motion pictures resulted in his becoming a movie critic for *Time* in 1939, and eventually going to Hollywood to write screenplays for The African Queen and The Night of the Hunter alongside

directors John Huston and Charles Laughton.

Agee's short fiction began appearing in *The Harvard Advocate* in 1928. During a break between his freshman and sophomore years, Agee embarked on a voyage across America. He paid his way by working as a day laborer in Oklahoma, Kansas and Nebraska, following the harvest from state to state. His ultimate destination was California, but it was the life experience itself that he acquired along the way that would prove invaluable, later to be incorporated into his fiction.

Agee was developing his own literary style, though, according to one critic, "Agee lacked, even more than other writers of our time, the traditional respect for genres" (Frohock 216). In the spring of 1930, Theodore Spencer, Agee's English Professor at Harvard, introduced him to an art and literary circle of creative talents. Dr. Arthur Percy Saunders of Hamilton College sponsored this group of luminaries at his home in Clinton, New York. Among the notable personalities in attendance were Robert Frost, I.A. Richards, B.F. Skinner, and actress Helen Hayes. That summer, Agee was also exposed to the teachings of fellow guest I.A. Richards. During his senior year at Harvard, Agee would fall under the influence of yet another great literary figure -- F.O. Matthiessen, author of American Renaissance.

During his final semester at Harvard Agee began work on

"John Carter," a satirical poem written in ottava rima that he hoped would reach a wider audience. It was modeled after Byron's "Don Juan," and parts of it would appear in *The Advocate*. He continued to work on it for the next four years, but abandoned the piece in 1936. In 1932 he published a parody of *Time* magazine in *The Harvard Advocate*, and the parody so impressed Henry Luce, the founder and publisher of *Time*, that he offered Agee a job. Agee felt fortunate, during these depression years, to acquire such a lucrative job.

He researched and wrote twenty-five articles for *Fortune*. According to John Hersey, Agee "had a reputation for having written, on assignment, a series of such relentlessly brilliant and quirky and subversive articles that Henry Luce and the editors of *Fortune* were obliged to scrap several of them" (72).

Agee's collection of poems, Permit Me Voyage, was published in 1934. Thanks to the patronage of Stephen Vincent Benet, who headed the Yale Younger Poets series of publications. Agee's poetry was awarded one of two honors in 1934, with the prize being publication of Permit Me Voyage, as part of the Yale Younger Poets series. The "Dedication" to Permit Me Voyage listed Agee's personal and literary influences: "Christ: Dante: Mozart: Shakspeare: Bach: Homer: Beethoven: Swift: the fathers of Holy Scripture: Shelley: Brahms: Rembrandt: Keats: Cezanne:

Gluck: Schubert: Lawrence: Van Gogh . . . " (Agee 16).

His friend Dwight Macdonald wrote that Agee's "best poetry is written in prose and is buried in his three books" (Macdonald 153). There was a restlessness of purpose within Agee which kept him continually volleying between genres. In letters written during this period, "he often seemed unsatisfied with merely conventional modes of writing -- the fictional and poetic forms which he mastered" (Kramer 21). Literary boundaries could not house Agee's creativity and therefore my dissertation examines what amounts to a struggle to break out of conventional discursive form.

Agee in the American Literary Tradition

Since Agee moved from genre to genre during his career, he found models within each discipline he explored. The different formal techniques Agee experimented with from his work for *The Harvard Advocate* reflect the wide array of techniques which shape Let Us Now Praise Famous Men. Agee later incorporated these diverse techniques into the ethnographic collage of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men.

From the beginning Agee's most admired forebears were the creative innovators and the radical new voices of earlier as well as contemporary literature. From Whitman and Thoreau's uniquely "American" writings, Agee learned how to use his imagination in order to craft poetry and prose in what John Hersey has called "a deep American vein of

dissent." Certainly Agee's sphere of influence would then naturally embrace such contemporaries or near-contemporaries as Sinclair Lewis, Sherwood Anderson, Hart Crane, Faulkner and Steinbeck. All of these writers shared a deep empathy and passion for the underdog, and all believed fervently that a cultural regeneration was possible and desperately needed. They focused upon and ultimately revealed the hidden truths behind cultural facades. They clung to the hope that a collective good could be realized through the illumination of economic realities. In this sense Agee belongs among the ranks of dissenters.

Agee therefore shares the interests of two groups of American writers. He owes to such classic nineteenth century authors as Emerson, Thoreau and Whitman a commitment to the individual, a kind of spiritual nationalism, and a deep involvement with language. In twentieth-century contemporaries like Hart Crane and William Faulkner, Agee found models for how he could write about his own world, with its dramatic economic and technological transformations, while holding onto a vision of what America might be.

Whitman

Agee's development of Whitman's poetic experimentation in his own poetry and prose works helps the reader gain an insight into Agee's experimental use of evocative language.

In 1927, Agee wrote a letter to Father Flye regarding his exhilaration upon the discovery of Leaves of Grass. He explained how the work had a cathartic effect upon him, stating:

I've been reading Leaves of Grass since I came back. You know, since last winter or so I've been feeling something -- a sort of universal -- oh, I don't know, feeling the beauty of everything, not excluding slop-jars and foetuses -- and a feeling of love for everything -- and now I've run into Walt Whitman -- and it seems as if I'd dived into a sort of infinitude of beautiful stuff -- all the better (for me) because it was just what has been knocking at me unawares. (34)

By 1934, Agee's high regard for Whitman would alter but not before Whitman's writings would have a profound effect upon him. In his writings, Agee was a proponent of Whitman's technique of mixing the real and the lyrical.

Agee's "Dedication," Part II of Permit Me Voyage, has been called by Frohock "a sort of declamatory prose; and . . . a wilful parade of eccentricity." The "Dedication" is closer to prose than poetry in form, and strategically names Whitman directly after family and alongside Twain, Lardner and Lincoln in inspirational worth.

Peter Ohlin writes: "To Whitman, the poem is *literally* the world, rather than as in most poets the selective embodiment of an already existing world. Therefore, the poem does not refer to an act of perception, but constitutes in itself that perception . . . "(38). Agee's goal as a writer was to embody experience into a language of 'reality.' He would experiment with this method in his

early poetry, and later develop it further in the prose of
Let Us Now Praise Famous Men. Agee writes:

It is simply an effort to use words in such a way that they will tell as much as I want to and can make them tell of a thing which happened and which, of course, you have no other way of knowing. It is in some degree worth your knowing what you can of not because you have any interest in me but simply as the small part it is of human experience in general.

It is one way of telling the truth: the only possible way of telling the kind of truth I am here most interested to tell. (246)

Like Whitman, Agee would strive to enter his own work and become a part of the experience. Agee viewed the American experience with passion and wonder, yet felt no trepidation in entering his own narrative and chastising the American public for not caring as much for the underdog as he did. Ohlin refers to this as 'the poet's radical subjectivity' which supports a frequently dissenting world view.

Agee catalogued the names of persons, places and objects throughout his various poems and Let Us Now Praise Famous Men. For example, "Intermission: Conversation in the Lobby" contains the following list of 'usable people':

Christ: Blake: Dostoyevsky: Brady's photographs:
 everybody's letters: family albums: postcards:
 Whitman: Crane: Melville: Cummings: Kafka: Joyce:
 Malraux: Gide: Mann: Beethoven: Eisenstein:
 Dovschenko: Chaplin: Griffith: von Stroheim:
 Miller: Evans: Cartier: Levitt: Van Gogh: race
 records: Swift: Celine: (353)

This list reiterates the list of influences from the
 "Dedication" to Permit Me Voyage and shows Agee trying to
 work up a literary ancestry for himself. He does so in an

almost incantatory way, reciting the names as if they possess a magic power. This ritualistic 'magical quality' of listing allows Agee to draw the reader into the experience by giving points of reference.

The poetry of 'reality' is suffused in Leaves of Grass's "Starting From Paumanok," in passages such as the one that invokes Indian names:

Okonee, Koosa, Ottawa, Monongahela, Sauk, Natchez,
Chattahoochee, Kagueta, Oronoco,
Wabash, Miami, Saginaw, Chippewa, Oshkosh, Walla-
walla . . . (Section 16)

These are all rhythmic and descriptive, in much the same way Agee catalogued the names of his literary influences at the time. In "Dedication," from Permit Me Voyage, Agee writes:

To those who, living, are soon to die: and
especially to Via my wife, and to my sister Emma
and to David Preston her husband, and to Gladys
Lamar Agee my father's mother; and to Hugh Tyler,
and to Paula Tyler, and to Erskine Wright, priest
. . . To Mark Twain; to Walt Whitman; to Ring
Lardner; to Hart Crane; to Abraham Lincoln; . . .
(17).

Names were a magical means of expression for Agee, helping to form a bridge between art and life.

Another similarity between Whitman and Agee, according to Ohlin, is that both conceive of their poetic works in metaphors of the body and of musical composition. The musicality of Agee's poetry and prose often echoes the cadences of the long lines and occasional internal rhymes of Whitman's free verse. In both writers, the words flow into a cohesive pattern of verbal imagery.

For example, the section of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men that describes the Gudger house as if it were a human being is imbued with the type of sexual language that Agee admired in Whitman. The passage consists of a grouping of sense-oriented objects presented in warm human tones:

It is not entirely otherwise now, in this inhuman solitude, the nakedness of this body which sleeps here before me, this tabernacle upon whose desecration I so reverentially proceed: yet it differs somewhat: for there is here no open sexual desire, no restiveness, nor despair. (137)

Agee's frankness mirrors Whitman's confessional language and bodily themes, although Agee claimed that Let Us Now Praise Famous Men was not a confessional text. He argued: "I am not interested in 'expressing' 'myself' as an 'individual' except when it is suggested that I 'express' someone else" (356).

In Let Us Now Praise Famous Men Agee writes:

I would say too that there is a purity in this existence in and as 'beauty,' which can so scarcely be conscious of itself and its world as such, which is inevitably lost in consciousness, and that this is a serious loss.

But so are resourcefulness against deceit and against strangling: and so are pleasure, and joy, and love: and a human being who is deprived of these and of this consciousness is deprived almost of existence itself. (315)

Let Us Now Praise Famous Men required a language that would appeal to both the educated reader as well as the tenant farmer the book was dedicated to. The problem remained,

If the book were directed solely to the tenant farmer, many passages would end up being dull or

even offensive. And if he were writing in order to do injury -- and that was one of the main intentions of the book -- it would be better to address himself to intellectual readers as well as to the defenseless farmers. (Moreau 167)

Agee appeared to be sensitive to the differences between himself and the tenant farmers. He admitted, "I could not wish of any one of them that they should have had the 'advantages' I have had: a Harvard education is by no means an unqualified advantage" (311). Consequently, Let Us Now Praise Famous Men consists of language direct enough to be understood by the least educated, and poetic passages that would appeal to the most learned.

Barson argues Ohlin's theory that Whitman was a major influence on Agee, though a short-lived one. He refers to a letter Agee wrote to Dwight Macdonald in May 1929, in response to a review Macdonald had written regarding Agee's poem "Ann Garner." Agee wrote:

I went through the W. Whitman stage about a year ago; and he seems generally half-assed to me now, wherever I open the book. My first reaction to your criticism was: 'Yes, - but at the time it was the best thing that could possibly happen to American writing' . . . I don't believe Walt had a hell of a lot of influence: but I still enjoy the idea of such stuff appearing when it did. I think if you boiled some of his stuff down and expressed it decently you'd get a few damned fine pictures and poetry: he was sometimes more than an ecstatic young gent flexing his thighs and letting the wind tear up his hair. (Barson 18-19)

Barson believes that Agee's ultimate rejection of Whitman

was based on the reevaluation of Agee's literary ideals under the pressure of having to find his own voice and style. Rather than be indebted, he rejected his most influential literary forebears. Ironically, Agee incorporated Whitman's principles in his later works, especially Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, in its epic language and imagery.

The issue of Agee's shifting allegiance to Whitman may rest in the notion that at the time Agee wrote his response to Macdonald, he did not fundamentally admire Whitman as a poet, but rather as a visionary. Whitman felt that the United States itself was the greatest poem. However, in the 1930's the great poem that was America was visibly ailing, and by diagnosing the sickness and prescribing a cure, Agee appeared to be championing the potential for healing.

Emerson and Thoreau

Agee believed that the reader must bring to the work not only his eyes, but his ears as well, "not only his intellect, but his entire being" (Moreau 187). For Agee, this could only be achieved by continually provoking the reader's interest -- holding "his attention, appealing by turns to his mind, his sensitivity, his moral and artistic senses" (ibid.). Agee's writing depends on a receptiveness to the sensory world based on continual acts of perception, and this dependency is indebted to the theories of the

American transcendentalists. Agee writes in "(On the Porch: 2":

'Description' is a word to suspect.
Words cannot embody; they can only describe.
But a certain kind of artist, whom we will
distinguish from others as a poet rather than a
prose writer, despises this fact about words or
his medium, and continually brings words as near
as he can to an illusion of embodiment. (238)

Agee's belief that "Words cannot embody; they can only describe" directly parallels Emerson (238). In "Nature" Emerson writes,

A man can only speak, so long as he does not feel his speech to be partial and inadequate. It is partial, but he does not see it to be so, whilst he utters it. As soon as he is released from the instinctive and particular, and sees its partiality, he shuts his mouth in disgust. For, no man can write anything, who does not think that what he writes is for the time the history of the world; or do anything well, who does not esteem his work to be of importance. (321)

Agee felt restricted by what he viewed as the limitations of language and wished to use what he calls the "language of 'reality'":

The language of 'reality' (in the sense of 'reality' we are trying to speak of here) may be the most beautiful and powerful but certainly it must in any case be about the heaviest of all languages. That it should have and impart the deftness, keenness, immediacy, speed and subtlety of the 'reality' it tries to reproduce, would require incredible strength and trained skill on the part of the handler (236)

As a result of what Agee had witnessed in Alabama he needed to ponder a cause and effect. He ultimately was unable to find the fault in man, for like Emerson he always adhered to mankind's ultimate goodness, and instead Agee

found fault with the social order which allowed such suffering to take place. In "A Definition" Agee explained the tenant farmer:

The generic word for tenant is tenant. In the vicinity of which we tell, however, and, it appears, generally throughout the south, the word is used to designate only one of the two chief classes of tenant, that is the man who, as distinguished from the man who owns nothing save, perhaps, some furniture, one or two eating or hunting animals, and the clothes on his back, owns a mule and some farm implements and who, not needing to be furnished these, can arrange to yield less of his two major crops in payment of rent to the landowner.

One name for the other chief sort of tenant, the man who, owning neither mule nor implements, must be furnished these as well as land and shelter, and must pay the landowner half his cotton and a third to half his corn, is sharecropper. (454)

Emerson verbalized Agee's regard for the tenant farmer as worker and laborer in "Nature" when he wrote:

We cannot bandy words with nature, or deal with her as we deal with persons. If we measure our individual forces against hers, we may easily feel as if we were the sport of an insuperable destiny. But if, instead of identifying ourselves with the work, we feel that the soul of the workman streams through us, we shall find the peace of the morning dwelling first in our hearts, and the fathomless powers of gravity and chemistry, and, over them, of life, preexisting within us in their highest form. (324)

Agee emulated the way Henry David Thoreau catalogued, listed and outlined the basic necessities for living in Walden. Similarly, Thoreau's Journals -- a massive body of "research" -- provide many examples of ethnographic modernism and "force us through the use of words and things to the only reality that signifies, they show he was a poet

to the marrow" (Ruland and Bradbury 126). In the November 12, 1851 entry of the Journals, Thoreau suggests the reader "Write often, write upon a thousand themes, rather than long at a time, not trying to turn too many feeble somersets in the air, -- and so come down upon your head at last" (Baym 1857). Similarly, in the July 14, 1852 entry of the Journals Thoreau says "A writer who does not speak out of a full experience uses torpid words, wooden or lifeless words, such words as 'humanitary,' which have a paralysis in their tails" (Baym 1858).

Thoreau approached language as a Romantic poet does, and Walden embodied Thoreau's most realized powers of description. Thoreau moved from the non-interfering modernism of the Journals to the postmodern narrative of Walden, where his subjective voice could distinctly be heard. Similarly, Agee underwent the same shift in paradigm during the writing process of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men.

The strange ethnography of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men parallels Walden and reveals Thoreau as Agee's ethnographic precursor. The similarities between Walden and Let Us Now Praise Famous Men include listings -- the cost of crops in the "Economy" and "Bean-Field" chapters of Walden, Agee's listing of the tenant farmers's clothes etc. in Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, the inclusion of verses of poetry in the "Economy," "Baker Farm," "Higher Law," "House-Warming," and "The Ponds" chapters of Walden, and Agee's lyrics located

throughout Let Us Now Praise Famous Men. Agee's language echoes Thoreau's and Agee's description of George Gudger and his family in the "(On the Porch: 2" chapter of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men mirrors Thoreau's description of John Field in the "Baker Farm" chapter in Walden. Thoreau writes:

An honest, hard-working man plainly was John Field; and his wife, she too was brave to cook so many successive dinners in the recesses of that lofty stove; with round greasy face and bare breast, still thinking to improve her condition one day; with the never absent mop in one hand, and yet no effects of it visible anywhere. (139)

The theme of country dwellers and the description of structures of shelter in Walden also parallels Let Us Now Praise Famous Men. Thoreau writes in the "Where I Lived" chapter of Walden:

The only house I had been the owner of before, if I except a boat, was a tent, which I used occasionally when making excursions in the summer, and this is still rolled up in my garret; but the boat, after passing from hand to hand, has gone down the stream of time. With this more substantial shelter about me, I had made some progress toward settling in the world. (62)

Thoreau's language in this passage is reminiscent of Agee's when he describes a tenant farmer's home in the "Shelter" chapter of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men:

It is put together out of the cheapest available pine lumber, and the least of this is used which shall stretch a skin of one thickness alone against the earth and air; and this is all done according to one of the three or four simplest, stingiest, and thus most classical plans contrivable, which are all traditional to that country. . . (142)

Another example of Thoreau and Agee's similar language is found in Thoreau's description of the rabbits and partridges in the "Winter Animals" chapter of Walden and Agee's description of the foxes at the conclusion of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men. Thoreau writes:

What is a country without rabbits and partridges? They are among the most simple and indigenous animal products; ancient and venerable families known to antiquity as to modern times; of the very hue and substance of Nature, nearest allied to leaves and to the ground, -- and to one another; it is either winged or it is legged. (188)

This resembles Agee's passage:

In the sound of these foxes, if they were foxes, there was nearly as much joy, and less grief. There was the frightening joy of hearing the world talk to itself, and the grief of incommunicability. In that grief I am now as then, with the small yet absolute comfort of knowing that communication of such a thing is not only beyond possibility but irrelevant to it. . . (469)

Hart Crane

Hart Crane's The Bridge has often been viewed as a twentieth-century continuation of Leaves of Grass. Both works represent a symbolic quest for a sense of order in an increasingly confusing America and draw attention preeminently to language itself. Both works, moreover, hold out to the reader the prospect of regeneration and redemption, to be achieved through the saving intonations of the poet. The Bridge places the reader in a postwar urban 'waste land,' where the poet is a savior and redeemer, offering hope to those who heed his ecstatic parables.

The chaotic landscape of The Bridge is reminiscent of T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land," and aims for a similarly epic scope. Both Crane and Agee acknowledged the "waste land" of twentieth-century civilization, but unlike Eliot both were determined to discover a means of renewal, of "breeding lilacs out of the dead land" (Eliot 29). Despite a disorderly life, Crane never lost hope in American life and in human nature. He declaimed in "Voyages II":

O minstrel galleons of Carib fire,
Bequeath us to no earthly shore until
Is answered in the vortex of our grave
The seal's wide spindrift gaze toward paradise.

Like Whitman, Crane envisioned a paradise, albeit one not devoid of pain and suffering. This became Agee's ideal as well, always persevering, and always placing his faith in mankind.

Agee was influenced by Crane's poetic travels through space and time, in search of a connection with God and humanity. Crane's ambivalent desire to retreat from the confinements and excitements of the city strongly parallels Agee's constant yearning to return to the Southern soil of his uncluttered early childhood. It was only in such a pastoral setting, as Emerson and Thoreau intimated, that a religious tranquility could be achieved. Whitman's voyaging on the open road corresponds to the ceaseless motion of The Bridge, and Agee's pilgrimage southward in Let Us Now Praise Famous Men.

Both writers appeared to be in cultural turmoil, lost

between two geographic locales: Crane between the Middle West and the East, and Agee between the South and the Northeast. Ironically, it was this very sense of rootlessness which would imbue their respective works with a sense of time and place. Viewing the United States from the perspective of detached citizens, not relegated to one locale, allowed Crane and Agee to imbue their works with a visionary impulse. They could capture and record both the pastoral and the urban movements of America.

Like Whitman, Crane and Agee desired to experience the actual events and report upon their findings. The notion that poetry emerged from the living experience was accepted by all three writers.

In "Voyages III," the prevailing notion is one of life realized as the fulfillment of love, where death is mentioned only to be denied. The line which Agee borrows -- "permit me voyage, love, into your hands" -- reveals Agee's placing his faith in the guidance of another, and in this case it may be Hart Crane himself in whom Agee places his faith.

Perhaps the primary connection between Agee and Crane is the religiosity of their poems. Permit Me Voyage represented on Agee's part an acceptance of the poet's role "and an expression of hope to 'herald' God" (Kramer 51). Furthermore, the religious nature of Permit Me Voyage is not strictly Judeo-Christian, but rather follows an Emersonian

ideal which seeks the truth in the form of an omnipresent godhead. It is this same notion of an omnipresent godhead which ushers Crane upon his journey across the Brooklyn Bridge in search of a common, shared destiny for modern man rooted in the pre-Christian past.

The reader becomes a participant who travels along with the poet, and in the process witnesses the fallen condition of the modern world by looking back upon idyllic scenes from a more innocent time. The Bridge becomes symbolic of a promise, and a promise unfulfilled.

The Bridge is a meditation upon the changing American landscape, evoking a sense of the past in order to illuminate the modern American scene. Crane's language, like Agee's, is experimental as the mood alternates between disillusionment and optimism. Like Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, the work is woven out of the "language of 'reality,'" as Agee called it, and is laced with a belief in the possibility of regeneration.

Like Crane, Agee devised a language to help the reader experience what he was experiencing. In Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, Agee wanted the reader to become a participant, just as Crane did, "standing alone, peering out across vast distances, journeying in imagination between two separated worlds, hoping to join the envisioned splendor of the one to the known actuality of the other . . . " (Lewis 256).

Consequently, there is a division between the world of

the past and the present, the real and the mythic. In Let Us Now Praise Famous Men Agee writes:

A 'usable past'? (The polite substitute for 'tradition.' Academic; philosophic; critics' language.) Beethoven 'used' the 'past': but do you think he ever sat down to wonder, What am I using: What is useful? (352)

In "Cape Hatteras," the journeying poet has returned to his homeland where Crane, like Whitman before him and Agee after him, attempts to record the living experience. This section anticipates Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, especially the passage where Crane writes:

'Recorders ages hence' -- ah, syllables of faith!
Walt, tell me, Walt Whitman, if infinity
Be still the same as when you walked the beach.
(Lines 47-49)

Thus, both Crane and Agee attempt to develop a connection with Whitman as spiritual predecessor and future visionary.

Edmund Wilson argued that the development of language beyond its theme was characteristic of a whole group of contemporary American poets, and certainly this group would include Crane and Agee. Agee's "career was partially formed by the Great Depression and World War II, and his entire generation might have developed differently under changed economic and social conditions" (Kramer 156). Like Crane, and other contemporary writers, Agee was interested in the subject matter as a means of recreating ancient myth and folk legend in contemporary poetic language. Agee's own Crane-derived poem "Permit Me Voyage" may appear unfinished, "with one unrhymed line as a gangplank toward the future"

(Ohlin 48). Agee would successfully build his own bridge between his early poetry and later lyrical prose.

American Regionalism

Alfred Kazin argues that Sinclair Lewis and Sherwood Anderson are the forebears of regional realism by asking, "who up to Sherwood Anderson in Winesburg, Ohio (1919) had written so penetratingly of the undersurface of life in small towns? Who up to Sinclair Lewis in Main Street (1920) had written with so much necessary bitter truth about the ugliness and timidity of the conventional surface life of that world" (197). Agee wished to penetrate that 'surface life' in his own prose.

It was this new regionalism which, originating in the eighties and nineties, finally emerged as a liberating force in American literature at the turn of the century. Regionalist literature was rooted in the Post War American experience as a domestic revolt,

instinctive, rambling and garrulous, and homespun . . . a realism concerned not with the conflict of great social forces that had dominated the first naturalist generation, but with the sights and sounds of the common life, with transcriptions of the average experience, with reproducing, sometimes parodying, but always participating in, the whole cluster of experiences which made up the native culture. (Kazin 206-207)

In its concern for local culture, this new realism emerged in the language and speech of the mid-westerners Lewis and Anderson depicted and in the Southern experience

Faulkner and Agee explored. Agee's experimental prose was a product of this new realism, for it was rooted in the frankness of a reportorial way of writing which candidly exposed the American experience. Regionalism involved a quest for the truth of American life, and "to know the truth . . . was to rise in some fashion above its prohibitions; to recognize the tragedy so often ignored in common-place lives to lead to a healthy self-knowledge" (Kazin 209). Agee writes:

The land, pale fields, black cloudy woodlands, and the late lamps in the central streets of the rare and inexpressible cities: New Orleans; Birmingham; whose facades stand naked in the metal light of their fear:

the land, in its largeness: stretches: is stretched: (85)

Edmund Wilson regarded Anderson's style as "closer to the poet than to that of the writer of fiction" (91), a description easily applicable to Agee as well. Wilson argued that:

It is a habit of Mr. Anderson's to divest his characters of their incidentals, their furniture, their houses, their clothes, their ordinary social relations; and he produces in the best of his stories an impression of classic simplicity. (92)

Agee fits Wilson's definition of Sinclair Lewis as an 'exposer of the spiritual poverty of America.' He also adheres to H. L. Mencken's notion of the universal qualities of Main Street, as being analogous of every small town in America, regardless of geographic locale.

Where Lewis indicted the American people in his satiric

exposes, Agee looked more sympathetically upon these individuals and their cultural predicament. Wilson argues that Lewis's fiction lacks beauty of style, and reveals nothing new about life. Agee discovered a way to imbue his prose with a measure of beauty. Both Agee and Lewis were 'documentors' exposing an underside to society through their prose and fiction. A difference was that Lewis pointed an accusatory finger at the American social structure, while Agee preferred to empathize with the individuals, believing that change was possible.

Cowley wrote that Anderson's Midwestern tales "were not incidents or episodes, they were *moments*, each one of them so timeless that it contained a whole life" (222). In the chapter from Winesburg, Ohio entitled "The Teacher," Kate Swift reminds her former student, George Willard, the reporter for the Winesburg Eagle, that: "You must not become a mere peddler of words. The thing to learn is to know what people are thinking about, not what they say" (163). This is the same ethnography Agee explored in his description of Emma Woods in Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, and Rufus meeting the great, great grandmother in A Death in the Family. These were Agee's *moments* that contained a whole life. Like Anderson's, they "were moments, in general, without a sequel; they existed separately and timelessly" (Cowley 225).

A further parallel exists between Agee and Anderson in

the way that both writers approached the inhabitants of small towns. Anderson explored the effects of the Great Depression on America in his book Puzzled America, and in a series of essays which featured dramatic photographs, such as Home Town. Stott argues that "Badly presented though they are, the photographs still are more interesting than Anderson's text to Home Town" (233). Regardless, Anderson "was the first reporter of the thirties to travel America and document what he found without trying to change it radically" (Stott 234). Anderson traveled across the country observing the various inhabitants and their living conditions. His articles reported firsthand upon the lives of "mill-workers, tenant farmers, the unemployed, the plain, simple people of the United States" (Stott 246). Consequently, Anderson's reporting was a precursor to Agee's more experimental ethnographic docudrama. Both men had a resolute faith in America and lacked any political convictions. Anderson may have sentimentalized his subject, but he "insisted, as did Agee, that reality was untellable" (Stott 249).

The literary prose of the thirties encompassed a new form of social realism. In his novels and short fiction William Faulkner focused primarily upon the townspeople he knew and lived among in Oxford, Mississippi, the 'Jefferson' of his future novels. Through his fiction Faulkner discovered his place in the social order, revealing a

romantic and self-complacent pessimism toward the South, expressed in his greatest fiction. Alfred Kazin wrote that Faulkner "admired the South, loathed it, wept for it, enjoyed it, lived in it; but he could not imagine an order of experience fundamentally different from it" (456).

Like Agee, Faulkner realized the romantic potential of Southern regionalism, rooted in its embrace of tradition, family, and class distinctions. Agee poetically expressed his more nostalgic Southern views in Let Us Now Praise Famous Men:

Why we make this book, and set it at large, and by what right, and for what purpose, and to what good end, or none: the whole memory of the South in its six-thousand-mile parade and flowering outlay of the facades of cities, and of the eyes in the streets of towns, and of hotels, and of the trembling heat, and of the wide wild opening of the tragic land, wearing the trapped frail flowers of its garden of faces. . . (9)

Like Agee, Faulkner used language to suggest the intensity of his feelings about the South. Faulkner's language is poetic and often full of suggestive sensory details. Agee's language is poetic too, but unlike Faulkner Agee takes the extra step and actually includes poetry in Let Us Now Praise Famous Men. Moreover, the very design of the book of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, it can be argued, is essentially poetic rather than novelistic. Let Us Now Praise Famous Men includes various pieces of lyrical verse, hallucinatory passages, and lacks a defined narrative. Also, it is poetic rather than novelistic because the book's

subject matter is secondary to the experimental language and form of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men. Faulkner's novels are linked together by what Kazin calls a "sensational lyricism," bringing to life a culture which both Agee and Faulkner felt inexorably bound to for better or worse.

Where Faulkner held to the Naturalist ethic of lacking faith in reform, of an individual or society, Agee believed that reform was possible. Faulkner's characters are submissive to their fate, Agee's less so. Both writers cared deeply for these rural individuals, and as Cowley said of Faulkner, both loved "these people created in the image of the land" (345). Cowley sums up both Agee and Faulkner, when he refers to Faulkner as a 'bardic poet in prose,' setting out to observe the actions and character in Shakespearean fashion, fitting them into the framework of his story and creating myths that he weaves together into a legend of the South. Whether it is Faulkner's mythical kingdom of Yoknapatawpha County or Agee's epic recording of the culture of the inhabitants of Hale County, Alabama, the legend of the South is preserved and passed down in all of its imperfect splendor.

Steinbeck

The South was not the only region to develop its literary identity during the twenties and thirties. John Steinbeck focused upon California's Salinas Valley as an

example of the small town during the Depression years and beyond. He was searching for a "usable past," as Agee called it. Unlike Agee, Steinbeck was not an experimental writer, although his great possession, according to Kazin, was "an unusual and disinterested simplicity, a natural grace and tenderness and ease in his relation to his California world" (394).

Like Agee, Steinbeck had a great faith in humanity. He saw the potential for the individual to overcome his societal constraints, and was able to arouse a sense of compassion in himself and the reader concerning the plight of the disenfranchised. He identified with the Joads's predicament and empathized with their degradation, although "He did not confuse the issue in The Grapes of Wrath; he was aroused by the man-made evil the Okies had to suffer, and he knew it was something remediable by men" (Kazin 396).

Steinbeck betrayed his objectivity by pitying his characters, and at times over-sentimentalizing their story. Agee successfully fought the temptation to pity the tenant farmers in Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, as well as the desire to politicize his writing. Steinbeck couldn't hide his socialist sympathies, nor his political views. H. L. Mencken wrote, regarding The Grapes of Wrath, that it was "well-written, but . . . full of the damndest political hoey (sic) ever heard" (388).

The Grapes of Wrath was the thirties novel most closely

related to documentary, just as Let Us Now Praise Famous Men was a response and revision upon the documentary paradigm. The Grapes of Wrath, published three years prior to Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, presented facts and statistics disguised as fiction, while Let Us Now Praise Famous Men stripped away all but the most minimal disguise from the social realities it presents. Both Steinbeck and Agee lived their research and both created epic works in different genres.

The Grapes of Wrath's tie to documentary extends back to the fact that Steinbeck started out not to write a novel but a documentary book, text with pictures. "Steinbeck toured Okie camps in California with *Life* photographer Horace Bristol, planning to do a *Life* article and book with pictures" (Stott 122). This notion did not escape Agee, who feared that Steinbeck may have already exhausted the topic. In retrospect, the reader may appreciate the similarities and differences in these two works. The following chapter will directly address the specifics of thirties documentary reporting and Let Us Now Praise Famous Men as an example of the experimental new form of docudrama.

Chapter 4: "The Human Document": Agee's Docudrama in an Age of Documentary

If you ain't got the Do Re Mi, boys,
 if you ain't got the Do Re Mi,
 Well, you better go back to beautiful Texas,
 Oklahoma, Georgia, Kansas, Tennessee,
 California is a Garden of Eden,
 it's a paradise to live in or see,
 But believe it or not, you won't find it so hot
 If you ain't got the Do Re Mi. (Woody Guthrie)

While it has been at times labeled documentary reporting, Let Us Now Praise Famous Men leans more closely toward what we call "docudrama." Scholars and critics such as William Stott have acknowledged Let Us Now Praise Famous Men as a classic documentary work of the 1930's "because it culminates the central rhetoric of the time, and explodes it, surpasses it, shows it up" (x). This chapter examines how Let Us Now Praise Famous Men differs from the documentary literature of the time, specifically Erskine Caldwell and Margaret Bourke-White's You Have Seen Their Faces, Paul Taylor and Dorothea Lange's An American Exodus and John Dollard's study Caste and Class in a Southern Town.

Documentary vs. Docudrama

The basis of docudrama is rooted in the transcription of the "human document," as Stott refers to it. The "human document" is "not objective but thoroughly personal . . . a human document carries and communicates feeling, the raw material of drama" (Stott 7). The human document is the

result of an intimate documentation of a particular form of life. Stott quotes Judith Crist, who defines documentary as "a sense of small people sharing the universal burden of existence" (6).

The roots of documentary extend back to John Grierson, a British film producer who was the first to use the term documentary in his 1926 *New York Sun* review of Robert Flaherty's Moana. Stott believes that Grierson selected the word documentary because the French had used the term "documentarie" to mean travelogue. These writers and photographers were travelers, who traveled to isolated regions of the world to study the life and culture. In this regard, "the essence of documentary is not information, as Grierson first thought . . . the essence, rather, is the same power to move that Grierson had all along sought in Hollywood's films" (Stott 11).

This is where the photograph becomes an indispensable tool of communication for the documentary writer. The visual element seems to animate and authenticate the written word. Agee wrote:

The photographs are not illustrative. They, and the text, are coequal, mutually independent, and fully collaborative. By their fewness, and by the importance of the reader's eye, this will be misunderstood by most of that minority which does not wholly ignore it. In the interests, however, of the history and future of photography, that risk seems irrelevant, and this flat statement necessary. (xlvii)

The imagery and emotion generated through film is an

integral part of 1930's documentary literature. Agee acknowledged Robert Flaherty's Nanook of the North as an essential work within the genre, which he recommended in an essay reproduced in Agee on Film. Regarding Flaherty's study of Eskimo life, Agee wrote, "Nanook has a beautiful simplicity, cheer, and hardiness which no subsequent documentary has improved on, and which most have lost or perverted" (228).

While researching Nanook of the North, Flaherty wrote a diary of his travels entitled "My Eskimo Friends." Nanook of the North is a "real-life" depiction of the Eskimo culture. Flaherty reenacts certain episodes in Eskimo life and films them, essentially creating a docudrama as opposed to a documentary. "In historical terms 'Nanook of the North' was a costume picture, as in far cruder terms the wild west shows of Buffalo Bill Cody were" (Calder-Marshall 85). Flaherty took liberties with his subject matter, posing and arranging the Eskimos much as Agee changed names and played with the reality of the lives of the tenant farmers.

Both Flaherty and Agee presented the essence of the experience, embellishing and enhancing through the medium of artistic style. Docudrama has negative connotations, seen as a manipulative and often mendacious art-form, lacking the prestige of the real. Through docudrama, however, artists like Agee and Flaherty attempt to arrive at some truer

apprehension of the real by trying to record and relate experience in heightened, idealized and condensed form.

Walker Evans's photographs, on the other hand, because of inherent qualities of the photographic medium, are vouchsafed by actuality. The photographs are of shacks, fields, towns, outbuildings, schools, barren rooms, roads, and above all people. The faces of the people are blank, sad, weather-beaten, resilient. Evans's photographs show a people who are not defeated, and this is why the phrase "Famous Men" in the title is apt. Evans photographs a heroic people who do not submit to their fate.

As a radical text attacking the economic system of the nineteen thirties, Let Us Now Praise Famous Men at the same time exonerates the tenant farmers and the South as a whole from any blame for this economic breakdown. While it is certainly difficult to imagine a purely truth telling text, Let Us Now Praise Famous Men comes very close to presenting the actuality of the tenant farming system, certainly much closer than the other so-called documentary books of the day, such as You Have Seen Their Faces and An American Exodus.

What is at issue here is what we take to be political. In light of the postmodern view, simply the act of Evans's selection of which photographs to include, and which to exclude, limits the documentary ideal of pure truth. Gathering, if not posing, the tenant farmers to be

photographed, becomes an act of selective choice in postmodern ethnography. Despite this notion, Evans continually denied any political agenda on his part in presenting the faces and landscape of Hale County. Agee maintained the same lack of political motive in the writing of the text. Evans's objectivity is maintained by his refraining from capturing and exploiting the pity and pathos of the farmers and steadfastly leaving their dignity intact.

The people in the photographs bravely face the camera lens and never appear intimidated or ashamed. In the photograph of Bud Woods on the twenty-eighth page of the photograph section of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, there is even a sense of ease with the camera as he appears to almost smile for the photographer. Woods appears in five photographs, more than anyone else. A few of the other adults attempt to smile for the camera, but only one child smiles, the rest appear more stoic or serious.

Where Woods appears haggard and tired, the picture of George Gudger, on page two in the photographs section, reveals a ruggedly handsome individual with a neatly trimmed beard, leathery tanned skin and narrow eyes, whose poverty is masked except for a tattered shirt, torn on the left shoulder. On the facing page is a portrait of his wife, Annie Mae, against a wooden background, appearing more ill at ease than her husband. One of the most shocking photographs is the one of Baby Squinchy on page eleven, with

her tiny body sprawled out on the floor, barefoot, and her face covered with a cotton sheet.

What is the relation between the realism of the photographs and the hyper-realism of the accompanying text? The photographs present the people and places of the deep South without captions. The absence of captions means that the subjects of the photographs, though on display in the book, have not been put on display. For instance, the picture of George Gudger appears without any identifying text in order to preserve his privacy. By nature of his vocation, Evans was a documentary photographer; the photographs in Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, because they lack any legend, seem to deny their documentary character, their grasp of a delimitable and explainable social reality, while at the same time vividly representing a social reality probably unfamiliar to most of the consumers of the photographs.

Agee's text is set in complex counterpoise to the photographs. The photographs on the one hand come under the genre of non-fiction documentary, and Agee's text comes under the genre of slightly fictionalized drama. When the two are brought together in one book, as in Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, the result is a docudrama whose photographs visualize the real and whose prose enhances the actual experience by focusing upon the dramatic vignettes of select tenant farmers and their families. The "Design of

the Book" contributes to the effect of the work by presenting the photographs first, as a sort of silent introduction to attract the reader's attention. They are followed by the written passages which detail the most memorable exchanges between Agee and the tenant farmer families.

Agee and Flaherty were striving in their work to present a portion of reality to both the reader and the film viewer. The entire concept of documentary represented "a reaction from the art world of the early and middle twenties . . . Likewise, if it was a return to 'reality,' it was a return not unconnected with . . . the Great Depression . . . Documentary was born and nurtured on the bandwagon of uprising social democracy everywhere; in Western Europe and the United States . . . " (Flaherty 133). Both Flaherty and Agee struggled to relate this 'reality.' Agee wrote to Dwight Macdonald about his desire to make an experimental work of his own similar to Nanook of the North, not realizing that he would ultimately create a docudrama as innovative and experimental in its own right as Flaherty's film documentaries.

The Components of Documentary

The value of documentary rests not in its capacity to convey information, but in its ability to move the reader. Visual aides become essential, either through film imagery

in motion picture documentaries such as Flaherty's, or in photographs like Evans's. A sense of empathy, as opposed to sympathy, becomes the desired response from such works. Standard documentaries want the reader to feel sorry for the characters; Let Us Now Praise Famous Men wants you to feel compassion for them but also to feel their heroism, their famousness, their nobility. This is achieved by Agee and Evans's refusal to manipulate the reader's emotions with forced sentiments, or to present the tenant farmers as victims of tragedy.

The photographs provide evidence meant to move the reader, to enlist the reader's acknowledgment of the truths the photographs record. Consequently,

Documentary is the presentation or representation of actual fact in a way that makes it credible and vivid to people at the time. Since all emphasis is on the fact, its validity must be unquestionable as possible . . . The heart of documentary is not form or style or medium, but always content . . . The actual facts. The truth. (Stott 14)

Walker Evans viewed

photography as a way of preserving segments out of time itself, without regard for the conventional structures of picture-building. Nothing was to be imposed on experience; the truth was to be discovered, not constructed. (Szarkowski 12)

At the time when Agee was recording his information, the term "documentary" usually referred to social documentary. Sometimes archives can educate one's emotions by recalling events which were virtually universal or common to all mankind. Ideally, then, social documentary could

focus upon events that were "neither permanent nor necessary, conditions of a certain time and place" (Stott 20). This was precisely how Agee approached the Great Depression -- a societal, manmade predicament that was neither necessary nor acceptable. Whereas Herbert Hoover and other figures at the time regarded the Depression as a natural phenomenon that simply had to be endured, Agee, like Franklin Roosevelt, viewed the entire episode as a manmade evil, which could be corrected by social awareness.

Though the major facts concerning the Great Depression were public, the tenant farmers were concealed, hidden away in America's deep South. Agee's self-assigned mission was to bring to public attention the material and spiritual experiences of these sharecroppers. Agee's goal in Let Us Now Praise Famous Men was to focus attention directly upon the present day events and occurrences in the lives of the tenant farmers. He

struggled in Let Us Now Praise Famous Men to set up a counterpoint between stark verbal photographs and -- as if to provide glasses to help the reader see the pictures more clearly -- long passages of filtration of their substance through his deeply kind, generous, quirky, guilt-ridden, hypersensitive consciousness. (Hersey 79)

Evans directly assaulted the reader with the bleak photographs of faces, fields, and ramshackle dwellings.

Agee voiced his disillusionment with standard documentary in Let Us Now Praise Famous Men. He wrote:

I doubt that the straight 'naturalist' very well understands what music and poetry are about. That

would be all right if he understood his materials so intensely that music and poetry seemed less than his intention; but I doubt he does that, too. That is why his work even at best is never much more than documentary. Not that documentation has not great dignity and value; it has; and as good 'poetry' can be extracted from it as from living itself: but the documentation is not of itself either poetry or music and it is not, of itself, of any value equivalent to theirs. (237-238)

The use of photographs served to add a new dimension to Agee's docudrama. Evans's caption-free photographs corroborated the text. They spoke volumes in their silence. The reader could see his own reflection in the hollow eyes of the men and women filtered through Evans's camera lens.

You Have Seen Their Faces

The first major documentary book of the thirties was Caldwell and Bourke-White's You Have Seen Their Faces. Written in 1936, ironically the same summer Agee and Evans set out to write Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, the book described the living conditions within nine Southern states. You Have Seen Their Faces was a strict documentary about the Southern economic system. It was an over-sentimentalized view of the disenfranchised sharecroppers. Caldwell argued the sharecropper as a weak and piteous creature, who was diminished by the author "because his audience expected such a picture" (Stott 219). What made Caldwell's conventional text saleable was Bourke-White's photographs.

When You Have Seen Their Faces was published to critical acclaim in 1937, the 'floodgates' had officially

been opened for a succession of documentary books to follow. The purpose was to educate and enlighten, where "the words and pictures were not only mutually indispensable, a kind of commentary upon each other, but curiously interchangeable" (Kazin 493).

You Have Seen Their Faces resembled Let Us Now Praise Famous Men in many respects. The names of the participants were changed, as in Agee's text, to secure the anonymity and protect the privacy of the individuals. A legend specifically states that the authors' aim is not to "criticize any individuals who are part of the system depicted" (vi). This notion parallels Agee and Evans's ironic use of biblical title to suggest the nobility of the tenant farmers. The reader learns that

"whatever the attitude toward the tenant farmer, there was widespread fascination with him. Here was Depression poverty at its most acute, its most spectacular, its most photogenic. (Holder 191)

The tenants's inability to realize their own social status corroborates the notion that only someone who is not a part of the collective injustice may champion the need for reform.

The most obvious difference between You Have Seen Their Faces and Let Us Now Praise Famous Men is in the captions Caldwell attached to Bourke-White's photographs, which are interspersed with the text. Caldwell informs the reader that

the legends under the pictures are intended to

express the authors' own conceptions of the sentiments for the individuals portrayed; they do not pretend to reproduce the actual sentiments of these persons. (vi)

Consequently, these captions serve to over-sentimentalize Caldwell's work; Bourke-White's photographs are weakened by explanation.

By 1941, when Let Us Now Praise Famous Men appeared, Agee further removed himself from the magazine tradition of captioning by totally freeing Evans's photographs of any written sentiment. Agee and Evans were aware of this minimalist method, and agreed to allow the pictures to be strategically placed, using only empty spaces to emphasize the poverty of the people and objects photographed. By contemporary standards, Caldwell and Bourke-White's captions appear to be informative in certain respects, however, forced and manipulative in their overall execution.

While Agee posts no blame in Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, in You Have Seen Their Faces Caldwell and Bourke-White chastise the South for "its failure to preserve its own culture and its refusal to accept the culture of the East and West . . . " (1). You Have Seen Their Faces refers to the Southern economy as "a worn-out agricultural empire" (2). The book argues that the sharecropping system was an outgrowth of the plantation system and views the tenant farmer as "trying to hold onto a spinning world until by some means he is enabled to get a grip on a better way of life" (6). There is an unmistakable social critique in the

portrait of an exhausted and defeated culture in You Have Seen Their Faces. The sharecropping system is viewed in a serpentine light, as feeding upon itself and devouring its own.

Caldwell and Bourke-White deny the nobility of the farmer's struggle, stating: "The sharecropper is anything but a heroic figure at present; if he continues being the nation's underdog, that is what he will become" (28). Where Agee views the tenant farmer as heroic, Caldwell and Bourke-White see an abject individual, whose only desire is to 'feed, clothe, and house' his family.

You Have Seen Their Faces focuses on the ordinary, while Let Us Now Praise Famous Men emphasizes the extraordinary nature of the tenant farmers. You Have Seen Their Faces perpetuates the notion of the old South as an isolated sub-culture, which has removed itself from the world in shameful defeat, mired in its sense of inferiority. This notion contrasts with Agee's belief that it is not the South historically which is to blame for the misery of Alabama during the Depression, nor the defeatist attitude of its inhabitants, but rather a guilt that all must share regarding the breakdown within the economic system.

Caldwell and Bourke-White view the tenant farmer as someone who is "willing to try anything that he thinks will help him make a living on a scale high enough to remove the association of the animalism from his mind" (44-45). In You

Have Seen Their Faces, the South and its inhabitants are irrevocably trapped in the 'waste land' whereas the sharecroppers in Let Us Now Praise Famous Men can still be redeemed.

The commercial nature of You Have Seen Their Faces, with its dramatic text and photograph captions angered Agee, who resisted such manipulative devices to play upon the reader's emotions. Before attacking Bourke-White's methods in Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, Agee had collaborated with her in 1934 on an article about the Great Drought.

Regarding Bourke-White,

Agee was particularly indignant about the contrast between the compassion evidenced in her portraits and her alleged indifference to their actual subjects. (Moreau 196)

Agee was reacting against what Kenneth Seib termed the "pseudo-realistic photography of Margaret Bourke-White" (46).

Stott quotes Evans stating that he and Agee were furious at You Have Seen Their Faces, feeling themselves outsmarted by an inferior motive. They believed Caldwell and Bourke-White to be guilty of propaganda and profit making. Agee and Evans despised exploitation. Agee felt guilty writing an article about the tenant farmers while working for a large moneymaking organization. You Have Seen Their Faces remains a prime example of thirties documentary while Let Us Now Praise Famous Men is docudrama because it refuted standard documentary devices.

Caste and Class in a Southern Town

In Caste and Class in a Southern Town (1937), John Dollard's famous study of African-Americans in the South, Dollard seems to anticipate the sort of ethnographic research and writing which Agee appears to have followed, knowingly or otherwise. Dollard, a psychologist from the North, ventured South to study a rural society and chronicle African-American life in an unnamed town he refers to simply as Southerntown. Consequently, Dollard believed that he was maintaining the anonymity of the individuals, for to name the town would ultimately have led to the betrayal of the identities of the inhabitants. Dollard's study took place between 1935 and 1936, roughly the same period that Agee conducted his own research.

Dollard recorded ethnographic data such as the physical appearances of Southerntown's houses and their interiors, a geographical illustration of the town, and a detailed examination of the unnamed individuals encountered. Dollard noted in the opening of his text that "the researcher cannot always be sure that the book he starts to write is the one it will be given him to finish" (1). Dollard admitted that it was never his wish to make a study of a community, nor to consider the intricacies of the cultural heritage of the American black. He realized, however, after arriving in the South, that in order to understand the specifics of the whole community he had to acclimate himself to the

individual lives.

Like Agee, Dollard realized the value of complete immersion in the lives he was studying, in order to accurately portray the "emotional structure of a specific small town in the deep South" (Dollard 1). Language aside, Agee appeared to have closely followed the general approach and many of the details of Dollard's text. For instance, Dollard argued that

it is a great sacrifice, for example, that I do not identify the state and town. To do so, of course, would be to identify my informants. These I should have liked to place at the front of the book in a cast of characters, with a psychological description after each name. (29)

Agee begins Let Us Now Praise Famous Men with "Persons and Places," a cast of characters enumerating the ages and occupations of the members of the three tenant farmer families.

Like Agee, Dollard chose to live with and conduct his research among his informants. Dollard rented work space in town to do his actual reporting, so as to allow himself a physical and emotional distance from his participants. Agee remained as close to the farmers as possible, preferring to live with the families and to write in his room while the family was asleep. Dollard's challenge may have been greater than Agee's. Agee was reentering the Southern culture he grew up in. Consequently,

the readiness and depth of Agee's emotional involvement with the tenants can be regarded, to some extent, as the response of a man who felt

that in coming to the cotton fields of Alabama he had come home. (Holder 205)

Hence, Agee could more easily identify with the tenants than Dollard could with the African-Americans in Southerntown.

An American Exodus

Dorothea Lange had devoted her photographic career to exploring and depicting social concerns, and like Evans's photographs, her work is stark and terrifying in its actuality, using little if any manipulation, staging, posing, etc. to embellish the cold truth (Lange and Taylor 9). The title of her best-known work, An American Exodus (1939), is ironic, for it refers to an exodus away from those economically ravished parts of America -- the deltas, the plains of the South, and the prairies -- that Americans had once migrated to in search of a better life.

Like Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, An American Exodus was "neither a book of photographs nor an illustrative book in the traditional sense" (Lange and Taylor 15) but rather an essay in indigenous American ethnography. Its goal was to convey information in order to render a measure of understanding from interested American readers. As in Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, the camera was used as a tool for research. Lange aimed for a realistic rather than sensationalistic record. In other respects, however, An American Exodus was a typical documentary, pandering to the popular conception of the face of poverty. The captions

above, beneath and along side the pictures were, according to the authors, direct quotations from the subjects of the photographs, actual transcriptions of what the individuals had said.

In the February 12, 1940 issue of *Time*, Agee criticized An American Exodus for its "tear-jerking inherent in dialect reused by sophisticates." Taylor and Lange include an entire page of direct quotations, at the end of their book, of the actual words spoken by the farmers they interviewed. The reader is informed that "Dorothea Lange's ear was as good as her eye. As she went about the countryside with camera, seeing, she also listened" (Lange and Taylor 134).

An example of An American Exodus' over-sentimentalization is when Taylor writes:

Nor does exhaustion of the soil distinguish the color of its victims: as in the North, the pioneers were wasteful of the land. Even before the war a southern congressman complained of Alabama "fields once fertile, now unfenced, abandoned and covered with those evil harbingers, fox-tail and broomsedge Indeed, a country in its infancy, where, fifty years ago, scarce a forest tree had been felled by the axe of the pioneer, is already exhibiting the painful signs of senility and decay in Virginia and the Carolinas." Erosion, the boll weevil, and lost markets forced plantation mansions into decay and left undernourished families on impoverished land.
(27)

Like You Have Seen Their Faces, the photographs in An American Exodus are scattered throughout the text. Many appear almost posed while others strictly emphasize the wretchedness of the rural living conditions. For example,

one photograph taken in 1936 in Sallisaw, Oklahoma, shows three gaunt and emaciated gentleman kneeling on a street corner, with the caption reading: "Stricken farmers, idle in town during the great drought" (54).

Another photograph attempts to depict the Oklahoma 'Exodus' of the book's title by focusing upon the arched backs of a family walking down a dirt road, the mother's head slightly bowed, with two of her children alongside her and another being pulled in a wagon up ahead. The caption beside this photograph reads: "Homeless family, tenant farmers in 1936. Cut from the land by illness, driven to the road by poverty, they walk from county to county in search of the meager security of relief" (55).

Lange's photographs are quite moving in themselves, and some, such as the profile of a wrinkled Bakersfield, California migrant woman staring blankly through the shadows out a window, capture the same mood, and have the same impact as Evans's. The fault is in Taylor's standard documentary text and the need to use words to explain even the most defined photographs. There are also differences in photographic style between Evans and Lange. For example, Evans would never pose his characters so intentionally in order to elicit an emotional response from the reader. The Oklahoma farmer on page fifty-one of An American Exodus mirrors the photographs of the Alabama farmers in Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, however a seemingly posed photograph of

an African American couple on page twenty-two of An American Exodus does not resemble Evans's work in Let Us Now Praise Famous Men. Hence, there are similarities in ethnographic approach in both books, however, the photographs in An American Exodus overwhelm the text, while in Let Us Now Praise Famous Men the text holds its own next to the photographs.

An American Exodus is a documentary book and not a docudrama because Taylor is not looking into the heart of the situation; he's writing around the subject. The book provides ample historical background concerning the areas photographed -- Georgia, Oklahoma, Mississippi, California - - but it fails to address the Depression era living experience as a remediable situation. All Lange and Taylor hope to elicit from the reader is shock and pity, whereas Agee and Evans attempt to get to the heart of the situation he describes. The words and the photographs in An American Exodus fail to complement as they do in Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, and even though the fundamental facts are presented in An American Exodus, Taylor and Lange emerge as reporters explaining a situation rather than as Agee and Evans, artists trying to relate a terrifying reality.

The Literary Uniqueness of Agee's Docudrama

The unique qualities of the sharecroppers intrigued many writers and photographers of the 1930's, since the

sharecropper, according to Kazin,

embodied so visual a conception of all that had to be recognized and redeemed in America. He provided an occasion for catharsis; he was a special contemporary phenomenon that fixed the general sense of outrage and quickened the sensibility of fellowship. Yet one had only to look at him . . . to know how little there was to say . . . Here was America, all of it undoubtedly America -- but America in a gallery of photographs, an echo of the people's talk, a storehouse of vivid single impressions. (496-97)

These 'vivid single impressions' helped to usher in the latter thirties' documentary notion of reform as part of a healing process, as these writers traveled the country searching for answers. The documentary books conveyed the surface story of the sharecroppers, and by their superficiality set apart Agee's journey beneath the surface in Let Us Now Praise Famous Men.

Agee took pleasure in testing the boundaries of literary convention. The form of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men is "outside any literary convention, and its prose is Agee at his most singular" (Wensberg 417). Informed by *Fortune's* editors that the work was too long and too detailed, Agee proceeded to embellish and expand the work even further. When told the work was too subjective, Agee set out to make it even more personal. Agee felt the way to shake the reader into awareness was to cheat his expectations by violating as many canons of documentary reportage as possible. By approaching documentary in such a way, Agee saved himself from having to adhere to the rules

of the genre.

Contrary to Stott's assertion, Agee did not succeed in creating a classic text within the thirties documentary framework. In fact, he appears to have usurped the most vital elements of documentary and tailored them to his own needs. For example, in the documentary genre the text relied upon photographs for corroboration. Agee's text, however, does not exactly corroborate Evans's photographs. The photographs, standing alone at the beginning of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men without any captions, speak for themselves. Agee's text also, through its poetic force, manages to speak for itself, so the reader is left to inquire in what way Evans's photographs and Agee's text speak to each other.

It might be asked whether Agee's text serves as commentary to Evans's photographs, or whether the photographs serve as commentary to the text. Which, in other words, following the logic of the design of the book, takes precedence? In the other 1930's documentaries discussed in this chapter, the photographs clearly make up the core. Because Let Us Now Praise Famous Men so curiously straddles the words-images divide, it is a mistake to group it together with such works as You Have Seen Their Faces and An American Exodus. Evans's photographs may be a documentary aspect of the collaboration that is Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, but Agee's prose -- which may be read as

an extended caption to Evans's photographs -- moves the work into another genre altogether. Because imaginative writing, unlike the sort of photography Evans's excelled at, is not limited by the constraints of the real, Agee was free to frankly explore aspects of tenant farmer life that no photographs could reach. It may be true that a picture is worth a thousand words, but Agee's contribution to Let Us Now Praise Famous Men shows that words and pictures are related but often incomparable media.

Through Agee's words and Evans's photographs, though in quite different ways, the stark, brutal living conditions of the sharecroppers was revealed as it was not in other documentaries. Agee wanted to provoke the reader into some sort of participation with the people and places represented in the photographs and the accompanying text. The dignity of the sharecropper remained Agee's fundamental concern. In order for their lives to serve as an inspiration and education for the reader, the sharecroppers had to be willing participants in the telling of their story, just as each individual was made aware of Evans's camera.

The sheer bulk of the text of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men is in itself a significant departure from the documentary pattern, in which the pictures were the dominant feature. Perhaps words could not convey reality with the force of the camera, but Agee was determined to use them, and at length. (Holder 195)

Let Us Now Praise Famous Men both dramatizes and refuses to dramatize the lives it describes. The pictures

underdramatize, because they are so stark and silent and mute, and the eyes stare out at you wordlessly. But then Agee's text has so many words, emphasizing and arranging certain episodes. The dramatic way Agee introduces the chapter on "Education" in Let Us Now Praise Famous Men is an example of this form of rhetoric:

In every child who is born, under no matter what circumstances, and of no matter what parents, the potentiality of the human race is born again: and in him, too, once more, and of each of us, our terrific responsibility towards human life; towards the utmost idea of goodness, of the horror of error, and of God.

Every breath his senses shall draw, every act and every shadow and thing in all creation, is a mortal poison, or is a drug, or is a signal or symptom, or is a teacher, or is a liberator, or is liberty itself, depending entirely upon his understanding . . . (289)

Agee's views on "Education" are powerful and he voices them with conviction, using grandiose language and making bold though unsubstantiated statements. Compare this to Evans's minimalistic photograph of "The Clean Hill" school on page sixty of the photograph section, and the reader discovers two completely different ways of explaining, what was education like for the tenant farmers in Alabama? Agee goes on to describe the intricacies of the system and what he believes to be the system's failure in thirty pages of text, while in one stark photograph Evans has already answered the preliminary question.

Let Us Now Praise Famous Men is set apart from the other documentaries simply because they lack the tension

between pictures and text that Let Us Now Praise Famous Men has. This tension results from the mutual compatibility of the two, as the pictures appear to ground Agee's high poetics in the reality of the tenant farmer experience. Likewise, the anonymity of the photographs's silence benefits from Agee's highly personal prose.

Agee agonized over what he believed would be achieved by writing Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, and whether the extravagant candor of such a work would violate the tenant farmers even more than the staged theatrics of Bourke-White and the documentary school. Agee wrote at the conclusion of "Shady Grove, Alabama, July 1936":

. . . it is not likely for any of you, my beloved, whose poor lives I have already so betrayed, and should you see these things so astounded, so destroyed, I dread to dare that I shall ever look into your dear eyes again: and soon, quite soon now, in two years, in five, in forty, it will be over . . . (439)

Agee wondered what end his work would ultimately serve, in shedding light upon what he himself termed "an undefended and appallingly damaged group of human beings" (7). Agee refuted his role as scientist or artist, though his whole relation to objectivity is fundamentally different from that of contemporary writers and makers of documentaries. Agee asked,

Is there such a cleavage between the 'scientific' and the 'artistic'? Isn't every human being both a scientist and an artist; and in writing of human experience, isn't there a good deal to be said for recognizing that fact and for using both methods? (242)

His most difficult formal problem remained how to translate the beauty and dignity he found in the tenant farmers, without resorting to the hackneyed techniques of standard documentary.

For the 1960 edition of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, Evans substituted certain photographs. Evans had his reasons, feeling the new photos were better than some of the original ones. What Agee and Evans chose to include in their collaborative book, and the necessity of selection itself, underscores a view of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men as a docudrama, a constructed document rather than a mirror-image of reality.

Agee was aware that he was taking a risk in the idiosyncratic style and innovative design of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men. He knew that he was inviting criticism, because he so drastically deviated from the customary approach of documentary writers of his day. Stott argues that Agee

exposed himself infinitely more than he did the tenants. He made public his tangled and often disreputable desires, his moral outrage at the 'obscene and thoroughly terrifying' assignment he had taken on. (298)

That Agee became an integral part of the events he was reporting immediately obscured any possible claim to documentary objectivity for his work. He was willing to relinquish such a claim in the name of a higher objectivity to be found in what I have been calling docudrama.

Let Us Now Praise Famous Men has been referred to as "that documentary book written to end all documentary books" by Kazin, a "religious work" by Wensberg, and an "anti-book" by Holder. Agee's stylized language, according to Kramer, "is closely related to his presence throughout, for he constantly reminds readers that what they know is filtered through him as intermediary" (92). The camaraderie detected between Agee and the tenants has helped to imbue Let Us Praise Famous Men with a strong spiritual center, unlike any found in documentary writing. Agee cares greatly for the tenant farmer families and this closeness is exemplified in the "Inductions" chapter, as he and Evans bid farewell to the Ricketts:

And this was the last we had any particular reason to think we would see either of you or any of these others: yet at the very last, just as we left, the unforgiving face, the eyes, of Mrs. Ricketts at her door: which has since stayed as a torn wound and sickness at the center of my chest, and perhaps more than any other thing has insured what I do not yet know: that we shall have to return, even in the face of causing further pain, until that mutual wounding shall have been won and healed, until she shall fear us no further, yet not in forgetfulness but through ultimate trust, through love. (370)

Agee and Evans succeeded in forming a familial tie with the various members of the Gudger, Woods and Ricketts families. Once they had established such a relationship the objectivity of the work had been largely lost. This camaraderie resulted in the experimental blend of art and science which is at the heart of Let Us Now Praise Famous

Men. Consequently, this subjectivity sets Let Us Now Praise Famous Men apart from the standard documentary books of the 1930's.

It is precisely this sense of compassion and personal interaction which encourages the reader to identify more readily with the tenants's predicament. We meet them, and get to know them in the same way Agee and Evans did. It is easier for us to empathize with such known and particularized individuals, rather than with the impersonal caricatures we discover in typical documentary reporting. Stott views Agee's personal frankness as the major flaw of his text, and while such confessions, sexual and otherwise, may be perceived as obtrusive, it would be wrong to view them as detrimental to the documentary force of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men.

Although he would have been the first to discourage a religious reading of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men or refute the need to sermonize to the American people, his book reveals an artist in search of a moral within his nation's degraded predicament. He was looking for answers, not just for his nation but for himself -- and such an all-encompassing search could only lead to moments of confusion. Agee wished his readers to identify with the simple yet heroic members of the tenant farmer families, and come to care for them as if they were their brothers and sisters.

Most important, by bringing his own emotions into the

texture of his documentation, Agee allows the reader to weigh the real problems of documentary, which is never entirely free of bias and personal feeling. In this respect, Agee was far ahead of his time among American writers. He anticipates the questions raised by professional anthropologists, and he solves them, for himself and for Evans, in his own unique version of lyrical documentary. The question remains, was Agee a sentimentalist? But the formal achievement of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men also remains, and it was to inspire Agee to continue, especially in his A Death in the Family.

Agee and Film Docudrama

Agee's later career took him to Hollywood, where he wrote screenplays for a number of dramatic movies including The African Queen in 1950 and The Night of the Hunter in 1954. Interestingly, in 1952 Agee was commissioned by NBC to write a series of teleplays about the life of Abraham Lincoln for their Omnibus series; these teleplays represent a new example of Agee wrestling with docudrama form, with the combination of words and images. The five-part presentation captured the poetic Lincoln, rather than the historical figure, and focused upon his romance with Ann Rutledge. Abraham Lincoln - The Early Years premiered November 16, 1952 and ran four and a half hours, every other week until February 8, 1953. Agee himself was featured in

the minor role of Jack Kelso, the mild-mannered, hard-drinking, Shakespeare-quoting interviewer.

The televised docudrama met with critical success. One dissenting voice, however, was historian Allan Nevins, who disputed the liberties Agee took with Lincoln's life, as an abuse of poetic license. This led to a debate on the March 29 edition of Omnibus, with a noticeably frail Agee appearing on screen with Nevins to debate the disparities between the real Lincoln and the heroic myth. The film was shot on location to emphasize the real America of Lincoln's childhood, and was later reedited and shown as a regular length movie.

In his teleplay about Abraham Lincoln and in Let Us Now Praise Famous Men Agee combined the real with the dramatic. Whether he was attempting to relate the tenant farmers's living conditions during the Great Depression in Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, or attempting to convey a sense of Abraham Lincoln, the man and the myth, Agee used docudrama as a means to best represent the truth as he saw it.

**Chapter 5: Houghton Mifflin and the Fate of
Let Us Now Praise Famous Men**

A past that's sprinkled with the blues
A few old dreams that I can't use
Who'll buy my memories
Of things that used to be? (Willie Nelson)

The Writing of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men

Agee and Evans originally intended to write their article for *Fortune* about the rural poor in Tennessee. Due to a change in plans, they left New York for Alabama one Saturday, in June of 1936. The original assignment was to describe the daily life of a representative family, analyze the economics of Southern farming, and detail how socio-political factors had helped to shape the conditions the two journalists found.

The first thing that Agee and Evans needed to do was find a host family to spend four weeks with, so that they could properly observe and research the living conditions of the tenant farmers. Agee writes that

the effort is to recognize the stature of a portion of unimagined existence, and to contrive techniques proper to its recording, communication, analysis, and defense. (xlvi)

By analyzing a collection of previously unpublished letters, this chapter explores the unique publishing history of the strange work that resulted from this "effort to recognize the stature of a portion of unimagined existence."

It is essential to understand the publishing background

of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, and its place within the American literary tradition, which valued big money and sales over literary content. Agee's ethnographic form made Let Us Now Praise Famous Men difficult to package for the publishing industry. They simply did not know what category to place it in. The unpublished correspondence provided by Houghton Mifflin illuminates the ethnographic, experimental form of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, and the difficulty Agee experienced in having his work published, throughout his life and even after his death.

I take these letters to be not only indicative of American book publishing during the nineteen thirties, but also an example of how two remarkably knowledgeable artists such as Agee and Evans stood up to and dared the publishing industry to work with them on their own terms to produce an unprecedented new kind of docudrama. These letters reveal the history of how such a book as Let Us Now Praise Famous Men could find its way into print. Granted, the publishing industry of the thirties was more receptive to literary artistry than say the publishing world of today, Let Us Now Praise Famous Men was even then a difficult sell.

These letters also reveal how Agee and Evans were obsessed with precisely how their book would look. Evans undertook the printing and engraving of the photographic plates while the book was assigned to Harper and Brothers, and both he and Agee followed the publishing process from

its inception through to fruition with meticulous care, insisting that they be allowed to examine all the proofs and have final approval of the book's galleys.

***The Publication and Remaindering of the 1941 Edition of
Let Us Now Praise Famous Men***

The background to the Houghton Mifflin company correspondence involves the earlier publishing history of the book. In 1937, a year after Agee and Evans returned from Alabama, *Fortune* relinquished the rights to the tenant farmer article, deeming it neither conservative nor liberal enough for their readership, reaffirming the work's lack of a clear political point of view. *Fortune* told Agee he was free to do what he wanted with the article. Agee signed a book contract with Harper and Brothers, and was offered a \$700 advance at the insistence of his friend Edward Aswell, who worked for the publisher. Agee demanded that Evans receive co-equal status as author and the same advance on his royalties. Agee expected to have the book, tentatively titled "Three Tenant Families," completed in one year. Aswell extended Agee's deadline, but he failed to turn in a manuscript until 1939. Harper and Brothers returned it to Agee suggesting that he edit certain passages.

Aswell had reservations about Agee's baroque manner of expression. The book seemed to him a disorganized jumble of impressions; it lacked a clear-cut beginning, middle, and end; and some sentences were so long and complex as to be meaningless. (Bergreen 234)

The manuscript was rejected and Agee had to return \$500 of his advance to Harper and Brothers. The Houghton Mifflin company correspondence reveals that in 1940, the book attracted the attention of Houghton Mifflin editors Paul Brooks (who had graduated one year ahead of Agee at Harvard) and Robert Linscott, who recognized the unique nature of the work and agreed to publish Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, which they deemed "a work of great oddity and power in a deep American vein of dissent . . . " (Hersey 78).

My reading of the letters will show as already suggested, two major problems. First that Agee and Evans met tremendous resistance to their project. Second the correspondence reveals just how stubborn they could be in their insistence upon authorial control of the aesthetic presentation of their work. One more general significance of these letters may be mentioned: at times the correspondence suggests, by comparison, that it might be a great deal more difficult to get such a book published by a major publishing house at the present postmodern time.

In 1941, Let Us Now Praise Famous Men was first published to less than overwhelming response. Many critics praised the work, yet appeared confused by its form and design; readers for the most part ignored the book. The climate of the times had changed and with the Second World War looming on the horizon, documentary books had largely become passe. The focus on America's internal workings had

shifted to a broader world view, and the trouble in Europe had consumed all of the public's attention.

Agee's material on cotton tenantry, in the American South, gathered during the summer of 1936, appeared already to be dated, as the United States hovered on the brink of World War II, heading toward that eventful day of December 7, 1941, which marked the end of the Great Depression. Pearl Harbor was attacked four months after Let Us Now Praise Famous Men appeared.

Perhaps the most important aspect of the publishing correspondence is the rich and powerful way it reveals how much courage it took for the Houghton Mifflin company to publish such a controversial work. By the mid-1950's, however, the publisher, Henry Laughlin, said he could not remember exactly what went wrong with sales of the book, which he thought "might have been chopped" (Angus Fletcher recalls this as the most striking statement Laughlin made in their conversation about the book.) The letters chronicling transactions concerning the book's publication have themselves never been published, and indeed I may be the first person to consult them.

The Houghton Mifflin letters were provided to me by Harvard University's Widener Library in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and they date from 1940 to 1978. They include correspondence between Houghton Mifflin and Agee, Evans, Father James Flye, Robert Fitzgerald, Dwight

Macdonald, and various Houghton Mifflin editors involved with Let Us Now Praise Famous Men and with other Agee writings. These letters provide new and essential background information regarding Agee and the publication process of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men.

Agee's former colleague and *Time* editor T.S. Matthews recalls in an article published in the *Southern Review* in 1966, that the finished manuscript Agee handed in caused great consternation at Houghton-Mifflin.

The editors tried chopping it into bits, to run serially: no go. They tried to edit it: impossible. At last, and reluctantly -- for it was an accurate, profound, and vivid report on the life of sharecroppers (besides being a most disturbing reflection on the human condition) -- the editors handed the manuscript back to Agee and Evans, saying doubtfully that perhaps it might be a book. (22)

A short time later the decision was made to expand the scope of the work into book form.

In a letter to Lovell Thompson, at Houghton Mifflin, dated July 18, 1940, Edward C. Aswell, Editor at Harper and Brothers, in a generous letter articulating why his firm could not publish Agee's book, explains his inability to justify the publication of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men to the new publisher of the book:

For various reasons, it took Agee a good deal longer to finish it than he had anticipated, but, meanwhile, we, acting in good faith under the contract, went ahead with our plans to publish and had plates made for the Evans photographs. I doubt if any engraver's plates were ever made under such careful and loving scrutiny as Walker Evans gave to these . . .

Needless to say, we are tremendously impressed with the text Agee produced. I had known him for years, and had expected something unique for its honesty and deep feeling, and what he wrote was even more moving than I had hoped it would be. There were, however, it seemed to us, certain minor changes which needed to be made in the manuscript in order to meet the practical requirements of publication. Agee, after much soul-searching and indecision, one day deciding to make the changes and the next reversing himself, finally concluded that he could not allow any alterations whatever. This impasse was embarrassing and disappointing all around. Technically, we could have stood our ground and done the required editing which one clause in the contract gave us the right to do, but I had too high a regard for Agee's integrity, and for my own friendship with him, to take this position. There seemed to be only one way out, and this we finally took most reluctantly . . .

On October 3, 1939, I wrote a letter giving him a conditional release from the contract and leaving him free to place the book elsewhere, on the understanding that if he did succeed in placing it elsewhere he would

(a) "Provide for the repayment to Harper & Brothers of \$500 advanced on the book," we agreeing at the same time to cancel and forget about \$200 of the total amount advanced; and

(b) "Arrange with the other publisher to take over from us all the engraver's plates for the photographic illustrations . . .

Let me tell you how greatly I envy you the privilege of publishing this book. It was a great blow to me personally that things turned out as they did. Agee is certainly one of the most remarkable writers I have ever known and the only one now living who, I feel sure, is an authentic genius.

Based on the work's literary significance, rather than commercial prospects, Houghton Mifflin agreed to publish the text without any revisions, except for the deletion of

certain words which were deemed illegal in Boston at the time. These deletions are discussed in an undated letter from Agee to Robert Linscott.

On the suggestions of change because of the stiffening of moral climate: The points raised are of themselves small -- not worth a (?) etc. but the point of tempering in any way to such a shift of climate seems to me very large. Because of this I prefer not to make any further changes. I think the dashes as printed (Galley 191) look silly too, and for that matter that the whole passage is cheap. But if the words themselves can't be had, then I prefer the silliness of the dashes to nothing at all. I suggest they would look less silly if only the vowels were left out -- Though god knows that's silly enough. Would also favor a footnote as follows:

*These deletions look silly. They are a strict image of the law which requires them.

My regret on the Notes and Appendices in that they represent so little of a strain of feeling I had wanted to use much of in the book. But these are included, and set against other types of treatment, at least to suggest that other strains: so that between the Notes and Porch: 3 the book ends on a discord.

On the Definition: In the Galleys as I have them the shit-words are simply omitted. That suited me in so far as they would scream their presence by their absence. As I recall, my ms. solution was deliberately silly doubletalk. I would prefer this to omission but if it is too expensive resetting, let be as is. The words would be:

duck, snit, dart, kiss, runt, glass, rock

Hope all these things will be o.k. with you. I'm really aware of the reasonableness of the suggestions and in many agree a good deal -- but the other reasons for keeping them as they are seem too important.

In an undated letter to Nina Holton at Houghton Mifflin, Agee further addressed the censorship issue:

Some obscure words, by legal necessity, have been blacked. Others I find have been changed to euphemisms, and still others have been left out entirely. I don't of course know the legal problems and distinctions, as the editors do. But I very much hope it will be possible to be consistent in the handling of these words. If s__t is legally permissible, then can't the other words be similarly used? The euphemisms -- fuggish, and futs, are badly untrue to the particular character; something else must be done about them. I have indicated in the galleys what I would prefer if it is possible -- all of the forbidden word given. What is allowed, the hyphens, or the exact number of the letter omitted. If this is not possible, then treat them as the word s__t is treated, -- a long dash instead of hyphens, and the first and last letter of the word. If that is not possible, then simply the first letter and a dash. For your convenience in reference here are the places and words, numbered in order of my preferred treatment. If even the least preferred is possible, or if the editors make it still necessary to omit words altogether, or to substitute euphemisms. Please let me know before going ahead, for there may be something else I could do about it. I remember that Paul wrote me (approximately) -- "Fortunately, I don't think any specific cussword is indispensable to the integrity of the characterization or the story." But they are, I feel; otherwise I would have used others, or none. I clearly realize the legal problem; but I want the story to suffer the minimum damage possible.

Gal 3 ¶ 3: The word mothuhfuckin has been omitted. Can it be replaced to some extent as follows: 1) mothuhf---n. 2) mothuhf_____. 3) m_____f_____.

Can s__t be hyphenated (as an editor indicated in typescript). Or, if not hyphenated, can the dash be shortened into proportion?

Gal 3 (over), ¶ w: mothuhfuckin is often omitted between sonofabitchin and bastud. Can it be treated as above.

fugguh is a euphemism out of character and, I suspect, (?) as well. The word was cocksucker which, I know, is illegal. Can it be treated to any context as: 1) cocks-----'s; 2) c-----'s; 3) cocks_____ 's; 4) c_____ 's.

Gal 26 ¶ 6: s--t if legal; otherwise as printed. f--k is possible; 2) f__k; 3) f____. Futs is not true to his character.

Gal 30: A longish insert, trying to intensify and slow the sensations of delay in getting to the (?) water. I leave it to the editors whether this is worth inserting.

Despite Agee's valiant attempts, Houghton Mifflin decided to delete the disputed words from Let Us Now Praise Famous Men.

This correspondence shows how determined Agee was that Let Us Now Praise Famous Men not fit any standard form. In an undated letter written to Robert Linscott between November 17, 1940 and April 20, 1941, James Agee wrote:

Proofs are coming in regularly -- Nearly, 2/3rds done now. There seems to be one mistake of omission. I'm not impressed, I sent in the material and directions so late. But it is an important one:

On the Porch was to run in 3 parts, one at beginning, 3rd at end, 2nd, and longest (c. 25 -- typed pages) at dead-centre, immediately following SHELTER. Shelter, Clothing, Education and part of Work have now been sent me, also parts 1 and 3 of On the Porch, but no copies of Part 2 of the Porch. Should I write the Press rather than you? I had an idea I'd better write you instead.

Changes in the book's layout were also addressed in a letter from Agee to Linscott dated May 14, 1941:

Dear Bob --

A few notes and questions.

The title page and a few others have come printed on other than galley paper -- I hope it isn't the paper that will be used in the book. What had been agreed on was white (this is ivory or near it) and thin (this would make, at 471 pp. a book a yard thick) and hard surfaced just short of glaze (This is dull).

I have been assuming that page-proofs were sent me only for a check on page order; that if this was o.k. there was no need to send them back. If I am wrong in this please let me know and I will send back the whole batch.

I know it costs to break into the page but I have noted 2 or 3 things I would like to speak of: On page-numbers I had hoped brackets might be removed. But if the numbers can't be moved all the way to the margin I guess they may as well stay.

On page 244 Judgement is spelt Judgment: on page 314 little is spelt littlle. Can these be corrected?

On page 471, at the end of the book, on page proofs, printers have inserted THE END. I'm sure this wasn't in the ms. (if it was, charge me) in any case, this must come out.

On the necessitated change of page-numbering, I didn't feel I should be charged, since the insertion of a half-title page for On the Porch: 1 and the transposition to several pages later of

The house had now descended

All over Alabama the lamps are out

was not my doing; it was essential to correct it. But I wired, regardless, because at whatever cost I did want it changed.

Walker tells me of the jacket as a photograph of ground. I have a feeling we are venturing out of our province in speaking of this, but we had hoped the jacket might-be as plain as possible print and paper. But I do realize that this is out of our territory.

I hope to see you when you are in town.

Sincerely,

Jim.

P.S. I enclosed a small piece of paper as near as I can find to what was agreed on.

The above letter is presented in its entirety, and Agee

actually enclosed a swatch of paper as a sample of the sort of paper stock on which he wanted Houghton Mifflin to print the book. (Houghton Mifflin has kept the swatch of paper on file.) Agee had a vision of the design of the book, of the total form of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, and this included not only the rhythms of the language but also the layout, the pagination, the placement of Evans's photographs and the type of paper stock.

Agee wished Let Us Now Praise Famous Men to have a plain brown paper cover simply stating the title. He and Evans had agreed that any dust cover photograph showing a tenant family member would be a violation and they insisted on not exploiting their subjects in any such manner. Houghton Mifflin agreed not to put a tenant farmer's picture on the cover of the book and instead used a picture of dirt taken by an uncredited photographer. This fact is, like other production questions, brought out in the letters (as made recently also in Dorothy Rathbone's biography of Evans).

Walker Evans was as particular about his photographs as Agee was about the preciseness of his language. A number of letters written by Evans to Lovell Thompson attest to this fact. In a letter dated November 5, 1940, Evans writes:

Jim Agee and I have decided to ask you whether it would be possible to place the photograph reproductions of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men on one side of the pages only, rather than, as we have all thought until now, on both. We'd like very much to have it this new way.

Evans's precision is also evident in a second correspondence to Thompson, dated April 20, 1941, in which he further deliberates the placement of the pictures, concluding:

It seems all right to me to print the photographs in Let Us Now Praise Famous Men as you now prefer, back to back. Could we then follow that paper dummy you mention having, literally; allowing the blank page to fall where it does, and letting the last photograph come on a left-hand page?

Agee and Evans wished the book to be published in a lower-priced edition, so that people of more humble means could afford to purchase it. The publishers explained that this would be impractical. Agee conceded and the book was finally published August 1941. It contained 471 pages of text along with 31 photographs by Walker Evans, and it cost three dollars and fifty cents.

The total sales of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men upon its initial publication in 1941 amounted to six hundred copies the first year. It remains unclear what Houghton Mifflin did with the unsold copies of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, but not much later it could be found on the remainder shelf selling for as little as nineteen cents.

On August 17, 1941 Agee sent a letter to Robert Linscott at Houghton Mifflin requesting extra copies of the book for himself and Evans to be sent to reviewers:

Figuring it out with Walker, there are several volumes we want to send notes with . . . Quite a while ago you asked for suggestions of people (writers, critics, etc.) to send it to; and in work and heat I never got around to it. Does it

still hold as possible, or go up the spout with publication? I hope it may be possible, for we both find most of our personal copies eaten up by personal obligation and affection, which leaves little room for gestures of respect - which have rather more meaning to them.

Let Us Now Praise Famous Men was published at an unpropitious time, which made marketing the book more difficult than usual. With the Depression over, readers were more interested in war novels and other war-related publications, so Let Us Now Praise Famous Men never had the chance to attract the socially-concerned audience it was designed for. It appears that Houghton Mifflin was relieved to have the book run its course without vigorous promotion, and may have refrained from prolonging its shelf life.

Controversy surrounded the issue of whether the unsold copies of the book was to be remaindered. In a letter from the critic W.M. Frohock to Lovell Thompson dated February 27, 1958, Frohock writes:

Let me intrude long enough to contribute one detail to the discussion of the remaindering of James Agee's Let Us Now Praise Famous Men. I suspect that somebody at Houghton Mifflin is a little bit responsible for Dwight Macdonald's statement that the book was remaindered by the publisher as soon as he decently could do so. I do not have my note in front of me, but sometime before Agee's death -- I know because I discussed the matter with Agee -- a member of your staff answered an inquiry in one of the weeklies -- perhaps the *New York Times Book Review* -- about "Good books that have not sold," to the effect that Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, having sold hardly more than 600 copies, was an excellent example. One gathered from the reply that H.M. had had its fingers burned and that they still stung a little. I said something about all this in an article published last year in the *South-*

West Review, which, in revised form, became a chapter in the revised version of my Novel of Violence in America. For all I know, David McDowell and Dwight Macdonald may have picked the thing up from me. If they did, you can see the line of transmission: I would have concluded too much from the report from Houghton Mifflin, and in turn Dwight would have concluded too much from what I said.

I may add that I am much less scandalized by the slight mis-information which I may have had a hand in disseminating than by the fact that A Death in the Family did not come out under your imprint. I understand from John Cushman, however, that this was not from any unwillingness on your part; I also know that it cannot have been from any wish of Agee's, since in the last years of his life I know that he waived off a number of suggestions that he transfer his allegiance to Random House.

By 1948 Let Us Now Praise Famous Men was out of print, and it was not available again until after Agee's death.

Ironically, even after Agee's 1955 death, Let Us Now Praise Famous Men remained an enigma and a rarity. In a letter from William Morris, Editor-in-Chief at Grossett and Dunlap Incorporated, to Hardwick Moseley at Houghton Mifflin dated November 5, 1956, Morris wrote:

One of our editors has been after me for some time, urging that we consider Let Us Now Praise Famous Men by Agee and Evans for our Universal Library. I patiently point out that it is a picture-and-text book, but he asserts that the text alone, if reset would stand up as a book.

The discussion has been in a vacuum, so to speak, since we don't have a copy of the book in hand and our out-of-print sources have failed to turn one up. If you would be interested in hearing any sort of proposal from us on this title, would you send along a copy for us to look at?

Incidentally, now that the first group of Universal Library titles have been published, do you have any other titles to suggest for future

releases?

Let Us Now Praise Famous Men continued to cause conflicts within the publishing industry fifteen years after its publication. In a follow-up letter dated April 23, 1957, Morris reiterated:

I have spent a good deal of time off and on during the past few months trying to persuade Manuel Siwek and Tom Maher of the desirability of reissuing Let's Now Praise Famous Men (sic) in the Universal Library line. Our editors unanimously favored the project: our sales people unanimously opposed it. I am sure you will have no difficulty in guessing who won.

Since you were good enough to loan us your file copy, I am returning it to you under separate cover.

The unpublished letters from Houghton Mifflin argue the fact that only such an experimental work would have met with such resistance and caused such confusion within the publishing industry.

Adding to this confusion was the ongoing question of whether Evans's photographs might be separated from Agee's text and published independently, and whether the text might be separated from the photographs and published independently. To what extent was the Agee-Evans collaboration integral to the design of the book, and to what extent was it incidental? In a letter dated September 27, 1957 from Jephtha H. Wade at Choate, Hall & Stewart to Lovell Thompson:

I had been thinking that perhaps if Walker Evans were friendly a recognition by him of the

continued validity of this contract would be of value and would at least prevent Agee doing anything until some compromise had been reached. You now indicate that Evan's (sic) contribution was limited to photographs which are separable. My question, therefore, is whether Walker Evans is entitled to a portion of the proceeds under paragraph 18 if the contract is valid but you arrange for a reprint excluding photographs.

. . . Thus, McDowell might have some incentive to enter a new contract with Houghton Mifflin if you have the possibility of selling the text alone, whereas Evans would have every incentive to recognize and enforce this contract.

Evans's Role in the 1960 Reprint of *Let Us Now Praise*

Famous Men

When it was reissued in 1960, the *New York Herald Tribune* called Let Us Now Praise Famous Men 'The most famous unknown book in contemporary letters,' and today it is recognized as a true American classic. The 1960 edition featured the same text as the original along with sixty-two pictures by Evans; twice as many as had appeared in the original. Evans stated in a letter dated April 18, 1960, sent to David Harris at Houghton Mifflin, that his desired acknowledgment to the text should read as follows:

In the original edition thirty-one pictures -- just half the number Walker Evans intended to publish -- were printed. Now the full complement of photographs is appearing. If most professional photography is dominated by the commercial stance or the artistic posture, Evans is in recoil from these. His work might even be said to have brought photographic style back around to the plain relentless snapshot. In this sense the pictures in this book amount to a technical and a psychological adventure.

It is important for the reader to realize that a work originally deemed unfit for publication should emerge representative of its time and place in history.

Walker Evans attempted to get at the essence of James Agee in an article entitled "James Agee in 1936," which appeared as a foreword to the 1960 reprint. Evans's verbal photograph of Agee captures a man who was proud yet not pretentious, strong yet not intimidating, eloquent yet not pompous, focused yet easily distracted. Walker Evans's high regard for Agee's talent is expressed in a letter to Lovell Thompson dated January 12, 1960 in which he offers to edit Agee's writings:

Could I have the writings on Agee, the advertising and proposed other copy you mentioned as having been done in your offices? I'm going South for a week or so tomorrow, and could work over the things as possible lead to my piece, in conversion to a magazine publication.

Thompson quickly sent the material and Evans responded in a letter dated January 16, 1960. Evans refers to the controversial passage in the "Notes and Appendices" section of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men in which a vicious review of the photographer Margaret Bourke-White is reprinted to suggest that Bourke-White has sold out her artistic integrity for money and fame. In this letter Evans expresses his views opposing censorship, specifically his desire to have the controversial language cut from the original manuscript reinstated in the 1960 edition of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men.

Yes, your notes about changes concern the Bourke-White business. Forget it now, it can all stay as it was. But consider what I wrote you about restoring words on pp 384-385. I hate the thought that four-letter words are now in high style, the very latest thing in smart writing, every up-to-date publisher must have them -- but in that passage of Agee's stream-of-thought, they were written effectively and truly, and he would want them restored now that it is legal, a recently established custom.

I will work on the jacket ideas this week. You know I've been in favor of the plain jacket. But there is one consideration I haven't mentioned, because I haven't thought of it until now that I see your picture jacket: those people, our "selling" use of their faces. Inside it is not so bad to have invaded and used them; Agee has enobled (sic) them. But jumping out publicly in bookstores that bothers me. They will (be) made conspicuous, or worse; they will be really harmed. Inside, there is every chance they will never know of it. After all, it was to protect them that we altered their real names . . you knew that?

Handwritten to Lovell Thompson, in the left margin of Evans's letter, David Harris of Houghton Mifflin voiced his opposition to Evans's suggestion:

Good. What he wrote is attached. I think Evans misses the point. We don't mind spelling out four-letter words. But Agee's cussing was modified by the publishing convention of the 30's and this is of at least some interest from the standpoint of literary history. (There is, for example, some earnest correspondence with Nina Holton in which Agee specifies which (?) are acceptable to him, which not.) Granting that Agee would not use hyphens today, don't we lose more than we gain by making a few minor changes in this one respect?

In an undated letter Evans reiterated his desire to reinstate the disputed passage and attached it as follows:

Here enclosed, separately typed, is the passage on page 384 bottom -- 385 top which I have spoken to

you about: my typing has restored the words as Agee wrote them. Now there are only four words in the whole book. I want them restored in our new edition. I need not cite all the examples of respectively published books that now print these words. I believe Houghton Mifflin in general may now feel that these things can be printed. But if there is any question, I'd like to be told, so that I can cite my instances of current respectable use of them.

As to the Appendix Note 3 on page 450, I now feel it may stay in, but I haven't made up my mind finally on this. The thing does seem important as a thought of Agee's. I intend to ask around about Miss Bourke-White's condition. (I told you she was sick.)

Attached:

page 384, line 3 from bottom, starting:

".....hurting people and fucking yourself everlastingly and only the hard bastards come through, I'm not born and can't be that hard apparently and God fuck Genius and Works of Art anyway and who the hell am I, who in Jesus' name am I. This is a beautiful country. You can take that and good art and love together and stick them up your ass. And if you think da dialectic is going to ring any conceivable changes, you can stick that and yourself up after. Just an individualizing intellectual. Bad case of infantilism. And fuck you, too."

Lovell Thompson's shock is mirrored in the handwritten note at the bottom of the letter to David Harris. It reads:

David.
Have we any scruples left? If so tell me.
Lovell.

In a letter dated January 20, 1960, Evans responds to Paul Brooks at Houghton Mifflin, who had written to praise Evans's foreword to the 1960 edition of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men. Evans expresses his regard for Agee's writing:

Thanks for your letter. I am so glad you like the Agee foreword that much. I'll take what part of your praise I can; comparison with Agee I must

decline with thanks, though.

I write some. It comes terribly hard. I should put it, it's terribly hard, for me, to make it come. I suppose there are many like me in that respect. It's a hell of a problem, but a fascinating one, you'll agree.

A dispute had arisen over the choice of jacket cover for the 1960 edition of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men. Evans wrote to Lovell Thompson on January 20, 1960:

I've just realized that using photographs on a dust jacket falls under the classification of advertising, or would so be called from the legal standpoint. If you use a person's photograph for advertising or selling without permission, you are liable to be sued by that person, as your lawyers will tell you. As part of a journalistic story, it as (sic) permissible (sic), and as often been so ruled. The book pictures are safe.

I have sketched a couple of plain jacket ideas for you. I like the colors. Note that the gray is warm gray (Actually white with raw umber.) Your sample gray, while handsome, was cold or blueish.

Evans's concern for the tenant farmers, even after almost twenty years, is expressed in the above letter as well the following dated January 31, 1960 to Lovell Thompson:

My feeling about the jacket photographs is not entirely a matter of legality. Personally I shrink over putting those faces so immediately on display. I think there is a chance the families will not hear of their use if they are kept inside. Or will not mind it if so used, only.

Jeptha Wade addressed the issue in a letter dated February 8, 1960 to Lovell Thompson:

To boil it down, if something about a man's life is newsworthy, you can use the news, the man's name, his photograph, all with considerable freedom under a claim of privilege.

However, what you have here, with due respect to

Walker Evans, seems to be something different. I take it that for purposes either of the inside of the book or the cover, any of the persons whose photographs are shown in Let Us Now Praise Famous Men would have to give their permission, at least under the law of New York and probably, in many other jurisdictions as well. In this regard I note with some interest Evans's concern, together with his bland assumption that the use of the pictures in the interior of the book is perfectly alright. Does he differentiate on the basis of the type of permission given on the likelihood that there would be an objection, or on our somewhat differing interpretations of the Law? I also note that in the original edition (Charlie's copy) the pictures are accompanied by the phrase, "Photographs reproduced through the courtesy of the Farm Security Administration, United States Department of Agriculture." You might want to look up the permission which you obtained from the department although this is no assurance that the department obtained permission for reproduction.

Additional insight is provided on the question of ownership of Evans's photographs in a letter from Cass Canfield at Harper and Brothers to David Harris at Houghton Mifflin dated March 8, 1960:

I'm afraid I can shed no light on the copyright status of the illustrations for Let Us Now Praise Famous Men. Although Harpers originally contracted for the book, the contract was terminated because of difficulty with Agee over the text and Houghton Mifflin became the publisher. In view of this fact, I am surprised that there is no illuminating evidence on the copyright page of your original edition. My guess is that the photographs all belong to Walker Evans, and I would suggest that you contact him about the ownership and copyright.

Walker Evans's loyalty to Agee's legacy is revealed in a letter addressed to Lovell Thompson dated April 15, 1960 requesting monies made on reissue go directly to the Agee family, so that Agee's son, John Alexander Agee, could

attend Exeter:

I always take moral matters with the utmost seriousness, and you say the agents commission has become a moral matter to you. So I must tell you something I forget to say about it: all the money from the "foreword," including this H.M. payment, is for the Agee family. Does that make a difference? Of course H.M. should collect if that is the unalterable rule. But that collection won't come out of my pocket. Let us hope what it really looks close to is that John Agee will be sent to Exeter instead of Groton.

Robert Fitzgerald edited The Collected Poems of James Agee and The Collected Short Prose of James Agee. His correspondence with Houghton Mifflin regarding these publications is illuminating because Fitzgerald was determined to reintroduce Agee at a time when most of Agee was out of print. In a letter dated November 29, 1963 to Robert Lescher, Fitzgerald wrote:

I have reasoned that while we are about it we might as well make the best book possible, one that will really contain everything of interest and relevance to James Agee's poems as well as the poems themselves. My own narrative could take no other form in the end than the form it took, if I were to do justice to my friend and to his work as I understand it. Your original interest was in a biography -- a kind of work that I have neither the training nor the time nor inclination to perform. But this book as it stands is the best I can do to satisfy that original interest as well as the nominal one that we settled upon.

Like Evans, Fitzgerald was willing give any book profits directly to the Agee Trust. In a letter to Robert Lescher dated April 4, 1964 Fitzgerald expressed his wish that:

Mia Agee should be told that I'm willing to forego in favor of the Agee Trust or Estate or whatever

any royalties accruing to me beyond the amount of the advance H.M. made me last year.

I agree about the photographs and would choose the one by W.E. of J.A. with glass in hand.

By December 1966 The Agee Trust had agreed in writing to publication of The Collected Poems of James Agee with provisions. On January 6, 1967 David McDowell and Mia Agee requested to discuss the contents of the proposed book with Robert Fitzgerald. On March 24, 1967 Chester Kerr granted permission to republish the contents of Permit Me Voyage.

Robert Fitzgerald wrote to David McDowell, now Senior-Editor at Crown Publishers Inc., in a letter dated April 29, 1967 expressing his delight that all parties are in agreement. This letter is especially poignant because it reveals Fitzgerald as a lifelong champion of Agee's writings:

I continue of course to feel, as I told you, that the book I made is peculiarly appropriate to Jim Agee as poet -- to that phase and that aspect of him, showing how the phase ran its course and how the aspect was qualified. Perhaps a simple statement precisely to this effect would enlighten and disarm prospective readers. It seems to me that I, as a poet myself, as a friend of Jim in poetry first of all, and as the man who in 1962 undertook this labor and study, do have a kind of claim (here I see what Mia means) to make my presentation and to substantiate it. I believe the portrait to be true as Jim and I understood the truth in such matters, though it fall short of being complete as your own work in due course will be. But it's truth depends upon a balance of part against part, and you were quite right in saying that to remove any of these would disturb that balance as I see it.

Therefore I feel that though you may later wish to bring out not only the complete letters but also

the shorter prose works, you should allow me to publish in general those portions of letters and those bits of prose that are significant in my account of Jim. Not that I am not open to your suggestions or better reasoning on any specific point. But I would simply be unfair to myself and to my own profoundest sense of things if I should consent to emasculate what I had done in favor of what you will later wish to do. That being said, I hasten to add that I look forward with pleasure to your own work and to whatever contribution I may make to it.

Thus, the only remaining obstacle was to decide on how to present the poems, in a collection with selected prose or as two separate volumes -- one poetry and one prose. In a letter dated July 30, 1967, Fitzgerald wrote to Lovell Thompson:

I propose that the Agee volume be turned into Poems and Uncollected Prose of James Agee, edited with an introductory memoir by R.F. in two volumes, to be published and sold together by Houghton Mifflin if you agree . . . This is what Mia wants and David McDowell wants and is in fact only an expansion of the book I made. Are you willing? I will plan to work on it in September.

Houghton Mifflin agreed to the two volumes. However, McDowell preferred to have them published as separate entities autonomous of each other. Also, in accordance with Father Flye and Robert Phelps's wishes, Fitzgerald wrote to David McDowell on October 23, 1967 of his willingness to "write a shorter introduction for the poems and let the memoir, suitably revised, stand with the prose." Consequently, more attention would be paid to each volume if not published simultaneously.

In 1967 Agee's lawyers began action to secure the

rights for Agee's work to become part of The Agee Trust. In a letter dated December 12, 1967 Aaron L. Danzig wrote to Lovell Thompson:

Mr. McDowell tells me that at this time he is very anxious to have the copyright in Let Us Now Praise Famous Men and Morning Watch transferred of record to the James Agee Trust (reserving of course such rights as appropriately appertain to Houghton Mifflin).

Houghton Mifflin's Loss of A Death in the Family

In 1957, Houghton Mifflin was approached to publish Agee's autobiographical novel A Death in the Family from Agee's unfinished manuscript. After other offers had been made by Farrar, Straus and Harcourt Brace, McDowell and Obolensky secured the right to publish the work. Paul Brooks at Houghton Mifflin was informed by Agee's attorney James Murray that Houghton Mifflin was losing its bid to publish A Death in the Family. In a letter dated February 15, 1957, Murray wrote:

I have carefully examined your offer of January 17, and regretfully inform you that it does not compare favorably with other contract offers received from three major New York publishers.

I have been advised by the trustee that he (David McDowell) could not consider any agreement for the publication of this work that did not embody at least the following:

\$2500 minimum advance.
Fifteen per cent flat royalty.
No option arrangements on future works to be tied into the basic contract.

James Murray reproached Houghton Mifflin in a letter dated March 7, 1957:

Mrs. Agee, the estate representative and the James Agee Trust are now of the opinion that any further delay in a definite disposition of this work would constitute financial damage to the interests of the late Mr. Agee . . .

Consequently I am required to insist that you inform me at once whether or not you accept the terms recited in my letter of February 15.

On March 26, 1957 James Murray wrote Paul Brooks officially rejecting Houghton Mifflin's offer to publish A Death in the Family:

I am now in a position to forward you a definitive reply.

First of all, there appears to be a serious discrepancy in the recital of facts as you present them, or perhaps in the interpretation which you have given to them.

For example, the delay to which you refer was created by the very complicated problems of the James Agee Estate, followed by the difficulty of securing properly typed transcriptions from the longhand manuscripts which were most difficult to read . . .

I must also make it clear that I have encountered a considerable body of professional opinion that inclines to the view that the weak sales record of James Agee's books is due in very large measure to the weak effort of the Houghton Mifflin Company.

More importantly for my purposes, and the purposes of the Trust, your concept of an advance against royalties for A Death in the Family contrasts sharply with offers that have been made to me by four other major publishing houses. Please be assured that all of these publishers have already submitted offers very much higher than yours and have in addition agreed to a guaranteed advertising budget. In all fairness to the interests of the Estate I am obliged to advise the Trust that comparison of these offers -- all other things being equal -- would seem to indicate that Houghton Mifflin approaches this project with little real enthusiasm. You can, I am sure, understand that in the present frame of reference

we have no choice but to decline such an approach
 . . .

If your letter of March 12 is to be considered a final offer for A Death in the Family I must regretfully inform you that it is herewith rejected.

It was "One of Agee's friends, David McDowell, who had attended St. Andrew's after him, had met him through Father Flye, and had grown faithfully close to him, formed a publishing firm, McDowell, Obolensky, and two years after Agee's death he published A Death in the Family" (Hersey 81). In a letter from Alice Morris at *Harper's Bazaar*, sent to Paul Brooks on December 20, 1956, Ms. Morris states:

Looking over the manuscript again convinces me that many lengthy sessions of meticulous work will be necessary, as well as consultations with Mia Agee, and a thorough reconsideration of the fictitious names substituted by Walker Evans for the real ones used by Jim . . .

Quite aside from all discussion of ways and means, I consider it wonderful, heartening news that you want to publish this rare and moving work of talent.

Houghton Mifflin did not end up securing the rights to A Death in the Family, and as excited as Alice Morris appeared to be, in a follow-up letter dated February 25, 1957 she admitted that she had not begun work on the manuscript, adding, "How disappointing! And, on another level, something of a relief to have a respite from too much work."

Agee had planned to complete the book during the summer of 1955, but at his death on May 16, 1955 left behind a

manuscript that was hard to decipher. Frohock recalls that:

a day or so before he died, Agee told a friend that he needed two months to finish A Death in the Family. From the text, as edited by his widow and his publisher, it is not clear whether he was planning to add to the present twenty chapters or meant rather to spend the time reworking what he had already written. But the book as we have it is a series of scenes which tell a complete story, whether or not it is exactly the story Agee set out to tell. (225)

What is evidenced here is the importance Agee placed upon poetry in his novel. It was begun, though never completed, as a lyrical prose work which allowed language to dictate the dramatic scope of the work, sacrificing narrative for description. Like Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, Agee wished to "capture the everyday events of existence with an increasing accuracy" (Moreau 268). A Death in the Family is a personal narrative using the poetic style which Agee first conceived of for Let Us Now Praise Famous Men.

After Agee's death, his wife Mia wrote to Paul Brooks at Houghton Mifflin requesting the release of its contract on her husband so that she could pursue offers from other publishers regarding his unpublished works; including what would become the two volume Agee on Film, which gathered together all of Agee's movie reviews, essays and screenplays. Whether Mia Agee's letter to Paul Brooks on January 5, 1956 had any direct impact on Houghton's growing desire to reissue Let Us Now Praise Famous Men is unclear.

The book had become so scarce that when Gilman Kraft, of The Readers' Subscription, Inc., wrote to Jack Leggett at

Houghton regarding his company's interest in possibly reprinting the work, Kraft ended his letter of June 27, 1957 by stating "P.S. If it is humanly possible to lay your hands on a copy of the book it would be of great value to me for obvious reasons." Thus, Let Us Now Praise Famous Men had become an underground classic so scarce that copies were hoarded while the book could not secure a reprint, in any form, until five years after Agee's death.

Chapter 6:
Epilogue: A Death in the Family in the
Context of Agee's Career

This world is not my home, I'm just a-passing through
My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue
The angels beckon me from heaven's open door
And I can't feel at home in this world anymore.
(Traditional)

Ethnographic Form in A Death in the Family

This chapter takes the idea of ethnographic form and applies it to Agee's A Death in the Family. Unlike Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, A Death in the Family is not about strangers from another culture but about Agee's own family. As in Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, Agee assigns fictitious personae to the real individuals he writes about. Consequently, A Death in the Family functions as a personal ethnographic exploration of actual events in Agee's life.

Besides this personal dimension A Death in the Family alerts us to the central method by which Agee was intuitively able to do ethnographic work. That enterprise has always required the study of kinship systems, which remain its central concern no matter how kinship is defined. At the center of any kinship system is the family. If one wants to understand Agee's remarkable sensitivity toward ethnographic questions one needs to understand his lifelong fascination with the dynamics of family relationships. My purpose in focusing however briefly on A Death in the Family

is to provide this familial perspective to the detailed analysis already given.

If one wanted to stand back from Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, one could do nothing more revelatory than reading Agee's last work. A Death in the Family serves thus as a lens, which will allow the reader to enter Let Us Now Praise Famous Men through the central notion of the family experience. A Death in the Family is Agee's personal docudrama, formed from the fragments or "moments" of his own childhood days in Knoxville. It offers ample evidence as to the events that helped shape Agee's writing, and as such foreshadows the literary ethnography of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men.

A Death in the Family is a thinly veiled account of Agee's childhood years spent growing up in Knoxville, Tennessee. Like Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, the book defies genre classification, for the facts of Agee's life penetrate the fictional surface, and biographical truth is revealed through poetic efflorescence.

The crux of A Death in the Family is the relationship between Rufus and Jay Follet, counterparts of Agee and his own father Hugh James Agee. Agee records the effects of a beloved father's death not only upon his impressionable young son, but also upon his compassionate wife Mary, his daughter Catherine, and various other family members.

In his book Contemporaries, Kazin praises the care and

patience with which Agee recounts the effect of the father's death on the family. He views Agee's artistry as best exemplified in the scene where the spirit of the dead father enters the room where the family sits mourning, revealing

a universe of feeling, of infinitely aching feeling, which is built up so thoroughly, with meticulous truth to the agony of bereavement, that we finally have the sense of a wholly tangible sorrow, a materialization of human grief. (196)

The ancient meanings of such scenes are basic to deep ethnography as well. Agee reduces his scope from the cultural (Let Us Now Praise Famous Men) to the familial, but the interest remains the same. This mourning episode, along with the scene where young Rufus recalls meeting his paternal great-great grandmother, illuminates Agee's grasp of the meeting of the entirely personal with the objectively universal.

The Family as Subject of Ethnographic Study

Beyond a novelistic exactness, Agee's book is shown to "document" a way of life, as in docudrama again, but this time with the family unit as focus of attention.

In an early scene preceding the father's death, Rufus remembers going with his father to the movies and stopping off at a tavern so his father could have a few drinks. When the father becomes sufficiently drunk he is able to express his feelings for his son:

He looked up his father's length and watched him bend backwards tossing one off in one jolt in a

lordly manner, and a moment later heard him say to the man next to him, "That's my boy"; and felt a warmth of love. Next moment he felt his father's hands under his armpits, and he was lifted, high, and seated on the bar, looking into a long row of huge bristling and bearded red faces. (16)

Another example of the ethnographic framework of A Death in the Family is found at the conclusion of chapter 2. Agee describes Mary's reaction to Jay's trying to start the car before going to see his father:

Uhgh -- hy uh you hy why uhy uh: wheek-uh-
wheek-uh:
Ughh -- hy wh yuh: wheek:
(now the nearly noiseless, desperate
adjustments of spark and throttle and choke)
Ughgh -- hyuh yuhyuh wheek yuh yuh wheek
wheek wheek yuh wheek wheek yuh yuhyuh: wheek;
(which she never understood and, from where
she stayed now, could predict so well):. (40)

The entire episode is recalled in this sort of synaesthetic manner, as Mary anxiously anticipates Jay's actual departure. The chapter concludes with the engine finally turning over and Jay's pulling out of the gate:

. . . she waved, but he did not see her --
and drew the gate shut disappearing beyond it)
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Craaawwrk?
Chiquawkwawh.
Wrrawkuhkuhkuh.
Craarrawwk.
rwrwrk?
yrk.
rk:

She released a long breath, very slowly, and
went into the house. (41)

In A Death in the Family Agee succeeded in recounting and reimagining autobiographical details without resorting to bald statement. As if engaged in ethnographic analysis, Agee examines each family member's feelings and relates the loneliness each experiences, along with the coming together of the family unit for strength and support in a difficult time.

The ability of the spirit to survive and flourish amid emotional upheaval is one of Agee's great themes, figured memorably in a sustained allegorical passage where Agee presents Jay's great-grandmother as a spiritual symbol of America. During a Sunday drive to visit Rufus's great-great-grandmother the reader is offered a moving vignette of a woman who sits silent, yet content, seemingly oblivious to her surroundings and outside of time. The great-grandmother is a 103-year old woman, described by Mary as being "almost as old as the country" (232), who appears to awaken and become animate only when young Rufus approaches her. Up to that point she had been watching them all, "not changing, rarely ever blinking . . . she didn't even move her head

or her mouth" (237).

When Rufus approached her,

Vague light sparkled in the crackled blue of the eye like some kind of remote ancestor's anger, and the sadness of time dwelt in the blue-breathing, oily center, lost and alone and far away, deeper than the deepest well. (239)

As Rufus leaned forward, identified himself and kissed her, a choking gurgle began to emanate from deep within her,

making shapes which were surely words but incomprehensible words, and she held him even more tightly by the shoulders, and looked at him even more keenly and incredulously with her giggling, all but hidden eyes, and smiled and smiled, and cocked her head to one side, and with sudden love he kissed her again. And he could hear his mother's voice say, "Jay," almost whispering, and his father say, "Let her be," in a quick, soft, angry voice, and when at length they gently disengaged her hands, and he was at a little distance, he could see that there was water crawling along the dust from under her chair, and his father and his Aunt Sadie looked gentle and sad and dignified, and his mother was trying not to show that she was crying, and the old lady sat there aware only that something had been taken from her, but growing quickly calm, and nobody said anything about it. (240)

This scene is solely a product of Agee's imagination -- an idealistic wish fulfillment. It is a religious communion for Agee, where life is victorious over death and "the old woman represents a past whose dimensions are epic, outside of time" (Moreau 265). Rufus is immensely affected by this newfound union with his paternal heritage, as his father witnesses a ritual passage as his only son replaces him as the bearer of the family's legacy and future.

In this vignette "we move from the apparently

unavoidable and forceful presence of evil to a kind of pastoral innocence" (Coles 88). Rufus meets the woman who represents a timeless wisdom and an unknown age. She embodies the past in the present, and of all that once was -- which will be passed on to Rufus, who symbolizes all that will be. She sits Sphinx-like in her wisdom of age, silent and omniscient, like an icon approachable only by the most devout. Thus, the old woman ordains Rufus the keeper of the family bloodline, for in her wisdom she can see her own image in Rufus, who remains an extension of his own father's mortality. Agee records the scene both as the participant he is and as if he were an outside observer, looking on and listening and letting his senses fill with the details of the old woman, to be later written down.

In the scene focusing on Rufus's great-great grandmother, Seib refers to "the embrace of humanity" (77), as the old and the young converge in a covenant of love and adoration. It is the human chain unbroken as grandmother waters the ground for the generations to follow.

The ability of Rufus and his three year old sister Catherine to understand death at such an early age, at times more perceptively than the adults, is central to the narrative. Rufus's acceptance of the death serves as an example for the adults around him. Ironically, as the adults attempt to shield the children from the father's casket, it is the children who could teach the adults a

lesson in the meaning of living.

A Study in Human Acceptance

The story of A Death in the Family is a study in human acceptance. The paradox and emotional depth of the novel lies in the family's attempt to comprehend the incomprehensible. The language is direct, simple yet profound, in its effort to relate the thoughts and reactions of the central characters' points of view. In a stream of consciousness passage focusing on Rufus's boyhood memories, Agee reveals how Rufus's almost sacred recollections of his mother and father allow him the strength to endure human tragedy years later. Agee writes:

I hear my father; I need never fear.
I hear my mother; I shall never be lonely, or
want for love.

When I am hungry it is they who provide for
me; when I am in dismay, it is they who fill me
with comfort.

When I am astonished or bewildered, it is
they who make the weak ground firm beneath my
soul: it is in them that I put my trust.

When I am sick it is they who send for the
doctor; when I am well and happy, it is in their
eyes that I know best that I am loved; and it is
towards the shining of their smiles that I lift up
my heart and in their laughter that I know my best
delight.

I hear my father and my mother and they are
my giants, my king and my queen, beside whom there
are no others so wise or worthy or honorable or
brave or beautiful in this world.

I need never fear: nor ever shall I lack for
lovingkindness. (82-83)

This passage is like a prayer, as if Rufus is reasserting his own place in the family and in the world. The passage

is told from Rufus's point of view as a sort of connection between a world of human acceptance and childhood. Since children are thought to be more accepting than adults, it is not surprising that they are also more easily betrayed by the tragedies of life, in this case the death of a parent. In order to confront the enormity of his father's death Rufus dreams of his childhood, a time when he was sheltered by his parents from all the bad:

His mother sang to him too. Her voice was soft and shining gray like her dear gray eyes. She sang, "Sleep baby sleep, Thy father watches the sheep," and he could see his father sitting on a hillside looking at a lot of white sheep in the darkness but why; "thy mother shakes the dreamland tree and down fall little dreams on thee," and he could see the little dreams floating down easily like huge flakes of snow at night and covering him in the darkness like babes in the wood with wide quiet leaves of softly shining light. (97)

Peter Ohlin writes that "the basic metaphor of the book is implicit in the idea of going home" (197). Home then becomes synonymous with childhood and safety. At the Follet home, Jay is safe. Away from the security of his wife and children, he gets into a terrible accident and is killed.

According to Peter Ohlin, A Death in the Family "is a demonstration of the impossibility of comprehending death in human terms" (210). The act of dying solves nothing and brings no sudden maturation; it is the acceptance of such a circumstance, however, which allows the family to survive. The reader realizes that "Rufus is no wiser at the conclusion; on the contrary, he has lost whatever

understanding he had of the world" (Ohlin 211). Agee spent his whole life trying to come to terms with his own father's death. Agee and the reader finally realize that "the death of Jay Follet does not clarify anything: it has no meaning, and nothing can give it meaning" (Ohlin 210).

Agee's own fears are unleashed in A Death in the Family. A brooding darkness permeates the narrative, adding to the lugubrious imagery of a family trying to come to grips with death. The past is recalled with a shaky and surreal clarity as Agee struggles to reconcile the joys and anguish of his childhood. One detects that

as a writer Agee later returned to the images of happiness that his childhood evoked, but as a child he aspired to a less confined and harsher world. Descriptions aside, he looked for experiences that would reveal him to himself, free him from his uncertainties, help him understand the contradictions he saw and unveil for him the secrets of the universe. (Moreau 35-36)

As a child, Agee could be forgiven such an ambition, and in the end he came to realize that the secrets of the universe belonged to the universe, and the secret to surviving was to be gained through blind -- yet observant -- acceptance. The question remained, how does one blindly accept death?, and the answer for Agee, whether he admitted it or not, was rooted in his Christian faith.

According to Moreau, it was because of his father's death that Agee came to regard death as a mystic event. It was a cathartic experience and "the images that Agee retained from this event pervade most of his writing, to be

reworked in terms of a fall from innocence, of a first contact with a world of violence and tragedy, betraying the comfortable delusions of childhood" (40). Through faith, Agee would come to accept these circumstances. As in Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, the real far outweighed the fiction in A Death in the Family. Agee could never seem to find a purely fictional voice, could never create a truly fictional world, and, therefore, Agee imbues all of his writings with an ethnographic sense of the world and of himself.

Concluding Thoughts

Robert Fitzgerald eloquently emphasized the measure of the man in a letter to Paul Brooks dated February 25, 1968:

It is good to have your letter about the Agee memoir. If it were not painful at times it could not approach doing justice to his life, his magnitude and his trouble in the world as it was and is. But he did win out, he accomplished essentially what he had it in him to do, and my notion was to make that clear in tribute to his vitality.

James Agee appears to have left the critics uncomfortable and the public unaware, because his work never could find its proper place within any one genre, for Agee never could embrace one at the expense of abandoning another. It is a testament to Agee's legacy that one work, Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, could justifiably cause so much confusion. Nonetheless, upon being reissued in 1960 Let Us Now Praise Famous Men has sold over half a million copies.

Many critics believe that Let Us Now Praise Famous Men should secure Agee a permanent place in American literature. The time has come to do away with all types of labeling and to reexamine a work that deserves to be evaluated for its innovative ethnography, its experimental use of language and its unapologetic faith in the dignity of human beings.

By exploring the ethnographic collage of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, this dissertation gives a new picture of James Agee and shows how difficult his achievements are to categorize. Agee wrote that Let Us Now Praise Famous Men "is not a work of art or of entertainment, nor will I assume the obligations of the artist or entertainer, but it is a human effort which must require human co-operation" (111). The human aspects of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men encourage the reader to become a participant in the drama of the three tenant families and of James Agee.

Over the years Let Us Now Praise Famous Men has been categorized as both literature and sociology. The truth is that it is so difficult to categorize because it resembles no other book. Let Us Now Praise Famous Men belongs to an unusual class of works in the sense that it anticipates many questions that have been raised in debates over the climate of postmodernism. Agee perhaps does not articulate the scientific/abstract principles of postmodern ethnography and its skeptical attitudes, but he understands the difficult balance between truth and empathy. Such a concern

anticipates the postmodern.

Through Agee's and Evans's unpublished correspondence with Houghton Mifflin regarding the publication of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men and an exploration of the text as docudrama, the design of the book is illuminated. This dissertation has argued that Let Us Now Praise Famous Men is James Agee's masterpiece, and only through an ethnographic reading can the reader begin to approach such an experimental work. Current debates about the personal dimension of anthropological research show that work such as Agee's belongs to an important time in literary history, since he confronts the tension between the personal and the impersonal, and develops an original literary form to express his vision.

Appendix 1

List of 171 Letters and Notes referring to the Publication of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men.

All letters are heretofore unpublished and belong to the Houghton Mifflin files (microfilm): Harvard University Library, Reproduction Service, Widener Library, Cambridge, Mass. 02138, U.S.A.

In most cases I have used standard xeroxes of the letters. In some cases the type script was so faint that I have used a reversed image, so that the white type script shows up more clearly against the black background. Finally, all the letters existing in holograph manuscript appear in two forms, first my own type script, second the holograph manuscript. Miscellaneous materials include for example, telegrams of May 6, 1941 from James Agee to Robert Linscott and August 18, 1968 from Robert Fitzgerald to David Harris.

1. Aswell, Edward C. Letter to Lovell Thompson. 18 July 1940. James Agee Correspondence with Houghton Mifflin. Harvard University Lib., Cambridge
2. Evans, Walker. Letter to Lovell Thompson. 5 November 1940. James Agee Correspondence with Houghton Mifflin. Harvard University Lib., Cambridge.
3. Evans, Walker. Letter to Lovell Thompson. 17 November 1940. James Agee Correspondence with Houghton Mifflin. Harvard University Lib., Cambridge.
4. Agee, James. Letter to Robert Linscott. Undated. James Agee Correspondence with Houghton Mifflin. Harvard University Lib., Cambridge.
5. Agee, James. Letter to Robert Linscott. 9 April 1941. James Agee Correspondence with Houghton Mifflin. Cambridge.
6. Evans, Walker. Letter to Lovell Thompson. 20 April 1941. James Agee Correspondence with Houghton Mifflin. Harvard University Lib., Cambridge.
7. Agee, James. Telegram to Robert Linscott. 6 May 1941. May 6, 1941. James Agee Correspondence with Houghton Mifflin. Harvard University Lib., Cambridge.
8. Agee, James. Letter to Robert Linscott. 14 May 1941. James Agee Correspondence with Houghton Mifflin.

Harvard University Lib., Cambridge.

9. Agee, James. Letter to Robert Linscott. 17 August 1941. James Agee Correspondence with Houghton Mifflin. Harvard University Lib., Cambridge.
10. Agee, James. Letter to Robert Linscott. Undated. James Agee Correspondence with Houghton Mifflin. Harvard University Lib., Cambridge.
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Mifflin. Harvard University Lib., Cambridge.

Appendix 2**Texts of Correspondence
Listed under Appendix 1**

All letters are heretofore unpublished and belong to the
Houghton Mifflin files (microfilm): Harvard University
Library, Reproduction Service, Widener Library, Cambridge,
Mass. 02138, U.S.A.

July 18, 1940

Dear Lovell:

When your telephone call came through yesterday afternoon, I was in the middle of a conference. I was so involved in other matters at the moment that I was not able to shift my mental gears completely and therefore failed, as I realized later, to tell you certain things about the Agee-Evans book which I should have told you. To avoid misunderstanding perhaps I'd better give you the whole story, as I gave it to Barker several days ago.

The Agee-Evans book which you are going to publish was written under contract for us, and we advanced Agee \$700 to enable him to complete the text.

For various reasons, it took Agee a good deal longer to finish it than he had anticipated, but, meanwhile, we, acting in good faith under the contract, went ahead with our plans to publish and had plates made for the Evans photographs. I doubt if any engraver's plates were ever made under such careful and loving scrutiny as Walker Evans gave to these. He spent a good deal of time at the engraving plant supervising the job, and, as I recall it, several of the plates were made over and infinite pains were taken in correcting small imperfections in others, until finally Evans was satisfied and the whole batch of plates was pronounced perfect. The engraving costs, as I told you, were \$195.00.

This part of our manufacturing job was completed many months before Agee finished his manuscript. Needless to say, we were tremendously impressed with the text Agee produced. I had known him for years, and had expected something unique for its honesty and deep feeling, and what he wrote was even more moving than I had hoped it would be. There were, however, it seemed to us, certain minor changes which needed to be made in the manuscript in order to meet the practical requirements of publication. Agee, after much soul-searching and indecision, one day deciding to make the changes and the next reversing himself, finally concluded that he could not allow any alterations whatever. This impasse was embarrassing and disappointing all around. Technically, we could have stood our ground and done the required editing which one clause in the contract gave us the right to do, but I had too high a regard for Agee's integrity, and for my own friendship with him, to take this position. There seemed to be only one way out, and this we finally took most reluctantly.

On October 3, 1939, I wrote Agee a letter giving him a conditional release from the contract and leaving him free to place the book elsewhere, on the understanding that if he did succeed in placing it elsewhere he would

- (a) "Provide for the repayment to Harper & Brothers of \$500 advanced on the book," we agreeing at the same time to cancel and forget about \$200 of the total amount advanced; and
- (b) "Arrange with the other publisher to take over from us all the engraver's plates for the photographic illustrations. . . these plates to be supplied at their actual cost to us."

It seemed to us at the time, and we still think, that these conditions under which we released Agee from the binding terms of his contract with us

Mr. Lovell Thompson

2.

July 18, 1940

were fair. I dare say you will agree.

Let me tell you now how greatly I envy you the privilege of publishing this book. It was a great blow to me personally that things turned out as they did. Agee is certainly one of the most remarkable writers I have ever known and the only one now living who, I feel sure, is an authentic genius. My friendship for him and convictions about him have in no way been affected by the disappointing outcome of my only business dealings with him. So literally true is this that I tried very hard this Spring to persuade the Guggenheim Committee to award him a fellowship, though without success.

Do telephone me the next time you come to New York, and let's have lunch together.

Sincerely yours,

(Signed) Edward C. Aswell

Mr. Lovell Thompson
Houghton Mifflin Company
2 Park Street
Boston, Mass.

ECA/hg

441 East 92nd Street
New York
November 5, 1940

Mr. Lovell Thompson
Houghton Mifflin Co.
2 Park Street
Boston, Mass.

Dear Mr. Thompson,

Jim Agee and I have decided to ask you whether it would be possible to place the photograph reproductions of 'Let Us Now Praise Famous Men' on one side of the pages only, rather than, as we have all thought until now, on both. We'd like very much to have it this new way, and I wonder whether you could send me a note to Washington, where I am about to go for a week, about it. My address there will be in care of T. M. Brewer, 509 Cumberland Avenue, Somerest, Chevy Chase, Md.

Cherry

If it is going to be possible to have this change of picture arrangement, the present inclusion of one blank page among the pictures will be eliminated, and they then ought to run without that break. If this would make an irregular, impossible signature, should I supply another photograph, or let a blank fall at the end?

If I may, I am going to send you another form of acknowledgement to be placed immediately following the pictures; and the placement of this will depend on whether the photographs are run singly or doubly on pages. Therefore I'll send this acknowledgement as soon as I hear from you.

/

We hope we are not inconveniencing you.

Yours sincerely,

Walter Evans

509 Cumberland Avenue
Chevy Chase, Md.
November 17, 1940

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Dear Mr. Thompson,

I promised to send you a rewritten acknowledgement note to follow the photographs of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men. I have been waiting in the hope of hearing from you, first, about the page placement: but now I am leaving Washington, and I believe Jim Agee must have come to Boston and then failed to send me your decision. In any case I hope it is now not too late to use this new acknowledgement, immediately following the pictures, no matter how they are placed - singly or double-paged. Here it is:

"Photographs reproduced through the courtesy of Farm Security Administration, U.S. Department of Agriculture."

I'll be relieved if this can go in, and much obliged.

Sincerely,

Walker Evans
Walker Evans

6/1/41

Gave Bianchi
this new copy

Undated: between November 17, 1940 and April 20, 1941 --
James Agee to Robert Linscott at Houghton Mifflin (Editor)

Dear Bob --

Thanks a great deal for your speed with the Karan mss. I'm glad you personally thought so well of them. Two things: again somewhat urgent, one relating to Karan, the other to the book.

Karan: she has had a piece of (temporary) luck with visas and The Authorities and didn't have to leave the country, it is here now at least for the meanwhile. She is exceedingly interested in your suggestion of the possibility of publishing a cut and merged with volume, because she has thought rather seriously of doing that herself. That she hasn't written you herself is puzzling, that for the time being I'm amateur agent for her: she has been rather tired-out and seemed to need a rest from whatever could be relieved of. But as I've said she very much is interested in discussing this with you -- so if you are too it would save time to write her direct: Anna Karan, W. 53rd st., N.Y.C. I do hope it goes through.

The book: Proofs are coming in regularly -- Nearly, 2/3rds done now. There seems to be one mistake of omission. I'm not impressed, I sent in the material and directions so late. But it is an important one:

On the Porch was to run in 3 parts, one at beginning, 3rd at end, 2nd, and longest (c. 25 -- typed pages) at the dead-centre, immediately following SHELTER. Shelter, Clothing, Education and part of Work have now been sent me, also parts 1 and 3 of On the Porch, but no copies of Part 2 of the Porch. Should I write the Press rather than you? I had an idea I'd better write you instead.

I hope to see you if you're down next month. I'm even more tied to this series than I'd expected. As I hope I wrote you but can't surely recall, my only regret on the not getting in the series is need of money, both for myself and Walker. Aside from that we agree it is far more sensible (?), both from my point of view, the banks, yours and the series.

A better new year to you and everyone else there. This last one was.

Jim.

322 W. 5th
NY City

Dear Bob:

225

Thanks a great deal for your speed with the Kavanas mss. I'm glad you personally thought so well of them. Two things, again somewhat urgent, one relating to Kavanas, the other to the book.

Kavanas: She has had a piece of (temporary) luck with visa + two authorities and didn't have to leave the country, & is here now at least for the next while. She is exceedingly interested in your suggestion of the possibility of publishing a cut + merged single volume, because she has thought rather seriously of doing that herself. That she has, I write, for herself & family, that for the time being I'm almost agent for her: she has been rather tired-out & seemed to need a rest from whatever she could be relieved of. But as I've said she very much is interested in discussing this with you - so if you do too it would save time to write her direct: Anna Kavanas, 55 W 53rd St., N.Y.C. I do hope it goes through.

The book: Things are coming in regularly - nearly 2/3rd done now. There seems to be one mistake of omission. I'm not sure, I sent in no initials & directions so late. But it is an important one:

On the Porch was to run in 3 parts, one at beginning, 2nd at end, 2nd, and last part (c. 25-typed pages) at the dead-centre, immediately following SHORTER. Shelter, Clothing, Education - part of Work have now been sent me, also part 1 & 2 of On the Porch, but no sign of Part 2 of the Porch. Should I write the Press rather than you? I had an idea I'd better write you instead.

I hope to see you if you're down next month. I'm even more tied to this job than I'd expected. As I hoped writing on but can't touch it, my only prospect on the art. picture - with series is need of money, both for myself & Walker. As to your that we agree it is far more desirable to sit around, both from the point of view, the books, games, and the series.

A better new year to you and everyone else than this last one was.
Love,

322 W 53rd
W. G. L.

April 9, 1941 -- James Agee to Robert Linscott

Dear Bob --

I got off all the proofs this afternoon (Thank god) -- So I hope the postponement won't be too hellishly long. Lord knows it's my funeral & doing.

It was fine to see you and I hope to again soon.

Best regards --

Jim Agee

322 W 15

-- N. Y. C.

4/9/41

227

✓

Dear Bob-

I got off all the proofs this afternoon (Thank God) -
So I hope the postponement won't be too hellishly long.
Lord knows it's my financial doing.

It was fine to see you and I hope to again soon.

Best regards-

Jun. Ayce.

322 W 15

- N.Y.C.

441 East 92nd Street
New York, N.Y.
April 20, 1941

Mr. Thompson
Mr. Lovell Thompson
Houghton Mifflin Company
2 Park Street
Boston, Mass.

Dear Mr. Thompson,

I was glad to have your letter of April 16. It seems all right to me to print the photographs in LET US NOW PRAISE FAMOUS MEN as you now prefer, back to back. Could we then follow that paper dummy you mention having, literally; allowing the blank page to fall where it does, and letting the last photograph come on a left-hand page? The acknowledgement to follow immediately after the pictures would then be placed on a page falling on the right, opposite that last plate. The words I want are the ones I believe I sent you Nov. 17th last Fall. If by any chance you haven't that particular wording, I'll send you one immediately, by wire if you are pressed for time. I do not care in what position on the page these words of acknowledgement are printed; I have a slight preference for having them top or bottom rather than center, if that is no extra work.

As I told Paul Brooks on the telephone the other day, I expect to be in Norton soon, could come in to Boston to see you and him. I'm not sure when this will be, but will phone before coming.

Sincerely yours,

Walter Evans

CLASS OF SERVICE
This is a full-rate Telegram or Cablegram unless the lettered character is preceded by a suitable symbol above or preceding the address.

R. B. WHITE
PRESIDENT

NEWCOMB CARLTON
CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD

J. C. McLEVER
FIRST VICE PRESIDENT

STATIONS
DE-Delaware
MT-Montgomery
LC-Louisiana
MT-Montreal
MT-Montreal

WESTERN UNION

(05)

The following times shown in the date line on telegrams and day letters is STANDARD TIME at point of office. Time of receipt is STANDARD TIME at point of destination.

3PM 10=PM NEW YORK NY 5 700A

ALBUQUERQUE ALBUQUERQUE ALBUQUERQUE

2 P.M. ST. LOUIS

OK Y B P NO CH NO C J L B P C OK TO F CH NO B AL

J.H. Ager



THE COMPANY WILL APPRECIATE SUGGESTIONS FROM ITS PATRONS CONCERNING ITS SERVICE

May 14, 1941 -- James Agee to Robert Linscott

Dear Bob --

A few notes and questions.

The title page and a few other have come printed on other than galley paper -- I hope it isn't the paper that will be used in the book. What had been agreed on was white (this is ivory or near it) and thin (this would make, at 471 pp. a book a yard thick) and hard surfaced just short of glaze (This is dull).

I have been assuming that page-proofs were sent me only for a check on page order; that if this was o.k. there was no need to read them back. If I am wrong in this please let me know and I will send back the whole batch.

I know it costs to break into the page but I have noted 2 or 3 things I would like to speak of:

On page-numbers I had hoped brackets might be removed. But if the numbers can't be moved all the way to the margin I guess they may as well stay.

On page 244 Judgement is spelt Judgment; on page 314 little is spelt littile. Can these be corrected?

On page 471, at the end of the book, on page proofs, printers have inserted THE END. I'm sure this wasn't in the ms -(if it was charge me) - in any case This must come out.

On the necessitated change of page-numbering, I didn't feel I should be charged, since the insertion of a half-title page for On The Porch: 1 and the transposition to several pages later of

The house had now descended

All over Alabama the lamps are out

was not my doing; it was essential to correct it. But I wired, regardless, because at whatever cost I did want it changed.

Walker tells me of the jacket as a photograph of ground. I have a feeling we are venturing our of our province in speaking of this, but we had hoped the jacket might-be as plain as possible print and paper. But I do realize that is out of our territory.

I hope to see you when you're in town.

Sincerely,

Jim.

P.S. I enclosed a small piece of paper as near as I can find to what was agreed on.

14 May 41

231

Dear Bob -

A few notes & questions -

The little page or few others have come printed on other than yellow paper - I hope it isn't the paper that will be used in the book. What had been agreed on was white (then is ivory or near it) and Pitt this (this would make, at 471 p. a book of good size) and had imposed just short of glare (this is dull).

I have been assuming that page-proofs were sent me only for a check on word page-order; that if they were also, there was no need to send them back. If I am wrong in this please let me know and I will send back the whole batch.

I know it costs to make into the page but I have cited 2 or 3 things I'd like to speak of:

On page-numbering I had hoped brackets might be removed. But if the numbers can't be moved all the way to the margin I guess they may as well stay.

On page 244 judgement is spelt judgment; on p. 314 little is spelt litttle. Can these be corrected?

On page 471, at end of book, on page-proofs, printers have inserted THE END. I'm sure this won't mislead - (if it was, change me) - in any case this must come out.

On the necessitated change of page-numbering, I didn't feel I should be changed, since the insertion of a half-title page (on On The Point: 1 and the transformation to several pages later of the book had been decided.

Not even if the same for comparison

was not my doing; it was inevitable in case it.

But I would, regardless, be coming at it anyway, and I did want it changed.

Wallace tells me of the pocket as a photograph of ground. I have a feeling we are venturing out of our province in speaking of this, but we had hoped the pocket might be as plain as possible just a paper. But I do realize that is out of our territory.

I hope to see you when you're in town.

Sincerely,

Jim

a small piece of)

I enclose a paper as near as I can find to what was a proof.

17 August 1941.

Dear Bob:

Figuring it out with Walker, there are several volumes we want to send notes with, so it will be easiest if the whole batch is sent to Time, care/of me. I wish not, for I hate to wrap packages and appreciate the offer. (Maybe I get cum then to do it here, come to think of it.) Quite a while ago you asked for suggestions of people (writers, critics etc) to send it to; and in work & heat I never got around to it. Does it still hold as possible, or go up the spout with publication? I hope it may be possible, for we both find most of our personal copies eaten up by personal obligation & affection, which leaves little room for gestures of respect - which have rather more learning to them.

Vacation seems now to be shifted to October. Still have to see you and play some records.

Things seem to be stirring in work way (and I do 't mean Time); but best said nothing about until the bitterling tests are in, at least.

Best regards,

Jim.

Undated (1941?) -- James Agee to Robert Linscott

Dear Bob --

A line at least, which I should have sent a long time back. Between work at Time and impossible personal living I have not touched proofs in weeks. It looks though as if things were clearing now. I will get every thing done with just as soon as I can.

I am sorry as hell for the delay, and that there has been no word from me on it.

I hope you're well.

Best regards,

Jim Agee

322 W 15 st
New York City

Dear Bob.

A Excuse at least, which I should have sent a long time back.

Between work at Time and impossible personal living I have not touched proofs in weeks. It looks through as if things were clearing now. I will get everything done with just as soon as I can.

I am sorry as hell for the delay, and that there has been no word from me on it.

I hope you're well.

Best regards,

Jim Agee

322 W 15 St
New York City

Undated (1941?) -- James Agee to Robert Linscott

R.N. Linscott
Houghton Mifflin Co.
2 Park St.
Boston

Dear Bob:

I'm sorry and surprised there's such difficulty in order -- I thought I'd got everything strictly in order on the proofs as I last sent them, and the m.s. to match.

But much of the confusion, come to think of it, is in the preliminary stuff prior to Book Two -- dedications, etc., which I haven't yet seen proofs of.

I'll go through your letter in order with time out on one or two points.

Photographs: It is only secondarily my business to agree to anything on this. So far as I have any, my vote would be, subject only to Evans' change of mind -- to run them as agreed on, first of all, before even any title page. They comprise one or two books and half of a collaboration and must not be sandwiched. But really it is up to Walker rather than me to decide and that of mine is only personal preference and opinion. He is again at 441 E 92 St.

Order of headings -- preferred:
[Photographs; page contains of Evans' acknowledgement and 'End of Book One']; preface; half title; title; copyright; table of contents (one page*); poem (poor naked wretches) and quotation (workers of the world) -- on facing pages; quotation (The Great Ball); Persons and Places: Book Two; Design of Book Two (2 pages)*; preamble; from there on, as in your letter.

If the half-title, title and copyright must precede the preface, all right, but the above order is preferred. Otherwise, let preface immediately follow copyright.

*Contents, and 'design of Book Two': The contents page should be only one page, as follows:

Book One	o
<u>preliminaries</u>	oo
Book Two	oo

(preliminaries being all text between photographs & Book Two) Then the detailed contents -- 'design of Book Two' --

on 2 pages -- a spread, utilizing backside of half-title page of Book Two.

On the suggestions of change because of the stiffening of moral climate: The points raised are of themselves small -- not worth a (?) etc. but the point of tempering in any way to such a shift of climate seems to me very large. Because of this I prefer not to make any further changes. I think the dashes as printed (Galley 191) look silly too, and for that matter that the whole passage is cheap. But if the words themselves can't be had, then I prefer the silliness of the dashes to nothing at all. I suggest they would look less silly if only the vowels were left out -- Though god knows that's silly enough. Would also favor a footnote as follows:

*These deletions look silly. They are a strict image of the law which requires them.

When I sent the Bourke-White interview, I wrote suggesting that a request of permission from Houghton Mifflin would probably be more efficacious than from me. Not hearing from you and seeing it in Galleys, I assumed this was had. I still suspect you could get it better than I could, but if you think not or prefer not, I'll write them.

My regret on the Notes and Appendices in that they represent so little of a strain of feeling I had wanted to use much of in the book. But these are included, and set against other types of treatment, at least to suggest that other strains: so that between the Notes and Porch: 3 the book ends on a discord.

On the Definition: In the Galleys as I have them the shit-words are simply omitted. That suited me in so far as they would scream their presence by their absence. As I recall, my ms. solution was deliberately silly doubletalk. I would prefer this to omission but if it is too expensive resetting, let be as is. The words would be:

duck, snit, dart, kiss, runt, glass, rock

Hope all these things will be o.k. with you. I'm really aware of the reasonableness of the suggestions and in many agree a good deal -- but the other reasons for keeping them as they are seem too important.

Sincerely,

Jim

322 W 15
N.Y.C.

R. N. Lunscomb
 Intergate Mfg. Co.
 2 Paul St.
 Boston

Dear Bob:

I'm sorry and surprised there's such difficulty in order — I thought I'd get everything straight in order on the proofs as I don't want them, and the ms. to match.

But most of the corrections, even to title of it, is ... the preliminary stuff prior to Book Two — dedication, etc., etc., which I haven't yet seen proofs of.

I'll go through your letter in order with time out on one or two points.

Photographs: It is only considerably my business to agree down things on this. So far as I have any, my vote would be, subject only to Evans' change of mind — to run them as agreed on, first of all; before even any title page. They comprise over a two books and half of collaboration and must not be sandwiched. But really it is up to Walker rather than me outside and that if there is only personal preference. Depressive. He is again at 441 E 92 St.

Index of headings — preferred:

[Photographs; page contain up Evans' acknowledgment and 'End of Book One']; preface; half title; title; copyright; table of contents (one page¹); poem (from naked words); and quotation (workers of the world) — on facing pages; quotation (The Great Ball); personal and places: Book Two; Design of Book Two (2 pages)²; preamble; from there on, as in your letter.

1 p the half title, title and copyright must precede the preface, all right, but the above order is preferred. Otherwise, let preface immediately follow copyright.

* Contents, and 'design of Book Two': The contents page should be only one page, as follows:

Book One	0-
<u>preliminaries</u>	00
Book Two	00

(preliminaries: benign text between photographs & Book Two); Then the detailed contents —

'design of Book Two' — on 2 pages — a spread, utilizing backside of half title pages of Book Two.

On the suggestions of change to cancel of the stippling of moral climate:

The points raised are of themselves small — not worth a 'change', etc. — but the point of

temperament in any way to such a height of clarity seems to me very large. Because of this I prefer not to make any further changes. I think the dashes as printed (Galley 141) look silly too, & in that matter that the whole passage is cheap. But if the words themselves can't be had, then I prefer the silliness of the dashes to nothing at all. I suspect they would look less silly if only the vowels were left out - though god knows that's silly enough. Would also favor a footnote as follows:

*These deletions look silly. They are a strict image of the law which requires them.

When I sent the Boulder-white interview I wrote suggesting that a request of permission from Huntington Kipley would probably be more efficacious than from me. Not hearing from you, & seeing it in Galley, I assumed this was bad. I still suspect you could get it better than I could, but if you think not or prefer not, I'll write them.

My report on the Notes & Appendices is that they represent a little of a chaos of feeling I had wanted to work up in the book. But there are included, and set against other types of treatment, at least to suggest that there is a chaos between the Notes and Poems: the book ends on a discord.

On the Definition: In the Galley, as I have seen the first words are simply omitted. That suited me as far as they would screen their presence by their absence. As I recall, my ms. solution was deliberately silly double talk. I would prefer this to omission but if it is too expensive something, let so be so. The words would be:

duck, swit, dart, kiss, hunt, glass, rock

Hope all these things will be o.k. with you. I'm really aware of the reasonableness of the objections and in many cases a good deal - but the other reasons for keeping them on they are so much important.

Sincerely

Jim

322 W15

N.Y.C.

P. 3 Design of Book Two

verses -- Page
 probable --

(On the inside: 1)

July 1936

Like Sunday morning
 At the time
 Near the
 or see the book

Part One: A Country Letter 00

Colony

Part Two: Some Findings and Comments 00

Money

Shelter

(On the inside: 2)

Clothing

Education

Waste

Introductions, Conclusions, the body

Part Three: Instructions

Shady Side, Alabama

Two hours of

Title statement

Notes and references

(On the inside: 3)

[Note to printer. By whatever way you can design it, please make clear that pieces are grouped as here showing { ; and that Parts One, Two & Three are entirely separate from the pieces about them -- All over Alabama; Colony; Int. community; Shady Grove & Two hours. Also that Notes & References stand apart & themselves.]

Things to be done before the

verses.

The Table of Contents should immediately follow the title-page and should read: [insert contents]

CONTENTS

BOOK ONE

0

preliminaries

00

BOOK TWO

00

English and page
 to with a title page

Undated (1941?) -- James Agee to Lovell Thompson

Dear Mr. Thompson --

I have seen Evans and these are last details:

No half-title for the photographs; they begin directly after the fly leaf.

Between photographs and the title page, a blank page.

The credit-note on the photographs, I will insert in the preface when I get the galleys.

The type is fine.

We would rather have the page-numerals at the bottom of the page than at the top, then at the outward cover rather than at top-center.

Neither of the jackets mentioned is so good that but we would rather see another design.

I will send along the dummy model (for cover-cloth & cover-design) as soon as I have the money to mail it; badly broke just now.

I think this covers all details that we left in doubt, and I hope it is legible.

Sincerely,

James Agee.
322 West 15th St.
N.Y., N.Y.

Dear Mr. Thompson-

I have seen Evans and the other fact details:

No half-titles for the photographs; this is very desirable after the Hyatt-
Belmont photographs and the title page, a blank page.

The credit note on the photographs, I will insert in the preface when I get the
pages.

The type is fine.

We would not have the page numbers at the bottom of the page but at
the top. But I have a note at the top, there at the bottom of the page I have
a note at the top.

Most of the footnotes have been moved to the end of the book and are
now in the back.

I will send you the final copy of the book (the corrected version) as soon
as I can. I will also send you the final copy of the book (the corrected version) as soon
as I can.

I will send you the final copy of the book (the corrected version) as soon
as I can. I will also send you the final copy of the book (the corrected version) as soon
as I can.

Sincerely,

James D. G.

322 West 15th St

N. Y., N. Y.

Undated (1941?) -- James Agee to Robert Linscott

Dear Bob --

Page-proofs and front-of-book proofs return by same mail.

Only one query. Is it possible to reset the page-numbering? Is set at top-centre and bracketed it seems to me to make the page look pinched and dinky. If it can reset I would prefer bottom of page where outward cover of text -- i-e. lower lh corner of lh pages, rh lower corner of rh pages -- and without brackets.

Otherwise it looks fine as it begins to become visible -- all except about 80% of the writing.

Even if this costs, & must be charged at cost to me, I'd prefer the reset -- when it costs too God dammed much. I thought I'd spoken of it when format was discussed but I may have merely mumbled or for that matter dreamed it.

Best to you --

Jim.

322 W 15
N.Y.C.

Dear Bob -

Page-proofs and front-of-book proofs return by same mail.

Only one query. Is it possible to reset the page-numbering? As set at top-centre and bracketed it seems to me to make the page look pinched and dicky. If it can be reset I would prefer bottom of page underlined corner of text - i.e. lower l.h. corner of 2th pages, with lower corner of 1st pages - and without brackets.

Otherwise it looks fine as it begins to become visible - all except about 80% of the writing.

Even if this costs, & must be changed afterwards, I'd prefer the reset - unless it costs too good damned much. I thought I'd spoken of it when format was discussed but I may have merely mumbled or for that no one dreamed it.

Best to you -

Jim -

322 W 15th

N.Y.C.

Undated (1941?) -- James Agee to Robert Linscott

R.N. Linscott
Houghton Mifflin
2 Park St.
Boston.

Dear Bob:

Recently Mrs. Saunders, the editor of the Junior League Magazine, called Walker asking for a print, and it has occurred to us that other review copies might possibly be sent out without the photographs. I hope this can be avoided. I realize it's often done, with illustrated books -- an advanced set of bound proofs -- but we are anxious to make it clear to everyone that this is not an "illustrated" book -- that the photographs and text are a collaboration, each of full importance to communicating our subject. I'm afraid this fact could be seriously obscured by text without photographs. Even when the completed book arrived later, the reviewer would be liable to have made up his mind, and done his review. I hope you won't think us merely fussy in foreseeing this as a possibility, and hoping to forestall it. If it weren't of such basic importance to our whole intentions with the book, we wouldn't want to trouble you with it.

If you have any spare time it would be nice to see you, next time you are in New York --

Best regards,

Jim

R. N. Leiscott
Houghton Mifflin
2 Park St.
Boston.

245

Dear Bob:

Recently Mrs. Saunders, the editor of the Junior League Magazine, called Wallace asking for a print, and it has occurred to us that other review copies might possibly be sent out without the photographs. I hope this can be avoided. I realize it's often done, with illustrated books — an advanced set of bound proofs — but we are anxious to make it clear to everyone that this is not an "illustrated" book — that the photographs and text are a collaboration, each of full importance to communicating our subject. I'm afraid this fact could be seriously obscured by text without photographs. Even when the completed book arrived later, the reviewer would be liable to have made up his mind, and done his review. I hope you won't think us merely pussy in possessing this possibility, and helping to forestall it. If it were not of such basic importance to our whole intention with the book, we wouldn't want to hang on with it.

If you have any spare time it would be nice to see you, about time you are in New York.

Best regards,

J. A. J.

Undated (1941?) -- James Agee to Robert Linscott

R.N. Linscott
Houghton, Mifflin Co.
2 Park St., Boston --

Dear Bob --

Enclosed is a biographical data sheet: I've lost the name I was supposed to return it to, but imagine you will know.

I'm afraid the brevity of my answers may seem merely smart-aleck, but it's all I could do. The personal material seemed more personal than I could do anything about, the "informational" things too untrue. [I don't like to have been educated at Harvard or at all] -- and I can't say anything about the book.

Thanks, and thank Paul for sending me a copy of the book. It hasn't arrived but I expect it any time, and look forward to seeing it.

Best to you --

Jim Agee.

R. N. Linscott
Houghton, Mifflin Co
2 Park St, Boston-

247

Dear B.S. -

Enclosed is a biographical data sheet: I've lost the name I was supposed to return it to, but I suppose you will know.

I'm afraid the biog. my archives may seem merely snail-
slow, but it's all I could do. The personal material seemed more
personal than I could do anything about, the "informational" things too
untrue { I don't like to have been educated at Harvard or at all } - and
I can't say anything about the book.

Thanks, and thank Paul for sending me copies of the book.
It hasn't come yet but I expect it any time, and look forward
to seeing it.

Best to you -

J in Apr.

Undated (1941?) -- James Agee to Robert Linscott

19 December

R.N. Linscott
Houghton Mifflin
2 Park St.
Boston.

Dear Bob:

Can you have sent to me c/o Time and soon as possible 3 copies of the book? And bill either me direct or (ha-ha) put it against royalties. Thanks for the novel that was sent me (which I haven't had time to read).

Some good letters about the book, and a good review in Kenyon Review I hear, -- but precisely work of the sort that will help Houghton Mifflin in its Delicate Problem.

A good Christmas to you and all best wishes. Hope to see you when you're in town --

Jim Agee.

Time Magazine
Time-Life Bldg
Rockefeller Plaza
N.Y.C.

19 December -

R. N. Livscott
Houghton, Mifflin Co.
2 Park St
Boston:

ordered

Dear Bob:

Can you have sent to me, c/o Time,
and soon as possible, 3 copies of the book?

And bill me direct or (ha-ha) put
it against royalties. Thanks for the
novel that was sent me (which I haven't had
time to read yet).

Some good letters about the book, and a
good review in *Karyon Review* I hear, - but
probably not of the sort that will help Houghton
Mifflin in its delicate position.

A good Christmas to you and all
best wishes. Hope to see you when
you're in town -

Jim Agee.

Time Magazine
Time-Life Bldg
Rockefeller Plaza
N.Y.C.

THE WESTERN UNION TELEGRAPH COMPANY

NOTICE OF NON-PAYMENT OF TOLLS

W. P. MARSHALL, PRESIDENT

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M. HOUGHTON MIFFLIN
MR., MRS. OR MISS
BSN
ADDRESS

The tolls on your telegram of JAN 9 19 50 to JAMES AGEE
DATE ADDRESS
BEVERLYHILLS CALIF were not paid at destination for the followi
ADDRESS AND CITY
reason:

FORWARDED TO SAN YSIDRO RANCH SANTA BARBARA CALIF

Please pay the amount, \$ 1.03 to the bearer; or if you have an account with us, we will char
the tolls to you. HUB8020

If you have occasion to communicate with us about this message, please call
and ask for LINE 381

Form 34 (Rev. 3-49)

THE WESTERN UNION TELEGRAPH COMPANY

January 13, 1950 -- James Agee to Paul Brooks at Houghton
Mifflin

Dear Paul --

Now, damnit, I can't find any of the letters I owe you answers on; I'm not even perfectly sure of the Boston address but send this assuming the Postal Service can take care of it for a firm so well known in Boston.

I was out of the country last Fall and got your letter too late to let you know. I'm very sorry to have been so tardy about replying.

I'd love to have lunch with you: will you confirm which ever date is more convenient for you? (?)

In case you're pressed for time on this trip perhaps I can save you time by telling you, that if I can do so before my savings run out, I'd rather get the book finished before submitting any of it or discussing possible cost or advance. I realize gratefully, that publishers are very kind and flexible about deadlines, but if I agree to one, even nominally, it seems to get badly under my hide, and hinder writing. Same as advance: if I can manage (and I still have a (?) of savings), I'll do better not to incur business obligations at least not until I've finished writing. Perhaps the more so, because I can't by any means be sure you'll like the book when it is done. I'm at present out on a limb with it, much interested and on the whole confident in what I'm trying, but quite unsure how it'll look when I get a first draft completed. (Trying to postpone self-criticism and new ideas until then.) I'm certainly happy you look forward to getting it; I equally look forward to redoing it and to your independent opinion of it. Also I specifically want to thank you for the very nice thing you said the tenant book and to tell you my appreciation of people, and of a firm, which would publish it in the first place.

If you do have the time to spare, it'll be a great pleasure to see you --

Best regards always --

Jim Agee

My address is 172 Bleaker Street
Phone GRamercy 7-8146

Jan 13 1950

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Dear Paul -

Now, I must, I can't find any of

The letters I owe you answers; I must

guess perfectly sure of the Boston address
but sending assuming. The Post Office
can take care of it for a time so well known in
Boston.

I was up in the morning last Fall and let
you to the hotel to be taken home. I'm
very sorry to have been so long about
replying.

I'd love to have lunch with you
again. I'd love to be more convenient
for you? (I'd love to be more convenient
sure enough if the letters to answer in the.)

In case you're pressed for time on
this trip please let me know you some
by telling you, that if I can do so before
my scraps run out, I'd rather get the
book finished before submitting any of

I'm discussing possible contracts or advances. I realize, gratefully, that publishers are being kind and flexible about deadlines, but if I agree to one, even a temporary, I seem to get badly under my heels and hinder writing. Same is advance: if I can manage (and I will have a fair bit of earnings), I'd better not to incur business obligations at least while I'm finishing writing. Perhaps I'm wrong so, because I'm not being any more sure of my life like the birds when it is done. I'm at present so much as a bird, with it, much interested and as the birds are confident in what I'm trying, but quite unsure how it will turn out when I get a bird's eye complete. (Trying to put some self-criticism and new ideas into it.) I'm certainly helping you, and I'm glad to help it; I equally look forward to reading it and to your independent opinion of it. Also I specially want to thank you for the very nice thing you said about the latest issue and to let you my appreciation of people, a day a few, which would put it in the first place.

If you do have the time to spare, it'll be a great pleasure to see you -

Best regards -

Jim Agee -

My address is
 172. Bladen St.
 Phone GR 7-8146

July 8, 1950 -- James Agee to Paul Brooks

Paul Brooks
Houghton Mifflin Co.
2 Park Street
Boston, Mass.

Dear Paul:

Would you consider printing as a seperate (sic.) volume a story of approximately 24,000 words? By my impression & rough estimate, that is about the length of a shortish novelette or whatnot. This is not a novelette much less (I can't stand the word) a novella, but just a long story. I expect to try to get it published in a magazine in any case but I'd like to know whether you'd be interested, and whether magazine publication would work against or for book publication.

The longer book waddles along. Hope things are going well with you.

My best regards,

- - - Jim

Hillsdale, N.Y.
Route 1

July 18, 1950 -- James Agee to Paul Brooks

Dear Paul:

Thanks very much for your quick reply. I'm sending the story along by the same mail. I'm awfully glad of course that it can be considered.

I have thought of (first) trying magazines which might pay a fair amount; of those the best possibility seemed Flair because it still seems unsettled, and flexible (to put it mildly) about length, & such; but by now that seems a waste of time, with a piece so long, and I think I may as well try the only places where it might have a fairly good chance. I don't imagine either (magazine) is of a kind which would much help towards book publication in the way you spoke of, but if either would at all distinctly be more useful in that way than the other, I'd appreciate your opinion before I send it out. One is Partisan Review, without much of a circulation here; the other is Botteghe Oscure, published in Italy, with still less circulation here I imagine but, so far as I've heard, an excellent reputation. Aside from helping or hindering book publication I'm not quite sure which to send to first anyhow. Partisan gets around more, after a fashion, and fashion I don't much care for, and I'd like it to get around. The other less but I think better of it and believe it would pay at least a little more. But again, I'll appreciate your opinion in relation to possible book publication.

My sense is the thing stands all right by itself: but whether as a book I certainly don't know. Anyhow I am glad that you want to look at it and thanks-

Best regards always,

Jim Agee

August 8, 1950 -- James Agee to Paul Brooks at Houghton
Mifflin.

Dear Paul --

Would you, if convenient, send back the proof of the story?
Harper's Bazaar wants to see it -- My other copy is with a
friend in Texas. I'll return one copy or the other, if
wanted, as soon as possible --

Best --

Jim

Aug 8
 To PAUL BROOKS
 HAWTHORN, MIFFLIN
 2 PARK
 BOSTON, MASS.

Dear Paul-

Would you, if convenient, send back the
 No. of the story? I have been unable to find it.

I am going to the city with a friend in Texas. I'll
 return one copy in the other, if wanted, as soon
 as possible.

Best-

Joni

August 17, 1950 -- James Agee to Paul Brooks

Dear Paul:

I'm thunderstruck and needless to say, happy. Contract signed and returned herewith, one copy kept. Few if any questions or desires for change on that. Such as they are: Paragraph 19 is merciful and full of sense, but a \$20,000 ceiling (sic.) is beyond even my wildest hopes. I would be glad to stretch taxes over succeeding years & avoid lump payment on as low as \$5,000 (which is also beyond said hopes) or for that matter lower, if it can sensibly and conveniently be set so low, from your end. But rather than phrasing it "on anything exceeding carfare" will you, if you think it sensible and convenient to change it, set it at a \$5,000 ceiling (sic.)? (If it means sending a new contract don't trouble yourself or anyone else; the issue in this case is so nearly metaphysical it's not worth your trouble.) The other question or wish is: I'd be very happy if I could get more than a \$500 advance; savings have leaked out very swiftly. But I can think of two excellent reasons why not and very likely you know still others. One is that some, I don't remember how much, of the advance on the other book, is still outstanding. The other, that there's no reason for either me or Houghton Mifflin to expect, with the best of luck, better than a fairly modest sale for the new one. On the other end very little I can say except that money is worth so much less than it used to be, goes so much less far; and that though I'm by no means yet, in immediate need, any money I get can help put a bottom back into the leaky savings situation. And in an aside to you, as of our conversation last winter: though as I said then I'm uneasy about taking advances on unstated or unfinished work and would try to avoid it even in dire need (some probably neurotic need to be beholden only to the writing itself until it's finished), I don't at all feel so about advances on finished & accepted work, short of advances a-la-New Yorker, in amounts or kinds which obligate one deeply into the future. I've often thought of sending back i.e. paying off what was outstanding in the first advance while I was on salary and failed to out of the same vagueness by which I've not kept clear in mind a record of the amount of the debt, or of sales. Might that debt be deducted from present advance, whether it's \$500 or more? Or does that too greatly complicate book keeping and the in-writing in contracts, or could it be handled outside the contract? As I say I'm not in immediate need and it would be nice to clear the debt up; and, on the other hand, if a larger advance is feasible, I'll be very comforted to have it in the bank. But I'm assuming that since it is listed as it is it probably can't be larger and that if it can, that can be arranged, so I'm signing the contract as is. It's in no sense an attempt to dicker.

On the profanity & obscenity I probably didn't write you, I can't remember but by your letter judge not. I of course realize that by laws in your State and likely as not postal laws I don't even know, they can't be used outright; and, too, that the problem for you and for me is purely legal. If I had written you then it would have been as I'm doing now: something obviously must be done about the words. In this case I'm against paraphrase by euphemism or any trick of indirect discourse or by the "obscenity you, you obscenity" of The Bell or the use of the word deletion in the Hemingway Cosmopolitan serial. I very much hope it can be managed just by the use of hyphens for vowels as in the old-fashioned "G-d d-m," or c-f--nd -t", but I realize that "mothuhf-ckin" and "c-cks-ckuh" are a good deal riper and more blatant. If such is possible I'll be very glad to let it go at that; how about "mothuhf---in" etc? That a few spurts of just this language, sufficiently undisguised to be recognizable, be in the story, is I think essential to Hobe's character and to the story; very little of the rest of the air of the school, of its general context and personnel, is given and what is

there I think is needed, in the most razorish possible conflict with the religiosity both good bad and equivocal. I realize that if hyphens or my second kind of dash wre (sic.) used it gives these phrases a shading of prurience, and prominence, which I regret, and which would be absent if the words could be run outright and without comment; but the Law prevents that and is welcome to the blame for it. Any attempt at paraphrase or indirect discourse would I fear give a tinge of facetiousness or priggishness which wd (sic.) be still worse. I think it must be unmistakably clear that he swears, and that he reaches for wild ones & is rather proud of his swearing. But this is as far as I can get without further consultation with you. I do hope that one of the two types of blanking mentioned above may be feasible and if it is, I will rest content. Of course I understand you about it, absolutely; I should have written saying so, in the first place.

The other ms. has been returned by my friend in Texas and is now with Harper's Bazaar, so that is fine. I made one or two minor changes in it -- no fourletter words -- which I'll want to transfer to this copy before it gets into inconvenience for the printer; word substitutions, nothing involving space.

Rather far ahead to speak of it and very likely needless to, but it occurred to me in connection with your quoting of Miss Wilson's report. I warmly agree (sic.) with her about the books she mentions and the whole religious-revival guck, and I think I understand what she means, and thank her; but I do hope it won't be suggested in blurb or advertising that the story is antireligious, or is merely or mainly antireligious. Quite a bit of it is, in degrees ranging between somewhat and absolutely, but as you say a little later in the letter, it is trying for a number of levels and meanings, and quite a lot of it is ambiguous, in conflict, or contradictory; some is I suppose even "pro-religious", though above all I wanted to keep it deadpan & nonpartisan and to suggest at least some of the doubleness of such experience, moral and otherwise. I'm not imagining that she meant that she liked it in contrast with the other books because it was anti, but because it was trying to examine certain aspects of such experience and was not trying to do a sales job or a come-all-ye; but out of my own repugnance for the come-all-ye's, it did make the whole problem occur to me. I'd be equally sorry if it were presented as "proreligious". But I'm awfully long-winded and clumsy: it just isn't essentially a partisan story or a disguised tract for or against, and on much, it is intended that the reader draw his own conclusions; and you yourself have already said this more clearly than I have, so what am I talking about.

Considering how very little it uses any except one character I'd fear that to call it a novelette would be overstating it and would lead some kinds of reviewer into spending half his time defining what a novelette is in order to say this is not, so I hope you just call it a story, though I'm so glad you want to publish it I'd happily settle for anything short of novella or a four-letter word.

Quite aside from publication, I'm so very happy that you like it, Paul.

Best regards always,

Jim

Undated (1950?) -- James Agee to Paul Brooks

Dear Paul --

I'm in Hollywood protempore. Talking with my wife by phone today she tells me of an urgent letter: that there are no breaks in the story and that they are needed; do I want to make my own, or leave it to you; and to let you know too because of manufacturing.

There are 2 breaks in the story; i.e., it is in 3 parts. I had indicated this only by space-breaks, but if it will relieve it more, use Roman numerals. I, immediately beneath the epigraph. II, just before they go to in the chapel door. III, just as they leave the chapel. I can't remember the wording, but I think you will find triple spacing in those places, in the typing.

I would prefer that the long middle sections be continuous but if you prefer, make space-breaks on even page-breaks between sections. So well as I can remember, the places where these could occur are fairly clear, but, coating a copy, I am at a real disadvantage. ~~If you can air-mail it out here~~ I may come back to New York for a week almost right away, or may not. As soon as I know I will wire, where to air-mail the copy -- as I will greatly appreciate your doing if there is time. My idea would be that however these breaks are made in the long middle section, there be no numerals, for that could only confuse the form.

What is being done about the language?

Since writing you last I have had the story accepted by Botteghe Oscure, in Rome. I understand the editor doesn't mind later publication in an American magazine and that some of the latter doesn't mind publishing things Botteghe Oscure has carried since Botteghe Oscure's circulation is almost wholly in Europe. I have written the editor and have still to have this verified. If it is, I want very much to send to some magazine in this country, and hope you will be willing, if need be, to defer gook publication long enough for it to appear. It will mean somebody needed extra money if I could do that.

Also for that reason I would greatly appreciate having your copy back for a maximum of a few days, long enough to get more copies made by a typist. (My handwriting, as you can see, is hard to read, and my typing is slow.)

I'll wire you as soon as I know the proper address.
Best regards always,
Jim

Dear Paul -

I'm writing you in Europe. Talking
with my wife by phone today and I'm
better. But there are no books in the city and that
they are needed; do I want to make my own, or
leave it to you; and I let you know how I'm
managing.

There are 2 books in the story; e.g., it
is in 3 parts. I had indicated the story by
space - breaks, but I think I have done it wrong,
use Roman numerals. I, immediately
before the 2nd graph. II, just before
they go in the Chapter 3. III,
just before the ending but I made you write
just before the ending in the places, in the
typing. I would prefer that the story middle
section be continuous but if you prefer,
make space-breaks on every page-break
between sections. So well as I can
remember, the places where there could

occur all fairly clear. but. To send a copy, I am
 at a real disadvantage. ~~If you can direct it~~ ⁽²⁾
~~out here~~ I may come back to New York for a while
 almost right away, or may not. As soon as I know
 I will write, where to air-mail the copy - as I will
 greatly appreciate your doing it there is time. My
 idea would be that however these Greek accents are made in
 the copy middle section, there be no numerals, (or
 that could only confuse the form.

What is being done about ^{the} language?

Since writing you last I have had the
 story accepted by Bohème Oscure, in
 Rome. (I understand the editor does not mind)
 later publication in an American magazine
 and that some of the latter do not mind publishing
 things Bohème Oscure has carried, twice

Bohème Oscure's circulation is almost wholly
 in Europe. I have written the editor and have still
 to have this verified. If it is, I want very much
 to send it to some magazine in this country,
 and hope you will be willing, if need be, to
 defer book publication long enough for it to
 appear. It will mean somebody's pocket
 extra money if I can do that.

Also for that reason I would greatly

3) appreciate having your copy back (on a maximum of a few days, long enough to get more copies made by a typist. (My handwriting, as you see, is hard to read, and my typing is slow.)

I'll write you as soon as I know the proper address.

Best regards always

Jim

/

Nina Holton
Houghton Mifflin Co.
2 Park Street
Boston Mass.

Dear Mrs. Holton:

Very sorry to have been slow with the galleys. They are coming under separate cover - by air mail if I find I can afford it.

An urgent question: I wrote Paul Brooks some while ago asking if publication might be delayed long to allow appearance in a magazine; I need the money. I have not heard from Paul, and so have not felt I could properly submit it to the magazines I had thought of, but I would like to. A problem is involved in this. The story will be published (it is presumably out by now) in Better the Oscure, in Rome; the editor asks that it not appear in an American magazine within four months of her publication date (which she named as late October or early November). That would mean it could be published in a March issue - and could presumably appear in book form, as soon after March 1 as you thought good. I am asking you about this because I gather my lateness has held up manufacture - and, gather, through that, that H-M may have made other plans for publishing it. I will be very grateful if you will refer this to whoever should see it, and ask him please to let me know where I stand on it.

Here are some notes which may help with the galleys:

I have not been able to locate a book of Common Prayer, and so cannot check a number of points. I hope one could be gotten by without too much inconvenience in your offices; if not, you might more conveniently ask checking points of the Rev. Oliver Dale, Society of St. John the Evangelist, Cambridge. I feel sure he would oblige you, though I would prefer not to put him to the trouble; if you do call him, please give him my thanks for his help and my warm regards. The uncertain points are:

Gal. 1. Is the epigraph quoted from ~~Isaiah~~ or Isaiah? I begin to suspect it is Isaiah.

Gal. 12 Para. 2, 1. 2: Let your light so shine before men; or light?

Gal. 16, Para. 2: Almighty and everlasting God, or everliving God; esp. B on Ever-
living? (or lasting?) (This is the opening of the General
Confession in the Holy Communion Service in the Prayer Book.)

So much for the Book of Common Prayer.

On space-breaks, new Paragraphs, etc:

I am all in favor of Roman numerals I, II, III, where indicated, if you are; and for full-page breaks there, as for new chapters, if you are.

On space-breaks (my symbol, which may be incorrect, is >), I mean the ordinary skipping of 1 or 2 lines - no ornaments, dots, or such. On these and on new paragraphs as indicated I would in many ways prefer not to make them; I think they breakdown, to some extent, efforts I have made for continuance, flow,

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massiveness, and showing a sense of gradual exhaustion. But I do realize that many people find long paragraphs very tiring and hard to read. I have indicated as many as I feel I can, and leave it to your discretion whether you use them or how many you use.

On language:

Some obscure words, by legal necessity, have been blacked. Others I find have been changed to euphemisms, and still others have been left out entirely. I don't of course know the legal problems and distinctions, as the editors do. But I very much hope it ~~is~~ will be possible to be consistent in the handling of these words. If s---t is legally permissible, then can't the other words be similarly used? The euphemisms - furwuh, and futs, are badly in tune to the particular character; something else must be done about them. I have indicated in the margins what I would prefer if it is possible - all of the forbidden word given. What is allowed, the hyphens, or the exact number of the letters omitted. If this is not possible, then treat them as the word s---t is treated, - a long dash instead of hyphens, and the first and last letter of the word. If that is not possible, then simply the first letter and a dash. For your convenience in reference here are the places and words, numbered in order of my preferred treatment. If even the least preferred is possible, or if the editors make it still necessary to omit words also other, or to substitute euphemisms. Please let me know before going ahead, for there may be something else I could do about it. I remember that Paul wrote me (apparently) - "Fortunately, I don't think any specific euphemism is indispensable to the integrity of the characterization or of the story." But they are, I feel; otherwise I would have used others, or none. I clearly realize the legal problem; but I want the story to read as the children can read possible.

Gal. 3, P. W. 3: The word nothingness is not permitted. Can it be replaced to some extent as follows: 1) nothing--- n. . .) nothingness---. 2) nothingness---. 3) nothingness---

Can s----- be hyphenated (as in earlier indicated in typescript). Or, if not by hyphen, can the dash be shortened into proportion?

Gal. 3 (over), para. 2: nothingness is often omitted between penetration and pasture. Can it be treated as above.

furwuh is a euphemism out of character and, I suspect, as well. The word was cocksucker which, I know, is illegal. Can't it be as: 1) cocks- - - -'s; 2) c- - - - -'s; 3) cocks-----
2) c-----'s.

Gal. 26, para. 6: s---t is legal; otherwise as printed. f- -k is possible; 2) f---
3) f-----. Futs is not in tune to his character.

Gal. 20: A longish insert, trying to intensify and slow the sensation's of delay in in getting to the the water. I leave it to the editors whether this is worth inserting.

Gal. 34: Another insert. I am somewhat more sure of the usefulness of this one, but may be over-obvious, over-explicit. If in the opinions of the editors, the of the child's that life and death, and of the death of Christ, are sufficiently

3

present by this moment, then this insert is unnecessary. Otherwise I much think it should be used, but leave it to the judgment of the editors.

I am very sorry to have to write on at such length, in longhand. I know that my hand is very hard to read.

Sincerely yours,

James Agee

There must be acknowledgment to Botticelli's Obscure and, of course, if it is also published in some magazine here, one to that magazine - I suppose as follows:

Acknowledgment is made to Botticelli's Obscure, in which this story just appeared.

But the preferred phrasing will be better known in the office, than by me. Will you please tell who ever it may concern that I think the title* looks fine - and the whole design as far as I can get an impression of it, and way of printing, my thanks and appreciation.

No need to return the typescript.

* page

Nice Hotel
 149th St
 2 Park St
 Boston Mass.

They are coming with
 separate covers - by air mail
 if I find I can afford it.

Dear Miss Hollow:

Very sorry to have been slow with the galley's.

An urgent question: I wrote Paul Brooks some while ago asking if publication might be delayed long to allow appearance in a magazine; I used the word, "I have not heard from Paul and to have it; I could possibly submit it to the magazine. I had thought of, but I would like to. A problem is involved in this. The story will be published (or presumably out by now) in Bohème Obscure, in Paris; the editor asks that it not appear in an American magazine within 4 months of her publication date (which she estimates late October or early November). That would mean it could be published in a French issue - and could presumably appear whole form, as was the March 1 as you thought good. I am asking you about this because I gather my late work has holding manuscript and galley, through that, that H-M may have made earlier plans for publishing it. I will be very grateful if you will refer this to someone should see it, and ask them please to let me know where I stand on it.

Here are some notes which may help with the galley's:

I have not been able to locate a Book of Common Prayer, and so cannot check a number of points. I hope one can be gotten at without too much inconvenience in your office; if not, you might more conveniently call these checking points of the Rev. Oliver Peck, Society of St. John the Evangelist, Cambridge. I feel sure he would oblige you; though I would be glad to put him to the trouble; if you

do call him, please give him my thanks for his help and my warm regards. The number of notes is:

Gal 1. Is the epigraph quoted from Psalm 129 or 130? I began to think it is 130.

Gal 12:9 2 L. 8: Let your light be shown before men; or light?

Gal 16, 9 2: Almighty and everlasting God, or everlasting God; cap E on Everlasting? (relating?) (This is the opening of the General Confession in the Holy Communion service in the Prayer Book).

So much for the Book of Common Prayer.

On 3 piece-brakes, new DS, etc:

I am all in favor of Roman numerals I, II, III, where indicated, & you are; and for full-size breaks there, as for manuscripts, if you are.

On 3 piece-brakes (my symbol, which may be incorrect, is $\succ$), I mean the ordinary sketching of 1 or 2 lines — no ornaments, dots, or ends. For these and one new DS as indicated I would in many ways prefer not to make them; ~~that I do realize~~ I don't only break down, but make that off. I have made for countenances, faces, manures, and so forth, a very good deal of exhaustion. But I do realize that many people find it very tiring and hard to read. I ~~do~~ have indicated as many as I feel I can, and leave it to your discretion whether you use them, or how many you use.

On language:

Some of the words, by legal necessity, have been changed. Others I find have been changed to euphemisms, and still others have been changed entirely. I don't know how the legal problems and distinctions, as heads do. But I very much hope it will be possible to be consistent in the handling of these words. If S — T is legally permissible, then can't the other words be similarly used? The euphemisms — agony, and fatigue, and badly untrue to the particular character; something else must be done about them. I have indicated — the queries, what I would prefer if it is possible — all of the forbidden words given. But no. 3. New hypotheses, as the exact words of the letters omitted.

If this is not possible, then treat them as the word S-T is treated as a long, unbroken hyphen, and the first & last letter of the word. If that is not possible, then simply the first letter and a dash. For your convenience, references here are the first and words, as marked with my (personal) brackets. If the last hyphen is impossible, or if the solution is still necessary to omit words all together, or to substitute superfluous. Please let me know before going ahead, for there may be something else I can do about it. I am sure that Paul will be (opportunity) - "For instance, I don't think any specific character is indispensable to the integrity of the characterization of the story". But they are, I feel; otherwise I would have used others, or none. I clearly realize the legal problem; but I must tell the story to suffer the minimum damage possible.

Gal 3 93: The word methaphor has been omitted. Can it be replaced to answer the following: 1) methaphor-----; 2) methaphor-----; 3) M-----.

Can S-T be hyphenated (as a solution indicated in typewriting). Or, if not hyphenated, can the dash be marked with a proportion?

Gal 3 (over) 92: Methaphor is a term employed between for and to - to and to. Can it be treated as above.

Prognosis is a supplementing of character and, I think, a solution in the word.

The word was Codebook and, I know, is illegible. Can it be replaced by any one of the following: 1) Codes-----; 2) C-----; 3) Codes-----; 4) C-----.

Gal 2 64.6. S-T if legal; otherwise - pro. If pro - to if possible; 2) pro - to; 3) pro - to. Fritz is not true to his character.

Gal 30: A longish word, trying to write it and then the two following delays in getting to the end of the writer. I leave it to the solution, whether this is worth inventing.

Gal 34: Another word. I am somewhat more sure of the meaning of this one, but it may be over-observed, over-emphasized. If with the opinion of the solution, the sense of the child's long life and death, and of the death of Christ, are sufficiently present by reference at this moment, then this word is unnecessary. Otherwise I think it is necessary, but I leave it to the solution, whether it is.

I am very sorry to have to write you at such length, as longhand - I know that
my hand is very hard to read. 270

Sincerely yours,

James Beece.

There must be an acknowledgment to Boiteghe Occure and, of course,
if it is also published in some magazine here, our to that magazine - I suppose
as follows:

Acknowledgment is made to Boiteghe Occure, in which this
story first appeared.

But the paper belonging to the printer is in the office. Do you mind.

Will you please tell wherever it may come that I think the
title page looks fine - and the whole design as far as I am yet
concerned, and way of printing. My thanks and appreciation.

No need to return the typescript.



January 10, 1951 -- James Agee to Nina Holton at Houghton Mifflin.

Dear Miss Holton --

I'm very sorry to have been so late with everything. Until about Jan. 20th -- I will be at the address given here, if anything is wanted; Thereafter, c/o T.W. Durant, Box 1445, Beverly Hills.

Soon after receiving your letter and the enclosed jacket material, I tried a revised drafting it -- which I find I've left in Beverly Hills. So, last night, I wrote out a draft of my own, such as I could. Needless to say, please disregard and use your own version, if you prefer -- or take whatever you may find useful from mine; all I can say for mine is, I think it a little more accurate about the intention of the story, but I don't think any writer is able to write his own blurbs or should they.

The story has appeared in Botteghe Oscure, a trilingual magazine (Italian, French, Swedish) published in Rome. What American magazine, if any, it will appear in, I will know more and will let you know as soon as I do. Norway of course, when they can print by March 1.

My best regards to you --

Jim Agee

Wednesday Jan 10

272

Dear Mr. Hutton.

I'm very sorry to have been so late with everything. Until about Jan. 20th I will be at the address given here, if anything is wanted; thereafter, at ~~20~~ % T. W. Durant, Box 1445, Beverly Hills.

~~that~~ Soon after receiving your letter and the enclosed folder material, I had tried & revised drafting it — which I just have left in Beverly Hills. So, last night, I wrote out a draft of my own, such as I could. Needless to say, please disregard, and use your own version, if you prefer — a title word whatever you may think bestful from a title; all I can say (as it is), I think it a little more accurate about the introduction of the story, but I don't think any writer is able to write his own blurb, or something.

The story has appeared in Botteghe Oscure, a tri-lingual magazine (Italian, French, English) published in Rome. What American magazine, if any, it will appear in, I will know soon and will let you know as soon as I do, not many, of course, unless they can read it by March 1.

My best regards to you —

Jim Agee

Undated -- James Agee to Nina Holden

Tuesday evening --

Dear Miss Holden --

Sorry, I forgot to enclose this in my note to you, sent today.

Sincerely,

Jim Agee

Tuesday evening -

Dear Miss Hutton -

Sorry I forgot to enclose this with my

note to you. See today.

Sincerely,

Jim Fogg

November 7, 1951 -- James Agee to Paul Brooks at Houghton Mifflin

Nov. 7 1951

Mr. Paul Brooks
Houghton Mifflin Co.
2 Park St.
Boston

Dear Paul:

Thank you very much for your letter and for the one last summer with the reviews. I'm sorry not to have answered long ago. What prevented me, aside from bone inertia, was simply that I had no news about the novel, or no good news anyhow. I left the ms. at home when I came west, expecting to be home, and back at work on it, within a few months. I've been out here now more than a year. Depending on how certain jobs work out or fail to, I now expect to be back east either within about 6 weeks or within about 5 months. In either case I probably won't be able to work much on the book before summer or late spring. My time-estimate once I do get back to work on it is also confused, in a way I believe I once wrote you about: I seem to be writing two versions at once, a short and a long. Of the short version I have close to 4/5ths done, is from first to 25th drafts; of the long, possibly half. I suspect that in the long run the short version will be the one.

Regards,

Jim Agee

Nov. 7 1951

Appz

Mr. Paul Brooks
Houghton Mifflin Co.
2 Park St
Boston

Dear Paul:

Thank you very much for your letter and for the
one last summer with the reviews. I'm sorry not to have answered
long ago. What prevented me, aside from basic inertia, was simply
that I had worries about the world, or at least about myself. I
left the Mf. at home when I came west, expecting to be home, and
back at work on it, within a few months. I've been out here now
nearly three years. Depending on how certain jobs work out or fail
to, I now expect to be back East either within about 6 weeks or
within about 5 months. In either case I probably won't be able to
work much on the book before summer or late spring. My time-
estimate on it once I do get back to work on it is also confused, in a
way I believe I once wrote you about: I seem to be writing two
versions at once, a short and a long. Of the short version I have
close to 4/5ths done, as far as first to 12th drafts; of the long,
possibly half. I suspect that in the long run the short version will
be the one. But each time I have tried to exclude the long version

Mrs.
Agge James

N
17 King St.
New York

January 5, 1956

Dear Mr. Brooks:

I have been meaning to write to you for some time, to ask you if Houghton, Mifflin would be willing to release its contract rights to the work of my husband. Two publishers are interested in some of his writings, most specifically in a collection of his writings on movies.

I would appreciate hearing from you as soon as convenient.

Sincerely,

M. Fritsch Agge
M. Fritsch Agge

Mr. Paul Brooks
Houghton, Mifflin Co.
432 Fourth Avenue
New York

GROSSET & DUNLAP · INC PUBLISHERS

1107 BROADWAY, NEW YORK 10, N. Y. (TWENTY-FOURTH STREET) CHELSEA 2-1600

November 5, 1956

Mr. Hardwick Moseley
Houghton Mifflin Co.
Two Park Street
Boston 7, Massachusetts

Dear Hardwick:

One of our editors has been after me for some time, urging that we consider LET US NOW PRAISE FAMOUS MEN by Agee and Evans for our Universal Library. I patiently point out that it is a picture-and-text book, but he asserts that the text alone, if reset, would stand up as a book.

The discussion has been in a vacuum, so to speak, since we don't have a copy of the book in hand and our out-of-print sources have failed to turn one up. If you would be interested in hearing any sort of proposal from us on this title, would you send along a copy for us to look at?

Incidentally, now that the first group of Universal Library titles have been published, do you have any other titles to suggest for future releases?

With every good wish,

Sincerely,



William Morris
Editor in Chief

WM:cs

Harper's BAZAAR

279

572 Madison Avenue New York City 22 Digo. 1-2100

December 20th, 1956

Dear Mr. Brooks,

It was a great pleasure to meet you last week -- I only hope I haven't kept you waiting too long for an answer on Jim's book!

Looking over the manuscript again convinces me that many lengthy sessions of meticulous work will be necessary, as well as consultations with Mia Agee, and a thorough reconsideration of the fictitious names substituted by Walker Evans for the real ones used by Jim.

Nevertheless, for three reasons I would be glad to take on the job for an honorarium -- or token fee, if you like -- of \$300. First, I am aware you cannot put much money in the book. Second, as I indicated in our talk, I am most anxious to do it. Third, I have a stipulation to make that no fee paid to me infringe on any advance or royalty agreement with Mia. For a variety of reasons, I would strongly prefer that my work be charged against costs of the book's publication, or any other way you see fit.

I suppose time also enters in. As to that, if I were to begin the book sometime in January, I would try to deliver it by late February or early March. It's difficult to say exactly, as I must work in off hours, there have to be those consultations, and so on.

If all this is agreeable to you, I will be happy to go ahead with the book. Incidentally, I would need a clear typescript to work with, rather than the cloudy carbon I have now in the office.

Quite aside from all discussion of ways and means, I consider it wonderful, heartening news that you want to publish this rare and moving work of talent.

I look forward to hearing from you. In the meantime, my very best wishes for Christmas and the New Year.

Sincerely yours,

Alice S. Morris

Mr. Paul Brooks
Houghton Mifflin
2 Park Street
Boston 7, Mass.

JAMES F. MURRAY, JR.
ATTORNEY AND COUNSELLOR AT LAW
808 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK 17, N. Y.
TELEPHONE: MURRAY HILL 2-1800

280

CABLE ADDRESS: "MURDOUNBEL"
NEW YORK

February 15, 1957

Mr. Paul Brooks
Houghton Mifflin Company
2 Park Street
Boston 7, Mass.

Dear Mr. Brooks:

May I draw your attention to the fact that all right, title and interest in and to the literary works and manuscripts of the late James Agee now reside in the James Agee Trust, for which I have been nominated as legal counsel.

Accordingly, your letter of February 7 to Mr. David McDowell, Trustee, as well as other documents and the contract offered by Houghton Mifflin for "A Death in the Family" have been forwarded to me.

You can understand that it is the obligation of the trustee to secure from the various properties of the late Mr. Agee not only the maximum financial consideration but assurance as well of the best possible treatment of any rights to be transferred.

I have carefully examined your offer of January 17, and regretfully inform you that it does not compare favorably with other contract offers received from three major New York publishers.

I have been advised by the trustee that he could not consider any agreement for the publication of this work that did not embody at least the following:

\$2500 minimum advance.

Fifteen per cent flat royalty.

No option arrangements on future works to be tied into the basic contract.

Harper's
BAZAAR

281

572 Madison Avenue New York City 22 Page 1-2100

February 25, 1957

Dear Mr. Brooks:

No, I had not begun Jim's book, although today was the deadline I had set myself for plunging in.

How disappointing! And, on another level, something of a relief to have a respite from too much work.

With best wishes,

Sincerely yours,

Alice S. Morris
Alice S. Morris
Literary Editor

Mr. Paul Brooks
Houghton Mifflin Company
2 Park Street
Boston, Mass.

ASM/si

*P.S., 9 contained here for difficulties
are similar suggested - 12/11*

✓ 3
JAMES F. MURRAY, JR.
ATTORNEY AND COUNSELLOR AT LAW
505 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK 17, N.Y.
TELEPHONE: MURRAY HILL 2-1800

CABLE ADDRESS: "MURCOUNSEL"
NEW YORK

March 7, 1957

Mr. Paul Brooks
Houghton Mifflin Company
2 Park Street
Boston 7, Mass.

Re: "A Death in the Family" by James Agee

Dear Mr. Brooks:

Reference is made to my letter of February 15, to which I have as yet received no answer.

Mrs. Agee, the estate representatives and the James Agee Trust are now of the opinion that any further delay in a definite disposition of this work would constitute financial damage to the interests of the late Mr. Agee.

May I point out to you that under Paragraph 27 of the Agreement of August 15, 1950, which provides for the option under which you are considering this manuscript, the publishers were entitled to "a period of six weeks after submission of the completed manuscript" within which to notify the author in writing whether they desired to publish. I am informed that prior to my being retained by the Trust you had this manuscript more than four months.

Consequently I am required to insist that you inform me at once whether or not you accept the terms recited in my letter of February 15.

Yours sincerely,

James F. Murray, Jr.
James F. Murray, Jr.

JFM:P
cc: James Agee Trust
Mrs. Mia Agee

Home-Deleware 3-3145

JFM
2-12-10

JAMES F. MURRAY, JR.
ATTORNEY AND COUNSELLOR AT LAW
808 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK 17, N.Y.
TELEPHONE: MURRAY HILL 5-1800

CABLE ADDRESS: "MURDUNESL"
NEW YORK

March 26, 1957

Mr. Paul Brooks
Editor in Chief
Houghton Mifflin Company
2 Park Street
Boston 7, Mass..

Dear Mr. Brooks:

Your letter of March 12 has been most carefully studied by myself and those concerned with the James Agee Trust. I am now in a position to forward you a definitive reply.

First of all, there appears to be a serious discrepancy in the recital of facts as you present them, or perhaps in the interpretation which you have given to them.

For example, the delay to which you refer was created by the very complicated problems of the James Agee Estate, followed by the difficulty of securing properly typed transcriptions from the longhand manuscripts which were most difficult to read.

Secondly, Mrs. Agee most emphatically denies that she ever stated or thought that the manuscript of A DEATH IN THE FAMILY would not be published without considerable editorial work. Moreover, she informs me that, contrary to the implications of your letter, that she specifically asked you not to approach Miss Morris until everything was arranged for publication.

In addition, it seems clear from evidence presented to me by those concerned that other major publishers disagree with your sales predictions with respect to A DEATH IN THE FAMILY. In all honesty I must also make it clear that I have encountered a considerable body of professional opinion which inclines to the view that the weak sales record of James Agee's books is due in very large measure to the weak effort of the Houghton Mifflin Company.

More importantly for my purposes, and the purposes of the Trust, your concept of an advance against royalties for A DEATH IN THE FAMILY contrasts sharply with offers which have been made to me by four other major publishing houses. Please be assured that all of these publishers have already submitted offers very much higher than yours and have in addition agreed to a guaranteed advertising budget. In all fairness to the interests of the Estate I am obliged to advise the Trust that comparison of these offers -- all other things being equal -- would seem to indicate that Houghton Mifflin approaches this project with little real enthusiasm. You can, I am sure, understand that in the present frame of reference we have no choice but to decline such an approach.

Your Omnibus offer was carefully considered and has been declined.

May I point out in conclusion that James Agee's death occurred two years ago this coming May. We are absolutely obliged to secure the best posture available in the interests of the Trust and the Estate.

If your letter of March 12 is to be considered a final offer for A DEATH IN THE FAMILY I must regretfully inform you that it is herewith rejected. If you have any further offer to make we are prepared to await its receipt up to and including Friday, April 5, 1957. If such revised offer should still be unsatisfactory we will inform you at once and our mutual situations will then be clear without further responsibility or liability between the Agee Trust and yourselves.

I hope I have made the position on the Trust clear and that you will respond as promptly as possible.

Yours sincerely,

James F. Murray, Jr.

JFM:F

Handwritten: file folder

Handwritten: Grosset & Dunlap

GROSSET & DUNLAP, INC. PUBLISHERS

110 BROADWAY, NEW YORK 10, N.Y. (TWENTY-FOURTH STREET) CHELSEA 2-1600

April 23, 1957

Mr. Hardwick Moseley
Sales Manager
Houghton Mifflin Co.
2 Park Street
Boston 7, Massachusetts

Dear Hardwick:

I have spent a good deal of time off and on during the past few months trying to persuade Manuel Siwek and Tom Maher of the desirability of reissuing LET'S NOW PRAISE FAMOUS MEN in the Universal Library line. Our editors unanimously favored the project; our sales people unanimously opposed it. I am sure you will have no difficulty in guessing who won.

Since you were good enough to loan us your file copy, I am returning it to you under separate cover.

• See you at Arden House! ~

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature: Bill

William Morris
Editor in Chief

dfb



The Readers' Subscription, Inc.

Editors: W. H. AUDEN, JACQUES BARZUN, LIONEL TRILLING

ELEVEN-FORTY BROADWAY, NEW YORK 1, NEW YORK

MURRAY HILL 3-8473

June 27, 1957

Mr. Jack Leggett
Houghton Mifflin Co.
Two Park Street
Boston, Mass.

Dear Jack:

In accordance with our luncheon conversation I am setting down these thoughts regarding James Agee's "Let Us Now Praise Famous Men".

1. The Readers' Subscription would like to use the book as part of a dual selection in September. This book must be produced by September 15th. We will sell it in combination with a second book at a price exceeding \$5.50. We are agreeable to making a commitment on 3,500 copies and paying a unit royalty of 40%.

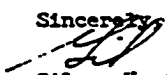
2. The question of whether or not to offset the photographs hinges on problems of time. If we are able to get new plates made in time, I would prefer to use the new plates. Otherwise, offset printing of the photographs will be acceptable.

3. We would be agreeable to Houghton Mifflin's producing this book for us provided they charged us for the actual manufacturing costs plus a percentage (probably one-half) of the plate costs.

4. It seems to me that the Readers' Subscription could insure receiving the books on time by taking on the production responsibility directly. We could produce 4,000 to 5,000 copies of the book, and make available to Houghton Mifflin from 500 to 1,500 copies of our edition at the manufacturing cost. We could pay for the plate making and be reimbursed by Houghton Mifflin for one-half of that cost, with the reimbursement constituting the purchase of those plates by Houghton Mifflin for future use.

Please advise as quickly as possible as to how you wish to proceed in this project for if the production responsibility falls on me, I would like to get busy as quickly as possible in contacting Walker Evans about the photographs.

Sincerely,


Gilman Kraft

P. S. If it is humanly possible to lay your hands on a copy of the book it would be of great value to me for obvious reasons.

JAMES F. MURRAY, JR.
ATTORNEY AND COUNSELLOR AT LAW
505 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK 17, N. Y.
TELEPHONE: MURRAY HILL 2-1800

CABLE ADDRESS: "MURCOUNSEL"
NEW YORK

September 18, 1957

Mr. Lovell Thompson
Houghton Mifflin Publishing Co.
2 Park Street
Boston, Mass.

Re: LET US NOW PRAISE FAMOUS MEN, by James Agee

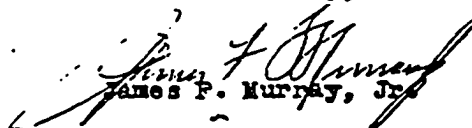
Dear Mr. Thompson:

I have been directed by the Trustee of the James Agee Trust to contact you concerning the above work. In the light of documents furnished the Trust by Mrs. Mia Agee and other evidence the Trust considers all right, title and interest in the above work to reside in the Trust due to the termination of the 1940 contract between the late Mr. Agee and Houghton Mifflin.

Accordingly, please be advised that the Trust regards any negotiation by you or other publishers for the rights to the above work to be unauthorized and invalid.

Would you kindly acknowledge this communication as promptly as possible.

Yours sincerely,


James F. Murray, Jr.

JFM:F

CHOATE, HALL & STEWART

30 STATE STREET

TELEPHONE, CAJUTOL 7-7421

BOSTON 9, MASS.

September 27, 1957

Mr. Lovell Thompson
Houghton Mifflin Company
2 Park Street
Boston 7, Massachusetts

Dear Mr. Thompson:

This is in answer to your letter of September 26, 1957. I am attaching a page to this letter which contains paragraphs 28, 30 and 31 of the copyright law relating to the recording of assignments. The essential point is that without a recording of your assignment Agee or his present representative might sell all of Agee's literary rights to a purchaser who was not on notice of your rights and thereby decrease or eliminate the value of your claim.

While a bit late as far as the statute is concerned, I would suggest having your people record your contract with Agee as an assignment since it should constitute notice to anyone actually checking the record and will therefore give you some protection. This is a simple matter of sending the original of the contract in, together with a statutory fee, and I am sure your people are equipped to do the job. If they are not, we will undertake it at your request.

I believe that you are sending me a copy of the letter to Agee under paragraph 12 and any answer received.

Your letter raises one other question: I had been thinking that perhaps if Walker Evans were friendly a recognition by him of the continued validity of this contract would be of value and would at least prevent Agee doing anything until some compromise had been reached. You now indicate that Evan's contribution was limited to photographs which are separable. My question, therefore, is whether Walker Evans is entitled to a portion of the proceeds under paragraph 18 if the contract is valid but you arrange for a reprint excluding photographs. As

Choate Hall
Judy
I need this to see
what he is
talking with
about. Will
you attach it
L

Mr. Lovell Thompson

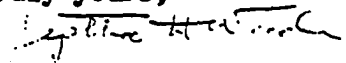
- 2 -

September 27, 1957

I read the contract without additional facts (for example any separate Agreements you or Agee may have with Evans), Agee would be entitled to only 37 1/2% of a royalty received under paragraphs 4(e) or (f). Thus, McDowell might have some incentive to enter a new contract with Houghton Mifflin if you have the possibility of selling the text alone, whereas Evans would have every incentive to recognize and enforce this contract. I think we should leave this question in abeyance for the time being, unless you have a ready answer.

One further question--is there any custom in the trade re disposition of copyrights on the termination of publication which might aid interpretation of the contract?

Very truly yours,


Jephtha H. WadeJHW:sm
Enc.

CHOATE, HALL & STEWART

30 STATE STREET

TELEPHONE (CARTOL) 7-5020

BOSTON 9, MASS.

November 1, 1957

Mr. Lovell Thompson
Houghton Mifflin Company
2 Park Street
Boston 7, Massachusetts

Dear Mr. Thompson:

This is in answer to your note of October 29th. Your letter of September 27th was indeed clairvoyant, at least in part. As I view our present position it is very simply that we still claim the copyright to "Let Us Now Praise Famous Men" because the publishers have never abandoned publication and reconveyed the copyright under Section 9 and the author never accepted Houghton Mifflin's offer to sell the plates under Section 12. As you know, there may be some problems along the way, but I would certainly recommend sticking to this position.

I believe that my letter of September 27th also suggested registering the contract as an assignment, which it is. I assume this has been done.

If you want to force the issue, and if McDowell really prevented the consummation of a profitable contract with Reader's Subscription, you may want to consider the possibility of a claim against McDowell. However, I would not recommend such a course unless there was some way of proving substantial damages, which I doubt, or unless it appeared to be the best way to approach settling the title, which it might be.

Mr. Lovell Thompson

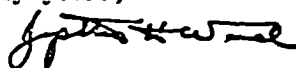
-2-

November 1, 1957

If you have a profitable contract in prospect, there are several possible ways of proceeding which we should discuss. This cannot be done sensibly until you have an idea in dollars and cents what the stakes are, and the risks. You still have title to the copyright, and if you are willing to guarantee title there should be no problem about proceeding with publication. However, before you would make any such guarantee, we would want to consider the way in which we could minimize any financial risk to you.

Let me know if you want to proceed further at the present time.

Very truly yours,



Jemtha H. Wade

JHW:jcc

CHOATE, HALL & STEWART

30 STATE STREET

TELEPHONE CAPITAL 7-5020

CHARLES F. CHOATE, JR.
1899-1927RALPH A. STEWART
1904-1928

BOSTON 9, MASS.

December 17, 1957

James F. Murray, Jr., Esquire
505 Fifth Avenue
New York 17, New York

Dear Mr. Murray:

Mr. Lovell Thompson of Houghton Mifflin Company sent me a copy of a letter from you dated September 18, 1957 asking that I act on his behalf in acknowledging it and answering it. My delay, for which I apologize, has been due to a variety of circumstances, including a fall vacation.

I have reviewed the contract between Mr. Agee and Houghton Mifflin dated April 25, 1940 in respect to the publication of the book entitled "Let Us Now Praise Famous Men," and I do not understand or agree with your contention that the right, title and interest in this work reside in the trust.

There are only two paragraphs relating to the transfer of title to the copyright in this work from Houghton Mifflin back to the authors. These are paragraphs 9 and 12. I assume from your reference to documents furnished the trust by Mrs. Agee that you are relying upon paragraph 12. It seems to me that you may be under a misunderstanding concerning the intent and effect of Houghton Mifflin's letter of September 12, 1957, offering the plates of this book to Mr. Agee. Paragraph 12 provides for an option to the authors to purchase the plates and reacquire the copyright. This option was not taken up by the authors either within the sixty days provided for the option or otherwise, and the copyright remains with Houghton Mifflin. As is explicitly stated in the second and third sentences of paragraph 12, it is only if the authors accept -- the publisher's offer that "the Authors shall thereupon become the sole owner of the copyright on said work. And thereupon

James P. Murray, Jr., Esquire

-2-

December 17, 1957

the publisher shall transfer the plates of the text and of the illustrations, dies, stock, and any copyright or copyrights held by them to the Authors."

Upon the failure of the authors to take up their option, Houghton Mifflin had no choice but to submit to the War Production Board's order and permit destruction of the plates. However, it continues to stand ready to republish or permit republication of this work by photographic reproduction from copies.

It is my understanding from Mr. Thompson that republication of this work by one organization may already have been prevented by activities ostensibly on the behalf of the Agee estate, and I have been asked to investigate this situation further and consider what steps should be taken. Obviously no one gains if republication is prevented by unnecessary controversies.

Very truly yours,

/s/ Conrad W. Oberdorfer

James *A. C. C.*
CHOATE, HALL & STEWART

30 STATE STREET

TELEPHONE CAPITAL 7-5020

BOSTON 9, MASS.

December 17, 1957

Mr. Lovell Thompson
Foughton Kifflin Company
2 Park Street
Boston, Massachusetts

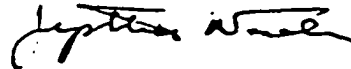
Dear Mr. Thompson:

Enclosed please find a copy of the letter which we have today sent to Mr. Murray.

It would be helpful if you would consider what attorney in New York you might choose to handle this matter if we do not come to an understanding with Mr. Murray. Mr. Curtis thinks highly of Mr. Samuel J. Silverman, 575 Madison Avenue, and I believe that you used with some success Pincus Berner, Esquire in the Wyatt Earp matter. *B*

This is obviously a borderline situation as far as the law is concerned, and if you do not believe that it would be worth while pursuing this matter, then it should be dropped. If you do wish to straighten it out one way or another, I think we should proceed with reasonable promptness.

Very truly yours,



Jeptha H. Wade

JHW:jcc
Enclosure

HARVARD UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF ROMANCE LANGUAGES AND LITERATURES

OFFICE OF THE CHAIRMAN

21 Little Hall
Cambridge 38, Massachusetts
27 February 1958

Mr. Lovell Thompson
Vice-President
Houghton Mifflin Company
2 Park Street
Boston, Mass.

Dear Mr. Thompson:

Let me intrude long enough to contribute one detail to the discussion of the remaindering of James Agee's Let us now Praise Famous Men. I suspect that somebody at Houghton Mifflin is a little bit responsible for Dwight MacDonald's statement that the book was remaindered by the publisher as soon as he decently could do so. I do not have my note in front of me, but sometime before Agee's death - I know because I discussed the matter with Agee - a member of your staff answered an inquiry in one of the weeklies - perhaps the New York Times Book Review - about "Good books that have not sold," to the effect that Let us now Praise Famous Men, having sold hardly more than 600 copies, was an excellent example. One gathered from the reply that H.M. had had its fingers burned and that they still stung a little. I said something about all this in an article published last year in the South-west review, which, in revised form, became a chapter in the revised version of my Novel of Violence in America. For all I know, David McDowell and Dwight MacDonald may have picked up the thing from me. If they did, you can see the line of transmission: I would have concluded too much from the report from Houghton Mifflin, and in turn Dwight would have concluded too much from what I said.

I may add that I am much less scandalized by the slight mis-information which I may have had a hand in disseminating than by the fact that "A Death in the Family" did not come out under your imprint. I understand from John Cushman, however, that this was not from any unwillingness on your part; I also know that it cannot have been from any wish of Agee's, since in the last years of his life I know that he waved off a number of suggestions that he transfer his allegiance to Random House.

Very truly yours,

W. M. Frohock

W. M. Frohock
Chairman

WMF:cpl

Walter Evans

1666 York Avenue
New York 28, N.Y.
December 27, 1959

Evans

Dear Lovell,

Here is what I have written about Agee. I've enclosed a copy for Paul Brooks. Perhaps you could have the piece typed properly for your own use, and could mail me a copy, too, triple spaced?

This piece of writing could be either Foreward or Appendix. To discard the first paragraph is easy; all that is needed to make it an appendix is a sentence or two to start the second paragraph suitably for appendix use. I would provide that.

I've just told Harvey Breit to wait with his note to Faulkner until I've heard from you that the matter has been satisfactorily wound up between you and Auden, the irresponsible hound.

Yours with best regards,

Walter

Mr. Lovell Thompson
Houghton Mifflin Company
2 Park Street
Boston, Massachusetts

January 12, 1960 -- Walker Evans to Lovell Thompson at
Houghton Mifflin

Walker Evans
1666 York Avenue,
New York 28, N.Y.

Jan. 12, 1960

Dear Lovell,

Could I have the writings on Agee, the advertising and proposed other copy you mentioned as having been done in your offices? I'm going South for a week or so tomorrow, and could work over the things as possible lead to my piece, in conversion to a magazine publication. Address please

c/o Talbot Brewer
Anna Maria, Fla.

My telephone there is Bradenton 9 2381
listed under Talbot Brewer, Anna Maria.
Returning to New York Jan 25th.

I'll write you about the jackets.

Thanks and regards

Walker

Walker Evans

1666 York Avenue, New York 28, N. Y.

Jan 12 1960

Dear Lowell,-

Could I have the writings on Agee,
the advertising and proposal other copy you
mentioned as having been done in your
offices? I'm going south for a week or
so tomorrow, and could work over the things
as possible lead to my piece, in connection
to a magazine publication. Address please

c/o TALBOT BREWER

ANNA MARIA, FLA.

my telephone there is BRADENTON 9 2381

Listed under Talbot Brewer, Anna Maria.

Returning to New York Jan 25th.

I'll write you about the jackets.

Thanks & regards

Walker

David noted 9/4-2-60
Note Ev. I guess
reliant - Thanks
Lovell

Anna Maria, Fla.
 Jan. 16, 1960

Dear Lovell,

Thanks for your letter with the Gerta Kennedy writing. And with the check for \$150. I will not cry out, because I should not have had to use so much time in that writing; and I appreciate your paying more than the going rate as it is. Perhaps I could ask for more than the usual author's copies when the book is published?

I will take the matter of Monique Lange under consideration. I'd love to see you behave that gallantly. Would you do it for anyone else?

Please give my apologies to Miss Kennedy, for marking up her copy. She has really worked on this, with intelligent sympathy for the book. Excellent. I have reminded, in a margin note, that May 1960 will be the 5th anniversary of Agge's death. Perhaps you can make use of this.

Good. Yes, your notes about changes concern the Bourke-White business. Forget it now, it can all stay as it was. But consider what I wrote you about restoring words on pp 384-385. I hate the thought that four-letter words are now in high style, the very latest thing in smart writing, every up-to-date publisher must have them -- but in that passage of Agee's stream-of-thought, they were written effectively and truly, and he would want them restored now that it is legal, a recently established custom.

What I wrote is attached. I think Evans misses the point, He isn't mind spelling out four-letter words. But Agee's cussing was modified by the publishing conventions of the 30's and this is of at least some interest from the standpoint of literary history. (There is, for example, some instant correspondence with Nina Holton (over))

I will work on the jacket ideas this week. You know I've been in favor of the plain jacket. But there is one consideration I haven't mentioned, because I haven't thought of it until now that I see your picture jacket: those people, our "selling" use of their faces. Inside it is not so bad to have invaded and used them; Agee has ennobled them. But jumping out publicly in bookstores that bothers me. They will made conspicuous, or worse; they could be really harmed. Inside, there is every chance they will never know of it. After all, it was to protect them that we altered their real names.. you knew that?

Well.

Best regards,

Walker

in which Age specifies which circumstances
are acceptable to him, which not.) Examining
that Age would not see happens today,
don't we lose more than we gain by
making a few minor changes in this
one respect?

SH
2-2-60

5-2

1666 York Ave
New York 28

302

Dear Lovell,

Here enclosed, separately typed, is the passage on page 384 bottom -- 385 top which I have spoken to you about; my typing has restored the words as Agee wrote them. Now there are only four such words in the whole book. I want them restored in our new edition. I need not cite all the examples of respectably published books that now print these words. I believe Houghton Mifflin in general may now feel that these things can be printed. But if there is any question, I'd like to be told, so that I can cite my instances of current respectable use of them.

As to the Appendix note 3 on page 450, I now feel it may stay in, but I haven't made up my mind finally on this. The thing does seem important as a thought of Agee's. I intend to ask around about Miss Bourke-White's condition. (I told you she was sick.)

Yours,

Walter

David

Have we any scruples
left? If so tell me

Lovell

page 384, line 3 from bottom; *starting*:

"..... hurting people and fucking yourself
 everlastingly and only the hard bastards
 come through, I'm not born and can't be
 that hard apparently and God fuck Genius
 and Works of Art anyway and who the hell
 am I, who in Jesus' name am I. This is a
 beautiful country. You can take that and
 good art and love together and stick them
 up your ass. And if you ^{think} ~~there~~ da dialectic
 is going to ring any conceivable ^{worthwhile} changes,
 you can stick that and yourself up arser.
 Just an individualizing intellectual. Bad
 case of infantilism. And fuck you, too."

Anna Maria, Fla.
Jan. 20, 1960

Evans

Dear Lovell,

I've just realized that using photographs on a dust jacket falls under the classification of advertising, or would so be called from the legal standpoint. If you use a person's photograph for advertising or selling without permission, you are liable to be sued by that person, as your lawyers will tell you. As part of a journalistic story, it is permissible, and has often been so ruled. The book pictures are safe.

I have sketched a couple of plain jacket ideas for you. I like the colors. Note that the gray is warm gray (Actually white with raw umber.) Your sample gray, while handsome, was cold or blueish.

Next week I'll be in New York again. There is a cold wave on here, and no fireplaces. I prefer my fireplace in cold weather. But there was good swimming up until yesterday. My vacation is up anyway.

I found a copy of "The Proper Bostonians" here. Rather trash, but interesting. If Bostonians were and are like that, why is the place charming? But it is. Better dinner conversation and better architecture than New York. I certainly dislike the tone of Cleveland Amory. Who the hell is he?

Let's publish in the Spring --
Could we?

Best regards,

Walker
Evans

Mr Thompson
File

1666 York Avenue
New York 28
January 20, 1960

Everman

S.

Dear Paul,

Thanks for your letter. I'm so glad you like the Agee foreword that much. I'll take what part of your praise I can; comparisons with Agee I must decline with thanks, though.

I write some. It comes terribly hard. I should put it, it's terribly hard, for me, to make it come. I suppose there are many like me in that respect. It's a hell of a problem, but a fascinating one, you'll agree.

Cordially; gratefully,

Walker

1666 York Avenue
New York 26, N.Y.
Jan. 31, 1960

Dear Lovell,

Thank you for your January 25 letter.

My feeling about the jacket photographs is not entirely a matter of legality. Personally I shrink over putting those faces so immediately on display. I think there is a chance the families will not hear of their use if they are kept inside. Or will not mind it if so used, only.

Two recent jackets are I think very good. One is Jack Leggett's novel; the other, Edmund Wilson's "Hecate County". The use of empty space in the former strikes me as excellent.

This week, in time for your visit, I will have a decision about Life, and a report from Breit. That is, I'll phone him. Though had he heard from Faulkner, he would have told me immediately. LIFE, you know, got started on an Agee ~~story~~ article at the time of his Pulitzer prize winning; and cancelled it all, for one of those incomprehensible journalistic reasons.

I am enclosing a retyping of my Foreword, which contains a few very minor corrections and alterations. Will you please see that it goes into the proper hands, to supersede the copies you all have? Some of the little changes I consider important to the final effect -- if I may. By the way, Paul sent me a very appreciative note about the piece. Naturally I loved it.

Good Lord, do you read Fortune?

Ever yours,

Walker

JAMES L. HALL
 CHARLES O. PETERSON
 HARVEY M. HUNDT
 CLAUDE R. NICHOLS
 JAMES GANFIELD
 CHARLES F. CURTIS
 MARCIEN JENCKES
 ROBERT PROCTOR
 RICHARD WATT
 SIMON F. TOWNSEND
 ROBERT POTTER
 JESSE R. FILLMAN
 SAMUEL L. GWIN
 FRANKLIN DEXTER
 JOHN M. HALL
 CHARLES H. STOCKTON
 RAYMOND W. ELLIS
 JOHN DANE JR.
 WM. ARTHUR DUKE
 JOHN D. RIGGOLD
 BRINLEY M. HALL
 CONRAD W. OVERBOSCHER
 C. BARDELOT DELIN
 CHARLES F. CHOATE
 WILLIAM T. POPE
 RHODES C. LOCKWOOD
 JEROME E. ANDREWS JR.
 HENRY W. MINOT JR.
 JEFFREY H. WADE
 JOHN M. PERRY

CHOATE, HALL & STEWART

30 STATE STREET

TELEPHONE: CAPITOL 7-3020

CHARLES F. CHOATE
 1899-1927
 RALPH A. STEWART
 1904-1928

BOSTON 9, MASS.

February 8, 1960

Mr. Lovell Thompson
 Houghton Mifflin Company
 Two Park Street
 Boston 7, Massachusetts

Dear Lovell:

This is to provide an "authoritative" answer to the question of your letter of January twenty-first. Summarized briefly, it would be that I agree with your hunch to the effect that you could do on the jacket what you could do in the book--but I think that needs some qualification.

To provide some of the qualifications at the closest thing to a reasonable price that seems feasible, I am enclosing a number of photostatic pages from an article regarding the Sidis case in New York. These excerpts discuss briefly the New York law with respect to the use of someone's name or picture, which, I believe, Walker Evans had in mind, and, in general, the common law with respect to these matters, which is of more general interest to you. To boil it down, if something about a man's life is newsworthy, you can use the news, the man's name, his photograph, all with considerable freedom under a claim of privilege. That the privilege may not necessarily connote great literary merit or educational value is indicated by the fact that a recent New York case, Jenkins v. Dell Publishing Company, 251 F. 2d, 447, (decided 1958) extended the privilege to include the use of photographs of the family of a murder victim in the magazine, "Front Page Detective." Needless to say, it includes such matters as the right to publish about or publish photographs of someone of, for example, Bernard Baruch's fame (or should the word be notoriety?)

However, what you have here, with due respect to Walker Evans, seems to be something different. I take it that for purposes either of the inside of the book or of the cover, any of the persons whose photographs are shown in Let Us Now Praise Famous Men would have to give their permission, at least under the law of New York and, probably, in many other

Mr. Lovell Thompson

-2-

February 8, 1960

jurisdictions as well. In this regard I note with some interest Evans' concern, together with his bland assumption that the use of the pictures in the interior of the book is perfectly all right. Does he differentiate on the basis of the type of permission given on the likelihood that there would be an objection, or on our somewhat differing interpretations of the Law? I also note that in the original edition (Charlie's copy) the pictures are accompanied by the phrase, "Photographs reproduced through the courtesy of Farm Security Administration, United States Department of Agriculture." You might want to look up the permission which you obtained from the department although this is no assurance that the department obtained permission for reproduction.

The above is as far as I thought you would want me to go for the present. If you have any further questions I would expect you to call. I assume from the fact that publication is proceeding that you have squared away the question of title and have a new contract with the appropriate party on Agee's behalf, whoever that may have proven to be. The last I recall of this matter, we were having some casual but still pointed disagreement with a Senator Murray on behalf of the Agee Trust.

On another matter, I believe that there were some changes to be made in the Houghton-Mifflin general contract. This was a subject of some delicacy and little urgency which I know Charlie had been enjoying. I regret to report that he had some of the files with him in Stonington at Christmastime. We had discussed the matter at some length, but I do not know its present status except that Houghton Mifflin was considering the matter. He was corresponding with Mr. Spaulding, but perhaps you could let me know if there is anything particular that we should be doing.

I enclose the jacket cover and Walker Evans' letter which you sent me.

Sincerely,



Jephtha H. Wade

JHW:vbd
encls.

February 24, 1960 -- Walker Evans to Lovell Thompson

FORTUNE
Editorial Department
Rockefeller Center,
New York 20, N.Y.
JUdson 6-1212

Feb. 24, 1960

Dear Lovell,

I am mailing you the "Cambridge Review" because it contains an essay on Agee and "Let Us Now Praise Famous Men," which your writers and promotion might find useful. Will you kindly pass it on to the proper people, and have them return it to me whenever they are through with it. Thanks.

Hope to see you soon,

Walker

F O R T U N E

Editorial Department

Rockefeller Center, New York 20, N. Y. • JUdson 6-1212

Walker Evans

Feb. 24 1960

Dear David,

I am enclosing you the "Cambridge Review" because it contains an essay by Agassi and "Settling the Score" which is a collection of articles and comments, mostly just respectful. Will you kindly pass them to the proper people, and have them returned to me whenever they are brought back. Thanks.

Hope to see you soon.

J. J. J.

W. J. J.

Q. J. J.

No - never

I sent you
last Feb 10

Lovell

HARPER & BROTHERS

*Publishers Since 1817**This is no help I'm
afraid — as you
expected.**Dave
3-11-60**Dave
HB
Ah - how true
Lovell*

EAST 2ND ST., NEW YORK 16, N. Y.

March 8, 1960

Dear Dave,

I'm afraid I can shed no light on the copyright status of the illustrations for LET US NOW PRAISE FAMOUS MEN by Agee and Evans. Although Harpers originally contracted for the book, the contract was terminated because of difficulty with Agee over the text and Houghton Mifflin became the publisher. In view of this fact, I am surprised that there is no illuminating evidence on the copyright page of your original edition. My guess is that the photographs all belong to Walker Evans, and I would suggest that you contact him about ownership and copyright. I believe he can be reached through Fortune magazine.

I am sorry I can't be of any help, but all we have is an inactive contract plus some letters with Houghton Mifflin discussing the terms of transfer. There is nothing in our original contract about copyright which would be useful, and there is no mention of the Farm Security Administration or any other agency.

It was nice to hear from you, and if you ever descend to these parts, I hope that we may meet again.

With best regards,

Cass
Cass Canfield, Jr.

Mr. David Harris
Houghton Mifflin Company
2 Park Street
Boston 7, Massachusetts

CC:EW

1666 York Avenue
New York 25
March 20, 1930

*File -
Writer's name*

Dear Lovell,

To my mind your jacket sketch is nearly right. I see your point about the white word. I believe Praise is the only word that should take white, and I do not think it will make an editorial stress to many eyes, though it will to some. The James Agee name I do not think should be white; I think that would raise a question and create a mystery.

Is this title lettering supposed to be a script, or just italic lower-case lettering? I would much prefer just regular upright lower-case. To me, the choice of type is important; you will probably agree that this can set the character of a book. Although I believe I submitted one sketch to you which was script, I don't like the script you now have in this rough, if I may say so, and would much prefer to return to type, to a very handsome type we could agree upon. The authors' names I feel should be in a serif letter; I like Didot very much; and I wonder whether a large Didot may do for the lower case title too. Severe, factual, reserved, unadorned, uncommercial, unarty, is the impression I'd like. Simple, direct, and plain. On this score, you do intend the gray paper to be plain-toned, don't you? Your sample has streaks of red and white that I take to be accident or sketchwork. Your gray shade is right to me, but the reddish lettering color wrong; raw umber, pure, is my choice; burnt umber is what makes the red I don't like. I would go to black before I would select the reddish brown.

I realize I'm late with this reply, perhaps too late to catch the work; and I apologize.

I am doing a series of warehouses for Fortune and for myself; I shall find some juicy ones in Boston, perhaps a Houghton Mifflin one, which could be burnt umber-all right. This will be possible in two or three weeks. But if you reach

a point where I should see something of the
book before that, I could come up briefly
just for that.

When the royalties come rolling in I'll
get a new typewriter if not a typist.

Best regards,

W. Miller

PS I shall return the books say so kindly
lent me, when I come.

W. Miller

March 24, 1960 -- Walker Evans to Lovell Thompson

United States Senate
Washington D.C.

March 24, 1960

Office of Senator Evans (Nihilist)

Dear Lovell,

I have seen proofs of the photographs, and am enthusiastic about one of the offset samples. I checked them all carefully. I sent the choices back to Terry Baker (I hope that is the name). If we can have these, and if the book run will maintain the standard & quality of the samples, I shall be happy.

The only information I have for you now is that Lionel Trilling is reading my Agee memoir, because if we like he will send it to his friends the editors of "Encounter." But of course I have not yet authorized him to do this, pending your affair with the Atlantic. I believe "Encounter" would take it, but I don't think they would consent to Bi-Atlantic publication, since they rather pride themselves on U.S. readers they have (I hear). Lionel, as I told you, will almost certainly want the book for his Club. Is it you he is dealing with? He says he is not getting anywhere much in trying to make a deal. This is in whose hands? Not mine, thank the Lord. L. and I were just having a conversation at a party; he couldn't recall what Houghton Mifflin official his club people were speaking to.

I'd love to see proofs of my Agee Preface: I suppose this will be some time coming.

The next time you are in New York there will be no snow and more cooperation from me. I may come back to Boston before you come here, though. Anyway. I'm very much at your disposal when it comes to the book -- need I say.

Yours

Walker

Walker Evans

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, D. C.

March 24 1960

Office of Senator Evans (Nihilist)

file

Dear David,

I have seen proofs of two photographs, and am enthusiastic about one of the effect samples. I checked them all carefully. I send the choice, back to Terry Barker (I hope that is the name). If we can have them, and if the both turn out according to the standard & quality of the samples, I shall be happy.

The only information I have for you now is that David Tiedling is reaching my office tomorrow, because it is late he will send it to his friends, the editors of "Encounter". But of course I have not yet authorized him to do this, perhaps, your office with the Atlantic. I believe "Encounter" would like it, but I don't think they would consent to Be-hind-the-pasture, since they rather pride themselves on U.S. relations they have (I hear). David, as I told you, will almost certainly want the rest for his book. Is it you he is dealing with? He says he is not getting anywhere near in trying to make a deal. This is a bit funny? Not more than the last. L. and I are just having a conversation at a party; he couldn't stand about Douglas Boffin officials but that people were speaking to.

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, D. C.

Not love to see proofs of my age & infirmity: but I suppose
this will be some time coming.

The next time you are in New York there will
be no more and more cooperation for me. I may
come to Boston before you come here though. Any-
way, I am very much at your disposal when it comes
to the book - must I say.

Yours

W. L. Allen

March 25, 1960 -- Walker Evans to David Harris at Houghton Mifflin.

FORTUNE
Time & Life Building
Rockefeller Center
New York 20

Editorial Department

March 25, 1960

Mr. David Harris
Houghton Mifflin Company
2 Park Street
Boston

Dear Mr. Harris,

Thank you for the proofs of my Let Us Now Praise Famous Men foreword.

As you can see there are only two changes I feel should be made. For the rest it is a remarkably accurate piece of printing and editing, and I'm grateful for the few corrections of any spelling and punctuation mistakes.

1. In the matter of the initials (W.E.) at the end, you'll agree that we must drop them because you have now printed my full signature at the beginning.

2. My other change is fully capitalizing the words Great Democracy, in the first paragraph, if you please. This was my intention originally, though I didn't write it that way.

I have checked it out carefully now, including your copyright lines. So, all is well, I believe.

Yours most gratefully

Walker Evans

FORTUNE

TIME & LIFE BUILDING
ROCKEFELLER CENTER
NEW YORK 20

EDITORIAL DEPARTMENT

March 25, 1960

Mr. Daniel Harris
Harrison Muffin Company
2 Park Street
Boston

Correction carried
to master proof
3/28/60 JH

Dear Mr. Harris,

Thank you for the proofs of
my little introduction to your new journal.

As you see there are only three
changes I feel should be made for the next and it is
a remarkably accurate piece of printing and editing,
and I'm grateful for the few corrections of my spelling
and punctuation mistakes.

In the matter of the initials (v.c.) at
the end, you'll agree that we must drop them
because you have been printed in full name
at the beginning.

My other change is fully capitalizing the
words Great Democracy, in the first paragraph. If you
please, this was an intention originally, though I didn't
write it that way.

FORTUNE

TIME & LIFE BUILDING
ROCKEFELLER CENTER
NEW YORK 20

EDITORIAL DEPARTMENT

I have checked it and carefully now,
including your copyright lines. It
all is well, I believe.

Yours most gratefully
Walter Evans

April 1, 1960 -- Walker Evans to Lovell Thompson.

The Century Association
7 West Forty-Third Street
New York 36, N.Y.

April 1, 1960

Dear Lovell,

I'll put my psyche on the problem of sending you a
photograph.

Yours

Walker

Walker Evans

THE CENTURY ASSOCIATION
7 WEST FORTY-THIRD STREET
NEW YORK 36, N.Y.

April 1 1960

Dear David,

I'll put my payche on
the problem of getting you a
photograph.

W

Walker

April 15, 1960 -- Walker Evans to David Harris.

Walker Evans
1666 York Avenue
New York 28, N.Y.

Dear Mr. Harris,

Thank you for your letter of April 12, with the book jacket text for "Let Us Now Praise Famous Men." Thanks, too, for accepting my two alterations of the introduction.

In the jacket writing, which is excellent I think, I'd like very much to have a few changes. These I've indicated in the copy I'm returning with this letter. I've made off boldly with your writer's first paragraph. I'd like very much to say what I've written in place, and beg H.M. to accept it that way. I believe your paragraph has some over-familiar phrases in it, and that it does not say enough beyond praise of the pictures. Please give me this change! (and enroll me as a blurb-writer). I appeal to all: Mr. Thompson, Mr. Brooks, Mr. Harris, Mr. Houghton, Mr. Mifflin.

Sincere Thanks,

Walker Evans

April 15 1960

323

Dear Mr Harris, -

Thank you for your letter of
April 12, with the book jacket text for "Let Us
have Please Formless men". Thanks, too, for
accepting my two alterations of the introduction.

In the jacket writing, which is
excellent, I think, I'd like very much to have
a few changes. These I've indicated in the
copy I'm returning with this letter. We made off
boldly with your writer's final paragraph.
I'd like very much to say what I've written in
place, and beg H.M. Co. to accept it. That way.
I believe that ~~the~~ your paragraph has some
over-familiar phrases in it, and that it does not
say enough beyond praise of the pictures. Please
give me this chance! (and enroll me as a ghost-writer).
I appear to all: Mr. Thompson. Mr. Brooks. Mr. Harris,
Mr. Houghton, Mr. Muffin

Sincerely thanks,

Walker Evans

April 15, 1960 -- Walker Evans to Lovell Thompson.

The Century Association
7 West Forty-Third Street
New York 36, N.Y.

April 15, 1960

Dear Lovell,

I always take moral matters with the utmost seriousness, and you say the agents commission has become a moral matter to you. So I must tell you something I forgot to say about it: all the money from my "forward", including the H.M. payment, is for the Agee family. Does that make a difference? Of course H.M. should collect if that is the unalterable rule. But that collection can't come out of my pocket. Let us hope what it really looks close to is that John Agee will be sent to Exeter instead of Groton. Proceed.

Now what about that famous book jacket design? I believe I dropped a suggestion some time ago, and I've never heard your reaction.

Please do something "influential" for me: I've just sent back to Mr. Harris my small criticism of his excellent jacket text. I did rewrite his final paragraph almost entirely, and I like what I wrote. Will you ask to see it and back me if you feel you can? I just hope you'll like it too, that everyone will, and that it can be accepted. But it may need your helping word.

Well, Mrs. Jad has her picture of me.

What else can I do -- before coming to Boston. Let me know.

Yours

Walker

David: Jess

Wyl

Walter Evans

325

THE CENTURY ASSOCIATION
7 WEST FORTY-THIRD STREET
NEW YORK 36, N.Y.

Tell me if

April 17 1960

Dear Lovell,

Lovell

I always take moral matters
into the utmost seriousness, and you
say the agent's commission has be-
come a moral matter to you. So I
must tell you something I forgot to
say about it: all the money from my
~~contribution~~ "forward", including the
H.M. payment, is for the agent family.
Does that make a difference? Of course
H.M. should collect if that is the
unalterable rule. But that collection
must come out of my pocket. Let us
hope what it really looks like is
that John Acee will be sent to
Exeter instead of Boston. Proceed.

P.S. (to John)

1 -
 undetermined his own
 It provided all by
 David.

Now what about that former
 book jacket design? I believe I
 dropped a suggestion some time
 ago, and I've never heard your reply.

Please do something influential
 for me: I've just sent back to
 Mrs. Harris my small criticism of
 her excellent jacket text. I don't
 rewrite her final paragraph above
 entirely, but I like what I wrote.
 Will you ask to see it and back me
 if you feel you can? I just hope
 you'll like it too, that everyone will
 and that it can be accepted. But
 all men need your helpful word.

Well, Mrs. Ford has her picture
 of me.

What else can I do - before coming
 to Boston. Let me know.

Yours

Walter

Page

1666 York Avenue, New York 28 N.Y.
April 18, 1960

Dear Mr. Harris,

I find the last paragraph of the suggestions I sent you is not quite it, and have altered it. Would it be too much to ask that you substitute? I'd like it to read as follows:

~~ifxxviii~~

In the original edition thirty-one pictures-- just half the number Walker Evans intended to publish-- were printed. Now the full complement of photographs is appearing. If most professional photography is dominated by the commercial stance or the artistic posture, Evans is in recoil from these. His work might even be said to have brought photographic style back around to the plain relentless snapshot. In this sense the pictures in this book amount to a technical and a psychological adventure.

I'd be very grateful to have this change made.

Very sincerely,

Walker Evans
Walker Evans

Undated: Between April 15, 1960 and July 23, 1960 -- Walker Evans to Lovell Thompson.

Walker Evans
1666 York Avenue
New York 28, N.Y.

Dear Lovell,

You must of course follow that path concerning the Atlantic Monthly. I too think you played the part perfectly and John Agee will be much better if in Exeter than in Groton. There he will learn tact, restraint, discrimination, conscience also. Energy he already has great zeal for. So, a toast to the Chairman of the Board. And to you especially.

Yes, check to me, and I'll make it over, like the last one. I just passed it to Mia Agee, not the Agee Fund, because David McDowell made himself director of the latter while no one was looking, and I wasn't particularly to slight him for his presumption.

The weekly thermafax is beautiful and will look well in the gold frame I am ordering for it.

See you soon I hope,

Walker

1666 York Ave.
New York 26
July 23, 1960

330

Dear Lovell,

Thanks for your letter of the 10th and for the list of people and publications who are to receive books. Let me emphasize that the names I gave you are not at all just those of friends of mine who would like a copy, but that they are all persons whose writing or whose talk will be influential. If some seem off the track or unknown to the publishers, I beg you to use them anyway, on the ground that I have considered them carefully and can assure you of their value.

For one reason or another you may strike the following names; if it is not too late to:

John Davenport

Alexander Eliot

James Thrall (this is J Thrall Sody
of Sat. Rev. Lit. *perhaps you already have.*)

(Auden

Trilling, they may take their own

Shouldn't I help with addresses for some of my names? You have a few misspelled, but I assume these to be typing errors.

I find that Dorothy Parker is the Esquire reviewer. She knew Agee and was very interested; do add her. Gene Lichtenstein would be the literary editor at Esquire who would assign; he is very interested too. I suggest the London Times Lit. Supp. since it reviews American books as published here. Probably you will have seen to that. Another English editor and critic I have found to be an Agee and a Photography enthusiast is David Sylvester of Encounter and The New Statesman. Well, well worth sending him a copy. I should certainly add Schlesinger Jr., the next U.S. Minister of Culture and Welfare. He knows my work and has referred to it several times in essays and books. He will tell Kennedy to make us a platform plank. Seriously though, send him one if you can. Murray Kempton of the New York Post should get one. His column is much read as you know, and he is interested in my work and in the subject of the book. Marquis Childs also knows me (or should I put it the other way around?) As you know, he is syndicated, and lives in Washington; someone could tell us where to address him; I could give you his home address but that is not very businesslike.

Thanks so much for the extra Atlantics.
I'm having some gratifying personal response to 331
the Sketch.

When it comes to buying copies of the book, which it certainly will with me., can I get a nice brad discount from your firm? I hope so; I could use many copies. I thank you for the second batch of four, author's allowance copies, which came. Mia Agee got some too, I saw.

I hope you were able to accept and use my suggestions for the ~~xxxxxx~~ release.

One more thought, an important one. I have told you the The Gotham Book Mart of New York is very interested, and has a large or anyway, considerable Agee-Evans following. Its proprietor has written me asking about the book. I forget her name, but your salesmen will know her. I think in view of her interest that someone should write her immediately. She I think will make her shop a special New York outlet, and could easily be persuaded to put up a good window display if given a special call and extra sales attention. My bookshop in New York where they love me because I owe so much money is The Holladay, run by Robert Vanderbilt. Large clientele of intellectual, artistic, and social snobs. Vanderbilt has no window, but I think will favor the book. He is friendly to me, and surely would love to get his money out of me by helping my profits.

I feel it a little undignified to be so promotional, but that it will be useful to you and all concerned. Perhaps we're not involved in crime. Or are we. Agee would hope so.

Very best regards, and please give my congratulations to Terry Baker and have some yourself for a beautiful job. I shall write him of my pleasure and admiration.

Yours,

Walter

PS Dwight MacDonald grants permission to quote anything, and I got the enclosed copy from him. Will you please read the material yourself -- I know you'll be interested, and you will find other usable quotations and information. Later I want to keep these essays for my collection, so would appreciate your holding them for me and returning them when their use there is over.

hr

July 26, 1960 -- Walker Evans to Lovell Thompson

332

The Century Association
7 West Forty-Third Street
New York 36, N.Y.

Dear Lovell,

Thanks for your note with the question about Rosalind Constable. No, there is nothing special that she need be told now -- I don't remember why we made that note. The book itself will make its own suggestion to her -- she is the Time Inc: personage who keeps her finger on the pulse of Culture for the benefit of over-busy Time editors and bigwigs, and she places her information around the company as she thinks fit. We do want all those editors to know os our book, hence I gave you her name. I received also a batch of extra copies of the book, presumably from you or at your signal. Fine, thanks, I need them. I think I did ask you whether I would buy a lot at some wholesale price or other -- tell me. I shall want many.

Are you thinking about a paperback edition any further? And -- I forget -- did you tell me some great person at Curtis Brown - London was actually offering the cost to English publishers, or just thinking about it?

You will see by the MacDonald (sic) piece I sent you that Simone Da Beauvoir is interested. I'm sure she would recommend it to Zallimard - Paris and that her word not be extremely influential with them. Of course there is our Monique there, the girl he left behind us. Wouldn't you like to see a good French edition? I would. We needn't tell our wives. Monique will of course be our translator and promoter. Simone isn't nearly attractive enough.

I must say my part of that book is beautifully produced -- just what I hoped. The whole thing too is right, as I wanted it -- a reproduction of the original. I congratulate you, Paul, Houghton Mifflin, Terry, all concerned.

Yours,

Walker

Walker Evans

333

THE CENTURY ASSOCIATION
7 WEST FORTY-THIRD STREET
NEW YORK 36, N.Y.

July 26, 1960

Dear Lovell -

Thanks for your note
with the question about Rosalind
Constable. No, there is nothing
special that she need be told now -
I don't remember why we made
that note. The book itself will
make its own suggestion to her -
she is the Time, Inc. personage
who keeps her finger on the pulse
of Culture for the benefit of over-busy
Time readers and listeners, and she
places her information around the
company as she thinks fit. We do
want all these letters to know of our
work, hence I gave you her name.

I received also a batch of extra (2) copies of the book, presumably from you or at your request. Fine, thanks, I need them. I think I shall ask you whether I could buy a lot at some wholesale price or other. Tell me. I shall want many.

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with them. Of course there, as
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edition? I would. We needn't
tell our ~~wives~~ wives. Monique
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or promoter. Simone will nearly
attractive enough.

I must say my part of that
book is beautifully produced —
just what I hoped. The whole
thing too is right, as I wanted it
— a reproduction of the original.
I congratulate you, Paul, Hengsten
Moffen, Terry, all concerned.

Yours

Walker

September 27, 1960 -- Walker Evans to Lovell Thompson

The Century Association
7 West Forty-Third Street
New York 36, N.Y.

Dear Lovell,

I hasten to acknowledge the Houghton-Mifflin check for 1142.99, transcendently mystical, indeed. But it had an earthly ring on the counter of my bank.

Of course I could not make head or tail of your explanation letter, and didn't try. I'm just grateful. I await your further letters, and shall apply more effort to them.

Ever yours,

Walker EVANS

P.S.

Also, package of Agee material arrived, thanks. W.

THE CENTURY ASSOCIATION
7 WEST FORTY-THIRD STREET
NEW YORK 36, N.Y.

337

file Sept 27 1960

Dear Lowell

I hasten to acknowledge the
Houghton-Mifflin check for 1142.49;
transcendently mystical, indeed.

But it had an earthy ring on the
counter at my bank.

Of course I could not make
head or tail out of your explanatory
letter, and doubt try. I'm just
grateful. I await your further
letters, and shall apply more effort
to them.

Ever yours

PS.

Also, package of paper material
arrived, thank W.

Walter

EVANS

Walter Evans to Lowell Thompson

CURTIS BROWN LTD.

338

Telephone:
Covent Garden 2188

13 King Street,
Covent Garden,
London, W.C.2

Telegrams and Cables:
Brownacurt, London

GH.

1st December, 1960.

Lovell Thompson, Esq.,
The Houghton Mifflin Co.,
2 Park Street,
Boston 7, Mass.,
U.S.A.

Dear Mr. Thompson,

Mr. Watson wrote to you on the 25th October, asking for a quotation for 1,000 or 1,500 folded and imprinted sheets, inclusive of royalty, of Agee's LET US NOW PRAISE FAMOUS MEN. I do hope you will soon be able to let us have these figures to pass on to Peter Owen.

Could you at the same time let us know whether Agee's THE MORNING WATCH has already been published over here.

Yours sincerely,

Gillian Huddy

Secretary to Mr. Watson.

Directors: Spencer Curtis Brown,
Graham Watson (Managing), Juliet O'Hara, W. A. Meares, James MacGibbon

339
3925 - 51 Street
Woodside 77, New York
February 22, 1961

Houghton Mifflin Company
Boston, Mass.

Gentlemen:

I have just finished reading LET US NOW PRAISE
FAMOUS MEN (Agee-Walker) and am amazed that in
reissuing the book in the year 1960 your editor
felt it fitting to reproduce Agee's use of
"Negro" throughout as "negro".

The distinction is not a small thing, and that
the change was not made in this day and age is
inexplicable.

Very truly yours,


Martha Garlin

PAUL, WEISS, RIFKIND, WHARTON & GARRISON

575 MADISON AVENUE, NEW YORK 22, N.Y.

MURRAY HILL 8-5600

CABLE LONGHIGHT 27

1425 24th STREET N W

WASHINGTON, D C

ARTHUR J COHEN

COUNSEL

[illegible]

60000 100000 150000

SIMON H. REIFMAN
ROBERT E. SAMUELS
JOHN F. SHANNON
LEON J. SHAPIRO
MICHO M. SHAPIRO
HOWARD A. SEITZ
RUSSELL S. SHORUM
JEROME J. SILVERMAN
SUSAN M. SILVERMAN
ADRIAN W. SHINDLER
EDWARD G. MILLER JR.
NORDECA R. SODOLIN
PAUL J. NEWELL
GORDON S. SOKAN
JAMES S. LEWIS
SIDNEY R. RUBINENFELD
MARTIN R. RUBINEN
ROBERT R. RUBINEN
JOHN E. RUBINENFELD
J. M. TOPPIS
EDWARD N. COSTANTIN
ROBERT E. COSTANTIN, JR.
CHAS. E. TAYLOR, JR.
BERNARD M. GREENE
ERNEST RUBINSTEIN

April 17, 1962

Mr. Lovell Thompson
Houghton Mifflin Company
2 Park Street
Boston 7, Massachusetts

Dear Lovell:

Agée. I have your letter of April 16 about l'affaire

If the facts you have imagined are indeed the true facts, that might have something to do with the difficulties we are having. It also reinforces the desirability of your sticking to the regular legal procedures.

Of course the fact that a work earned a good deal of money after the author's death is not conclusive in the question of estate taxes. The issue, after all, is the value at time of death. And at that time play and Pulitzer Prize did not exist so that the work might have had a very low value indeed for estate tax purposes. But of course the argument is easier to make to a Revenue Agent before the work has earned the money than after.

Sincerely,

Samuel J. Silverman

SJS : dmd

Silverman

May 1, 1963 -- Philip Rahv to Robert Lescher at Houghton
Mifflin.

329 Beacon Street
Boston 16, Massachusetts

Dear Mr. Lescher:

Thank you for your letter. I don't teach on Tuesday, May 7th, so we might have lunch on that day. I could meet you at your office on Park Street around one o'clock. Do let me know.

Sincerely yours,

Philip Rahv

RTR

329 Beacon Street
Boston 16, Massachusetts

Dear Mr. Tescher: May 1, 1963

Thank you for your letter. I don't teach on Tuesday, May 7th, so we might have lunch on that day. I could meet you at your office on Park Street around one o'clock. Do let me know.

Sincerely yours,
Philip Rahr



Alumni Headquarters
Wesleyan House
281 Main Street

WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

BOX D, WESLEYAN STATION
MIDDLETOWN, CONNECTICUT

ROBERT M. ARNOLD '41, Chairman
41 Forest Lane Drive
Glastonbury, Conn.

FRANCIS K. BURR '33, Past Chairman
48 Poplar Street
Dorchester, Mass.

BAXTER S. PATRICK '36
Secretary

May 27, 1963

Mr. Robert Lescher
Houghton Mifflin Company
2 Park Street
Boston 7, Massachusetts

Dear Bob:

It was good of you to let us know about the possibility of Robert Fitzgerald's availability next Spring. I am forwarding your letter to Joe Palamountain who is, as you probably know, Provost and he has offered to explore this interesting possibility with appropriate members of the faculty. Joe will be glad to let you know, probably sometime early in the Fall, about the kinds of arrangements we might be able to set up.

I hope that all goes well for you.

Sincerely,

Baxter S. Patrick

CC: Joseph Palamountain

- WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY
MIDDLETOWN, CONNECTICUT
ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICES

THE PROVOST

May 30, 1963

Dear Mr. Lescher:

Baxter Patrick was good enough to pass on to me your letter of May 22 about Robert Fitzgerald. I know that there will be much interest on the campus in him; indeed, Dick Wilbur has reacted enthusiastically to my mention of him.

However, as you are probably aware, life comes to a screeching stop -- for all save administrators, alas! -- on Commencement, so that I expect to get no concrete responses until September. I am, however, passing on your information to the Chairmen of our English and Classics Departments, to Dick Wilbur, and to Paul Horgan, the Director of our Honors Program. I hope that September will not be too late a time in which to invoke your generous offer to serve as a broker.

Thank you very much for calling the opportunity to our attention.

Sincerely yours,

Joseph C. Palamountain, Jr.

Mr. Robert Lescher
Houghton Mifflin Company
2 Park Street
Boston 7, Massachusetts

JCP:nej

cc: Messrs. Baxter Patrick
Thab Nassan
Archibald Allen
Richard Wilbur
Paul Horgan

San Fortunato della Collina
Perugia

22 June 63

Dear Mr. Lescher,

Thank you very much for stirring interest in Philip Khav and Mr. Palamontain. Later in the year the matter can be pursued, perhaps by my hopeful sponsor of recent memory.

I'm writing to Wilder Hobson to request his transcript of the Agce program on WBAI; I'll ask him if he'd mind letting you have it for a day or two, long enough to get it thermofactum for my use. During my days in New York I accumulated a great deal of "material" of the kind I wanted. As I go ahead with my work on it, I'll let you know if there is any prospect of beating the November 1 deadline, or of being beaten by it.

See to it in Washington: Horst Franz, Chairman of Comm. Lit., 1617 Maxwell Road or 400 Ballantine Hall, Newton Stalknecht, Director of School of Letters, 115 North Bryn. There are others on the car introduced you, if you like, to younger 1st. See to it. The Indian H. Franz is in the hands of Bernard Perry, a son of Miss Perry.

In Seattle: Robert Wilkin, Chairman of English. Carolyn Lizer, editor of Loctay Northwest, Art. 6, 441 East Eleventh St. between Main Street and Second Avenue writing in the Northwest.

I'll send notes to Stalknecht and Lizer to warn them of your approach. To prepare them for your approach. I'm sure it will be a pleasure for all hands.

Yours faithfully.

Robert Fitzgerald
Robert Fitzgerald

GERALD W. BARRETT, 120 Charles Street, New York 14, N. Y.

July 22, 1963

Houghton Mifflin Company
53 W 43 Street
New York, N. Y.

Attention: Robert Leshner

For transcribing tape of WBAI program on James Agee:

10 hours

\$2.50 per hour

\$25.00

Note: Agee's own reading of Night Piece on an incorporated, exceedingly poor quality tape; I would not like to be responsible for the exact words in all cases. I hope it is possible to verify the accuracy and the form and punctuation. It was a poem.

San Fortunato della Collina
Perugia

3 August 63

Dear Mr. Lescher,

Thank immensely for the transcript—thanks both to Wilder Hobson and to yourselves. I have the poem, don't worry, in a correct copy. I am glad to hear you allude to "the royalty account on the book." Let us hope it will be a decent book.

You did receive the notes of introduction I sent?
I used surface mail since there didn't seem to be any hurry.

I hate to ask anything more of you, especially in the weather I hear you've been having, but there was a little magazine called ~~EXILE~~ FURIOSO in the years just before during and after the war, and in this appeared a review of LET US NOW PRAISE written by myself for TIME and rejected as too reverent. It would be a curiosity. No hurry.

Give me sixty days and you shall have something.

Yours,

1943
Trinidad

Love & Joy

10/1/1943

September 4, 1963 -- Robert Fitzgerald to Robert Lescher

San Fortunato della Collina
Perugia: 4 September 63

Dear Mr. Lescher

I very much appreciate your digging out my old review in Furioso. There is nothing else now with one strange exception that will be much simpler to supply: a copy of The Morning Watch. I should tell you too that it will not have been sixty days but ninety, and that I count on making it now by November 1st. Things have intervened. I hope your exposition goes well, and hope those people can be of some help.

Yours faithfully

Robert Fitzgerald

San Fortunato della Colonna

Penzance 4 September 63

Dear Mr. Leach

I very much appreciate your digging out my old review in FORNOS. There is nothing there now with one strong exception that will be much simpler to supply: a copy of The Morning Post.

I should tell you too that it will not have been sixty days but ninety: and that I came on making it now by November 1st.

Things have intervened. I hope your explanation you will, and hope those people can be of some help.

Yours faithfully

Ron Dighton

San Fortunato della Collina
Perugia : 29 November, 1963

Dear Mr. Lescher,

As I xmail this letter in the morning, I will also mail by airmail, registered, the manuscript of the book that I have put together, and the copy of The Morning Watch that you supplied me. I'd like to thank you again for that, for all your previous help and kindnesses, and for putting up so gracefully with the delay of nearly a month, now, beyond the deadline that I had hoped to meet.

You will find it a fairly abundant book, but I have reasoned that while we are about it we might as well make the best book possible, one that will really contain everything of interest and relevance to James Agee's poems as well as the poems themselves. My own narrative could take no other form in the end than the form it took, if I were to do justice to my friend and to his work as I understand it. Your original interest was in a biography--a kind of work that I have neither the training nor the time nor inclination to perform. But this book as it stands is the best I can do to satisfy that original interest as well as the nominal one that we settled upon.

I should think that the problem of space in the book, from the publishing point of view, could be solved by printing the first two sections (the poems) in a normal size of type, and the third and fourth sections (memoir and documents) in a smaller size. Not that it doesn't all hang together as it is, each part related to and supporting the others. The photographs by Helen Levitt are also chosen to go with the sections where they appear.

In Mia Agee's company and with Father Flye, and later with folders of manuscript that I borrowed, etc., I believe I was able to go through all the verse. Mia was to send me his drafts of lyrics for Candide, but they never came and I've had no response to my letter asking about them. It's very difficult for her to bring herself to search for things unless I am there. A page or two should be left for these; I assume they can be found. Perhaps

memoir, she might be stirred to look for these again.

I'm glad your tour of the northwest was a pleasure for you and that you found congenial company there as I was sure you would.

Yours faithfully,

San Fortunato della Collina

Perugia: 8 December 1963

Dear Mr. Lescher,

The photographs went separately last week in a tentative order and with dates, sometimes conjectural. Now I have a letter from Helen Levitt about them and the prose piece Jim wrote for her photographs:

"4 East 12 St.

Dec. 4, 1963

Dear Robert -

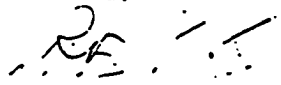
Viking Press is thinking about publishing a book of my pictures with, of course, Jim's introduction. The Museum of M. A. is thinking about it too, though I don't believe either one will do a thing about it. They both have a batch of my pictures in their offices and they should have told me something about it weeks ago. So--the question is--if they do, would they mind ^{your} using the piece you want.

If you can afford to wait a few more weeks for the answer on that - good. If not, let me know and I'll ask them about it. I'm reluctant to do so now as I don't want them to feel pushed in any way about decisions - but I'll ask them anyway if you need to know.

Of course you may use any photographs of Jim. Just send back the prints after the plates are made as I haven't many..."

This is just to let you know how that matter stands. I got a card from your office to let me know that the manuscript had arrived. I'll send a card to Miss L. to say we'll wait for the present and will be in touch later. Merry Christmas!

Yours faithfully,



Donna Elena Elant
1/10/63
San Fortunato della Collina
Perugia

10 December 63

Dear Mr. Lescher,

Well. I'm very glad the manuscript struck you favorably on first reading, and send you this line or two to assure you that I'm perfectly receptive to all your thoughts for its improvement. I want it quite simply to be as good as it possibly can be.

You will have received the photographs by now, and my copy of Miss Levitt's letter.

Yours faithfully,

R. F. J.

January 25, 1964 -- Robert Fitzgerald to Robert Lescher

Box 182
South Hadley, Massachusetts
25 January 64

Dear Mr. Lescher

5 Greenwood Lane will always reach me but the fact is that all my mail goes in Box 182. Not such a pretty address but serviceable. Many thanks for both packages. I am writing to Maddow and also to Helen Levitt. She should soon know if her book is going to be done or not. I hope it is, and of course if it is I can drop the prose piece. It would still please me to be able to quote from it, as you suggested, and we can raise that question when and if it is indicated. I'll ponder other possibilities of quoting rather than printing entire. My conviction about the stories, however, has lost some of its fervor. This is not to say that your question on this point, like your questions on all others, was not a natural and logical one. Certainly what I have written will be better because of your close reading.

Reading my prose again and critically I find two (other) slight errors. Oldfield Point was and is on the North shore of Long Island, the South shore of Long Island Sound. The cover story for TIME was on Laurence Olivier, not on a producer. I will give all due attention to eliminating anything else of this kind. Likely additions, as we agreed, will be

- 1) a quotation from his tentative preface to a book of stories never actually carried through (1934)
- 2) a quotation from The House, his first published scenario (1937)
- 3) a brief 'discussion': maybe following 3), of his early movie work or projects.
- 4) An explanation of lines revised in Permit Me Voyage
- 5) Possible quotation from late Love Affair sketch for scenario.

Numbers 1) and 5) must be found by my wife in a drawer in Perugia. Two weeks. Say one month for everything. Mia Agee must meanwhile try again to find the lyrics for Candide. I'll write to her, too (and much good it will do). Maybe I can get down to N.Y. in mid-February.

Yours,
R.F.

Box 182

~~MOUNT HOLYOKE COLLEGE~~
SOUTH HADLEY, MASSACHUSETTS

~~DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH~~

25 January '68

Dear Mr. Lescher

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- 3) a brief 'discussion' maybe following 2), of his
early movie work or projects.
- 4) An explanation of lines raised in Parnie the
Voyage.
- 5) Possible quotation from late Love Affair sketch
 for scenario.

Number 1) and 5) must be found by my wife in a dinner
 in Paris. Two weeks. Say one month for everything.
 Lisa Agee must meanwhile try again to find the lyrics
 for Candide. I'll write to her, too (and much good it
 will do me). Maybe I can get down to N.Y. in mid-February.
 Yrs love. RF.

February 1, 1964 -- Robert Fitzgerald to Robert Lescher

Box 182
South Hadley, Massachusetts

1 February '64

Dear Mr. Lescher,

A good deed by Mr. Warren. D.O. Stewart may have presided but A. Mack must then have spoken first: he presided in my memory.

Instead of sending manuscripts back and forth, why do we not plan on another Blue Ribbon lunch and afternoon of work on, say, Friday the 21st. I will bring the memoir and you can have the other contracts ready with questions. You will have had a reply by this time from the Cummington Press. I hope you can do this. It's the only Friday this month that I could be in New York.

Yours faithfully

R.F.

Box 182

~~MOUNT HOLYOKE COLLEGE~~
SOUTH HADLEY, MASSACHUSETTS

~~DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH~~

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Friday this month that I could be in New York.

Yrs faithfully
R.F.

February 4, 1964 -- Robert Fitzgerald to Robert Lescher

Mount Holyoke College
South Hadley, Massachusetts

Department of English

4 February '64

Dear Mr. Lescher

I wonder if Harry Duncan's book would be affected by ours at all, really. People would buy it for its looks, and few could afford it, and it wouldn't make any difference to them that two of the four stories were printed elsewhere. In any case they would have all four. The two that I want to print are a corner on which my own piece of writing rests.

Well, I'll see you this Friday. I think I'd like to ask you not to lock up the book until mid-March. I will be seeing, early in March, a very old friend of mine and Jim's, and I will also be visiting Cambridge when I can check, in old college catalogues, such things as the day of Robert Hillyer's seminar in versification and the name of Jim's dormitory. In short it would be best to wait until I have satisfied myself (and you) as to the accuracy of everything that is verifiable there.

I hope to see Mia when I am in New York and hope that she will have found Jim's draft of lyrics for Candide.

Yours,

R.F.

MOUNT HOLYOKE COLLEGE
SOUTH HADLEY, MASSACHUSETTS

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

4 February '64

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I hope to see him when I am in
New York and hope that she will have
found Jim's drafts of lyrics for Casside...

Es. even

R.F.

February 25, 1964 -- Robert Fitzgerald to Robert Lescher

Mount Holyoke College
South Hadley, Massachusetts

Department of English

Tuesday Feb 25

Dear Mr. Lescher

Two things I have on my mind:

1) Mia Agee clearly hopes that the business affair will soon be settled and doesn't see why it hasn't been sooner; she thought the legal parties were satisfied. I urge that you urge no necessary delay.

2) Please also urge sound and handsome production for this book. I don't like any implication (from the price you would) that it might be "Economically" produced. Some photographs will certainly add to it.

In haste

Robert Fitzgerald

MOUNT HOLYOKE COLLEGE
SOUTH HADLEY, MASSACHUSETTS

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

Tuesday Feb 25

Dear Mr. Lischer

Two things I have on my mind:

1) Mrs. Agge clearly hopes that the business affair will soon be settled and doesn't see why it hasn't been sooner; she thought the legal parties were satisfied. I urge that you urge an unnecessary delay.

2) Please also urge sound and handsome production for this book. I don't like any implication (from the price you named) that it might be "economically" produced. Some photographs will certainly add to it.

in haste

Robert J. [unclear]

February 29, 1964 -- Robert Fitzgerald to Robert Lescher

Mount Holyoke College
South Hadley, Massachusetts

Department of English

29 February '64

Dear Mr. Lescher

Now I have both your letters of last week and the enclosures for which I'm very grateful.

Ben Maddow's letter was a good one but added almost nothing to what I already knew. This morning there was a card from Helen Levitt saying that Viking had apparently decided to do her book. Why don't you choose a paragraph for us to quote, since I haven't got Jim's piece on his photographs? A good long one in which the idea of the actual perceived as a work of art clearly emerges. Then I can ask Helen to get the publisher's permission for us to quote.

Dwight MacDonald's (sic) book will be available to me on Monday. On Tuesday I hope to send to you in Boston the paragraph on J.A. and films, with anything more on Dwight that may be indicated. Remember, please, that at the end of next week in Boston and Cambridge I hope to have final counsel on my prose and verification of one or two facts.

I'll see what can be done in a subordinate clause to explain why the Yale Press did P.M.V. Nothing need be done about the religious women (?), which corresponds now fairly exactly to the state of things referred to.

I blush to have been so positive about the spring '33 publication of Ulysses. Of course it was '34. Unless you discover it to have been '35 . . .

And of course the xerox copy will do.

Now. A large point. The manuscript of the Candide lyrics that Mia found at last and gave me last week is much bulkier than I had expected, and on first and second reading it is rather a mess. I will have to get in touch with William Hellman or Leonard Bernstein or both to be able to edit this thing with any intelligence, and this is going to hold us up. Moreover (additional point) a few more poems have

turned up, plus a bibliography compiled by a French woman now in Cambridge who is doing her doctoral dissertation on Jim for the Sorbonne. I will see her on my visit to Cambridge next Saturday. She includes a few publications I hadn't known (e.g. Untermeyer's American Poetry, 1950, Harcourt Brace) and must look into. Brakes! I'll do all I can as quickly as I can, but I'm heavily engaged.

Yours hopefully however

R.F.

MOUNT HOLYOKE COLLEGE
SOUTH HADLEY, MASSACHUSETTS

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

29 February '64

Dear Mr. Lechner

- Now I have both your letter of last week and the
• enclosures for which I'm very grateful.

Ben Mallow's letter was a good one but added almost
nothing to what I already knew. This morning there was a card from
Helen Levitt saying that Viking had apparently decided to do her book.
Why don't you choose a paragraph for us to quote, since I haven't
got time to price on her photographs? A good long one in which the
idea of this actual process as a work of art clearly emerges. Then
I can ask Helen to get the publisher's permission for us to quote.

Dwight MacDonnell's book will be available to me on
Monday. On Tuesday I hope to send to you in Boston the
paragraph on J.A. and films, with anything more on Dwight that
may be indicated. Remember, please, that at the end of next
week in Boston and Cambridge I hope to have final counsel
on my prose and verification of one or two facts.

- I'll see what can be done in a subordinate clause to
• Explain why the Yale Press did P.M.V. Nothing need be done
about the religious nomenclature, which corresponds now fairly

Exactly to the state of things referred to.

I think to have been in position about the spring '33
publication of Ulysses. Of course it was '34. Unless you
decide it to have been '35.---

And of course the Xerox copy will do.

Now. A large point. The manuscript of the
Candida lyrics that Mia found at last and gave me last
week is much better than I had expected, and on first
and second reading it is rather a mess. I will have to get
in touch with William Hellman or Leonard Bernstein or both
to be able to edit this thing with any intelligence, and this
is going to hold us up. Moreover (additional point) a few
more poems have turned up, plus a bibliography compiled by a
French woman now in Cambridge who is doing her doctorate
dissertation on Steu for the Sorbonne. I will see her on
my visit to Cambridge next Saturday. She includes a few
publications I had known (e.g. Uexküll's Modern American
Poetry, 1950, Harcourt, Brace) and must look into. Brakes! I'll
do all I can as quickly as I can, but I'm heavily engaged.
Yours hopefully however

March 5, 1964 -- Robert Fitzgerald to Robert Lescher

Box 182
South Hadley
Mass.

5 March

Dear Mr. Lescher:

I am just about to be off for Boston by way of Andover and will be there this evening and through Saturday. I have considered well the editing problem with respect to the draft lyric for Candide and it is clear that Leonard Bernstein will have to be consulted as well as Miss H. But he will not be free till next week.

Let us therefore say in revision of our previous time-schedules that the paragraph on films and the reference to Candide will be worked over -- as we more or less anticipated on the phone -- by the end of the week, is March. Dwight's piece in his book by the way is a splice of his Encounter article and his N Yorker review of ADITF. Nothing new.

Yours

R.F.

Box 182

369

~~WADSWORTH CLUB~~
~~127 WEST 11TH STREET~~
Smith Hadley
Mass.

5 March

Dear Mr. Lescher:

I am just about to be off for Boston
by way of Andover and will be there this evening and
through Saturday. I have considered well the editing
problem with reference to the draft lyrics for Candidate and
it is clear that Leonard Bernstein will have to be
consulted as well as Miss H. But he will not be
free till next week.

Let us therefore say in revision of our previous
time-schedules that the paragraph on films and the
reference to Candidate will be worked out — as we have
or less anticipated on the phone — by the end of next
week, 15 March. Dwight's piece in his book by the
way is a style of his Encounter article and his NY Times
review of ADITF. Nothing new.

Yours

Rif.

Box 182
South Hadley
14 March 64

Dear Mr Lescher,

Just to let you know on your day in New York:

- 1) When the P. O. opens Monday morning I will send you, to your Boston office, your copy of the Memoir with various revisions and additions. Note:
- 2) Insert on p. 37 with quote from J. A.'s piece on Helen Levitt. I've written to her that I'd like this and hope her publisher doesn't mind.
- 3) Insert on p. 55, two paragraphs on J.A. and Film.
- 4) Corrections of fact on p. 4, p. 10 and 11, p. 46A, p. 47, and p. 54 (it was Trilling, not the Time reviewer, who spoke of the "moral effort" in LUNEFM.)
5. Deletions of sentences, notably p. 2 and p. 51, unnecessarily dragging in R. F.
6. Additions: notably about Dwight MacDonald on p. 13 (with corresponding deletion on p. 19), about dentistry on p. 21, about second Guernheim application p. 40 (again to spare H. A. Roe), about Yale on p. 23 (for Mr. Brooks).
7. A few minor revisions I won't enumerate here.

8) To meet the Candido difficulty, an insert on p. 58. But the lyrics themselves I am afraid cannot be well included until I hear from Hellman-Bernstein, to whom I have decided to send xerox copies this week with requests for a bit more illumination. I regret it very much, but it looks as though you will have to wait for those till the first week of April when I get back here from ten days of constant travel--I'm taking my son to Florida, setting off by car on Thursday morning the 19th. There will be about six pages of the Candido stuff, and I agree that it should go at the end of the section "Later Writing."

9) I am also sending two more poems to be included in "Later Poems." I found these, of all places, in Untermeyer's Modern American Poetry, 1936 edition, where I hadn't thought to look before. Jim must have sent them to him when asked. They are dateable 1935-36 and should be inserted thereabouts in the chronological order.

10) Some other college-era poems have turned up, but they are inferior and were not published, and I don't think he would see any point in adding them. You may differ with this opinion? no, I don't think so.

This is all I can do, and it does substantially complete the book to my satisfaction. I'll be here the day after Easter. Mrs.

(New edition of know)

R.E

Box 182
South Hadley, Mass
3 April 64

Dear Mr. Lescher,

Here is the Candide material selected and ordered as best. I can select and order and preceded by a note quoting Leonard Bernstein on the context of the lyrics.

Will you please make the following final corrections in the Memoir:

- 1) p. 1 ...a calculated yielding of structural steel.
- 2) p. 11 ...had begun at Cambridge and had written up in his book, Practical Criticism (1929).
- 3) p. 19 after sentence ending ...steel business. drop following footnote:
 * A story later got around that the Founder for a time considered sending Agce to the Harvard Business School. "That story," he writes to me, "is quite plausible--though I do not actually recall it. A problem of journalism that interested me then--and still does--is to combine good writing and 'human understanding' with familiarity with business."
- 4) p. 38 after sentence ending...not so good. insert following sentence: He never did as well in this vein as in the epigrammatic "Songs on the Economy of Abundance" that he had sent to Louis Untermeyer for the 1936 edition of Modern American Poetry.
- 5) p. 39 it is Old Field Point.

I am also sending along a poem on Brahms evidently written in New York c. 1935 and given to a Miss Gladys Lea, who is now at 353 East 50th Street. I would like to include it and am requesting Miss Lea's permission.

I received this poem from Mme Genevieve Fabre of 5 Ashton Place, Cambridge, Mass., who is engaged on a dissertation on James Agce for the Sorbonne. As she must return to France on the first of May, I wonder if she could see proof by then--if we are going to have it by then--or even possibly see the typescript. She has been working independently on a bibliography of the poems and tells me that the Bulletin of Bibliography in Boston would like to have it by mid-April and would like to publish it. Listen to some of what she says:

"I am still running after the poem published in Nation whose last line is 'Don't bite the hand that is feeding you; reach for the throat'--would you know in what year-volume-page it was published? ---but I don't remember that one at all! Have we got it? Moreover: Apparently some poems were actually published in New Masses and although I went through many issues and volumes I was only able to find book reviews. Do you know about the poems--you said something about Sunday-Outskirts of Knoxville being first published there--would you again know

-2-

approximately when? ~~at~~ or, if not in New Masses, where this poem was published?"-----

I can almost remember seeing it in the New Masses and I believe that it given on our postcard as the place of publication but this girl can't find it in the files. She goes on:

"I have also started going through the issues of Common Sense in order to find references of the poems Agee did publish there--but unsuccessfully so far. I think 'Millions are Learning How' was published some time in '38. Are there, to your knowledge, other poems there too?"

Well, I can't remember others. I never went through the files of Common Sense and God forbid I ever shall. She goes on:

'Permit Me Voyage' was published in England, H. Mphrey Milford, Oxford University Press--is this exact? and when was the publication?"

I haven't the faintest idea.

I'd like to assist Mme. Fabre as far as I can--and it looks as though she may be assisting me. Would it be possible for me to come in the Boston office to make a rapid list of later poems by titles, first lines, and place of publication as we have it, so that I could turn this over to her? She has Widener library at her disposal and would be checking the stuff for us.

One more thing. An item in her present bibliography is the "Class Ode" in the Harvard Class Album for 1932. I don't believe I ever saw this, and I'm asking her for a copy.

One must have a love for details.

I want to thank you, by the way, for sending me the book of poems by Selway Finnell. During the vacation I was able to read them, and to appreciate them; they are appreciable poems.

Yours faithfully,

Oh. Please also insert on p. 67A, after died. I.R. Bernstein recalls "the ~~inn~~ joy of long hours spent with Jim, of much talk about the nature of sung lyrics, and Jim's understanding that this was not his métier. His work was charming, as you can see, and he couldn't have been more cooperative; but he never quite caught the great simplicity and immediacy that are essential to words that have to be sung." "he was not a lyric etc

April 4, 1964 -- Robert Fitzgerald to Robert Lescher

Box 182
South Hadley
4 April

Dear Mr. Lescher

I trust this will reach you in N.Y. Monday. I've sent the Candide section with a letter to the Boston office when you'll find in Tuesday.

In case your meeting with lawyers occurs in N.Y. on Monday please be advised that if it will expedite the matter Mia Agee should be told that I'm willing to forego in favor of the Agee trust or Estate or whatever any royalties accruing to me beyond the amount of the advance HM made me last year.

I agree about the photographs and would choose the one by W.E. of J.A. with glass in hand.

Yours

R.F.

Box 182

374

Smith Hurdley

4 April

Dear Mr. Lecher

I trust this will reach you in N.Y. Monday. I've sent the Candidate section with a letter to the Boston office where you'll find it Tuesday.

In case your meeting with Lanyon occurs in N.Y. on Monday please be advised that if it will expedite the matter Miss Algee should be told that I'm willing to forgo in favor of the Algee trust or estate or whatever any royalties accruing to me beyond the amount of the advance HM made me last year.

I agree about the photographs and would choose the one by W.E. of J.A. with glass in hand.

Yours

R.F.

April 19, 1964 -- Robert Fitzgerald to Robert Lescher

Mount Holyoke College
South Hadley, Massachusetts

19 April '64

Dear Mr. Lescher

You are again very considerate and helpful in sending the xerox copy. I'm sorry you won't be at Houghton Mifflin any longer. But I understand how difficult it must have been to shuttle back and forth every week, and I congratulate you on joining the famous firm. Seems that the Agee book is or soon will be in the printer's hands at last. I trust the Trust will agree.

My days here have been getting fuller and fuller as more things have been turned up for me to do, and I don't think I'll be able to have a New York weekend in May. I must visit Cambridge where I've rented a house for next year for almost all my family. I face a pretty strenuous summer arranging the transplantation -- and teaching in Indiana too.

Thank you for your kindness now as ever. You've been an admirable editor and will be an admirable agent too. Certainly we must keep in touch.

Sincerely

Robert Fitzgerald

Mount Holyoke College
South Hadley, Massachusetts

19 April '64

Dear Mr. Lescher

You are again very considerate and helpful
in sending the Xerox copy. I'm sorry you won't
be at Houghton Mifflin any longer. But I ~~can~~
understand how difficult it must have been to
shuttle back and forth every week, and I
congratulate you on joining the famous firm.
~~It~~ ^{there!} seems ~~as though~~ the Age book is or soon
will be in the printer's hands at last.. I
trust the Trust will agree.



125
YEARS
of higher education
for women

My days here have been
getting fuller and fuller

Mount Holyoke College
South Hadley, Massachusetts.

as more things have been turned up for me to do, and I don't think I'll be able to have a New York weekend in May. I must visit Cambridge when I've rented a house for next year for almost all my family. I face a pretty strenuous summer arranging the transplantation - and teaching at Indiana too.

Thank you for your kindness and as ever. You've been an admirable editor and will be an admirable agent too. Certainly we must keep in touch.



125
YEARS
of higher education
for women

Sincerely
Rose Loring

Yale University Press

92A YALE STATION NEW HAVEN, CONNECTICUT

May 28, 1964

Dear Paul:

Do I understand that Bob Fitzgerald has turned in the Ages manuscript? If so, when do you plan to bring it out? We'll be right behind you, remember, with the Yale Paperbound edition.

All the best.

Yours,

Chester Kerr
Director

CK:ASB

Mr. Paul Brooks
Houghton Mifflin Co.
2 Park Street
Boston 7, Massachusetts

Agee

Yale University Press

92A YALE STATION, NEW HAVEN, CONNECTICUT

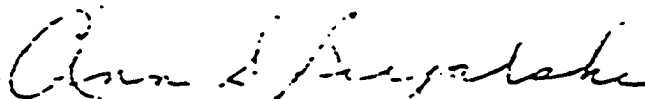
July 9, 1964

Mr. Alick Bartholomew
Houghton Mifflin Company
2 Park Street
Boston 7, Massachusetts

Dear Mr. Bartholomew:

Mr. Kerr is expected back from England
the first week in August. I shall bring your
letter of July 7 to his attention at that time.

Yours sincerely,



Ann S. Bujalski
Secretary to Mr. Kerr

Dear Mr. Brooks

THE SCHOOL OF LETTERS—INDIANA UNIVERSITY
BLOOMINGTON, INDIANA 47403

ESIDING OFFICER

WM W. ASKTON

RECTOR

WTON P. STALLMECHT

SOCIATE DIRECTOR

ART FRANK



SENIOR FELLOWS

JOHN CROWE BANSON

LIONEL TRILLING

PHILIP RABY

AUSTIN WARREN

ALLEN TATE

22 July 1964

Dear Mr. Brooks,

Early in June I called Mr. Thompson from New York and understood from him that the Agee book would soon go to the printer since agreement had been reached between the Agee Trust and yourselves; I then sent him a note giving the above as my summer address and asking that proofs be sent to me here if they were going to be ready before the end of July. I am writing now to ask for news of this enterprise, if there is any news, and to remind you that I'll be leaving on the 31st of the month, bound for Italy. I have begun to feel rather painfully in the dark. I'll be at home in Italy during August and then, after the 10th of September, at 77 Raymond Street, Cambridge.

Sincerely yours,

Robert Fitzgerald

Robert Fitzgerald

Robert Fitzgerald
via

MURRAY, NOBILETTI & KENNY
ATTORNEYS AND COUNSELLORS AT LAW
ONE ROCKEFELLER PLAZA
NEW YORK, N. Y. 10020

CASSAR NOBILETTI
JAMES F. MURRAY, JR.
MICHAEL J. KENNY

TELEPHONE "FIE JUDSON 2-3000"
CABLE ADDRESS "MURCOUNSEL, N. Y."

October 30, 1964

Houghton Mifflin Company
Publishers
Wayside Road
Burlington, Mass.

Re: James Agee Trust -
"Let Us Now Praise Famous Men"

Gentlemen:

During a recent quarterly conference, the Trustee of the James Agee Trust directed me to seek clarification on numerous matters presently pending between your company and the Trust with respect to the works of James Agee.

With particular reference to the contract executed April 25, 1940 between Houghton Mifflin, James Agee and Walter Evans on the above work, the Trust wishes to know the exact status of your records and of the contract itself.

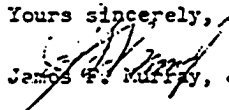
In accordance with paragraph 12 of the said contract, (the last sentence thereof) failure by the authors to accept the publisher's offer to sell plates and all copies of the work, the publisher's are at liberty to destroy or dispose of such material and the agreement would accordingly be deemed terminated.

The files of the Trust do not reflect any acceptance by James Agee of such offer. Would you kindly inform us whether or not you exercised your rights under paragraph 12 and if so, on what date.

The Trust would also appreciate photostats of annual royalty accountings for each year since the death of James Agee with respect to the above entitled work.

Thanking you for this courtesy, I remain,

Yours sincerely,


James F. Murray, Jr.

JFM/mew

PAUL WEISS, RIFKIND, WHARTON & GARRISON
575 MADISON AVENUE, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10022

IRVING
SAMUELS
WHARTON
ARRISON
BWIN
SCITZ
WINKLER
J. H. MEYER
WIND
MILLER, JR.
ABRAM
ROCHLIN
ALON
ISCHMAN
EWIS
MUSSENFIELD
KINBARO
PAUL
FLENN
MSSENGALC
KIS
COSTIKYAN
MONTGOMERY, JR.
FLORES
GREENE
UDENSTEIN
CHEN
PURCELL

MURRAY HILL 8-5500
CABLE: LONGSIGHT, N.Y.

ARTHUR J. COHEN
COUNSEL
—
RICHARD F. PAUL
LOUIS S. WEISS

December 21, 1964

*Atch -
On shorted in?
will*

Mr. Lovell Thompson
Houghton Mifflin Company
2 Park Street
Boston 7, Mass.

Dear Lovell:

On reflection, I don't think I will send that letter to Senator Murray yet. I think I will wait till he reminds me, because it's a sleeping dog and we might as well let it lie.

Sincerely,



Edward N. Costikyan

PAUL, WEISS, RIFKIND, WHARTON & GARRISON
575 MADISON AVENUE
NEW YORK, N. Y. 10022

January 7, 1965

Hon. James F. Murray, Jr.
1 Rockefeller Plaza
New York, N.Y.

Re: James Agee Trust

Dear Jim:

I must apologize for not having been in touch with you concerning your letter of October 30, 1964 to Houghton Mifflin. They had asked me to follow up with you, and somehow it got lost in the shuffle.

Now I understand you have written again, and I thought it might be helpful to straighten out what transpired.

First of all, as to LET US NOW PRAISE FAMOUS MEN, in your letter of October 30 you inquired concerning paragraph 12 of the agreement.

The publisher has not exercised any rights under paragraph 12 of the agreement. However, during the Korean War, a War Production Authority order required the disposal of plates in order to free the metal for war purposes if the plates had been in existence for a period of four years and had not been used during that period.

A form letter was sent to Mr. Agee some time in the summer or fall of 1952, but our files do not reflect any reply by him.

The publisher did not destroy anything other than the metallic plates which it was required to destroy by the Government order. Copies of the work on hand and other materials, including the illustrations, etc., were preserved. From these materials the 1950 edition was prepared.

2

Hon. James F. Murray, Jr.
January 7, 1965

Accordingly, the surmise in your letter of December 21 as to the plates having been destroyed in 1942 or 1943 is clearly erroneous.

I have asked Houghton Mifflin to get me photostats of annual royalty accountings for each year since the death of Mr. Agee, and I am enclosing photostats for the period December 1956-December 1963. I am sure you appreciate it was somewhat burdensome to look up these rather ancient records, and I hope that your client will take care that they are not misplaced.

As to MORNING WATCH, Houghton Mifflin has advised me that under the contract there was no requirement to keep the work in print, and the plates are still on hand and a reprint could be issued at any time. The termination clause of the contract states:

"If the Publishers shall print said work from letterpress plates or electrotypes, and if at any time after the expiration of two years from the date of first publication there is not in their opinion sufficient sale for the work to enable them to continue its publication profitably, they may destroy or dispose of said plates free from any claim on the part of the Author and this Agreement shall terminate; provided that the Publishers shall first send by registered mail to the Author at the Author's last known address an offer to sell said plates at one-quarter their cost and all copies of the work then on hand at cost. If the Author shall within sixty days of the mailing of said offer accept it and pay for said plates, the Author shall thereupon become the sole owner of the copyright and this Agreement shall terminate."

The publisher has not exercised any rights under the termination clause in question.

If you have any further questions, please let me know. I trust that in light of the foregoing the conference that you suggested will not be necessary, but if I am wrong please let me know.

Sincerely,

Edward N. Costikyan

ENC:22c
Dm:1a

PAUL WEISS, RIFKIND, WHARTON & GARRISON
575 MADISON AVENUE, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10022

SIMON M. RIFKIND
ROBERT C. SAMUELS
JOHN F. WHARTON
LLOYD A. GARRISON
MYER D. WEISS
HOWARD A. RIFKIND
H. RUSSELL WINDAUR
ALEXANDER WEINSTEIN
ADRIAN W. DEWIND
EDWARD O. MILLER, JR.
MORRIS S. ABRAHAM
MORDECAI ROSENBLIN
PAUL J. NEWLON
JOSEPH S. ISHMAN
JAMES S. LEWIS
SIDNEY S. HUSCHENFELD
MARTIN ALLENBARD
RICHARD H. PAUL
NORMAN FELCHER
JOHN C. HASSIDODALE
JAY H. TOPKIS
EDWARD H. COSTIKYAN
ROBERT H. HORTONOWERT, JR.
JOHN C. TAYLOR, 3RD
BERNARD H. GREENE
ERNEST RUBINSTEIN
ALLAN S. ECHER
ALLAN H. COHEN
JAMES L. PURCELL

MURRAY HILL 2 3600
CABLE 100-1571 N.Y.

ARTHUR J. COHEN
CENTRAL
—
CHARLES E. COUL
LEWIS S. WEISS

January 7, 1965

Mr. Alick Bartholomew
Houghton Mifflin Company
2 Park Street
Boston 7, Mass.

Dear Mr. Bartholomew:

I have been attempting to accommodate myself to Mr. Murray's well-known speed, with some success. I have taken the liberty of replying to his letter of December 21 in the form enclosed herewith. I should add that Murray had asked, in a letter to me of January 5, to confer with respect to several problems arising on the trust, which explains the last sentence of my letter.

Sincerely,

Ed Costikyan
Edward N. Costikyan

ENC:sac
Encl.

MURRAY, NOBILETTI & KENNY
ATTORNEYS AND COUNSELLORS AT LAW
ONE ROCKEFELLER PLAZA
NEW YORK, N.Y. 10020

TELEPHONE 1212 JUDSON 2-3000
CABLE ADDRESS "MURCOUNSEL, N.Y."

u. a. 65

Alacks
I think we should put

to get this in -
(1) It will help sales
(2) It will help our agee relationship
(3) It will help our editorial points of view

February 8, 1965

Mr. Lovell Thompson
Houghton Mifflin Company
2 Park Street
Boston, Mass.

Dear Mr. Thompson:

I enclose a duly executed copy of the contract
x between Houghton Mifflin Company and The James Agee
Trust for promission to publish "A Mother's Tale".

You will note that the contract has been
altered to reflect the Trust rather than Mrs. Agee
as the proper party to the agreement.

Yours sincerely,

[Signature]
James F. Murray, Jr.

JFM:xb
Enclosure

- LT We can not put it in
- "Be. Times" in

December 18, 1965 -- Walker Evans to Lovell Thompson

Yale University
School of Art and Architecture
New Haven, Connecticut

Department of Art

Walker Evans
1681 York Avenue
New York, N.Y. 10028

Dec 18 1965

Dear Lovell,

It is done. Mia agrees, in most friendly fashion, to let me have the Agee piece, and I sent her \$300.00. There will be no difficulties, and I'll tell you just how I did everything, later: She even says she thinks nothing of letting it go for this purpose, understanding that it was written for me in the first place.

See you January

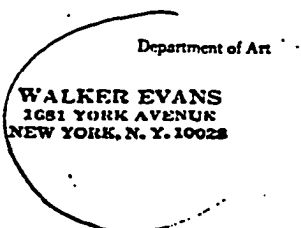
Walker

PS

As for you, H-M is reimbursing me for this peculiar financial juggling, I'll have to leave that to you -- after we've signed contracts, of course. I may need it back at, the time of advance, if that is possible. By then I'll have stated for form's sake to the company just what it is getting -- some statement in writing I suppose will be wanted. We shall forget the \$500 figure for reasons I'll explain.

W

Yale University School of Art and Architecture New Haven, Connecticut



Free

DEC 18 1965

Dear Lowell, —

It is done. Mia agrees, in most friendly fashion, to let me have the Asa piece, and I sent her \$300.00. There will be no difficulties, and I'll tell you just how I did everything later. She even says she thinks nothing of letting it go for this purpose, remembering that it was written for me in the first place.

See you tomorrow

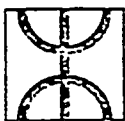
W Allen

PS

As for you, H.M. Co. reimbursing me for this peculiar financial juggling, I'll have to leave that to you — often with signed contracts, of course. I may need it back at the time of advance, if that is possible. By then I'll have stated, for firm's sake to the Company just what it is getting — some statement on writing I suppose will be wanted. We shall forget the \$500 figure for reasons I'll explain.

Post Office Box number: 1688 Zip Code: 06520 Telephone: 772-0880

161



Agenzia Letteraria Internazionale

Milano - Corso Matteotti 3 - Telefono 723609
Fondata nel 1898 da Augusto Foa

Mr.
Alick Bartholomew
Houghton Mifflin Co..
2, Park Street
Boston, Mass.
USA

Milan
Dec.22nd, 1965

Dear Alick,

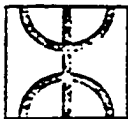
you will presumably recall that years ago we sold to Messrs. Sugar of Milan the Italian rights in MORNING WATCH by James Agee, - a book which they published in a handsome edition, but with (to put it mildly) rather indifferent success.

They have however now, after so many years, managed to obtain a rather good paper-back reprint offer from Mondadori, running as follows:

- a) Mondadori guarantee 150,000 copies in their "Oscar" series, at Lire 350, and on the basis of a 4% royalty on these 150,000 printed and bound copies, making for a total of Lire 2,100,000: these would be paid as to 1/3 on signature, 1/3 on publication or on March 31st, 1967, whichever is the earlier date, and 1/3 90 days after publication or on June 30th, 1967, whichever is the earlier date.
- b) Should Mondadori print in excess of 150,000 in their first printing, all copies printed and bound in excess of 150,000 copies would be paid in full together with the final payment to be rendered 90 days after publication
- c) any further printings to be settled in full 90 days after the completion of each printing
- d) Mondadori's license to expire 5 years after their first publication of the book
- e) all proceeds to be split 50/50 between HM and Sugar.

I do hope that you will be able to approve of this, and I look forward to a rider to Sugar's master agreement, in four copies, at your very earliest convenience. The amount of money involved is fairly considerable, and Mondadori's offer is subject to the deal being clinched within the next two or

./.



Agenzia Letteraria Internazionale

Milano - Corso Matteotti 3 - Telefono 793609
Fondata nel 1898 da Augusto Foa

three weeks: I should therefore be extremely grateful if you could give this some kind of priority treatment.

Very many thanks in anticipation.

Yours sincerely

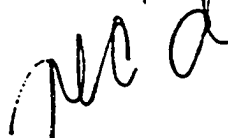
p.p. Agenzia Letteraria Internazionale

Milan, January 31st, 1966

Dear Sirs,

we are pleased to inform you that we have sent you, through our Bankers, Banco Ambrosiano, Milan, the following amount (s), which you shall receive within the next few days: on the 26th January 1966, ~~xxx~~ through First National Bank at Lire 626,44 to the \$.:

\$ 483,92 (lire 303,150) : i.e. Lire 350,000 less 3,30% income-tax and 10% commission : SUGAR's 1st advance payment for THE MORNING WATCH by James Agee.



Yours sincerely
AGENZIA LETTERARIA INTERNAZIONALE

HARVARD UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

Gayle

WARREN HOUSE
CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS 02138

February 6, 1966

Mr. Lovell Thompson
Houghton Mifflin Co.
2 Park Street
Boston 7

Dear Lovell,

I'm glad to hear that you had a pleasant meeting with Mia. You can most assuredly confirm to her my wish to receive no royalties from the book after I have earned back the \$1,000 advance. Her feeling that the book should contain noems only is difficult for me to share not only because the introduction was scaled to a larger book (and I'm afraid might seem disproportionate if not worse in a smaller one) but because there is so much direct reference in it to the contents of the book that I put together. We meet rather head-on on this point. I suppose it is I who am going to be difficult now. But I'll consider it, and in the meantime I urge that you again make sure of your arrangement with Chester Kerr who has been champing at the bit to reissue

Permit me Voyager. I had in fact got the impression from Dudley that Chester was going ahead with this unless H. M. came to an understanding with the Agee trust by the first of the year.

If I hear from Mia I'll re-ly, but won't you please communicate my misgivings to her along with my reiteration about the royalties. We are very heavily engaged here trying to settle into a new house in Cambridge, and my time is taken up with this and, beginning this week, with the University work, so I'll be happy over any correspondence I can be spared.

If we don't get together before you take off for London, best wishes to you both for an early spring there, and Sally and I will hope to see you when you get back.

Yours faithfully,



Robert Fitzgerald

THE CENTURY ASSOCIATION
7 West Forty-Third St.
New York

. 25 February 1966

Dear Lovell:

Forgive this longhand, I'll be brief and legible - answering your letter of this week.

I'm glad you spoke to Szarkowski. Surely something good for us all will come of it.

May I have you note, and perhaps tell Terry H., that (1) I want to change my proposed dedication; (2) I'd like to have a page for "acknowledgement" - to Guggenheim Foundation and to Carnegie Corporation.

I propose to dedicate "Many are called" to J.R.A. - that is, Agee. Isabelle releases me, and I shall give her the portfolio I am publishing, which I may have told you about (twelve reproductions of recent work, not of course any of the subway, miscellaneous things, for the smaller art-book market). Perhaps Terry ought to be told this, too.

I am right now going over the finished set of prints I had made for the engravers. Quite a job of ordering, page-placement, sizing, layout, etc. But absorbing work. Probably I ought to collate my set with the prints now in your vault in Boston.

The photoprinter here went over the estimated sum, of \$200 - of course, don't worry. I won't ask you for his entire bill of some \$300 if you can't budget it conveniently; though I had the bill sent to Terry.

Speaking of money, did I or didn't I have a reimbursement for the money I gave Mia for the rights to Jim's preface? I can't find record. I believe we were going to adjust that and I think we didn't. It was \$300 and we were prepared to go to \$500 if you remember. Sorry if I'm out of order to mention it.

You must be rushing to leave for England - if you haven't already gone. No; you wouldn't leave without "many are called" more in hand if you intend to publish in October that is. John Szarkowski is more and more interested, you know is reserving exhibition wall space for October. I needn't repeat, his show and other assistance will be invaluable. All our good fortune, n'est ce pas?

I'm following Ballantine paperback action here through George Davidson of Pocketbooks (or is it now General Motors?)

Isabelle wants to entertain you in our garret. Come.

Yrs. ever,
WALKER EVANS

kav

March 11, 1966 -- Walker Evans to Alick Bartholomew at
Houghton Mifflin

Walker Evans

1681 York Ave., New York 28 NY
March 11, 1966

Dear Mr. Bartholomew,

Thank you for your note of March 9th, enclosing a check for \$300.-- in reimbursement for payment I made to Mrs. Agee for rights to James Agee's essay on my work.

Yours in sincerity

Walker Evans

Mr. Alick Bartholomew
Houghton Mifflin Company
2 Park Street
Boston

WALKER EVANS

(Agge) 966

1681 York Ave., New York 28 NY
March 11, 1966

Dear Mr. Bartholomew,

Thank you for your note
of March 9th, enclosing a check for \$300.- in
reimbursement for payment I made to Mrs. Agge
for rights to James Agge's essay on my work.

Yours very sincerely

Walker Evans

Mr. Alvin Bartholomew
Houghton Mifflin Company
2 Park Street
Boston

Yale University Press

924 YALE STATION, NEW HAVEN, CONNECTICUT 06520

May 13, 1966

Mr. Lovell Thompson
Houghton Mifflin Company
2 Park Street
Boston 7, Massachusetts

Dear Mr. Thompson:

Chester Kerr has asked me to write you for a progress report on the Agee-Fitzgerald book. Time is passing, and it would have been nice to have had a poetry paperback--yours or ours--out in time to coincide with the release of the other volumes. But do let us know whether the Gordian knot has been cut, or remains as inscrutable as ever.

Very sincerely yours,

Walter E. Langsam

Walter E. Langsam
Editor

WEL/ej

T Agee
I should
Call
up

Fitzgerald
 HARVARD UNIVERSITY
 DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

Agel
 20 Bryant Street
 WAGGON HOUSE
 CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS 02138

6 July 66

Dear Lovell,

Extricating myself toil by
 toil from the preoccupations of this
 year, I come at last to the Agee matter
 and have looked into the carbons I have
 with me to see how I feel about it now.
 This morning I called you up to see how
 you felt about it or if there were any
 change in the general predicament. It
 seems I missed you by one day. But Eric
 Bartholomew tells me that you had
 recently been in communication with
 Mia and that this had at least not
 discouraged you. I don't like to break
 in on your retreat at St. Andrew's. I
 must leave, myself, however, before you
 get back to Boston, and it would cheer
 me to hear from you. Mr. Bartholomew and
 I are going to have lunch on the 12th,
 then update and correct the manuscript
 a bit so that it will be as it should be
 in your hands. My greetings to E.

Yours

Bob Fitzgerald

LAW OFFICES OF
NEMEROFF, JELLINE, DANZIG, PALEY & KAUFMAN

WISCONSIN 7-8780

ELIOT S. PALEY
AARON L. DANZIG
MITCHELL JELLINE
BERNARD KAUFMAN
LEONARD N. MANDEL
JOSEPH W. ROSENBERG
HOWARD J. LEVINE
ROGER SMITH COHAN
HENRY I. HANDBURGER
LOUIS COHEN

350 FIFTH AVENUE
NEW YORK, N.Y. 10001

Bernard O. Nemeroff
Counsel

July 8, 1966

Mr. Chester Kerr
Yale University Press
New Haven, Connecticut

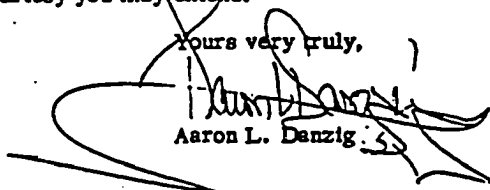
Dear Mr. Kerr:

We represent the James Agee Trust.

In connection with the clarification of the legal rights of said trust to the various literary properties of James Agee it is necessary for us to obtain a copy of the agreement between you and James Agee with reference to the publication of the collection of poems entitled "Permit Me Voyage".

We would be most appreciative if you would be kind enough to provide us with a copy of said agreement. Thank you in advance for any courtesy you may extend.

Yours very truly,


Aaron L. Danzig

ALD:jm

HARVARD UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

20 Bryant Street
~~WAGNER HOUSE~~
CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS 02138

14 July 66

Mr. Alick Bartholomew
Houghton Mifflin
2 Park Street
Boston

Dear Mr. Bartholomew,

Thank you again for the
very good lunch and talk and the
chance to look over the manuscript.

I have written to Mia
Agos and will of course let you know
what if any reply I receive.

The absence of your copy
of my introduction worries me a little,
especially because I now remember that
it included an insert on the Candide
episode that I sent to Mr. Lescher
in the late spring of 1964. I seem not
to have a copy of that. It would be
reassuring for me to hear that it had
turned up.

We'll have a spot of malt
whiskey next time.

Robert Fitzgerald
Robert Fitzgerald

July 19, 1966

Mr. Aaron L. Danzig
WENEROFF, JELLIE, DANZIG, PALEY & KAUFMAN
350 Fifth Avenue
New York, New York 10001

Dear Mr. Danzig:

As you requested in your letter of July 8,
I am enclosing a copy of our original contract
with Mr. Agee covering his volume PERMIT ME
VOYAGE. Also enclosed is a copy of our
October 10, 1951 letter at the time the volume
went out of print.

Yours sincerely,

Ann S. Bujalski
Secretary to Mr. Kerr

Yale University Press

TELEPHONE: 787-7411

MAIL: 92A YALE STATION, NEW HAVEN, CONNECTICUT 06520

CABLES: YALEPRESS

149 York Street, New Haven, Connecticut 06511

August 3, 1966

Mr. Lovell Thompson
Houghton, Mifflin Company
2 Park Street
Boston, Massachusetts 02107

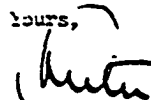
Dear Lovell:

While I was away in July, the enclosed exchange took place with a law firm claiming to represent the Agee Trust.

What's going on now? News of your edition?

I'm sorer and sorer that we didn't just reprint PHILLIP DE VOLKLE, instead of getting so involved with you gentlemen in commerce and law.

Yours,


Chester Kerr
Director

CK:CK
Enc.

25 September 66

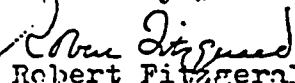
Mr. Alick Bartholomew
Houghton Mifflin Co.
2 Park Street
Boston, Mass.

Dear Mr. Bartholomew,

The Equinox has passed, so I write again. No reply has come to me from Mia Agee. I suppose one may as well admit defeat. Admitting it, I hereby agree to your publishing whatever the Agee Trust will consent to sign a contract for. In January of this year Mia agreed with Lovell Thomson that this could be the poems with my introduction. So be it, and I will modify the introduction accordingly.

Did you, by the way, locate Houghton Mifflin's copy of that writing?

Sincerely yours,


Robert Fitzgerald

5 October 66

Dear Mr. Bartholomew,

I am not at all happy to hear that Houghton Mifflin's copy of the Agee piece has not been found. For one thing, it shouldn't be floating around unpublished and for another, it contained a number of inserts on several matters of which I am not sure that I retained copies.

Who knows what depths of sadness we have yet to reach? If my writing is to be published with most of the quotations in it intact Houghton Mifflin will have to have a contract with the Agee Trust at least permitting that, since many were from unpublished material.

Ever yours,

Robert Fitzgerald
Robert Fitzgerald

*I have looked everywhere
try new ideas?*

*how are we going
to tackle this one?*

HELL JELLINE
 HARRY KAUFMAN
 HARRY M. MANDEL
 EDWIN W. ROSENBERG
 ARTHUR J. LEVITZ
 EDWARD BRIAN COWAN
 W. I. HAMBURGER
 4000 COUNSEL

350 FIFTH AVENUE
 NEW YORK, N.Y. 10001

BERNARD O. NEMERO
 COUNSEL

December 15, 1966

Houghton Mifflin Company
 Wayside Road
 Burlington, Massachusetts

Attention: Mr. Lovell Thompson

Gentlemen:

I have now had an opportunity to confer with David McDowell, Trustee for The Agee Trust, concerning the proposed agreement relating to The Poems of James Agee (edited by Robert Fitzgerald) and the following comments are a product of said conference:

1. Mr. McDowell requests that you remit to us a copy of your standard form of contract upon which the draft was prepared, without reflecting the changes made in the proposed contract. *Does mean blank*

Subject to inspection of the foregoing, the following additional comments are made: The Trustee requests an advance of \$5,000 instead of \$2,000 as indicated in this paragraph and requests that the royalty rate be modified to read as follows:

- 10% on the first 5,000 copies sold;
 - 12-1/2% on all copies sold in excess of 5,000 up to 7,500;
 - 15% on all copies sold in excess of 7,500.
2. Paragraph 7(b) should be revised to read as follows: On copies of said work sold through regular channels in the United States at a discount of 48% or more, the royalty stipulated in subdivision (a) of this paragraph less one-half of the difference between 44% discount and the discount granted. (In no event, however,

the
 2-15-67
 1967

December 15, 1966

shall the royalty be less than one-half of the royalty stipulated in subdivision (a) of this paragraph.

3. Paragraph 7(d) - Educational Sales. The royalty here should be changed to 10%.
4. Paragraph 7(f) - Remainder and Special Sales. This paragraph should be modified to read as follows: A royalty of 10% of the amount received for all copies of over stock sold at "remainder" prices, that is at special discount of 60% or more of the retail price, except when these are sold at or below cost.
5. Paragraph 7(g) - Sheets. The royalty here should be changed to 10%.
6. Paragraph 12 - Principal Subsidiary Rights. The percentage here should be changed to 50%.
7. Paragraph 13 - First Serial and Adaptive Rights. The percentage here should be changed to 90%.
8. Paragraph 14 - British Rights. The Percentage here should be changed to ~~80%~~ 25%.
9. Paragraph 16 - Translations and Foreign Rights. The percentage here should be changed to 90%.
10. Paragraph 17 should be stricken as not applicable.
11. Paragraph 19 - Small Printings. The royalty here should be changed to 10%.
12. Paragraph 22. We would like to see this paragraph as it appeared before the same was stricken.
13. Paragraph 25 option should be stricken.
14. Paragraph 28. The reference there should not be "for the benefit of the heirs of the late James Agee" but should be "for the benefit of The James Agee Trust" since the said trust was set up for the benefit of the children of James Agee and owns all of the literary properties except one not involved in this contract.
15. Paragraph 29. This should be stricken.

NEMEROFF, JELLINE, DANZIG & PALEY

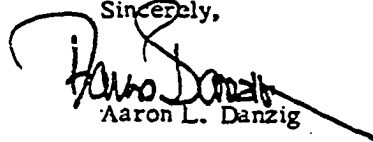
Page 3

December 15, 1966

Your early response to the above would be appreciated so that I
can move this along to a conclusion as rapidly.

Kindest regards.

Sincerely,



Aaron L. Danzig

ALD:jm
cc: Mr. David McDowell

LAW OFFICES OF
NEMEROFF, JELLINE, DANZIG, PALEY & KAUFMAN

WISCONSIN 7-672

ELLOY D. PALEY
AARON L. DANZIG
MITCHELL JELLINE
BERNARD KAUFMAN
LEONARD M. MANDEL
JOSEPH W. ROSENBERG
HOWARD J. LEVITT
ROGER BRIAN COHEN
HENRY I. HAMBURGER
LARRY COHEN

350 FIFTH AVENUE
NEW YORK, N.Y. 10001

BERNARD G. NEMEROFF
COUNSEL

January 6, 1967

Mr. Lovell Thompson
Houghton Mifflin Company
Two Park Street
Boston 7, Massachusetts

Dear Mr. Thompson:

This will acknowledge receipt of your letter dated December 30, 1966 and the revised form of contract attached. The contract would now seem to be in satisfactory form.

Before remitting the same to you signed, however, Mr. McDowell and Mia Agee would like to have an opportunity to discuss the content of the proposed book with Robert Fitzgerald in order to make certain that the same is in satisfactory form. I understand that Mrs. Agee is abroad at the moment and has the manuscript with her for the purpose of studying the same. I expect that she will return toward the end of the month, at which time I am sure that an agreeable manuscript will be arrived at.

Thanks again for all your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Aaron L. Danzig

ALD:jm

Yale University Press

92A YALE STATION, NEW HAVEN, CONNECTICUT

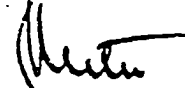
March 10, 1967

Dear Lovell:

I keep thinking I'm going to get down to the Publishers Lunch Club but so far this year my record is one of unbroken absence. Yet we ought to talk out the Agee problem.

I plan to phone you next week.

Yours,



Chester Kerr
Director

CK:ASB

Mr. Lovell Thompson
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
2 Park Street
Boston 7, Massachusetts

Dear C.

We're
had some encouraging
reaction for David we David
and also from Nina's lawyer
all seems now to wait on Nina's return
from Europe. I'll be in N.Y.
next week and will
follow up and
write again
yours

LAW OFFICES OF
NEMEROFF, JELLINE, DANZIG, PALEY & KAUFMAN

WINCHESTER 7-8750

100 WALL STREET
SUITE 1200
NEW YORK, N.Y. 10038
TELEPHONE: 7-8750
TELETYPE: 7-8750
FACSIMILE: 7-8750
CABLE: NEMEROFF
REGISTERED MAIL PERMIT NO. 1000
NEW YORK, N.Y.

350 FIFTH AVENUE
NEW YORK, N.Y. 10001

LEONARD C. NEMEROFF
Partner

March 24, 1967

Mr. Chester Kerr
Yale University Press
New Haven, Connecticut

Dear Mr. Kerr:

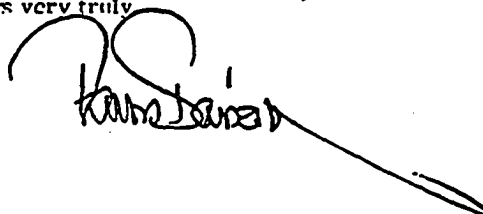
As you know, we represent the James Agee Trust.

You will also recall that pursuant to contract of September 14, 1934 between Yale University Press and James Agee, Yale University Press published the publication entitled, "Permit Me Voyage."

We have advised the Trust that no further rights pertain to you pursuant to said agreement to republish the above described publication.

If, therefore, you contemplate the republication of same, we would appreciate your contacting us so that the appropriate contractual arrangement can be made.

Yours very truly



AJD:cb

cc: Mr. David McDowell

HARVARD UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

WARREN HOUSE
CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS 02138

25 March 67

Mr. Lovell Thompson
Houghton Mifflin Co.
2 Park Street
Boston 7, Mass.

Dear Lovell,

That will be fine, and
I'll be glad to spend a day in New York
on this mission.

As I doubt I'll have a
chance to get in to your office before
I go, I wonder if you'd do me the great
favor of getting copies made for me of
the table of contents of the book as
now set up, and of that break-down
made by Alick Bartholomew more than a
year ago in the form of a memo to
yourself against the McDowell-Agee
proposal to confine the book to poems.

Thanks so much, and
thanks again for moving ahead so
persistently in this matter.

Yours ever,

S. V.

Robert Fitzgerald

Yale University Press

TELEPHONE: 787-7411

MAIL: 92A YALE STATION, NEW HAVEN, CONNECTICUT 06

CABLES: YALEPRESS

149 York Street, New Haven, Connecticut 06511

April 3, 1967



Mr. Lovell Thompson
Houghton, Mifflin Company
2 Park Street
Boston, Massachusetts 02107

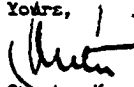
Dear Lovell:

The Bob Fitzgerald piece is a beauty -- and that makes me all the sicker over the enclosed letter from the lawyer representing the Agee Trust.

We have no stomach for this sort of thing. We published Agee as a Yale Younger Poet, as part of our contribution to American poetry through this series, and now in response to the suggestion, made to us several years ago by several people, that we should reprint that volume, we have run into one trial and one tribulation after another. I don't mean to sound lofty, as in an ivory tower, but truly you gentlemen in commerce are better equipped to wrestle with these matters than we are.

Therefore, unless you offer me a compelling reason for doing otherwise when we meet in New York at the Publishers Lunch Club on Thursday, I plan to tell Mr. Lenzig to go climb a tree -- meaning that the Trust can do anything; it wishes with these rights. We do not propose to argue any longer with that body or its legal beagles.

Yours,



Chester Kerr
Director

CK:SK
Enc.

*From
Wanna get
a check*

20 Bryant Street
Cambridge

4 April 67

Mr. Lovell Thomson
Houghton Mifflin
2 Park Street
Boston

Dear Lovell,

I will be talking to you today
about my New York conference and its results; this
note is only to present my little expense account
as follows:

Taxi to Logan Airport	\$4.65
Shuttle to New York	13.00
Taxi to lunch	.80
Taxi with Mia	1.75
Shuttle to Boston	16.00
Bus to-fro LaGuardia	3.00
Callahan tunnel	.25

\$39.35

Ever yours,

RF
Robert Fitzgerald

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

20 Bryant St.
 ALEXANDRIA
 CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS 02138

6 April 67

Dear David,

That conference was surely a good thing, and I want to thank you for it and for the lunch. I will be equally grateful for your criticism. From the start I had hoped that you and the world lot me have your impressions and suggestions, and if these are reinforced by Father Elze's, all the better.

You now know the strength of my feeling on the question of including those few bits of prose, and my reasons for feeling as I do, so you can take account of that as you read.

I'm impressed and delighted by the Lewis Reprint program. Good for you.

Yours,

R. G. L.

Dear David,

I have suggested a meeting for getting the matter settled. I think it will be better to settle it right with you. I am sure anything will be settled by the time you return some time in May.

Sincerely,

W. L. G.

LAW OFFICES OF
NEMEROFF, JELLINE, DANZIG, PALEY & KAUFMAN

WISCONSIN 7-8780

ELLIOT S. PALEY
AARON L. DANZIG
MITCHELL JELLINE
BERNARD KAUFMAN
LEONARD M. MANDEL
JOSEPH W. ROSENBERG
HOWARD J. LEVITZ
ROGER BRIAN COWAN
HENRY I. HAMBURGER
LARRY COHEN

350 FIFTH AVENUE
NEW YORK, N.Y. 10001

BERNARD G. NEMEROFF
COUNSEL

April 11, 1967

N.Y. Post

Mr. Lovell Thompson
Houghton Mifflin Company
Two Park Street
Boston 7, Massachusetts

Dear Mr. Thompson:

I enjoyed reading "Number 10" immensely. Since I am a great admirer of C. P. Snow, I was bound to get a great deal of pleasure from it. Thank you so much for your thoughtful gift.

I suppose by now you have heard the news of the summit conference on the proposed book of poems. While it does mean some delay, I am still of the opinion that we will be able to break a bottle of champagne over the book at its launching sometime this year.

Kindest regards.

Sincerely,

Aaron L. Danzig
Aaron L. Danzig

ALD:jm

April 29, 1967 -- Robert Fitzgerald to David McDowell

20 Bryant Street
Cambridge, Mass.
29 April 67

Mr. David McDowell
Senior Editor
Crown Publishers, Inc.
419 Park Avenue South
New York, N.Y. 10016

Dear David,

It is really cheering news for me that I can look forward to counsel in my work not only from yourself but from Father Flye and Robert Phelps, and from Mia on her return. I have always asked and hoped for this. I know it has been difficult for all of us to get together before. If only Mia could add her notes to the rest and let me hear by mid-May, when my decks will be relatively clear, I might hope to put my mind again on the book and perhaps at last conclude this effort.

Some time ago Lovell Thompson wrote to tell me that from their point of view it would be a good thing to announce the poems in their next listing along with books for fall publication, though not necessarily in that category ("later" it could be). He said this would make for anticipatory interest in the new book and renewed interest in the others. As you and I and Mia had not really resolved the questions we talked over in New York. I did not then think I should bring this up with you, but now I think I should at least tell you they'd like to announce it. It may be too late now; he said they could get the announcement in as late as the first of May. And maybe anyway we are just not that far along.

I continue of course to feel, as I told you, that the book I made is peculiarly appropriate to Jim Agee as poet -- to that phase and that aspect of him, showing how the phase ran its course and how the aspect was qualified. Perhaps a simple statement precisely to this effect would enlighten and disarm prospective readers. It seems to me that I, as a poet myself, as a friend of Jim in poetry first of all, and as the man who in 1962 undertook this labor and study, do have a kind of claim (here I see what this means) to make my presentation and to substantiate it. I believe the portrait to be true as Jim and I understood the truth in such matters, though it fall short of being complete as your own work in due course will be. But its truth depends on a balance of part against part, and you were quite right in saying that to remove any of these would disturb that balance as I see it.

Therefore, I feel that though you may later wish to bring out not only the complete letters but also the shorter prose works, you should allow me to publish in general those portions of letters and those bits of prose that are significant in my account of Jim. Not that I am not open to your suggestions or better reasoning on any specific point. But I would simply be unfair to myself and to my own profoundest sense of things if I should consent to emasculate what I have done in favor of what you will later wish to do. That being said, I hasten to add that I look forward with pleasure to your own work and to whatever contribution I may make to it.

Yours ever sincerely,

Robert Fitzgerald

HARVARD UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

20 Bryant Street
~~WARREN HOUSE~~
CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS 02138

Monday 8 May 67

Dear Lovell,

Here is a carbon of my
letter of April 29th to David.
McDowell. I haven't had any reply,
so I assume it would be premature,
again, to announce the book as you
would like to. Patience is all.

Yours,

R.F.

Fell

(1970)

W. V. ...
...
...

1800
0821

418

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS



The Library AUSTIN, TEXAS 78712

July 12, 1967

Reply to:
Academic Center Library
P.O. Box 8150, University Station

Mr. Robert Lescher
Literary Agent
141 East 55th Street
New York, New York 10022

Dear Mr. Lescher:

Mr. Wardlaw of the University Press has forwarded a copy of your letter of June 26 to our office. Although Mrs. Mary Hirth, who normally handles all correspondence concerning manuscript materials in our collection, is on vacation, I believe I can give you what seems to be the pertinent information regarding our Agee holdings.

There are three people now using our Agee manuscript materials. One of the three is doing a critical biography of the work and career of Agee, the second is working on the poetry and fiction and the third is doing a critical analysis of specific items. Some of the materials are reserved for one of the scholars and will not be available for use by anyone else until his work is completed.

Use of all manuscript and unique materials is controlled by a faculty committee which considers requests for their use. I am enclosing a list of our Agee holdings which are not reserved and a form for you to complete and return if you are interested in working with any of these.

Sincerely,

Martha Collins

Secretary to Mrs. Hirth

Enclosures

Robert Lescher
LITERARY AGENT
141 East 55th Street
NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10022
PLaza 3-0317 cable: Rodelling

July 25, 1967

Dear Lovell:

I promised to send you a copy of the letter
I just received from the Library at the University
of Texas, regarding people who are using the materials
in their Agee collection. You'll see that one of them
"is doing a critical biography of the work and career
of Agee." I'm going to try to find out who that person
is. If I succeed, I'll share what I discover with you.

Very best,

Mr. Lovell Thompson
Houghton Mifflin Company
2 Park Street
Boston, Massachusetts

RL/sc
Enclosure

In affiliation with
MARIE RODELL

July 30, 1967 -- Robert Fitzgerald to Lovell Thompson

San Fortunato della Collina
Perugia

30 July 67

Dear Lovell

I propose that the Agee volume be turned into POEMS AND UNCOLLECTED PROSE OF JAMES AGEE, edited with an introductory memoir by R.F., in two volumes, to be published and sold together by Houghton Mifflin if you agree. This will enable us to publish not only A Mother's Tale but the early scenario, The House, that is still so impressing (and to which I you) along with his later scenario for the closing scene of Man's Fate and other things of great interest. This is what Mia wants and David McDowell wants and is in fact only an expansion of the book I made. Are you willing? If you are, I will plan to work on it in September. Best regards,

Robert Fitzgerald

...

San Fortunato della Collina.

Puglia

30 July 67

Dear Anne

I propose that the Agee volume be turned into POEMS AND UNCOLLECTED PROSE OF JAMES AGEE, edited with an introductory memoir by R.F., in two volumes, to be published and sold together by Hogston Riggall if you agree. This will enable us to publish not only A Mother's Tale but the early scenarios, The Horse, there is still so impression (and so which I refer) along with his later scenarios for the closing scene of Mother's Tale and other things of great interest. This is what Mia wants and David McHorse wants and is in fact only an expansion of the book I made. Are you willing? If you are, I will plan to work on it in September. Best regards.

Ross Fitzgerald

San Fortunato della Collina
Perugia

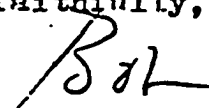
8 August 67

Dear Lovell,

I'm pleased that you like the idea of the two volumes, and it's a beautiful thought that a second advance may be in order. I'll accept it without grumbling if, as I assume, the New Yorkers corroborate to you the wishes they have suggested to me. I reckon this job will require about a month's work, and I'll be doing it here—since I don't go back to Cambridge until mid-January. I have a carbon of the whole book as first set up. Still, I'll probably have to ask your office for a little assistance in getting copies or reproductions of things I want. But I refrain from putting my mind on this job now because I'm heavily engaged with another that I think I can bring to a satisfactory stage by the end of August. Thanks for your support! I wish you a pleasant summer time, what's left of it, in Boston, Ipswich or wherever.

Yours faithfully,

R



Yale University Press

TELEPHONE: 787-7411

MAIL: 92A YALE STATION, NEW HAVEN, CONNECTICUT

CABLES: YALEPRESS

149 York Street, New Haven, Connecticut 06511

August 29, 1967

Dear Lovell:

All right, as I have just understood the telephone conversation with you, an agreement with the James Agee Trust is now really in prospect—one that may provide two HMC books, one of poems, one of prose, each with a piece by Fitzgerald. You hope to tell me of progress when we meet in October at the Publishers Lunch Club and to conclude the transaction, including one with us, before you retire next March.

In these circumstances, we will keep the file open a few months longer and will continue to ignore last March's letter from Aaron Danzig, the Trust's lawyer. In your dealings with him and with McDowell you may say Yale is still interested in bringing out a paper-bound edition of collected Agee poetry, featuring PERMIT ME VOYAGE.

Yours,

Cher
Chester Kern
Director

Mr. Lovell Thompson
Houghton Mifflin Company
2 Park Street
Boston, Massachusetts 02107

CK:gpr

*Remind me
to think
about
you*

San Fortunato della Collina
Perugia

6 October 67

Dear Lovell,

There is one chance in a million that a letter from you to me has gone astray during the last six weeks or so, but I have a feeling that it might just happen in our case. I am just where I was last time I wrote--able and willing to do the expanded job--but this condition won't last. If I don't do it in November, then other affairs and in particular the university will swallow me up until next June. I trust all's well with you.

Yours faithfully,

Bob
Robert Fitzgerald

x your letter went off
(see att.) but 7
misread his "Perugia"
for "Perugia" - unless you're harbouring
note 1 of his letters in your black folder

Lovell Thompson

San Fortunato della Collina
Perugia, Italy

23 October 67

Mr. David McDowell
Crown Publishers
419 Park Avenue South
New York

Dear David,

I have been deep in other work and didn't realize how time was passing until a couple of weeks ago I woke up to the fact that I hadn't heard anything further either from you or from Lovell Thompson. So I wrote to him to say that November would be my last chance this year for work on our project, before I am beset by university and other preoccupations. Well, his reply is here this morning; he has talked to you and you have confirmed your preference for two volumes, only you would rather they were not to be published simultaneously—a point he regards as inessential and so do I. But he says you still haven't signed a contract with him, which makes me think that you are still bothered by something or other. Casting around in my mind for what that could be, I remembered that in writing to you I did not expressly say that I would be willing to do as Robert Phelps and Father Flye suggested: write a shorter introduction for the poems and let the memoir, suitably revised, stand with the prose. But all this I am willing to do. So won't you please get the business of the contract tied up, but SOON, so that I can go ahead with a tranquil mind. I hope you will help me, too, by telling me what else you'd like to see included in the prose besides what is there already, and besides The House, A Mother's Tale, and Brooklyn.

Yours faithfully,
Robert Fitzgerald
Robert Fitzgerald

Agel
San Fortunato della Collina
Perugia

26 October 67

Dear Lovell,

It's possible that this further delay was partly my fault, because in writing to David McDowell late in July I agreed only in general terms to the sort of project he had suggested. Now I have written to him again, spelling it out, saying expressly that I will write a new and relatively brief preface to go with Jim's poems, that I will suitably revise the memoir to stand as introductory to the prose, and that (in further agreement with his attitude as you now report it) I will consider the two volumes as separate and not simultaneous publications

I have also explained that I must do the work now and have urged him to sign the contract at once so that I can go ahead with tranquillity. It seems to me that the job as now transformed justifies a new advance at least equal to the first one, and I will lack no tranquillity in accepting it. Could you or Mr. Bartholomew help me, too, by getting me photo-stats of certain works for the book of prose. 1) The House, a scenario, in New Letters in America, Norton, 1937; 2) A Mother's Tale, a story, included in a paperback anthology ed. by Mary Lou Aswell 3) a scenario of a scene from Man's Fate printed in the late '30s in a film magazine edited, I think, by the then curator of film at the Museum of Modern Art. Sorry to be so vague. I have asked McDowell what other works he would like to see in the prose collection, and I continue to hope for his help and Mia's, what else can I do. Yours faithfully,

Robert Fitzgerald

Telephone (212) 685-8330

Cable Address LEFOUT NEW

 *Crown Publishers, INC.*

Agree

419 PARK AVENUE SOUTH, NEW YORK, N. Y. 10016

October 31, 1967

Mr. Lovell Thompson
Houghton Mifflin Co.
2 Park Street
Boston, Massachusetts 02107

Dear Lovell,

Here is Robert's letter. I would have written you sooner, but I had to discuss this with Aaron Danzig and Mia.

I'm willing to go ahead with a contract for two books as outlined by Fitzgerald in the last half of his letter. However, I do not want simultaneous publication. By publishing them separately they will get twice as much attention, and, done that way, each will get the attention of a specialist, as Robert Phelps pointed out.

I should think that the poetry should be done first, but I leave that up to you and Robert.

So let's get together the next time you come down. I so much enjoyed our time together in Boston. If I come up that way, I'll let you know in advance.

Cordially,

David

David McDowell, Trustee
JAMES AGEE TRUST

cc: Aaron Danzig
Robert Fitzgerald

LAW OFFICES OF
NEMEROFF, JELLINE, DANZIG, PALEY & KAUFMAN

WISCONSIN 7-6760

100 WEST 57 STREET
SUITE 1100
NEW YORK 19, N.Y.
TELEPHONE: MU 5-1100
TELETYPE: MU 5-1100
FAX: MU 5-1100
CABLE: NEMEROFF
ATTENTION: MR. JELLINE
OR MR. DANZIG
OR MR. PALEY
OR MR. KAUFMAN

350 FIFTH AVENUE
NEW YORK, N.Y. 10001

FORWARDED BY NEMEROFF
JELLINE, DANZIG, PALEY & KAUFMAN

November 2, 1967

Mr. Lovell Thompson
% Houghton Mifflin Company
2 Park Street
Boston 7, Massachusetts

Dear Mr. Thompson:

I am now in receipt of copy of communication by Robert Fitzgerald to David McDowell which seems to resolve the problems pertaining to the forthcoming work to be published by your company with reference to certain writings of James Agee. It would seem therefore in order for you to transmit to us a revised contract and in connection therewith may we call to your attention the following changes that should be made:

- (1) The correct name of the trust is the James Agee Trust not "The Agee Trust".
- (2) With reference to Paragraph 1 of your standard form of agreement the exclusive right to copyright should belong to the James Agee Trust and accordingly line 6 of paragraph 1 should read as follows: "with any existing copyrights in said Work and the exclusive right in the name of the Proprietor to secure copyrights" etc.
- (3) The new contract as I understand it will refer to a two volume publication, one consisting of a volume of poems and the other a volume of prose.
- (4) Paragraph 28 of your submitted agreement dated the 20th of December, 1966 is somewhat ambiguous and we would suggest its revision as follows: "28. Robert Fitzgerald has been advanced \$1,000.00 against royalties for this book. He

-2-

Mr. Lovell Thompson

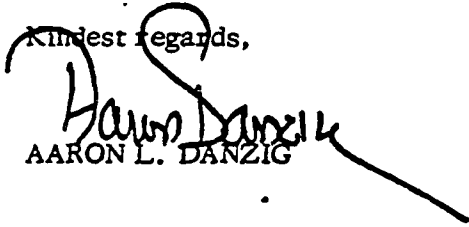
November 2, 1967

has indicated his desire that all royalties accruing to his account from this work in excess of said advance shall be assigned to the Proprietor, and therefore requests that no further royalties be paid to him. In view of the advance of the sum of \$5,000.00 to the Proprietor as provided in Paragraph 7 (a) there will no further royalties payable under this agreement until the two advances totaling \$6,000.00 have been covered. Thereafter all royalties shall be payable to the Proprietor. The Proprietor's royalties and share in subsidiary rights shall be increased by the amount of the Editor's share when the Editor's advance of royalties has been earned."

In all other respects the agreement of the 20th of December, 1966 seems to have been in good order.

I await early word from you.

Kindest regards,


AARON L. DANZIG

ALD:wmj

Fitzgerald
San Fortunato della Collina
Perugia

8 November 67

Dear Lovell,

Thanks very much for yours of the 6th. Yes, David McDowell sent me a copy of his letter to you, and also wrote to me very agreeably, so with all due caution I too conclude that we may all go ahead and go to work. He says he will reflect and confer and send me suggestions (as I had asked him to do) for further inclusions in the prose book. Those I mentioned in my last letter to you were the principal ones I myself had had in mind.

The terms you propose sound reasonable to me and I hereby agree wholeheartedly to them, hoping the Agee trust will accept the further generosity of a third thousand when the contract is signed. I do wish to waive any further royalties in the enterprise, so that when what I shall have been paid is earned back all royalties will go to the Trust. With appreciation,

As ever

Bob
Robert Fitzgerald

Crown Publishers, Inc.
419 PARK AVENUE SOUTH.
NEW YORK, N. Y. 10016

San Fortunato della Collina
Perugia

9 November 67

*File under
Robt. Fitzgibbon*

Dear David,

I was glad and relieved to have your letter, and will now be at work for the rest of the month and into December. Please do let me know what else you'd like to see included in the prose. I remember you mentioned a piece that had been in a New Directions annual--something I do not think I had seen. It would also tell me if she has in mind other things besides those already collected and those I have named. The late and very autobiographical scenario that I read on loan from Helen Levitt--is that so something Mia would want in or not? Let us all put our heads together as best we may over this distance so that the work will be done and well. With best regards to all hands,

Faithfully yours,

Ron

*10/20/67
David
and return*

San Fortunato della Collina
Perugia

24 November 67

Mr. Lovell Thompson
Houghton Mifflin Co.
2 Park Street, Boston

Dear Lovell,

I had to put off work on Jim's things until after Thanksgiving. This morning I turned to it with all decks cleared, free for it until Christmas, and opened up the bundle that I have here containing, according to my inscription, "All Agee material, carbon of book, etc." Well, it contains all Agee material EXCEPT my carbon of the book. I really do not know what has happened to this. Maybe I took it with me to Cambridge and left it in storage there. I would be impossible for anyone to find it among my papers. Could you please (I hate to ask it of you) recover the xerox copy you made for Mia and David McDowell and send it on to me by air mail (you can subtract the postage from my advance), or else get them to do this, but at once, please? I do have a corrected copy of my introduction, so you needn't send that, just the contents of the book as set up.

There is plenty that I can be doing while I wait. Amid all the raw material I find a xerox copy of the scenario called The House made for me four years ago by Robert Lescher (I had forgotten), so there is no need of your digging up and sending me this. I do need A Mother's Tale and the scenario of a scene from Man's Fate. The latter was published in the first number of a magazine called FILM, edited by Jay Leyda in New York in 1939. David McDowell is looking up some other things in New York; he might be willing to get a copy of FILM from the Museum of Modern Art Film Library and have it xeroxed for me. I am sending a note to him along with this, so he will be prepared for the suggestion if you call him up.

Yours ever,
Robert Fitzgerald

*to get
Harvard
h @
- ing. from Amherst to Xerox
Sartola*

San Fortunato della Collina
Perugia

27 November 67

Dear Lovell,

I quote from your letter to me of November 6th: "What I propose now is to send you--as soon as I hear from you that it is O. K.--a second thousand, assuming that the contracts will be signed...Start to work at your convenience and I will at once put our check-making machine into operation."

What happened? Some other machine got in between?

Yours ever,

A handwritten signature, possibly "R. L.", in dark ink.

LAW OFFICES OF
NEMEROFF, JELLINE, DANZIG, PALEY & KAUFMAN

ELIOT S. PALEY
AARON L. DANZIG
MITCHELL JELLINE
BERNARD KAUFMAN
LEONARD M. MANDEL
JOSEPH W. ROSENBERG
HOWARD J. LEVITZ
ROGER BRIAN COHAN
HENRY I. HAMBURGER
LARRY COHEN

350 FIFTH AVENUE
NEW YORK, N.Y. 10001

BERNARD G. NEMEROFF
COUNSEL

December 12, 1967

Mr. Lovell Thompson
Houghton Mifflin Company
2 Park Street
Boston 7, Mass.

Dear Mr. Thompson:

I am now happy to enclose signed copy of the agreement between James Agee Trust and Houghton Mifflin with reference to the two volume work consisting of James Agee Poetry and James Agee Prose, both edited by Robert Fitzgerald.

Mr. McDowell tells me that at this time he is very anxious to have the copyright in "Let Us Now Praise Famous Men" and "Morning Watch" transferred of record to the James Agee Trust (reserving of course such rights as appropriately appertain to Houghton Mifflin). I would be most appreciative if you could effect these assignments at the earliest possible moment.

Thank you for your many courtesies.

Kindest regards,

AARON L. DANZIG

ALD:wmj
Enc. (Agreement)

cc: Mr. David McDowell

FW

Fitzgerald

San Fortunato della Collina
Perugia

20 December 67

Mr. Lovell Thompson
Houghton Mifflin Co.
2 Park Street
Boston 7, Mass.

Dear Lovell,

I am obliged to you for the thermofax mss. and the check.

The first book, of poems, goes off to you in the same mail as this letter. Then I turn, as it were, to Christmas. After Christmas D. V. I'll finish organizing the prose book and revising the memoir.

I have retained Permit Me Voyage as the first part of the title because it is already so well known as the title of Jim's poems.

This book presents the verse more distinctly than the original book did, and I suppose that's an advantage. A lot of the early and incidental versing could do with a context such as the memoir and the prose gave it. But I have done what I could in the Foreword to suggest this.

A note from David Harris of your office inquires if I need the original manuscript. Thanks, no.

With best wishes to you for the New Year.

Yours *[Signature]*
Robert Fitzgerald

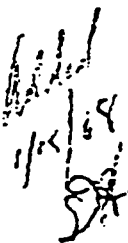
*Letter to P.B.
nwm.*

for Agw. H. H. H.


San Fortunato della Collina
Perugia

30 December 67

Dear Lovell,


The enclosure has just come from David McDowell. It had fallen behind his desk. It should be replaced in the manuscript and indexed in Part IV before "Home Again Blues" where I had placed it before.

I like this coffee stain and cigarette burn. Nothing could be more Agee-like.

Faithfully yours,



Robert Fitzgerald.

HARVARD UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

WARREN HOUSE
CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS 02138

25 February 68

Dear Paul,

It is good to have your letter about the Agee memoir. If it were not painful at times it could not approach doing justice to his life, his magnitude and his trouble in the world as it was and is. But he did win out, he accomplished essentially what he had it in him to do, and my notion was to make that clear in tribute to his vitality. If that happy photograph appears as frontispiece, it will help to make the point.

Submerged here in the work of the term I have made no further effort to spur Mia on in her search for the Brooklyn piece. I hope that you or David Harris will keep after that. In no other piece of writing did Jim so fully pay his respects to the urban North.

You may be hearing from Chester Kerr, whom I saw the other day here and informed briefly of the great breakthrough on this project. I am still waiting for the check that you sent to me on January 16th; forwarding from Italy takes a long time. I suppose you'll wait until the text is completed with the Brooklyn piece before sending the second check. My thanks for your kind letter, and best regards.

Bob
Robert Fitzgerald

D.H.

I think I should

Is there one more payment due?

THE KENYON REVIEW**Gambier, Ohio**

Editor, George Lanning
Business Manager, Elizabeth Browne

July 29, 1968

Dear Miss Hartman:

Yes, we'd like very much to see the Fitzgerald piece, and some of the unpublished prose pieces. I'm leaving for Europe on Friday, which means that we can't give you a decision until early September when I return. I hope that's okay.

Regards,

George Lanning

CLASS OF SERVICE
This is a fast message unless its deferred character is indicated by the proper symbol.

WESTERN UNION TELEGRAM

SYMBOLS
DL - Day Letter
NL - Night Letter
LT - International Letter Telegram

The filing time shown in the date line on domestic telegrams is LOCAL TIME at point of origin. Time of receipt is LOCAL TIME at point of destination

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B-CDF060 VIA RCA ZCZC WUE0060 ITC483 FTC184 GLL73

USNX CO IGRM 028

PERUGIA 28 19 0900

HARRISPOUGHTON MIFFLIN BOSTON

SORRY ABSENCE DELAYED THIS HIGHLY DEEIRABLE CORRECL JACKET COPY

ON FITZGERALD DELETE LAST LINE SUBSTITUTE NOW BOYLSON PROFESSOR

OF RHETORIC AT HARVARD PERIOD

FITZGERALD

Polypara! - proae

Boylston checked with Harvard SW 8/20

LN 8/20

*Loft. Please notify name
to the to. name good!*

San Fortunato della Collina
Perugia

20 August 68

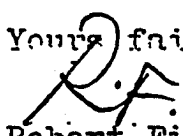
Mr. David Harris
Houghton Mifflin Co.
2 Park Street
Boston, Mass.

Dear Mr. Harris,

011111
Doubleday

Night before last I
returned from England to find your letter
of the 5th and the jacket proof for the
POEMS, about which I thought it best to
cable you yesterday. I am not a visiting
lecturer but hold a chair to which I was
appointed in 1965; temporarily on leave
in the fall term (I am doing the Iliad),
I will be in full-time residence from
September, 1970. That was a serious error.
Otherwise I am undistressed, and glad
you were able to get the verse letter in.
Proofs of the SHORT PROSE are here and
will go back soon.

Yours faithfully,


Robert Fitzgerald

THE KENYON REVIEW

Gambier, Ohio

September 10, 1968

Dear Miss Hartman:

I'm sorry not to have written sooner about the Fitzgerald piece. I broke my coccyx in Greece, and since I'm able to be up for only a few hours a day I'm behind with any number of things.

We like the essay very much indeed, and want to publish it-- although in a shortened form. As I'm sure Mr. Fitzgerald will understand, it's just too long to be manageable in a single issue. It runs about 18,000 words, and if possible we'd like to get it back to about half that length. One obvious place to cut would be in the long quotes in the first part of the essay. These could either be removed entirely or drastically trimmed. (The later quotes, from letters, ought to be retained, of course.) And we both feel that section IX could be eliminated. For the rest, I suppose we'd have to try for a general pruning.

I do hope you and Mr. Fitzgerald will be agreeable to this proposal. If so, I'm sure he'd prefer to make the cuts himself, unless he feels too close to the piece to be objective. In that case, we could try the trimming-down here, and show him the result.

As you will remember, we'd thought of this for early next year, but if we can get a finished version quickly enough we may use it in November. That means we're short on time, since the ms. would have to go to the printer by the end of this month at the latest.

We liked several of the Agee pieces, but the ones we're most attracted to have been taken by Esquire. I'm returning all of this material under separate cover.

Regards,

George Lanning
George Lanning

DELOS

A JOURNAL ON & OF TRANSLATION

1 SPEEDWAY, AUSTIN, TEXAS 78705. Phone 476-6181

September 12, 1968

Editor: D. S. Carne-Rosa

Editorial Board: William Arrowsmith, W. H. Auden

Kath Botzford, Roger Shattuck

Editorial Assistant: Patricia Pe

Art Direction: Kim Teyb

Miss Joyce Hartman
Boughton Mifflin Co.
53 W 43
NYC 10036

Dear Miss Hartman:

I am sorry not to have written to you before about the Ages translation of "Exit Diluculo." It came during a summer hiatus.

It is pleasantly done, but the fact that it will have appeared in book form before the next issue of DELOS is against it and I think I had better let it go.

Yours sincerely,

DS Carne-Rosa

D. S. Carne-Rosa

*the poetry ahead
come out - revised
9/16*

Published by THE NATIONAL TRANSLATION CENTER

THE KENYON REVIEW

Gambier, Ohio

Editor, George Lanning
Business Manager, Elizabeth Browne

September 26, 1968

Dear Miss Amussen:

I got a kind of yes-no response from Robert Fitzgerald. He agreed to our doing the cutting, but reserved the right to reject our version after seeing galleys. We're taking the chance that he'll approve the abridgment, and will be sending proofs tomorrow. I just hope we haven't done all this setting for nothing. He'll cable his answer, and I'll write you as soon as I've heard.

Regards,

George Lanning

cc DH

THE KENYON REVIEW

Gambier, Ohio

Editor, George Lanning
Business Manager, Elizabeth Browne

October 1, 1968

Dear Miss Amussen:

We've just received a one-word--"Yes"--
reply from Robert Fitzgerald, and are going ahead with
the essay in the November issue.

Regards,

George Lanning

San Fortunato della Collina
Perugia, Italy

3 October 68

Mr. Paul Brooks
Houghton Mifflin Co.
2 Park Street
Boston, Massachusetts

Dear Paul,

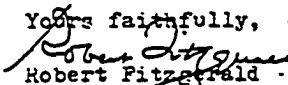
You people have made a good book of the Agee poems, and I'm glad to see it out at last. But you have done me wrong. The note on the dust jacket misrepresents my position at Harvard.

When I saw the proof of this jacket I cabled David Harris, on 19 August, asking in the strongest terms that the last line of the note on me be corrected to read "He is now Boylston Professor of Rhetoric at Harvard." At the same time I wrote to him, airmail, explaining that it was a serious error: since 1965 I have held a Chair, though in the Fall Term each year I have been on leave in Italy working on a translation of the Iliad. He replied early in September that this error had been "coped with" while he was on vacation.

It now appears that it was coped with by letting it stand.

If the appearance is true, I believe that Houghton Mifflin owes me a public apology and correction. I am not a visiting lecturer at my university but hold an appointment, and am engaged, as a member of the faculty. This may make no difference to Houghton Mifflin, but it does to the University and to me.

Yours faithfully,


Robert Fitzgerald

November 20, 1964

DEAR MRS. MARTMAN:

Are we to send the check for the Robert Fitzgerald piece to you, or directly to him? The issue got stalled at the bindery, by the way, and is just now coming in. I'm having a copy sent off to you today.

Regards,

George Lanning
George Lanning

THE KENYON REVIEW • Gambier, Ohio

THE PROGRESSIVE

MADISON, WISCONSIN 53703 • 608/257-4626

MORRIS H. RUBIN, EDITOR
December 9, 1968

Miss Carolyn Amussen
Houghton Mifflin Company
53 West 43rd Street
New York, N. Y. 10036

Dear Carolyn:

I greatly appreciate your sending me the James Agee. While there isn't anything here for us, I had a thoroughly good time reading it.

I seem to be running behind on nearly everything these days, but I have finally got around to writing to Marie Rodell about the Novick book. Quite possibly it is too late, but I felt it was still worth while to try.

I will be watching for Students and Politics.

Cordially,


Mary Sheridan
Managing Editor

MS/bh
Enclosure
Airmail

George Braziller, Inc.

ONE PARK AVENUE, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10016 • 889-8800

March 4th, 1969

Mrs. Carolyn Amussen
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN CO.
53 West 43rd Street
New York, N. Y. 10036

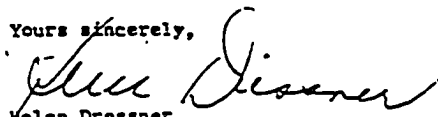
Dear Mrs. Amussen:

As the publisher of THE COLLECTED SHORT PROSE OF JAMES AGEE, I am submitting to you a copy of THE LETTERS OF JAMES AGEE TO FATHER FLYE, in the hope that you might want to consider a paperback reprint of the book.

The book had been issued in a paper edition by Bantam, whose contract has now expired. They had wanted to issue the book in a new form at a higher price, for inclusion in a new series of Modern Classics they are planning. However, we were not able to agree on terms for the new contract, and the book has now become free. Bantam has completely sold out of their edition.

I shall look forward to hearing from you, and in the meanwhile, send best wishes.

Yours sincerely,


Helen Dressner
Subsidiary Rights Director

HD/vs
Encl.

HARVARD UNIVERSITY • CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS 02138
DEPARTMENT OF COMPARATIVE LITERATURE • 401 BOYLSTON HALL

Anne Ford
+ please return

15 March 69

Dear Paul,

I know that you and I
share a real satisfaction in seeing
these Agee books well received. Thanks
for the clippings. And thanks too for
what you say of my reading and of
Dudley. He took me along as a guest
to one of those monthly dinners a few
years ago (Franklin Ford read a paper)
and I can easily imagine his talk on
the line from Donne. This was the first
Signet dinner that I've attended, but
I thought it right that he should be
remembered there.

Yours,

RF
Robert Fitzgerald

*File. Antitrust Section
TMC*

George Braziller, Inc.

ONE PARK AVENUE, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10016 © 1969-1970

August 1st, 1969

1511

Mr. Richard B. McAdoo
Houghton Mifflin Company
2 Park Street
Boston 02107

Dear Mr. McAdoo: re: THE LETTERS OF JAMES AGEE TO FATHER FLYE

I am sorry for the delay in answering your letter of May 6th, but I've been away from my desk so much during the last couple of months on sales trips, that I've fallen behind in my correspondence.

Our own figures show a sale of 15,000 copies in total, and as you know we are out of stock. Bantam's sales were 50,000 copies.

Please let me know as soon as you have reached a decision on this.

Yours sincerely,

Helen Dressner
Helen Dressner

hd

TIL-TMC.

George Braziller, Inc.

ONE PARK AVENUE • NEW YORK 10016 • N. Y.

889-5900

October 10th, 1969

Mr. Richard McAdoo
Houghton Mifflin Company
2 Park Street
Boston, Mass. 02107

Dear Mr. McAdoo:

Re: THE LETTERS OF JAMES AGEE TO FATHER FLYE

I am sorry to be so long in replying
to your offer of \$1,000 to acquire all
publishing rights to the Agee. We feel this
is rather too low, and wonder whether you
would consider making a higher offer?

Yours sincerely,



Helen Dressner

hd

CHOATE, HALL & STEWART

28 STATE STREET

AREA CODE 617

TELEPHONE 227-5020

CABLE ADDRESS CROMALSTE

BOSTON, MASS. 02109

October 21, 1969

Mr. F. K. Hoyt
Houghton Mifflin Company
2 Park Square
Boston, Massachusetts

Re: Amendment to Publishing Agreement with Respect
to Payment of Royalties After Death of Author

Dear Mr. Hoyt:

To cover the point we discussed on Friday last, I believe your Publishing Agreement (T.D. 59) could be amended by adding the following paragraphs:

25. If the Author shall predecease his brother, (name of brother), the Publishers shall, irrespective of anything in Paragraph 7 to the contrary, pay the royalties specified in Paragraph 7 and accruing after the Author's death to the Author's said brother in accordance with Paragraph 16, in which event the words "the Author" in Paragraph 16 shall refer to the Author or the Author's said brother as appropriate.

As you will note, this amendment would not affect the payment of amounts for subsidiary and other rights. Doing so might be construed as a testamentary disposition which would require a will. The amendment also does not include any proviso as to the Author notifying Houghton Mifflin to pay such sums to another because it would be difficult to constantly amend the Agreement to change the designated beneficiary. Furthermore, the amendment does not make Houghton Mifflin's obligation to pay the royalties to the brother subject to any contrary provision of the Author's will. I believe such a provision would be inviting future litigation between the

Mr. P. K. Hoyt
 Page 2
 October 21, 1969

Author's estate and his brother. Basically, under the amendment Houghton Mifflin could pay the brother the specified royalties accruing after the Author's death. I presume the problem you mentioned with respect to the Internal Revenue Service would be a problem which essentially would have to be solved by the Author's estate or his brother.

Although Houghton Mifflin should not give the Author legal advice, you and I agree it would be wise to point out to him that he is foolish to ask for such a provision in the Agreement without first conferring with his own attorney. He should assume that the Work to be published will be successful and will provide revenues for many years to him and, depending upon whether or not the requested provision is inserted in the Agreement and how it is worded, to his estate, brother, or brother's estate. A few of the points you might specifically mention to him are: the possible adverse tax consequences resulting from this type of provision; the likelihood of overlooking this provision in any subsequent planning of his estate and the care of his wife and children; the splitting of the rights to receive the specified royalties from the reversionary and other rights to the Work to be published, which in my opinion is very unwise; the fact his brother's estate could receive all the specified royalties if the brother died after the Author. His own attorney could undoubtedly with little difficulty find several other points which should be considered.

Unless the Author has some valid reason for wanting to avoid leaving all his rights under the Agreement to his brother, it seems much more sensible for him to do so rather than to split the right to receive the specified royalties from his other rights under the Agreement. If he wants to give his brother all his rights under the Agreement when he dies, there is certainly a question as to whether he can effectively do so in the Agreement rather than by a testamentary disposition. In any event, he should confer with his attorney before trying to do so since it certainly is more a matter for his concern than one for Houghton Mifflin.

Sincerely yours,

B. P. Roberts
 Brinton P. Roberts

BPR/ak

File New York

George Braziller, Inc.

ONE PARK AVENUE • NEW YORK 10016 • N. Y.

889-5900

December 8, 1969

Mr. Richard McAdoo
Houghton Mifflin Company
2 Park Street
Boston, Mass. 02107

Dear Mr. McAdoo:

Re: THE LETTERS OF JAMES AGEE TO FATHER FLYE.

We would be prepared to accept a \$1,500 fee for the publishing rights to this title. Shall I prepare a letter of agreement on this, or will you be sending one along to us?

I look forward to your reply. With our best wishes.

Yours sincerely,

Helen Dressner
Helen Dressner

hd

12/18/69

Discussed with Mr. Dorell, laying all cards on the table. He agreed to take up, first with Father Flye, then with Ed Green and George Braziller - and to report back.
RM

February 26, 1970 -- Rev. James Harold Flye to Richard B. McAdoo at Houghton Mifflin

Rev. James Harold Flye
19 Perry Street
New York, N.Y. 10014

Winter Park, Florida

February 26, 1970

Dear Mr. McAdoo:

I have been here at Winter Park on a visit at my sister's, but shall soon be leaving, and expect to be back in New York early in March. Thanks for your letter.

Terms of the contract that you spoke of are all right. There is one provision which it would be well to include, viz: that in case of my death, any further royalties from the book would go to the James Agee Trust.

I am glad that the book of Letters of James Agee is to be again in print and to be published by Houghton Mifflin; and thinking of the reading and use of the book by students in College or High School, I am pleased at the prospect of its issue, when this may be, as a paper-back, in lower price range. The Letters bring before me vividly aspects of Agee's personality, thought and feeling, and stir in many, older or younger, a sense of deep empathy and understanding

Noting what you said as to possible additions or changes I will think about this and be receptive to suggestions.

Point 1

Robert Phelps had had great admiration for the writings of James Agee, and came to know him in the last two years or so of Agee's life. The piece that he wrote about Agee that was put at the beginning of the book of Letters seemed to be good, and I think it might be kept.

(Point) 2.

I can see, certainly that it might be good to have, as you say, an added section about "the history of this book, and James Agee's evolving place in the thinking and outlook of our time," but as to the nature and incorporation of such a section you would know much better than I. Perhaps I could supply something about "the history of this book," but I am not qualified as to data, critical judgment, or ability in

critical writing to deal with Agee's "evolving place . . . "

I was well aware of the quality of those letters at the time they were being received, and might occasionally read something from them to a friend (e.g. I remember reading a passage written by Jim when he was at Harvard, telling of his hopes and plans for writing, to Allan Tate, who was impressed.) And some time after Jim's death (I don't remember just when) it occurred to me that if the letters could be published there might be many persons who, given this opportunity, would read them with interest and appreciation.

I had no thought or desire of getting myself into the picture: but I did think somewhat of including some of my letters to him. But I wasn't sure just how to manage this and I finally decided -- though without entire certainty, and I would have been glad of competent and entirely objective advice on this -- to make it (except for a verse-letter from me) just Jim's book without any of my correspondence to him.

Then too, as stated in a short prefatory note in the paperback edition of the Letters which you may have seen, most of my letters to him, though not destroyed or discarded by him had been lost, as was the case with quite a bit of his own writing. I made no copies when writing to him. The fifty or more letters of mine to him which I now possess (out of at least three times that number which I must have written to him in those thirty years) are originals salvaged from a miscellany of material left by him which I looked through some four years after his death.

From time to time persons have asked me about my letters to him, and I have sometimes wondered if in case another addition of the letters de novo were published, a few of mine might possibly seem worth putting in, but I am not sure. And where existing plates of type were used, no such inclusion could of course be made.

In the first printing of the book by Braziller, there were some typographical errors or misreadings, most of which were corrected in the 2nd or 3rd printing. There are still just a few small corrections of this sort that should be made.

I haven't access to a typewriter here, but want to send you some reply to your letter without further delay.

With all my good wishes,

James H. Flye

Winter Park, Florida

REV. JAMES HAROLD FLYE
19 PERRY STREET
NEW YORK, N. Y. 10014

February 26, 1970.

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Point
1

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REV. JAMES HAROLD FLYE

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a few of mine might possibly seem worth putting in, but I am not sure. And where existing plates of type were used, no such inclusions could of course be made.

4, In the first printing of the book by Braziller, there were some typographical errors or misreadings, most of which were corrected in the 2nd or 3rd printing. There are still just a few small corrections of this sort that should be made.

I haven't access to a typewriter here, but want to send you some reply to your letter without further delay.

with all my good wishes.

James H. Flagg.

REV. JAMES HAROLD FLYE
19 PERRY STREET
NEW YORK, N. Y. 10014

May 16, 1970

Dear Mr. McAdoo:

Thanks for your letter with enclosure received some time ago. I am sorry for delay in reply.

It hadn't occurred to me that questions might arise about payment of any royalties after my death. In speaking with Braziller's about contract or Agreement preliminary to publication of the book of Agee's Letters, I made the suggestion that any such payments go to the James Agee Trust. That was accepted without question, and in the written Agreement was the statement

"All sums of money due to the Author under this agreement shall be paid to the Author, or in the event of his death, to the James Agee Trust Fund, and such payment shall be a full and valid discharge of the Publisher's obligation."

That seemed to me a simple and practical arrangement, which I suppose would have been carried out if I had died while the book was still selling.

REV. JAMES HAROLD FLYE

In the letter from Mr. Roberts there was reference to one or two sections in the Form of agreement to be used (e.g. Paragraphs 7 and 10) for which one would need to see a copy of the Form. I haven't a brother, and the James Agee Trust seems perhaps as natural a recipient as any after me for royalties from that book if this could be arranged.

In case of possibility for changes or additions by me in the forthcoming edition of Agee's Letters. I would like a good margin of time for thinking about and working on this.

Sincerely and with all my good wishes,

James H. Flye.

REV. JAMES HAROLD FLYE
19 PERRY STREET
NEW YORK, N. Y. 10014

May 28, 1970

Mr. Richard B. McAdoo
Houghton Mifflin Company
Boston, Mass.

Dear Mr. McAdoo:

Thanks for your letter of the 21st.

It seems to me quite all right to have you go ahead and prepare a contract incorporating the clause contained in my agreement with Braziller, and if you will do so and send this to me, I will sign it. I appreciate your kindness and thoughtfulness.

With all my good wishes,

James H. Flye

REV. JAMES HAROLD FLYE
19 PERRY STREET
NEW YORK, N. Y. 10014

June 10, 1970

Windy 10/10/70
Dear Mr. McAdoo:

Herewith is the signed Agreement which I want to get back to you.

I am going to be away for two or three days, and will see after that about one or two things mentioned in your letter.

Anne C. P. 10/10/70
I noticed in the Agreement some mention of British rights. You know, probably, that there was an edition of the Letters published in England by Peter Owen by arrangement with Braziller. I know nothing more about this or whether it is still in print.

With best wishes,
With best wishes,

Noted Anne C.
James Harold Flye.

REV. JAMES HAROLD FLYE
19 PERRY STREET
NEW YORK, N. Y. 10014

Sept. "3, 1970

Dear Mr. McAdoo:

I see that in typing the paper
mailed to you last week, I omitted a half line
at the bottom of page 2. The enclosed page
supplies this.

With best wishes,

James Harold Flye.

REV. JAMES HAROLD FLYE

Addendum to be placed at the bottom of p. 2
of ms. of a preface by Rev. James H. Flye for
book of LETTERS OF JAMES MAGEE.

The last line of the typed ms. ends with .
the words "I am deeply"

There should be below this a partial line
containing just the words
"in anything you write."

0.9.70
REV. JAMES HAROLD FLYE
19 PERRY STREET
NEW YORK, N. Y. 10014

Sept. 8, 1970

Dear Mr. McAdoo:

Thanks fot the draft of letter to Braziller, which as I could see, said just what was needed, and which I copied without change and mailed to Braziller at once.

Any written composition proves to be a slow process with me, but with the content of such a preface as you suggested in mind, I am working at it right along and should have it done sometime next week. I want to get it done as soon as possible.

Yours with best wishes,

James Harold Flye

REV. JAMES HAROLD FLYE
19 PERRY STREET
NEW YORK, N. Y. 10014

1-984
Sept. 16, 1970

Dear Mr. McAdoo:

I am trying to get this into today's mail collection. I had hoped that there would be a chance to see you, but I understood that you were not certain about coming to New York at just this time, and I take it that this couldn't be arranged.

I never feel very confident or competent about writing anything, and don't know just what to think of what I am sending in the way of some sort of preface, as you suggested. I have spent, or wasted, a lot of time in the process of pondering, writing a few lines, thinking, rejecting, revising, re-arranging, fumbling for words, etc. I hadn't anyone here to talk with about it and get suggestions which can be of help, e.g. as to choice of words or phrasing, which I often have trouble with. I want to get this to you, however, without further delay. Do you think it will do? If by any chance you do get to New York at this time, I kept a carbon copy and could talk with you about it if desired.

As to the other enclosure, an excerpt from the last in our exchange of verse letters and in reply to one he had written me. This didn't get included, I am sorry to say, in the Braziller book, but was included in the paper-back edition. I thought perhaps it might be given a place in the

edition you are bringing out -- not of course following Jim's last verse letter where it would naturally come and did appear in the paper-back edition, but say in the prefatory ~~material~~ section with a little note. This may not be worth while or advisable, but Jim and I both enjoyed the verse-letters, and I thought it was not inappropriate to end with that letter of mine, i.e. that excerpt from one about twice as long.

With all good wishes,

James Harold Fife:

deleted
or removed
9/24/70

The letters of James Agee to me, like mine to him, were directly personal, written solely from the desire of the writer to communicate his observations, thoughts and feelings to a friend whose understanding and affection could always be counted on. In the compass and limitations of a letter there cannot be the fulness of narrative or discussion that conversation provides, but between two such friends there is at any rate no hampering by self-consciousness and artificial reserve. [The letters are frank and sincere.]

From the time of James Agee's death in 1955 I had hoped that I could recover any of my letters to him, but it was a long time before this became possible. As mentioned in footnote on p. of this book, I was living in Wichita, Kansas, and after four years there I was for one year in Omaha as Assistant at St. Barnabas Episcopal Church. It was not until the fall of 1959 when I came to live in New York that I had the opportunity of looking through things James Agee had left, in search of any of my letters.

He was of those who save rather than destroy or discard written material -- his own or other -- but that did not necessarily mean that such material was preserved, and in the circumstances and conditions of his life many of his own writings and other things were lost. He did not destroy letters from me, but of the perhaps two hundred that I had written to him in those thirty years, I was able to find only something over fifty. The first of his letters printed in this book was written in October, 1925, soon after he had entered Phillips Exeter Academy. The earliest of mine to him that has survived was written in October, 1938; and there are breaks in the sequence after that.

(2)

Though in the years of our correspondence it was only occasionally that I might show to some friend something that James Agee had written to me, I had realized the unusual quality of his letters in content, expression and warm human interest; and with this feeling freshened and deepened through the recovery of some of my letters to him and re-reading his, I began to think of the possibility of publication. There were undoubtedly persons who if given opportunity would read with interest and appreciation; but how many of such there might be, I had no idea.

At first I had thought of including letters of mine, to give some idea of the exchange between us; and also of occasional notes between letters, relating to them or to the circumstances of their being written, but with hesitation about this, I decided to have the collection consist of his letters alone except in the case of a little exchange in verse that we had at one time.

I did not realize then how much James Agee was coming to be known and appreciated. My own judgment, to be sure, had been formed many years previously. Writing to him in August, 1939, I had said:

"Your writing moves me deeply, and you realize that I say this quite objectively. So far as I can see, my feelings about a person -- liking, or great love, or great dislike -- do not enter, or at least exceedingly little, into my judgment of the literary worth of something written by that person. Besides what seems to me: great beauty and clarity of language, I feel in your work a depth, a penetration far below the superficial, a sincerity, a -- keenness of sympathy, which move me very much. I am deeply interested in anything you ever write."

(3)

And in a letter to Robert Fitzgerald in 1955, after Agee's death, I said:

"He wanted to write more poetry." And we know what kind of prose he could write; how penetrating his insight, how deep his understanding and sympathy, how keen his sense of the things which move to laughter -- and to tears. If only he could have been able to put into writing, as he would have liked to, more of what he had to give! So far as popular acclaim goes, his name is "writ in water", but in quality of mind and soul and in genius and stature, he is among the great."

But recognition is another matter.

^{Notable}
~~Excellent~~ writing of his had appeared in articles for FORTUNE, TIME and LIFE, including (in TIME) outstanding Cover Articles and brilliant motion picture criticism. But those articles were all unsigned. The remarkable book Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, dealing primarily with tenant farmers in Alabama, published when the country was in the midst of the Second World War, did not get the attention it merited. The Morning Watch in its first publication did not have wide reading. He had done brilliant script-writing for motion pictures, e.g. The African Queen and a beautiful, touching and impressive film ^{about} on Abraham Lincoln produced on television; but while actors and producers may get fame, who except professionals or the specially interested notice or care who wrote the script? His work had received some high tributes, to be sure, but at the time of his death he was really not well known,

(4)

The beginning of wider recognition came with the publication late in 1957, of A Death in the Family, from a manuscript he had left; a deeply moving and beautiful book (classed as fiction but largely factual from his childhood and family) which was widely read and gained a Pulitzer award. A little later came the two volumes of Agee on Film (film criticism and scripts he had written), and the re-publication of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, and The Morning Watch; with all of these issued before long in paper-back editions.

The first edition of these letters came out in September, 1962, with simply descriptive title chosen by the publishers. A book of personal letters may not attract the reading public very much, and though I knew their intrinsic quality I had no idea what sort of appeal such a book might have. Its reception, though, and the reviews from all sections of the country testified to how much James Agee had come to mean to a large number of readers, not only as a highly talented writer but as a fellow human being of deep sympathies and understanding.

Dear Jim:

I like your words on competition
Of friendly sort, not for position
O'er someone else to win or score
But as incentive to do more
Than if such challenge did not jog
And lift our spirits from the bog
Of sluggishness and petty day's routine
In which creative work is seldom seen.
(A slip into pentameters like this
May make a little variant not amiss.)
So thank you for the outside stimulation
Needed to spur a person in my station
To "take his pen in hand", and though he falter
Genuflect shyly toward the Muse's altar.

"All is not well," declared Saint Thomas More,
Because all men are not good." And before
Brash theorists lightly undertake to prove
Some social nostrum's certain to remove
(Or pretty nearly so) our inequalities
And put our total population all at ease,
They would do well to see that More's word state
A fundamental social postulate.
(Not that 'twas More's discovery. The Church
Full well aware of human nature's smirch
And seeing it in Adam first begin^①
Labels it tersely as Original Sin.

So I much doubt that Socialism would be
A remedy for the ills that we can see;
And if for some of these it were some cure
Its regimen would've galling to endure.
What economic system would
Work well where "all men are not good"
I do not know; (though some are better
Both in the spirit and the letter.)
You take your choice of ills and gains;
No one all evil force restrains;
In any, some things are secured
That cause some ills to be endured.

^① Chesterton says Utopians oft are dumb,
Assuming major difficulties overcome
And thereupon proceeding to dispute
About some minor ones not worth a hoot.
Assuming men as scrupulously fair --
That no one will want more than just his share --
About this share's delivery they discuss
If it will be by train or motor-bus.

Many a man should have had things that have missed him,
 But much will go amiss in any system.
 What Socialism would give I cannot say;
 I know full well some things 'twould take away.
 By its inherent nature it deprives
 People of something precious in their lives:
 The sense of freedom. They'd be regimented
 And standardized. Would we be thus contented ?
 Some might like this, some not. I'd say at random
 Simply "De gustibus non est disputandum."

.....
 Father Flye

REV. JAMES HAROLD FLYE
19 PERRY STREET
NEW YORK, N. Y. 10014

September 30, 1970

Dear Mr. McAdoo:

Your letter with returned manuscript came in yesterday's mail. I am glad you feel that what I wrote is suitable. Any suggestions would be welcome. You are quite right as to desirability of a paragraph regarding the forthcoming edition. Especially in view of what I had said about circumstances of the first publication, something about the forthcoming one is very appropriate, and this will make a good ending for a preface which did seem unfinished. I appreciated the few penciled substitutions in places where the writing was careless. Every one of these is good.

With the publication of the Letters in 1962, the printing date was advanced a little, and I didn't have as much time as I would have liked to go through the galleys, for proof reading or other details. In the Bantam Books Paper-back, with use of new plates, changes or additions could be made, and I put in the extract from my last verse-letter. In a somewhat belated reply (in prose) dated April 2, 1947, Jim referred specifically to points I had made in my verse-letter, and one might perhaps be interested to see what it was to which he was replying. If a place could be found for this without its seeming awkward or needless-- all right. If not -- again all right.

REV. JAMES HAROLD FLYE
19 PERRY STREET
NEW YORK, N. Y. 10014

A few small changes, mostly typographical, were made in the 2nd and 3rd printings of the Braziller edition. Will you let me know if the copy you have is of the first or later printing? In the later printings there are still a few minor errors, discovered later. I will send you a list of corrections.

Within the next fortnight I may be getting down to Washington for a few days visit at the home of my niece, but would not be away from New York very long.

I have not yet heard anything from Braziller in reply to the letter written early this month.

Yours with all good wishes,

James H. Flye.

REV. JAMES HAROLD FLYE
19 PERRY STREET
NEW YORK, N. Y. 10014

October 6, 1970

Dear Mr. McAdoo: /

The enclosed is the preface that I had previously written with just a few small changes and with something about getting the Letters into print again through the forthcoming edition. Perhaps I could do a little better with the last two or three lines on page 4. Perhaps the sentence on page 5 is all right. I could add or change further, and any suggestions of yours are welcome.

You have probably received by now the paperback copy I sent you with a note.

I think I shall be getting down to Washington for a short visit, but would in any case be back before the latter part of next week.

With all good *James Harold Flye*

James Harold Flye

I can't decide whether in line 5 of the second paragraph on p. 4 "would have" or "might have" is better

REV. JAMES HAROLD FLYE
19 PERRY STREET
NEW YORK, N. Y. 10014

October 21, 1970

Dear Mr. McAdoo:

I take it that the section I wrote about the publication of James Agee's Letters and this new edition of them -- in revised form and with some few changes you suggested -- will serve. I used the word "preface" for this just as a possible term. Any designation that seems appropriate is all right with me. Perhaps you may suggest something.

When I suggested inclusion of the verse letter of mine, I realized of course that since plates from the Braziller edition were being used, it could not be inserted in the place it occupied in the sequence in the paperback printing, but I thought it might perhaps be put in say as an addendum, with note saying where it belonged. I was rather pushed when the book first came out. Braziller advanced the publication date a bit, and I didn't have the time I would have liked, e.g. with the galleys, to consider some details and indeed for proof reading.

I assume that the copy of the LETTERS you have is of the first printing, for the others have a line on reverse of Title Page listing the printings 1st July, 1962, 2nd August, 1962, 3rd August 1962. In later ones some of the corrections on enclosed list were made. (Some had not been noticed then.)

REV. JAMES HAROLD FLYE
19 PERRY STREET
NEW YORK, N. Y. 10014

I haven't the picture you spoke of. That and other good ones which you have seen were taken by Helen Levitt, 4 East 12th Street, New York, who has rights to them.

Sincerely and with all good wishes,

James Harold Flye

*This page belonged with letter put
into mail collection.*

New York City
November 22, 1970

Dear Mr. McAdams:

I don't know whether what was contained in the letter from Braziller would make any difference with plans about publication of the book of James Agee's letters in this country. Perhaps not.

Ideas often come to me belatedly, and that was the case with something that occurred to me just a day or two ago, which I will at any rate mention now.

As you know, when first considering the publication of James Agee's letters, I thought of including some of my letters to him; not from a wish to get writing of mine into notice, but feeling that it might be of interest to readers to see some of the other side of the correspondence, which in some cases Agee was commenting on or replying to. I would have been glad if there had been some persons of good judgment in such matters with whom I could talk easily and who would give me a frank and objective opinion, competent and detached.

A number of persons, speaking to me after publication of the book, said "I wish we had your letters to him," and several who wrote to me expressed this wish. A college professor (whom I did not know) in a letter (which I wish I might sometime show you), with very perceptive and appreciative comment on James Agee's work, said, "Indeed, my only regret about the book of letters is that your own modesty prevented you from publishing more of your side of the correspondence, for it is evident both from the length of Agee's feelings about you and from the character of his letters to you that your own words would be well worth reading."

I had thought of this matter from time to time and that it might be considered if another edition of the book were brought out and mentioned this to you in a letter last February early in our correspondence; but of course with use of the plates from the original printing, no insertions could be made within the body of the text.

What occurred to me the other day was this: if it were felt that it would be of interest to readers to see some of my letters to James Agee, now would it do to put them into the forth-coming book, not in sequence among his letters to me but in an added section, so that one could if he wished turn to them and read them? They are dated, and if desired it could be indicated in a brief notation there, in relation to some letter of his, one of mine would belong. The material added would leave the book still a not very large volume. The first and main part would be just James Agee's letters, a reprint without change of the collection as originally published, and there would be the added section for any who might be interested. At any rate, I thought this might be worth mentioning.

I have typed copies of a number of those letters of mine, if you would wish to look at them.

I hope we may meet some time when you are in New York and your schedule permits.

Yours with all good wishes,

James H. ... Five

REV. JAMES HAROLD FLYE
19 PERRY STREET
NEW YORK, N. Y. 10014

7.6
December 19, 1970

Dear Mr. McAdoo:

Thanks for your letter received
today.

Within the next two or three days -- just as soon as possible -- I will send you typed copies of some of my letters to James Agee. I appreciate your consideration of the suggestion about having a section of the book for this purpose, and we can see what may seem feasible in this respect.

Sincerely and with best wishes,

James Harold Flye

- LOUISIANA STATE UNIVERSITY
AND AGRICULTURAL AND MECHANICAL COLLEGE
BATON ROUGE, LOUISIANA 70803

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

January 12, 1972

Dear Mr. Olney:

David McDowell, my editor at Crown, has shared with me your letter to him in response to his suggestion that Houghton Mifflin consider publishing three versions of *A DEATH IN THE FAMILY*: as novel, play, and movie, perhaps with illustrations from play and movie. I assume ~~you~~ told you that the idea originated with me in our conversations in Baton Rouge this summer while David was visiting me.

David thought it would be a good idea if I edited the volume and perhaps wrote an introduction, the appropriateness being that I am a native of Knoxville, Tennessee, Agee's hometown and locale of the novel, and that I have published novels and had plays produced that are set in Tennessee; in fact, my new novel, *BIJOU*, is set in Knoxville, in the theater used in the Chaplin movie scene in the film version of *A DEATH IN THE FAMILY*. Also, I have just finished a screen adaptation of my novel, *CASSANDRA SINGING*, which has had many productions as a play. I have published several essays dealing with my problems working with the same raw material in three different media; and at MLA in Chicago this year, I gave a talk in one of the open Forums on Literature and Film entitled: "*Cassandra Singing: Novel, Play, and Movie.*"

But I hasten to say that my main interest is in seeing the three versions of Agee's story published together. If you don't want me to edit or write an introduction to the book, I won't be unhappy. I would, however, enjoy getting the book together. If you want me to work on the project, let me know where we go from here.

*John
stude
ation*
While I was at MLA, I talked with Thomas D. Wittenberg, sponsoring English editor of the College Department of Houghton Mifflin, about the possibilities for a text edition. He seemed delighted with the idea. He might want to consider a series of such texts. Other possibilities come to mind: *JANE EYRE*; *A MEMBER OF THE WEDDING*; *END AS A MAN*; *OF MICE AND MEN*; *GREAT EXPECTATIONS*; *THE GREAT GATSBY*; *ALL THE KING'S MEN*; *THE TURN OF THE SCREW*; *TOBACCO ROAD*; *I AM A CAMERA*. All have appeared as novels, plays, and movies. I know of no book in print which offers a story in three different media. Such a book would not only answer the needs of the new film courses, but would appeal to English programs that offer introductory genre courses.

May I hear from you soon?

Sincerely,

David Madden

David Madden

Copy to Thomas D. Wittenberg.

Cable Address LPTOUT NEW YC

Crown Publishers, INC.

119 PARK AVENUE SOUTH, NEW YORK, N. Y. 10016

February 24, 1972

Mr. Richard B. McAdoo
Houghton Mifflin Company
2 Park Street
Boston, Massachusetts 02107

Dear Dick McAdoo,

I tried to call you a couple of days ago, but I was told you were out of town until next week. I wanted to say that I couldn't locate my copy of the Avon edition of the play and movie scripts of All the Way Home -- which, by the way is now out of print.

But, as you see, here it is. Jim's neice (and my god-daughter) Katherine borrowed it without telling me when she visited me; so I had to call several people before I found it out.

The Agee rights problems are very complex, but as I told Austin a year or so ago, I'd like to see all his work under one roof. I'll go into this in detail if you'll give me a call when you get your desk cleared.

Yours most sincerely,

David McDowell
Trustee
The James Agee Trust

DMC/sc
encl.

cc: David Madden
Austin Olney
Aaron L. Danzig, Esq.
Nemeroff, Jelline, Danzig, Paley and Kaufman

DAVID MADDEN
PHONE 344-3630
614 PARK BLVD.
BATON ROUGE, LA. 70806

June 23, 1972

Dear Mr. Olney:

You will recall my letter of January 12 asking whether you would be interested in acquiring the rights to James Agee's *A DEATH IN THE FAMILY* in its novel, play, and film script forms for a trade edition, which could then be offered by your College department as a textbook for the many film courses that have been created in recent years and for the already established literature courses. The Agee book could be the first of a series of play-novel-movie texts. It is because of this educational use of the book that I am eager to know what you have decided. The Agee book is perfect for starting the series. And I hope Mr. Wittenberg will want to publish the series; I have been in correspondence and in conversation with him about this project.

As I travel around the country giving readings from my fiction (two of the stories I read most often are, by the way, reprinted in *BEST AMERICAN SHORT STORIES*, 1969, 1971), I have been asking both high school and college teachers whether they would be interested in a series of novel-play-movie books. They all express great interest; in fact, several expressed a need for such a series without knowing of my own intentions to create one.

Several editors are interested in helping me prepare some of the titles: Lawrence Schaffer, humanities editor of *COLLIERS ENCYCLOPEDIA*, who publishes essays in film criticism; and Thomas Atkins, editor of the new film magazine, *FILM JOURNAL*.

I'm certain I will have no trouble getting a publisher for the series. Houghton Mifflin is the publisher I want most. Perhaps, if you decide not to publish the Agee book first in trade edition, the College Division can still proceed with an educational edition.

May I hear from you soon?

Sin
David Madden
David Madden
David Madden

Copy to Thomas D. Wittenberg

The Eakins Press Foundation

155 East 42 Street - New York City 10017 - (212) 986-4077

January 5, 1977

Mr. Jonathan Galassi
Houghton Mifflin Company
551 Fifth Avenue
New York, New York 10017

Dear Mr. Galassi,

It was good to let you know by telephone last week of Mr. Berg's interest in including Father Flye's side of the correspondence in the projected reprinting of The Letters of James Agee to Father Flye. Both Father Flye and I were pleased to see Mr. Berg's catalogue, and learn something more of his work.

The question of royalties is still unclear. You had spoken of an arrangement through which Mr. Berg will be making payments to Houghton Mifflin as a reprint fee, some portion of which will be paid directly to the James Agee Trust. Father Flye reports that in the past royalty payments were made directly to him, not to the Trust. I understand your point, made in our telephone conversation, that the question of possible royalties in consideration of the new material (Father Flye's letters) to be included in Mr. Berg's edition should be taken up with him; a copy of a letter to Mr. Berg will come with this. But could we clarify the original arrangement between Houghton Mifflin and Father Flye, and how that affects fees accruing from Mr. Berg's reprinting? Perhaps copies of contracts or other agreements could be sent to Father Flye at 487 Hudson Street, New York City 10014.

With greetings,

Yours,

Harvey Simmonds
Harvey Simmonds

copies: Mr. Berg, Father Flye

The Eakins Press Foundation

155 East 42 Street • New York City 10017 • (212) 986-4077

November 30, 1977

Mr. Jonathan Galassi
Houghton Mifflin Company •
551 Fifth Avenue
New York, New York 10017

Dear Mr. Galassi,

Father Flye was pleased to have your letter, and grateful to Lincoln Caplan for mentioning to you the concern of these past years that the Letters of James Agee to Father Flye should be unavailable. Father Flye has from time to time been in touch about the matter; replies have been cordial, but not of the sort that indicated a speedy return of the book into print.

During the past months there have been thoughts on the part of a university press of issuing a new edition of the Letters, or exploring that possibility, something which of course the news in your letter makes unnecessary. In these more recent thoughts the intention had been to include that part of the other side of the correspondence which has survived: the Letters Father wrote to Jim. Several were published in the second edition of the book, but there are many more. Could the plans for the Ballantine reissue, and the Norman S. Berg publication, take this into account? Father will be glad to have further word on this.

Yours sincerely,

Harvey Simmonds
Harvey Simmonds

copy to Father Flye

NORMAN S. BERG, Publisher**"SELLANRAA"****DUNWOODY, GEORGIA 30338***Ague*

January 15, 1978

Mr. Harvey Simmonds
The Eakins Press Foundation
155 East 42 Street
New York, N.Y. 10017

Dear Mr. Simmonds;

I have read the additional "Father Flye," letters with great interest; however I do not believe that I could successfully publish and market the collection.

As you know, there are about ten letters in the Houghton Mifflin edition, and these, I believe are the most pertinent to the correspondence.

Might I suggest that you contact Ballantine. They are much more in a position to attempt successful marketing.

My gratitude to you for allowing me to read the letters. Copies of my publications of "COLLECTED PROSE," LETTERS TO FATHER FLYE," and "A HIDDEN WHOLENESS," will be sent to you shortly.

Sincerely yours,

Norman S. Berg

Norman S. Berg.

copy to Jonathan Galassi.

Dear Jonathan; Most of Father Flye's letters not included in the HM edition, were of place, peoples and things. I had expected much more philosophical discourse, especially since Agee's health was failing and he was in melancholia, so much of the time.

Appendix 3

DESIGN OF BOOK TWO

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Appendix 4**"Three Tenant Families: A Selection"**

"Three Tenant Families: A Selection". *Common Sense* 8
(October 1939), 9-12.

This manuscript belongs to the Houghton Mifflin files
(microfilm): Harvard University Library, Reproduction
Service, Widener Library, Cambridge, Mass. 02138, U.S.A.

This excerpt from James Agee's first draft of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men (titled Three Tenant Families) is unknown to most people and included as part of the Houghton Mifflin archives. It reveals the unique nature of Agee's prose. In relation to the published text, certain names were changed and certain passages were omitted, while others added. This then becomes of value in regard to the metamorphosis of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, and is mentioned more than once in the body of the dissertation.

concede that there is much in his own career to justify his feeling of conceited superiority. He is not only a politician who has held almost every Cabinet Office—who was in the Cabinet before he was 40. He is a brilliant writer—and probably the most highly paid journalist in England. He is certainly England's greatest present-day historian. He has a complete mastery of military and naval tactics. He was the only Cabinet Minister in

spondent. In his spare time, he is even proficient as a painter and he holds a card in the Plumbers Trade Union.

And today, with Churchill's star on the ascendant again, let no one imagine he will lead a popular front government. He may get the support of Labour, to be sure—what else can Labour do but support the man who is going to fight Hitler?—but it will be on his terms and his alone.

Three Tenant Families: A Selection

By James Agee

*Preview to a Literary Event:
We Present Our Choice of Excerpts
From Mr. Agee's Unique Study*

LOYD HARGRAVES has of Chester Bowles a little over twenty acres of open farmland, a few more acres of woods and of hillside ravines, a house, a barn, a smokehouse, a henroost, a garden, and a spring, all suspended and emplaced in solitude out at the end of a mile of dwindled branch road I have written of, and not within sight nor within a half-mile's walk of any other inhabited house. A little of his land is on the flat crest of the hill; the rest is broken into large patches among ravines and woods along the falling shapes of the hill and into little patches along the road that leads him out. The house and outbuildings, the garden and the spring, stand about midway in the main pieces of this land, and about halfway down the hill.

The top three acres are a long flat rectangle of keenly red clay and are planted in cotton. Between the edge of the hill and his barnyard there is nothing planted, only wild woods and briars on a scrubbed looking set of rounded and trenched surfaces, and a narrow path, slid winding among them, but from this edge, standing at the edge of the cotton, you see the house and barnyard, resembling a large museum model or an establishment for large dolls, set at the middle of the slope back to you, facing due west, and the two large fields in front of it and on its left which make up most of the rest of the farm, the whole bound in by a bluff horizon of trees, and now and then a faint windy noise of speed or a noise of grinding, sweeping a western crescent beyond the trees and

through one thin sector of trees, for two seconds, the uncertain glimpse of a gliding bulk: and these are the thinly spaced sedans and trucks which use a minor artery between the two county seats profoundly distant to a walking man.

2.

I am obsessed with the need of giving this house where the Hargraves live, and its contents, 'whole', and my obsession and all the risen problems are such that I am long past the ability to give any part or aspect of it. Yet now in a last stand I am determined to sacrifice nearly all its great values and meanings, for the present, in order to get down anything about it at all. I may here try to speak of its contents a little more fully than is ordinary in a description of a house: aside from that I will try only to tell you what it is 'like' only in the simplest terms, as one might speak, in fact, who had lived in a place for a little while and loved it, and who wanted to tell a little about it. I cannot resist adding, though, that a house of simple people which stands empty and silent in the vast southern country morning sunlight, and everything which on this morning in eternal space it by chance contains, all thus left open and defenseless to a reverent and cold-laboring spy, shines quietly forth such grandeur, such sorrowful holiness of its exactitudes in existence, as no human consciousness shall ever rightly perceive, far less impart to another: that there can be more beauty and more deep wonder in the standings and spacings of mute

furnishings on a bare floor between the squaring bournes of walls, than in any music ever made: that this square home as it stands in unshadowed earth between the winding years of heaven, is, not to me but of itself, one among the serene and final, uncapturable beauties of existence: that this beauty is made between hurt but unvanquishable nature and the plainest cruelties and needs of human existence in this uncured time, and is inextricable among these, and as impossible without them as a saint born in paradise:

3.

Out on the sloping of this clay hill, at the end of a branch road off a branch road, a mile and a half from a minor highway which joins two county seats forty miles apart, there is this house.

It is made almost entirely of pine, stitched together with nails, into about as rude a garment against the hostilities of heaven as a human family may wear.

We stand first square in front of it, facing it, in the huge and silent light of an August morning; and it stands before us, silent and undefended in the sun.

No one is at home.

The man is some hours gone. Four miles east of here, in a broken woodland of young pine, in the heat, and in the bitter odors of work, of resin, of hot iron, of broken and heated weeds, he is snaking logs with a mule and loading them on a wagon.

4.

There is plenty of time. We may stand here in front of it, and watch it, so long as it may please us to; watch its wood: move and be quiet among its rooms and meditate what the floor supports, and what is on the walls, and what is on shelves and tables, and hangs from nails, and is in boxes and in drawers: the properties, the relics of a human family; a human shelter: all in the special silence and perfection which is upon a dwelling undefended of its dwellers, undisturbed; and which is contracted between sunlight and a human shell; and in the silence and delicateness of the shame and reverence of our searching.

5.

It is put together out of the cheapest available pine lumber, and the least of this is used which will stretch a skin of one thickness alone against the earth and air; and this is all done according to one or the three or four simplest, stingiest, and thus most classical, plans contrivable, which are all traditional to that country: and the work is done by half-skilled half-paid men, under no need

to do well, and who therefore take such vengeance upon the world as they may in a cynical and part wilful apathy; and this is what comes of it. Most naive, most massive symmetry and simpleness. Enough lines, enough off-true, that this symmetry is strongly yet most subtly sprained against its centres, into something more powerful than either full symmetry, or deliberate breaking and balancing of 'monotonies', can hope to be. A look of being most earnestly hand-made, again, as a child's drawing, a thing created out of need, love, patience and strained skill in the innocence of a race. Nowhere one ounce or inch, spent into ornament, not one trace of relief or of disguise: a matchless monotony, and in it a matchless variety, and this again throughout restrained, held rigid: and of all this, nothing which is not intrinsic between the materials of structure, the earth, and the open heaven. The major lines of structure, each horizontal of each board, and edge of shingle, the strictness yet subtle dishevelment of the shingles, the nailheads, which are driven according to geometric need yet are not in perfect order, the grain, differing in each foot of each board and in each board from any other, the many knots in this cheap lumber: all these fluencies and irregularities; all these shadows of pattern upon each piece of wood; all these in rectilinear ribbons caught into one squared, angled and curled music, compounding a chord of four chambers upon a soul and centre of clean air: and upon all these masses and edges and chances and flowerings of grain, the chances and colorings of all weathers, and the slow complexions and marchings of pure light.

6.

At a certain time of late morning in the full breadth of summer, in this dark and shuttered room, through a knothole near the sharp crest of the roof, a signal or designation is made each day in silence and not heeded. A long bright rod of light takes to its end, on the left side of the mantel, one of the small vases of milky and opalescent glass; in such a way, through its throat, and touching nothing else, that from within its self this tholed phial glows its whole shape on the obscurity, a sober grail, or divinity local to this home; and no one watches it, this archaic form, and alabastrine pearl, and captured paring of the phosphor moon, in what inhuman piety and silent fear it shows: and after a half minute it is faded and is changed, and is only a vase with light on it, companion of a never lighted twin, and they stand in wide balance on the narrow shelf; and now the light has entirely left it, and oblates its roundness on the keen thumbprint of pine wall beside it, and this, slowly, slides, in the torsion of the engined

firmament, while the round rind of the planet runs in its modulations like a sea, and along faint Oregon like jackstrewn matches, the roosters startling flame from one another, the darkness lifted, a steel shade from a storefront.

7.

There is a tin roof on the kitchen. It leaks only when the rain is very heavy and then only along the juncture with the roof of the main house. The difficulty is more with heat. The room is small: very little more than big enough to crowd in the stove and table and chairs: and this slanted leanto roof is quite low above it, with no ceiling, and half the tin itself visible. The outdoor sunlight alone is in the high nineties during many hours of one day after another for weeks on end; the thin metal roof collects and sends on this heat almost as powerfully as a burning-glass; wood fires are particularly hot and violent and there is scarcely a yard between the stove and one end of the table; between the natural heat, the cumulated and transacted heat striven downward from the roof, and the heat of the stove, the kitchen is such a place at the noon meal time that, merely entering it, sweat is startled in a sheet from the whole surface of the body and the solar plexus and the throat are clutched into tight kicking knots which relax sufficiently to admit food only after two or three minutes.

8.

Out behind, ten feet or so of scarred red yard, then the dirt is sharply bent and goes steeply down sixty feet to a near-level: and a little out beyond the lower edge of this bank, a small warm spring, guarded in wooden walls. The bank is steep enough that much of it must be climbed on the hands and knees: but that is necessary only when the device for getting water breaks down. This device, which stands close at the edge of the yard, is called a lazyboy. It consists in a windlass, a rope, a bucket, and a heavy rock. The bucket, which is battered nearly shapeless, is let fall rapidly, for the fun of it; the stone ballast ensures that it will strike the water right and fill itself. The rope is sectioned together of pieces of sheeting, small rope and clothesline, and is frayed in several places to parts of a single strand and is knotted and re-knotted where it has broken almost in every foot: the windlass is so insecurely mounted that on the uphill winding it is necessary to guard it against collapse with one hand while you wind with the other: and even so, a third to half the water is sloshed out by the time the bucket comes within reach. Sometimes it will go without much trouble as long as two or three days on end; then, as if

it had taken it into its head to be contrary, the rope slips its pulley at the far end, or the crank slips loose under the guarding hand, or the rope breaks in mid-climb, and the whole bucket goes banging to hell and has to be gone down after, as many as one trip in any two.

This water, as I have said, is warm and has an ugly, feathery, sickening taste; they believe it is full of fever. And they strongly attribute this sickness of the water to the fact that the spring is also used by a family of negroes who live beneath them in the hollow. For this reason Pearl will hide in watch at the top of her bank and, when the negro children appear (they always come as a pair; they're afraid to come alone), or even the father and mother, pelts down rocks at them which she has collected, and chunks of wood. And in retaliation, the children have a few times had the courage to slip the rope from its pulley, or once, even, to stand there and empty the bucket three times in a row before, coming to their senses, they stopped laughing and ran as hard as they could into the woods below. But mainly they know better than to fight back, and try simply to come for their water at times of day when they will be least expected.

9.

The warmest and best protected room at the Hargraves' is the kitchen. It is too warm in summer. The worst room at the Woods' is the kitchen. It is too cold in winter. The Garners' kitchen is too large for comfort in winter. The only screen on all three farms is one at Hargraves'. Aside from this, windows and doors are shut tight at night, in winter against cold, in summer by custom, and against "the night air", and against fever mosquitoes. As I have pointed out, two of Hargraves' four rooms are so badly made as to be uninhabitable. There is no possibility of privacy at any time for any purpose. The water facilities are such as to hold laundering and personal cleanliness at or beneath its traditional minimum; to virtual nullity during the cold months of the year, and in the case of the Garners and Woods, the water is very probably unhealthful. The beds, the bedding and the vermin are such a crime against sex and the need of rest as no sadistic genius could improve on. The furniture in general and the eating implements are all at or near the very bottom of their scale, broken, insecure, uncomfortable, ill-smelling, all that a man without money must constantly accept, when he can get it, and be glad of, or make do. Since I have talked of 'esthetics' the least I can do is to add a note on it in their terms: they live in a steady shame and insult of discomforts, insecurities, and inferiorities,

piecing these together into whatever semblance of comfortable living they can, and the whole of it is a stark nakedness of makeshifts and the lack of means: yet they are also, of course, profoundly anaesthetized. The only direct opinion I got on the houses as such was from Mrs. Hargraves, and it was, with the tears coming to her eyes, 'Oh, I do hate this house so bad. Seems like they ain't nothing in the whole world I can do to make it pretty.' As for the anaesthesia: it seems to me a little more unfortunate, if possible, to be unconscious of an ill than to be conscious of it; though the deepest and most honest and most incontrovertible rationalization of the middle class southerner is that they are 'used' to it.

10.

... the corn and the trees move as if a great page were being turned, the cat stalks a horned toad who will be too swift, the flies do what they

can between now and dinnertime; the bedbugs sleep and so do the rats who tonight will skitter and thump and gnaw, and fight the cats, and the dog dozes in shade, and the white puppy, his bowels bursting with petrified food, waddles along the shaded backyard close against the house, his nose to the bare clay, and out toward the spring the cow stands in the shade, working her jaws, and suspending upon creation the wide amber holy lamp of her consciousness, and at a gap in his pen next winter's meat hopefully dilates his slimy disk: and at dinnertime they are all drawn into the one and hottest room; the parents; the children; and beneath the table the dog and the puppy and the sliding cats, and above it, a grizzling literal darkness of flies, and spread on all quarters, the simmering dream held in this horizon yet overflowing it, and of the natural world, and eighty miles back east and north, the hard flat incurable sore of Birmingham.

Tom Paine's 'Rights of Man'

By John Dos Passos

Concluding the Biography of his Search for Justice

AS the spring of 1787 began, Paine found himself in the unusual position for him of having money in his pocket to travel with. He spent the summer in Paris, in close touch with Jefferson, trying to promote interest in his Schuylkill suspension bridge, but succeeded only in getting a theoretical endorsement from the Academy of Sciences, and went over to England in the fall. There he corrected proof on a new pamphlet, "Prospects on the Rubicon", that urged young Pitt's government to keep away from a European war long enough to let the growing forces of reason start to work. Paine was losing no time in jumping into politics.

For once liberal ideas were fashionable. The years up to '91 were the honeymoon period of the Enlightenment in Europe. London and Paris were closer than they have ever been since. The French reformist nobles, military men and writers, and the freethinking clergy and the humane ladies of the drawing rooms of the old regime were full of admiration for the British constitution. The British liberals, Charley James Fox and his friends, who were so American they wore Washington's buff and blue in parliament and at Brooks', spent

as much of their spare time as they could in Paris.

But now, the landslide in France gathered speed and it became obvious that more and more ancient fences would be broken down, Edmund Burke, who was a thoroughly humane man, but one of those many emotional Irishmen who have made themselves by their abilities a home in the English system, and in the end have come to love and reverence every machicolated anachronism of that complicated pile with a pious zeal from which the native English are quite free, began to feel that everything he had attained was in danger: the erminespotted hierarchy, the country houses, the green hedges that kept the mob off the cropped lawns of the great estates, the port wine and the oratory and the intimate chuckle that went around the benches of the Commons after a well delivered classical quotation. He had seen what the mob could do at the time of the Lord George Gordon riots; the English mob; now he saw the French mob, twice as bloodthirsty and unkempt, pouring out of the Faubourg St. Antoine. In a growing panic he wrote *Reflections on the French Revolution*.

Paine, who hated to believe ill of a friend, clung

Appendix 5

Agee Chronology

1909 November 27. James Rufus Agee is born to Laura Whitman Tyler and Hugh James Agee in Knoxville, Tennessee.

1912 Emma Agee, Agee's sister, is born.

1916 Hugh James Agee dies in a car accident on May 18.

1919 Agee enters St. Andrews School, a boarding school near Sewanee, Tennessee. Agee meets Father Flye and his wife Grace, who live on the grounds at St. Andrews.

1924 Agee's mother marries Father Erskine Wright, bursar at St. Andrews, and moves with him to Rockland, Maine.

1925 Summer. Agee travels to Europe with Father Flye.
Autumn. Agee enters Phillips Exeter Academy in Exeter, New Hampshire. Agee chronicles the account of his trip to Europe in *The Exeter Monthly magazine*.

1927 Agee is elected editor of *The Exeter Monthly magazine*.

1928 Autumn. Agee enters Harvard University. Agee's writing appears in *The Harvard Advocate*.

1929 Summer. Agee works in Nebraska and Kansas as a migrant farmer.

1930 Agee meets Olivia (Via) Saunders, the oldest daughter of Professor Percy Saunders and his wife Louise.

1931 Spring. Agee is elected president of *The Harvard Advocate*.

1932 Winter. The Advocate's parody of *Time*, edited by Agee, is published.

Spring. Agee graduates from Harvard and becomes a reporter at *Fortune* with the help of Dwight Macdonald, an alumni of Phillips Exeter.

1933 January 28. Marries Olivia Saunders.

1934 With encouragement from Archibald MacLeish, Agee submits Permit Me Voyage, a collection of his poetry, to the Yale Series of Younger Poets, and it is accepted for publication. The book is not a commercial success.

1935 Agee takes a leave of absence from *Fortune* and moves to Anna Maria, Florida, where he completes the short story, "Knoxville: Summer 1915," and works on A Death in the Family.

1936 Agee traveled throughout the South to gather material for a *Fortune* assignment on the plight of the tenant farmer. He and photographer Walker Evans spend several weeks in Hale County, Alabama living with, interviewing and photographing three tenant families.

1937 Agee relinquishes his staff position at *Fortune*, but continues to free-lance for the magazine.

1938 Agee divorces Olivia Saunders and marries Alma Mailman in December. "Knoxville: Summer 1915" is published in the *Partisan Review*.

1939 Agee quits working for *Fortune*. Delivers manuscript of "Three Tenant Families" to Harper and Brothers, who ultimately reject it. Robert Fitzgerald offers Agee a job reviewing books for *Time*.

- 1940 Joel Agee, Agee's first son, is born. Alma leaves Agee, taking Joel to Mexico.
- 1941 After many delays and negotiations, Houghton Mifflin publishes Let Us Now Praise Famous Men in August. The book receives critical praise though its sales are disappointing. Agee begins reviewing films for *Time*.
- 1942 Agee accepts a position reviewing films for *The Nation*, where he would remain until 1948.
- 1944 Agee divorces Alma Mailman and marries Mia Fritsch.
- 1945 Agee begins writing special feature stories for *Time*.
- 1946 Julia Teresa, Agee's first daughter, is born.
- 1948 Agee wrote commentary for Helen Levitt's film The Quiet One, and worked on scripts based on Stephen Crane's short stories.
- 1949 Agee's article "Comedy's Greatest Era", a study of silent film comedians, appears in *Life*.
- 1950 Andrea Maria, Agee's second daughter, is born. Agee goes to California to work with John Huston on a screenplay for The African Queen. Agee's article about John Huston, "Undirectable Director," is published in *Life*.
- 1951 Agee suffers his first heart attack while in California. Houghton Mifflin publishes Agee's novel The Morning Watch.
- 1952 Agee is commissioned by the Ford Foundation to write a

television script about Abraham Lincoln. Agee's short story, "A Mother's Tale," is published in *Harper's Bazaar*.

- 1953 Agee writes the screenplay for Noa, Noa, based on Paul Gauguin's diary.
- 1954 John Alexander, Agee's second son, is born. Charles Laughton hires Agee to write the screenplay for The Night of the Hunter.
- 1955 Agee suffers his second heart attack, and dies while riding in a taxi in New York City on May 16.
- 1957 A Death in the Family is published posthumously by McDowell and Obolensky.
- 1958 Agee is posthumously awarded the Pulitzer Prize for his novel A Death in the Family. McDowell and Obolensky publishes Agee on Film: Reviews and Comments, volume 1, a collection of film reviews and articles on movies.
- 1960 McDowell and Obolensky publishes Agee on Film: Five Film Scripts by James Agee, volume 2. Houghton Mifflin reissues Let Us Now Praise Famous Men.
- 1962 The Letters of James Agee to Father Flye is published by George Braziller.
- 1963 The movie version of All the Way Home premieres in Knoxville.
- 1968 The Collected Poems of James Agee and The Collected Short Prose of James Agee, both edited by Robert Fitzgerald, are published by Houghton Mifflin.

- 1985 James Agee: Selected Journalism, edited by Paul Ashdown, is published by the University of Tennessee Press.
- 1988 Let Us Now Praise Famous Men is reissued by Houghton Mifflin with an introduction by John Hersey.

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