TRADITION, MYTH AND THE AGRARIAN COMMUNITY: THE CRITICAL RECEPTION OF *I'LL TAKE MY STAND* AND JOHN CROWE RANSOM'S AGRARIAN PHILOSOPHY

BY

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(Under the direction of Dr. James E. Kibler)

ABSTRACT

Seeking to define aspects of John Crowe Ransom's agrarian philosophy, particularly as it relates to individuals, communities, and the traditions and myths associated with each. While critics dismissed the offering as a sentimentalized eulogy for the fantasy of antebellum culture, Ransom articulated that principles and ideas, those elements addressing the humane life lived in contemplation, were the focus of his contributions to *I'll Take My Stand*. This examination presents key criticisms that represent the harshest charges leveled against Ransom, and, in doing so, a context is provided in which the subtleties of the Agrarian philosophy can be contrasted with those of Industrialism. Ultimately, this examination will reveal that Ransom's philosophical position was dismissively misunderstood at *I'll Take My Stand*'s original critical reception.

INDEX WORDS: John Crowe Ransom, *I'll Take My Stand*, Critical Reception, Agrarianism, Philosophy, Agrarians, Myth, Tradition.

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DEDICATION

My efforts herein are dedicated to my family; truly, I am one of you forever.

To my mother and father, who, though tired and fatigued, read to me with passionate voices, I extend my deepest affections. Thank you for allowing me distance and time, two indulgences so rarely given with grace. There is no adversity in movement, only a replacement of finality with mystery.

This study is also dedicated to my brother. Though debts are absolved in kinship, I still owe you a lot of money.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis is more than an attempt to fulfill graduate requirements. The material that appears in these pages is a reflection of conviction and the permanence of Southern traditionalism. Transmitted by the mythic history of a region, these words reflect a continuing dedication to my home. All thanks must be extended to Dr. James E. Kibler for providing the critical impetus for this examination. Without his suggestions and encouragement, this material would never have been completed.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

As Louis D. Rubin, Jr. noted in his introduction to the 1962 Torchbook edition, *I'll Take My Stand* has been "the center of constant controversy" (xxiii). At the forefront of both Southern Conservatism and Agrarianism, *I'll Take My Stand*—hereafter referred to as *ITMS*—has been "[r]idiculed, condemned, championed, everything except ignored" (Rubin, Jr. xxiii). While noted for its literary merits and rhetorical construction, the historical and, more importantly, philosophical merits of the volume have remained poorly examined. While Virginia Rock has effectively cataloged and categorized the critical reception history of *ITMS*—the complete document can be viewed in The Making and Meaning of *I'll Take My Stand*: A Study in Utopian Conservatism, 1925-1939—she fails to examine critically the critic's understanding of the volume. Her study ends where it should begin: that is, she examines the reception history, only to present the material in mere objective classifications. Thus, this examination extends Rock's by critically challenging the negative reviews of *ITMS*. It also seeks to examine the most consistently offered criticisms, in order to reveal the critical misunderstanding implicit in the volume's reception history. In doing so, readers will find that far from comprehensive or insightful, the negative critical reception of *ITMS* is instead misguided. Disregarding the philosophy of Agrarianism, critical reviews and analyses wrongly sought the answer in the volume's supposed economic and political considerations. Wanting charts, graphs and schematics, critics misconstrued the element upon which the volume should be considered: the Agrarian philosophy.

Finally, as the philosophy of Agrarianism proves central to this discussion, the flawed critical reception will provide a starting point by which to articulate the central element of the Agrarian philosophy of John Crowe Ransom, the chief author and motivating force behind the work. Yet, as a complete review of the Industrial and Agrarian debate is beyond the scope of this study, the discussion of the Agrarian philosophy demands a specific context, allowing a detailed presentation of Ransom's Agrarianism. The volume's philosophical basis, organic in its connection to all the contributions, is clearly provided by John Crowe Ransom's two contributions, "Introduction: Statement of Principles" and "Reconstructed But Unregenerate." As Thomas Daniel Young has noted:

> John Crowe Ransom's […essays are] in a way […] keynote statement[s] in that [they] suggest in broad terms many of the specific ideas presented in later essays. [….] Through the use of the twin metaphors of Progress and Service—by which he can contrast two views of the social order—Ransom places before the reader the basic philosophical differences between agrarianism and industrialism. (26, 29)

As Ransom's contributions are the central philosophical element from which the volume's other essays emanate, they provide the specificity required by this study.

Critical reviews claimed that *ITMS* offered little in the way of solving the social, cultural, and economic crises affecting a country on the verge of the Great Depression. Rather, the critics argued, the Agrarians offered only sentimental nostalgia and neo-confederate eulogizing, anything but practical economic solutions. Yet, a consideration of the critical reviews of *ITMS* reveals a striking inconsistency. Misunderstanding the

Agrarian philosophy, critics asked for "systems" and "methodologies" promoting cultural, communal, and, most importantly, industrial harmony. While critics lamented the lack of "practical" implementations, few understood that, far from economic or political in purpose, *ITMS* was positioned and constructed as a philosophical treatise.

Ransom's contributions, placed first and second within the text, offer a foundation upon which the remainder of the volume is constructed. As Cleanth Brooks noted: "Ransom's essay [is] one of the most philosophical expositions in the collection, and, to my mind, one of the most able as a well-constructed argument" ("John Crowe Ransom: As…" 150). In establishing this organic point of origin, Ransom provided an eloquent presentation of Agrarianism, one presenting a complex presentation of traditions, nostalgia and myths. The two essays are the most thorough presentation of the Agrarian's position. Balancing between lament and celebration, Ransom resisted the quagmires of eulogy and indignant, nostalgic posturing. For Ransom, the philosophy was an attempt to, borrowing a line from Donald Davidson, "wed the tame abstract with the wild particular" (ll. 58-9). In achieving this union, Ransom presented the philosophy in which *ITMS* would take root: the Southern Agrarian philosophical tradition was a sustainable myth by which the individual governed his relationships to fellow man, community, land, and God. For Ransom, Agrarianism was the traditional opposition to the unsustainable promise of progress implicit in Industrialism. Resisting the abstraction implicit in Industrialism's philosophy, Ransom's Agrarian stance directly confronted the distressing slip from tradition to abstraction, from communities of objective faith to the modern, subjective hyper-individual, and the loss of a sustaining myth, based not in fantasy, but in the lessons of a past that was to be celebrated, not eulogized.

The critical reviews, articles, and books on *ITMS* have offered only a cursory treatment of the critical reception. Authors have noted the book's critical dismissal, poor reviews, and the scorn offered by newspaper and journal alike, but they have failed to address the validity and depth of these criticisms. Thus, the impetus for this examination lies in a considered analysis of the critical reviews, commentaries and responses offered on *ITMS*; however, this context requires clarification. Although many authors, both critical and supportive, reference *ITMS's* reception, only one offers a thorough and considered cataloging of the actual reviews—Virginia Rock's The Making and Meaning of *I'll Take My Stand*: A Study in Utopian Conservatism, 1925-1939. Rock's examination does two things. First, it offers the reader an overview of where and when the volume was reviewed. This first category presents evidence that *ITMS* was widely reviewed nationally, receiving large and small allotments of space in Southern, Northern, and Midwestern publications. Examining the content of these reviews, Rock notes that a regionalist bias is not apparent, that is, the volume received harsh criticisms from the Southern press, while at the same time garnering favorable reviews from some Northern and Midwestern journals. From her study, Rock makes an interesting point: "To examine the reviews, then, in terms of Northern vs. Southern will prove unrewarding" ("The Making and Meaning…" 330). Given the dismissal of regionalism as critical impetus, Rock shifts the focus of her study to offering an objective catalog of critical reviews. In distinguishing between the "superficial and flippant […and…] the searching and the grave," Rock draws a simple distinction:

> Far more revealing of the character of the symposium's reception is a descriptive classification of the various negative and positive critiques.

> Like the Agrarians, reviewers found an attack more exciting and absorbing than a defense. ("The Making and Meaning…" 331)

Invaluably, Rock draws quotations and examples from representative essays in an effort to offer readers an overview of *ITMS's* reception. Unfortunately, this is as far as she goes. Rock fails to offer a critical discussion of *why* the critics treated *ITMS* as they did. As her discussion remains focused on objectively presenting where the book was reviewed and the types of criticisms it received, Rock's presentation is inherently limited. Although her presentation is an excellent starting point, the lack of critical analysis limits the catalog to a reference piece. This study furthers Rock's work by focusing attention on the reviewers' central misunderstandings of the volume.

Commenting on the reception of *ITMS*, Donald Davidson humorously, yet accurately, noted that the volume "has [this] unique distinction: it has been refuted by more people who have never read it—or even seen a copy—than any book in American history" ("The Mystery…" 8). In assessing the critical history of *ITMS*, Davidson would be more accurate in stating that although widely read, the collection has this unique distinction: it has been refuted and ridiculed by more people who have not comprehend Ransom's Agrarian philosophy. Analyzing the progressive utopia promised by Industrialism and religious devotion to abstracted progress, Ransom's philosophy seeks to recover a tradition of sustenance. These traditions, transmitted by a religious myth, allow modern man to judge modernist subjectivity, a state in which the objective relationships of the Southern tradition are supplanted by the subjective hyper-individualism of progressive modernism.

Given the nature of his struggle, the easiest criticism leveled against Ransom is that of sentimentality. Yet, one should be warned against the trap of criticizing Ransom for neo-confederate nostalgia, for his position was not as a sentimentalist, pining for a South of popular literary fantasy, but as a purveyor of an ancient tradition, one perilously clutched within the claws of modernity. Far from "backward looking" sentimentalism, Ransom's Agrarianism was a modernist manifesto, but modern by a subtle distinction. As Richard Weaver notes:

> It is crucial to realize that the Vanderbilt Agrarians cannot be grouped with the uncritical eulogists of ante-bellum culture. An early document made it plain that they proposed little traffic with the moonlight and magnolia tradition. They were, in certain methods, a modern breed, though most critics lacked the wit to detect their modernism. ("Agrarian in Exile" 587)

Ransom's modernity was this: rather than attempting a reconstruction of the antebellum, slave-driven plantation system, Ransom recovered the community sustaining myth of the Southern tradition. Ransom questioned what he came to view as the man's attempt, through both a devotion to progress and unrelenting industrialism, to will himself to a position of ascendant power.

In undertaking this struggle, Ransom engaged in a twin defense. First, he defended the historical traditions of a philosophy far too often dismissed as fundamentalist and neo-confederate in origin. The secondary struggle was to make a critical and considered attack on the regional strife derived from those who, in their efforts to remove the South from a supposed pit of intellectual despair and a prescriptive

cultural waywardness, sought the gilded palace Industrialism promised. For Ransom, the traditional Southern society, emphasizing the objective relations of man-to-community and nature, presented a philosophy by which the yeoman farmer became the center, not the whole, of communities. Ransom understood that, removed from a unifying philosophy constructing not only community, but myth as well, the South would become lost to its history, a wandering child crying out in the industrial wilderness. Deprived of the holistic tradition that defined the individual, the relationships to community and nature, and the philosophy emanating from their interaction, the Southern communities would wither, as Ransom notes, in a "deracinated" existence. Rootless and wandering, longing for the utopia promised by Industrialism, the South would turn to any "system" promising salvation, only to find that the home that awaited was a slavish devotion to newly commodified traditions. Emanating from the philosophy of Industrialism, this deracinated existence is, in large measure, what Ransom questioned.

The wide array of critics who attacked Ransom's philosophy did so from an incomplete critical vision, a consideration of literal impracticality rather than a consideration of philosophical subtleties. In their efforts to dismiss *ITMS* as an economic impracticality, the critics detailed the impossibility of reconstructing a "neo-confederate" utopia. Yet, this attempt distorted Ransom's purpose. Never arguing for a return to the past, nor a singularly dominant economic system, Ransom presented a philosophy by which man could judge and govern his relationship to individual, land, labor, and community. In his philosophy, Ransom centered man and his community, particularly the Southern, in a humanistic tradition rooted to a holistic standard. Without this encompassing whole, Ransom envisioned the "deracination [of] our Western life […,] the

strange discipline by which individuals turn upon themselves, enticed by the blandishments of such fine words as progressive, Liberal, and Forward-looking" ("Reconstructed…" 6). All the enticing "blandishments" rose out of the "progressivist" spirit of Industrialism. As Ransom notes:

> The progressivist says in effect: Do not allow yourself to feel homesick; form no such powerful attachments that you feel pain in cutting them loose; prepare your spirit to be always on the move. According to this gospel, there is no rest for the weary, not even in heaven.
> ("Reconstructed…" 6)

An examination of this excerpt reveals that attention is directed not only toward place, but also to one's relationship with that place. In defending place (and for Ransom no consideration of place is complete without reflecting upon the place's historical tradition) Ransom was vulnerable to critical dismissal on the grounds of sentimental nostalgia. In addressing this charge, this study will present the critical misunderstanding consistently argued in the reviews of *ITMS*: rather than an oppressive shackle that must be cast off in search of self-definition, the past is a foundation upon which the present is understood. In examining Ransom's contributions to *ITMS*, considerable attention must be paid to the philosophical distinctions drawn between Industrialism and Agrarianism. Although Ransom's objections to the religion of Progress, manifest in what can be called the "theology" of Industrialism, has been noted in numerous other studies, few, if any, have attempted carefully to examine the subtleties of Ransom's arguments within the context of *ITMS*'s initial publication. By placing the examination in such a context, this study provides a backdrop by which Ransom's philosophies of Agrarianism and Industrialism may be deconstructed. Examining the initial critical reception

of *ITMS* reveals that Ransom's philosophy, far from appreciated, remained inaccessible or ignored by his critics. Here, the discussion will center on three issues: (1) the philosophies of both Industrialism and Agrarianism and their relationships to the individual, (2) the role of industry (including the distinctions Ransom drew between science and applied, abstracted science) in the Agrarian philosophy, and, finally (3) the religion of "Progress." While the critical reviews will offer a catalyst for this study, the discussion will center on the crucial concerns addressed in Ransom's contributions.

As Ransom's philosophy was misconstrued, his articulation of Agrarianism was missed, leading critics to offer a summarily patronizing dismissal. Thought to be suffering from "nostalgia," a backward glance which one reviewer described as "[the…] sighs for days lost forever. And not so very fine days at that" (Hazlitt 49), the authors were portrayed as cracker utopians, "ivory tower Agrarians" gathering in lament for the loss of their historical, thus provincial, fiefdoms. Yet, this supposedly reactionary rearguard against "what is already a lost cause" (Hazlitt 48) is not recognized for the honorable articulation of traditions such an effort would entail. Critical reviews construct a dismissal grounded in the apparently unforgivable sin of a backward glance, one many critics mistakenly described as the "myth" of the Old South. However, as Andrew Lytle notes, the critics have chosen their words poorly; the "myth" they dismiss is actually a "fantasy." As Lytle comments, "fantasy" is the construction of events with no historical basis; myth is truth drawn from a community's sustaining traditions (Lytle "They Took Their Stand: The…" 118).

According to the most malicious critics, the Agrarian philosophy was based in a desire for a past that did not exist, and, if this had been Ransom's foundation, they would have been correct in their dismissal. For the critics, the Agrarian's nostalgic "fantasy,"

shimmering in the antebellum moonlight, would wither upon contact with the harsh light of reality. Yet, like their misconception of nostalgia, these critics could not distinguish between myth, the metaphysical lyric by which a community is maintained, and a self-indulgent fiction—a fantasy—"that has no grounding in fact" (Lytle "They Took Their Stand: The…" 118). Arguing for the myth of tradition, one operating out of and as a reminder of a distinct history; Ransom did not so much resist myth, as rail against sentimentalized fantasies.

The criticisms of nostalgia form one of the threads connecting the reviews appearing within a few years of the work's 1930 publication. For the reviewer's "nostalgia" was interchangeable with "utopian," and this, according to the critics, revealed a significant weakness. The Agrarians were accused of not being able to offer any real answers to the disorder found in the principles of scientism and its literal application, industrialism. Critics asked for a pamphlet, a step-by-step schematic, which, instead of defending the Agrarian philosophy of tradition against the deracinated philosophy of industrialism, offers solutions *in vacuo*, that is, through the specificity of the fragmented individual. Those who dismiss Ransom's philosophy wish for the scientific; however, the fragmented, splintered specifics fail to offer the vision presented in a holistic philosophy of community. Laced in condescension, the critiques decry as provincial the historical tradition from which Ransom writes. As Henry Hazlitt, reviewing the volume for the *Nation*, would comment: "Their pleas for [the Agrarian] cause are eloquent and touching, and recall much that was gracious, and even precious, in the Southern ways and values that now seem forever doomed to defeat" (48). More than a recollection of "precious elements," Ransom's philosophy not only defines Agrarianism,

but also critiques Industrialism's philosophy. In offering this critique, Ransom carefully articulates the organic continuum as manifested in the binding history of myth. In this continuum, the present is merely a representation of how well the lessons of the past have been learned. As Andrew Lytle notes:

> A family, […] its kin and connections too, thrives on some fixed location [or tradition] which holds the memories of the past generations […]. Not only sentimental memories but [also] skills passed down through a knowledge of the earth tended. Add a knowledge particularly of the bloodstreams, so as to be warned and prepared for what to expect in their behavior. [This is what] industr[ialism] today uproots. ("They Took Their Stand: The…" 117)

Eloquently stated by Lytle, and apparent in Ransom's presentation, the unifying myth becomes the meaning conveyed by traditions. Sustained and transmitted by the myth of kinship, these traditions become the philosophy by which community was sustained. For Ransom, there were no distinctions to be made, because to make distinctions would be to attempt to fragment unity into quantitative parts. Forsaking the science of the fragmented, deconstructed individual, Ransom constructed a philosophy by which the sustaining blood of myth would take dominance. Ransom' Agrarian philosophy is based largely on the desire for an organic pattern, transmitted through the sustaining myth of tradition. In this way, Ransom sought balance in an increasingly abstracted regional picture.

CHAPTER 2

A SYSTEM THAT HAS SO LITTLE REGARD FOR INDIVIDUAL WANTS: INDIVIDUALS, INDUSTRY AND HUMANIZING INDUSTRIALISM

When examining the critical reviews and commentaries offered upon *ITMS*'s initial appearance, readers are confronted with a broad range of attacks and criticisms, each attempting to present Agrarianism's failure. While the critiques appear, upon initial examination, to offer thoroughly considered complaints, a closer examination reveals an inability to comprehend and distinguish both the nature and purpose of the volume's arguments. For the critics, *ITMS*'s greatest failure lay in its arguments against the growing industrialism of the South. Described as reactionary, nostalgic, and misguided, the Agrarians were supposedly arguing for a return to the memory of antebellum society—the moonlight and magnolia laden antebellum South of literary fantasy. Rather than addressing the practical concerns of managing the potential plight of those trapped in the horrors of industrialism. Interestingly, showing what might be termed a Marxist bias, few critics disagreed that Industrialism as an economic system possessed an inherent tendency to exploitation and ecological destruction. Instead, the Agrarians were accused of fighting a rear-guard action, with their ideal originating more in fantasy than fact. These critical attacks or dismissals argued that the Agrarians violently opposed industry, progress, or material wealth. According to the critics, the Agrarians desired a return to the plantation system of King Cotton, a livelihood in which the benevolent master oversaw "the happy darky, undyingly loyal to master and mistress, content to live out his days on the old home place as [his master's] servant and bondman" (Malvasi 8-9). Critics portrayed the Agrarian position as opposed to even the hint of industry or progress, as they saw each as representative of Northern invasiveness, an "Industrialized Reconstruction" by which the factory owners and industrialists sought control

over Southern land. The majority of critics, invoking the volume's supposedly provincial, anti-progressive spirit, attempted to discredit the Agrarians. As Gerald Johnson argues:

> [T]he practice of sixty years has developed in the South a fertility in the making of excuses which is not to be daunted by any such combination of circumstances. The latest dodge is to lay it, not to the invasion of Northern armies, indeed, but to a Northern invasion, just the same—this time to the invasion of industrialism. (332)

Yet, rather than merely simplify and distort the philosophy of the twelve contributors, the critics completely missed the purpose and nature of *ITMS*'s philosophical arguments. Criticizing the "armchair" and "ivory-tower" Agrarianism of the volume, critics decried the lack of practical solutions and recommendations. Critics drew a distressing contrast between the "glittering civilization" promised by Industrialism and the bleak outlook inherent in Agrarianism. Hoping to control and "humanize" Industrialism, the critics envisioned a "wealthy, urbanized South, plentifully equipped with machines, hospitals, universities, and newspaper literates as alert as [they] are" (Davidson "'I'll Take My Stand': A History" 302-03). Noting the critical "vision" of the Agrarian picture, Donald Davidson reveals the bleak picture constructed:

> Agrarianism suggested doomed farmers eaten up with hookworm, brutal labor from sunrise to sunset, or at best an idealized plantation life vanishing or utterly gone; or, so far as Agrarianism and meant agriculture in the strict sense, it signified a snappy commercialized occupation, making large-scale use of machines and scientific agronomy. ("'I'll Take My Stand' : A History" 303)

The philosophical focus of the volume thus went undetected, while the critics accused the Agrarian position as weak from "bookish" theory:

> The present authors, for all their sincerity, show in their own persons most of the worst weaknesses that now afflict their homeland. There is something dreadfully literary and pedagogical about their whole discussion. (Mencken "Uprising in the Confederacy" 380)

Yet, the criticism is simultaneously dismissive and revelatory. Mencken had correctly noted the volume's "impracticality," but, missing the philosophical focus, his charge was precisely the element that distinguished *ITMS* from a mere pamphlet of suggestions.

Ultimately, *ITMS*, particularly through Ransom's contributions, was a philosophical treatise. Ransom set about not to offer practical, implement-able recommendations but to a context in which, initially, the religion of "Progress" could be articulated, while, ultimately, critiqued through his Agrarian philosophy. The focus on principles and ideas was an effort to offer a philosophy of a Southern manner of existence. Ransom's contributions were not a "how-to" handbook, but an expression of a "complete order of society based ultimately upon the land" (Davidson "'*I'll Take My Stand'*: A History" 311). Through his efforts to present not only a complete critique of the peculiar applications, but also what was lost in a devotional surrender to a "foreign" philosophy, Ransom articulated an Agrarian philosophy. While criticizing Ransom's inability to bring a dictionary entry conciseness to his definition, the critics failed to recognize the organic nature of Ransom's vision. Attempting to reduce the whole to mere elements, the critics failed to realize that Ransom's arguments for Agrarian traditions were chosen precisely for their resistance to abstract reductionism.

Through a series of contrasts with his Agrarian philosophy, as well as examining the theoretical impact of Industrialism on man and his community, Ransom revealed the dangers of an abstracted religion of "Progress." For Ransom, if the religion of modernity was Progress, its practical theology, the practice by which "Progress" was worshipped, becomes manifest in the philosophy of Industrialism. Industrialism, reflecting a perverse pioneering impulse, told man he,

with the aid of machine technology, could master his destiny and environment. As Ransom notes:

> Industrialism, of course is the contemporary form of pioneering; from this point of view it is nothing but a programme under which men, using the new scientific paraphernalia, sacrifice everything to win pyrrhic victories from nature at points of no strategic importance. ("The South—Old or New" 145)

Promising the utopia that accompanied technological advancement, Industrialism's philosophy promised the acquisition of the perfected end product. The perfected end is achieved through the individual components, and, as these are perfected, progress will be achieved, moving the individual towards the utopia the religion of progress has promised. Ransom disagrees.

Understanding that a philosophy should not be judged by its promises, but through the relationships it constructs to both man and nature, Ransom questioned the relationships and social purpose industrialism fostered. Bringing these standards to bear on his analysis of both Industrialism and Agrarianism, Ransom constructed distinct oppositions. Agrarianism required a balance between individual, community and nature. In the Agrarian system, man constructed a relationship with community and nature by similar means. The individual, understood as an idiosyncratic creature, is allowed dominion to express his desires and beliefs; however, there was a requirement of submission. Although the individual is respected and, to a degree, free to express and act upon his convictions, disruption and subversion of communal standards is discouraged. Man does not exist *in absentia* of his relationships; rather, he exists through his relationships. Individual desires must be checked by community's harmony. The price of community was a weighing of personal gain against communal health. Submission to the community, although not fascist in it requirement, was the price paid by the individual.

Just as a submission to the community was required, submission to an inscrutable nature was asked of the individual. For Ransom, man's relationship to nature was reflective of his

capacity to understand his position. The land was bountiful, and, treated with respectful devotion, it would sustain both individual and community. But the relationship to land required a submission, for man must not attempt to control what is beyond his power. Ransom understood that "man requires some conception of the absolute to maintain his humanity" (Weaver "Agrarians in Exile" 605). Ultimately, draught, floods, frost, and famine—natural elements beyond man's control—powers left to what Ransom understood as God. As he was dependent upon the soil, the individual Agrarian sought balance and harmony in his interaction with the soil. If man related himself to nature, he would naturally understand his reliance not only on community, but on the benevolence of nature as well. Ransom writes:

> In most societies man has adapted himself to environment with plenty of intelligence to secure his material necessities from the graceful bounty of nature. And then, ordinarily, he concludes a truce with nature, and he and nature seem to live on terms of mutual respect and amity, and his loving arts, religions, and philosophies come spontaneously into being: these are the blessings of peace. ("Reconstructed…" 7)

As the individual cultivated respect for a land he could not control, he would begin to examine and understand the nature of this relationship. Ransom's description of this relationship seems particularly relevant to this point:

> He [the individual in the Agrarian philosophy] identifies himself with a spot of ground, and this ground carries a good deal of meaning; it defines itself for him as nature. He would till it not too hurriedly and not too mechanically to observe in it the contingency and the infinitude of nature; and so his life acquires it philosophical and cosmic consciousness. ("Reconstructed…" 20)

Ransom understood that only through this careful consideration could man hope to "contemplate, […] explore, respect and love […] an object as substantial as a farm or a native province' ("Reconstructed…" 20). Continuing his analogy, Ransom notes:

> [Man] cannot contemplate nor explore, respect nor love a mere turnover, such as an assemblage of "natural resources," a pile of money, a volume of produce, a market, or a credit system. It is into these intangibles that industrialism would translate the farmer's farm. It means the dehumanization of his life. ("The South Defends…" 115)

Understanding that peace only derives from a considered relationship comprised of both respectful dominance and willing submission, Ransom presented the Agrarian philosophy as one that participated in a distinct tradition, one that sought to:

> condemn an individualism torn loose from family, community, and civic responsibility—an individualism that has metamorphosed into egocentrism, personal irresponsibility, and a loss of civic discipline. (Genovese 14)

Ransom argued that Agrarianism's philosophy of the individual sought a dignity derived in balance, not mastery. This relationship fostered "the very dignity of the personality requir[ing] roots in the community and, above all, the family" (Genovese 14). Industrialism's philosophy, subverting man's objective relationships, disrupted Agrarian harmony. In formulating a critique of Industrialism's relationship to the individual, Ransom turned to the concept of "deracination."

For Ransom, deracination "is the strange discipline which individuals turn upon themselves, enticed by the blandishments of such fine words as Progressive, Liberal, and Forward-looking" ("Reconstructed…" 6). As deracination is the quality by which man, devoid of the rooted condition found in proper relationships to community and land, begins to deconstruct himself, Ransom sought the catalyst for this condition in Industrialism's philosophy. In an effort to establish this connection, Ransom would again turn to the individual's relationship to the land.

Just as Ransom had seen balance in the Agrarian's relationships to land, community and fellow man, Ransom saw the reversal of these principles in Industrialism. Ransom found a hyper-individualism, a state where individual desires supersede the communal requirements. Gone is the submission by which balance is attained, and in its place is a new desire for the end product, one satisfying the individual's immediate pleasures. Ransom described the perverse logic by which Industrialism operates: In the industrial system emphasis and importance is lent to the promise of a utopia where the individual's will, through the employment of "labor-saving" devices, have unlimited leisure. Labor, as portrayed by Industrialism, is reduced to an "evil;" "only the end of labor or the material product is good' (Ransom "Statement…" xl). Convinced of labor's deplorable nature, the individual supports the new technology. Although purpose and end are never established, advancing technologies are championed for contributing to "Progress." With each new advance comes the increased capacity for building a replacement. Thus, Industrialism becomes self-perpetuating. "There will be a stream of further labor saving devices in all industries, and the cycle will have to be repeated over and over. The result is an increasing disadjustment and instability" (Ransom "Statement…" xlv). The state of constant objective-less participation drives the individual into harassed and tenuous relationships. Desiring the balance promised by the new technologies, the individual must sacrifice the individualism promised by Industrialism as he struggles to maintain an impossible race. Having never defined its ultimate objectives, the religion of progress:

> thrust its victims at once into an infinite series. [The] industrial machine, with its laboratory centers of experimentation, and its far-flung organs of mass production, is like a Prussianized state which is organized strictly for war and can never consent to peace. (Ransom "Reconstructed…" 8)

Just as they had overlooked Ransom's focus on the nature of the individual's life, critics often presented the Agrarians as being violently opposed to any degree or form of industry. Attempting to refute Ransom and the Agrarian position, William Knickerbocker notes:

> A little amateurish reflection will swiftly indicate that agriculture and industrialism are reciprocal and interdependent states: that they are the two ventricles of the heart of the western society; that, If one wished to press the matter, one could even more convincingly argue that the whole Southern peasant and planter system was inextricably tissued with industrialism, and that that industrialism was not wholly confined to the North. (468)

Knickerbocker's argument can be simply stated: Agriculture and Industrialism, far from disparate philosophies, are, for the South, historically and inexorably united. Moreover, the yeoman farmer championed by Ransom was, according to Knickerbocker, *the* system of cotton farming. He writes:

> Cotton became king only after the invention of the cotton gin, and thereafter maintained his reign through the healthy functioning of the industrial system with its factories, cities, ships, railways, [and] banks. (468)

While his argument is historically accurate, Knickerbocker misconstrues the nature of this historical relationship. Upon closer examination, this example reveals several important points, ones that support Ransom's Agrarianism. The industrialism Knickerbocker refers to supports an Agrarian centered economy, that is, the economy is not built in relation to or in response to the Industrialism that directs it towards an abstract goal. Truthfully, the industry that surrounded this system, facilitating harvest and delivery of the Agrarian product, is a tool employed by choice of the farmers and merchants; these factories, cities, ships, railways and banks are merely the industries serving, rather than disrupting, the existing communal structure. As the structure remains Agrarian in nature, the industry is bent to the will of the community and the vocation of

the individuals within the community. Not allowed to challenge and supersede the Agrarian, the applied science of Knickerbocker's "industry" is never allowed to undergo conversion to the philosophy of Industrialism. As Ransom notes, the Agrarian society does not discredit or disown industry; rather the community asks for the proper consideration and integration of any element foreign to the dominant system:

> An [A]grarian society is hardly one that has no use at all for industries, for professional vocations, for scholars and artists, and for the life of cities. Technically, perhaps, an [A] grarian society is one in which agriculture is the leading vocation, whether for wealth, pleasure, or for prestige—a form of labor that is pursued with intelligence and leisure, and that becomes the model to which the other forms approach as they may. But an [A]grarian regime will be secured readily enough where the *superfluous* industries are not allowed to rise against it. (my emphasis, "Statement…" xlvii)

With attention to relationship between the desire of the individual and, ultimately, the community and the encroachment of industry, Ransom distinguished how and where the tools of industry fit in the *dominant* Agrarian society. Careful attention should be lent to any examination of Knickerbocker's terms. In making his claim of agriculture and industrialism's inexorable tie, Knickerbocker fails to recognize the distinction Ransom drew. For Ransom, a distinction had to be drawn between two sets of terms, "agriculture and industrialism" and "Agrarianism and industry." While critics detected little or no difference, Ransom and the Agrarians saw an infinite chasm separating the two. For Ransom, a distinction must be made between industry and Industrialism. When examined closely, Ransom's arguments present industry as the mere machinery individuals employ in developing, harvesting, or transporting their crop. Yet, this definition seems incomplete. In seeking to distinguish industry form the philosophy of Industrialism, further distinctions must be drawn.

Ransom drew a distinction between the science of industry and the "Cult of Science" that embodied the philosophy of Industrialism. Noting that necessary, as opposed to "superfluous," industry could be useful in the Agrarian community, Ransom made a carefully considered observation: "The apologists of [I]ndustrialism […] often take refuge in saying that they are devoted simply to science!" ("Statement…" xxxix-xl). Ransom detected a distinct difference between science and the religious devotion to the promise of applied science. In Ransom's philosophy, science existed as labor, the tools available to the individual. Through his own choice, an individual may seek to employ science's developments. Yet, modern labor, manifest in Industrialism, argues for a different scenario:

> They [the devotes of Industrialism] are really devoted to the applied sciences and to practical production. Therefore it is necessary to employ a certain skepticism even at the expense of the Cult of Science, and to say, It is an Americanism, which looks innocent and disinterested, but really is not either. ("Statement…" xl)

Differentiating between science and the applied sciences, Ransom argued that science, in offering industry that supports the existing community, served an important contribution:

> The contribution that science can make to a labor is to render it easier by help of a tool or a process, and to assure the laborer of his perfect economic security while he is engaged upon it. Then it can be performed with leisure and enjoyment. ("Statement…" xl)

Ransom understood that the tools of science, designed for the support of the economic system "he [the individual] is engaged upon," was the beneficial option available to the Agrarian system. In supporting the economic community—much like the cotton gin—in its chosen occupation, science, offering tools by which labor is complimented, has a purpose and a function, one dictated by individuals, rather than abstract principles. By supporting the dominant system, the tools allowed the Agrarian to celebrate his labor. As Ransom noted, "The first principle of a

good labor is that it must be effective, but the second principle is that it must be enjoyed" ("Statement…" xl). Far from replacing labor, the tools offered by science allow a further participation in the joys of labor. Yet, the applied science of Industrialism offered something entirely different. Rather than accentuating the task, the emphasis on production—a focus on the end product, dismissive of the act of labor—discredited labor. As Ransom notes:

> The regular act of applied science [Industrialism] is to introduce into labor a labor-saving device or a machine. Whether this is a benefit depends on how far it is advisable to save the labor. The philosophy of applied science is generally quite sure that the saving of labor is a pure gain, and that the more of it the better. This is to assume that labor is an evil, that the only end of labor or the material product is good. On this assumption labor becomes mercenary and servile […] The act of labor as one of the happy functions of human life has been in effect abandoned, and is practiced solely for its rewards. ("Statement…" xl-xli)

Discrediting the joy of labor, the applied science of Industrialism's philosophy offered this: your labor is hard, and the burden of sustenance has offered few rewards; however, there is deliverance, and this deliverance is in the machine that will replace the role you previously held. Ransom saw the "Cult of Science's" promise in a different light. In replacing the labor by which man defined his relationship to the land, his family, community and, ultimately, himself, Industrialism left only a worker. Devoid of an identity, the worker was ready for a new title, and the analytical categories of Industrialism would provide that very thing, a deracinated individual reconstituted as a mechanistic cog.

Given the discussion of Agrarianism earlier, industry should be viewed as a potential component of the Agrarian system. As Mark Malvasi has commented, Ransom's definition of the Agrarian philosophy was neither isolated nor disparate from industry. Ransom understood that a farmer, growing his crops primarily for the subsistence of himself and his family, still had

a potential surplus margin that could be traded for goods; these items could certainly take the form of crops grown by other farmers, but they could also facilitate the acquisition of manufactured goods. Thus, if the Agrarian proponent chose to purchase a plow, a gin, or, dare it be said, a car, the choice was his to make. In opposition to the Agrarian philosophy, lay Industrialism, fostering, as Ransom noted, "a system that has no little regard for individual wants" ("Statement…" xlvi). Having "no little regard" for the individual, Industrialism sought subservience to the abstract:

> Men are prepared to sacrifice their private dignity and happiness to an abstract social ideal, and without asking whether the social ideal produces the welfare of any individual man whatsoever. But this is absurd. The responsibility of men is for their own welfare and that of their neighbors; not for the hypothetical welfare of some fabulous creature called society. (Ransom "Statement…" xlvi)

Having provided for immediate concerns, the sustenance of family and community, the farmer was free to choose crop diversity through trade or equipment to facilitate harvest. Two important distinctions should be noted. First, choices should remain with the farmer; if a surplus was produced, the farmer need only divide his crop according to the surplus amount. However, if a surplus crop is not desired or produced, the farmer, having fulfilled the necessity of sustenance, could "harvest" a surplus of leisure. With the latter, the farmer gained the freedom to develop the communal and internal "harvest." For Ransom, this was the greater bounty. In reference to the second the distinction, the Agrarian use of industry should be noted. For Ransom, one important question must be answered: what is the role of industry, servant or master? In the Agrarian system, Ransom saw industry as a tool, one that could be employed or dismissed. He understood that industry controlled and implemented at the individual's desire was a tool that did not disrupt the community. When industry becomes master, making man the categorized tool by whose operation the machine functions towards an abstract goal, industry becomes Industrialism.

Rather than battle against the choice of industry, Ransom questioned Industrialism. Simply stated, industry is the chosen tool of the individual—in the sense that plow horses are a tool and, thus, industry—while Industrialism is the philosophy of components, categorized and ordered for the completion of an abstracted, undefined goal.

Much like Knickerbocker, Henry Hazlitt, in his review "So Did King Canute," sought to reveal Ransom's "savage" distaste for industry. According to Hazlitt, rather than constructing a context for philosophical inquiries, Ransom used the issue of Industrialism versus Agrarianism to facilitate a regionalist's debate. As Hazlitt notes, "Mr. Ransom, for one, seems rather happy at the prospect that the industrial invasion 'will offer the chance to revive ancient and almost forgotten animosities'" (48). Failing to understand the full distinction of Ransom's 'animosities,' Hazlitt portrays Ransom as a mere neo-confederate, attempting regional rebelliousness. Yet, this is a far too simplistic understanding of Ransom's argument. For Ransom, the ancient animosities could be understood as a reflection of philosophical differences, that is, an examination of not only the differences which distinguish perspectives, but also the applicability of each system as it relates to a particular ailment. Ransom understood that the significance of the Agrarians' animosities lay not in their antagonism towards industry; rather their importance arose from a vigorous embrace of the traditions sustaining their region. These values, the manners, customs, myths and traditions of the Agrarian community, were distinctly different from Industrialism's abstractions. Hazlitt's understanding remains cursory, and this taints his critique:

> He [Ransom] is not only against Industrialism; he is against all technological discoveries, against the ideal of Progress itself. Progress seems to him terrifying, for it 'never defines it ultimate objective, but thrusts its victims at once into an infinite series.' It also threatens us with 'deracination.' I am at some loss to understand, however, why Mr. Ransom […] should regard the old South as the ideal example of resistance to the industrial progress. (48)

Given the mocking use of Ransom's words, the failure rests in Hazlitt's inability to observe the connections supporting Ransom's philosophy. Opposing the balance of community, individuals, and communal traditions, "Progress" was the new religion of modernity, ever striving toward the promised utopia. Thus, if Progress was the name of the new religion, Industrialism was its practical theology.

One of the more interesting concerns raised by critics, was that of the "fashioning" of Industrialism to suit the individual and his community. Industry was inevitable, and as such lingering nostalgia for the antebellum days must be driven out. Unable or unwilling to understand Ransom's philosophy, critics dismissed the notion of resistance, arguing for "adaption." As Stringfellow Barr would comment, "adaptation must always be the chief preoccupation of a defeated people" (482). For Barr—he was not alone in his criticism—"there is no use appealing to the Southern people to reject industrialism in a spirit of Gandhian asceticism" (483). Barr's argument was dualistic. He assumed, first, that Agrarianism inherently implied a bleak and meager existence. Arguing that Southerners would not be content "to merely eat," Barr outlined the "true" desires of the 1930's Southerner: "he will want his share of radios, cars, and frigidaires which are considered part of the American citizen's rightful heritage" (483). Secondly, Barr, conflating industry and Industrialism, states, "the traditionalists have […] confused the machine technique with the lack of social purpose which the machine technique has generally implied" (484). In his estimation of the benign nature of the machine technique, Barr was correct; however, Barr fails to recognize that Industrialism, the philosophy Ransom discredits, is the machine technique made subservient to the social purpose. Ransom's Agrarian philosophy, as discussed earlier in this examination, was not opposed to the machine technique, a process that could easily be called "industry;" rather, the philosophy of Industrialism, bending industry to a malicious purpose, was Ransom's target. Industrialism did not apply to "any and every form of industry." Rather it referred to "giant industrialism, a force dominating every

human activity" (Davidson "'I'll Take My Stand:' A History" 313). Failing to distinguish between industry and Industrialism, the critics sought a "compromise," a system by which Industrialism could be "humanized." Yet, within this effort to humanize Industrialism, the critics failed, again, to understand Ransom's philosophy.

Noting that the Agrarian position was not "quixotic or visionary," but "stupid," Henry Hazlitt argued: "Our aim must be to humanize industry not to exterminate it" (49). Noting some suggestions that might bring about this humanization of industry, Hazlitt asks for people to "agitate for progressive labor legislation." Such agitation would bring about:

> [S]trict housing legislation, model-housing schemes, city planning that would minimize congestion, provide maximum light and air, establish parks and playgrounds, insure the largest number of trees and the smallest number of advertising signboard. In brief, [people] could 'gardenize' their towns and make them fit for humane living. (49)

In his desire for the 'gardenized' utopia of Industrialism's "Agrarian" community, Hazlitt dismissed Ransom's community of individuals working in proper relationship to the land and each other, sustaining their traditions through an attention to myth. Hazlitt's desire is representative of the industrialist's "remedy." Ransom understood that, following the abstracted goal of Progress—the poorly defined "ultimate objective' Hazlitt thought so comical—, industrialists offered only "homeopathic" remedies:

> They expect the evils to disappear when we have bigger and better machines, and more of them. Their remedial programs, therefore, look forward to more industrialism. (Ransom "Statement…" xli)

Ransom understood that Industrialism's remedy—and Hazlitt's recommendations, although not calling for more machines, did call for such a remedy—was more industry. Completing Hazlitt's recommendations called for a new Industrialism to replace or correct the damages of the first.

Though he hopes to "humanize industry," Hazlitt's corrective is merely self-perpetuation. Any effort to "humanize" industrialism is doomed, for the sacrifice is this: Industrialism subjects man to restrictive analytical categories. Once delineated to appropriate spheres, tasks and roles of production, the individual, the basis for community, is a mere component, working in a state of enforced efficiency. In the Agrarian philosophy, man is capable of regulating the industry by choosing how and when it is implemented. However, Industrialism reduces individuals to parts, cogs which efficiently serve the abstracted end promise of "Progress." Though Hazlitt seeks a mastery of Industrialism, he falls prey to the fantasy of "Progress."

Progress promises a distant and, ultimately, unattainable utopian end. With each adjustment and advancement, progress becomes the mirage of sustainable happiness. Yet, Industrialism's advancement is dualistic. First, with advancement, the past progress must be discredited; being discredited, it must be forgotten. Secondly, the new advancement must be heralded as the new promise of progress; recognized as such, the advancement endures tenuously, waiting for the succeeding innovation. In a movement of continual replacement, "Progress" maintains its illusory premise. Industrialism's utopia, although never attainable, remains in perpetuity. Rather than asking for a backward glance, Industrialism asks for a new nostalgia, one not in "days lost forever," but in days never realized.

H.L. Mencken, too, criticized Ransom's critique of Industrialism. Arguing that Industrialism must carry the day, Mencken argued that shifting to the Agrarian system would only complicate the already lamentable plight of the modern South's remaining farmers:

> Nothing can be done to help the farmers who still struggle on beset by worn-out soils, archaic methods and insufficient capital. They are doomed to become proletarians, and the sooner the change is effected the less painful it will be. The way to help them is not to talk boastingly and vainly of putting down

> industrialism; it is to seize industrialism by the horns, and try to shake some measure of justice and decency into it. (380)

Despite Mencken's claims, this is precisely what Ransom articulated. This is not to assert that Mencken's assertions were entirely without merit; on the contrary, they addressed a problem well understood by Ransom. Understanding the plight of a soil and an individual equally "worn-out," Ransom presented the basis for this plight, the farm of Industrialism. In Mencken's estimation, the farmer's only option was maligned resignation. Moreover, Mencken, perhaps unwittingly admitting that "justice and decency" must be shook from the beast-like horns of Industrialism, still resists Ransom's Agrarian philosophy. Mencken's suggestion, far from corrective, becomes another manifestation of the necessity of Industrialism's regulative machines. To shake "justice and decency" from Industrialism, Mencken must construct the industry of regulation. Continuing in the vein of the machine it is constructed to control, the new face of Industrialism becomes "Regulationism." The hydra existence of Industrialism allows a head to be severed, or, in Mencken's case, shaken vigorously, only to watch newly nefarious faces replace the old.

CHAPTER 3

"LOOK AWAY, LOOK AWAY, DIXIELAND": TRADITION, MYTH AND THE "CULT OF NOSTALGIA"

"The traditionalist, frightened by the lengthening shadows of the smokestacks, takes refuge in the good old days and in what I have called the apotheosis of the hoe. They make a charming but impotent religion of the past. They themselves no longer believe that they are going to do anything about it, and this cheapens their veneration of the past."

(Stringfellow Barr, "Shall Slavery Come South?" 488)

All societies are sustained by a myth. Such a myth is of necessity metaphysical, but it was not this kind of myth the critic [of *ITMS*] had in mind. He had mischosen his word. He meant fantasy, something that had no grounding in fact."

(Andrew Lytle, "They Took Their Stand: The…" 118)

As Mary Ann Wimstatt astutely notes in "Political and Economic Recommendations of *I'll Take My Stand*," the twelve authors "drew down upon the volume the wrath of contemporary reviewers, who—influenced by the New South, the manufacturing North, or Depression economics—overlooked or misconstrued the central message of the volume" (433). Wimstatt addresses both a key criticism of *ITMS* and the major cause of this criticism. In the reviews and commentaries, the Agrarians are far too often dismissed with a criticism of "nostalgia." The Agrarians and their supporters were well aware of this criticism. Noting the potential for critical misunderstanding and the potential damage it might cause, Cleanth Brooks, in a letter to Donald Davidson, states:

> I think that the charge of nostalgia as brought by Hazlitt in *The Nation* and by Mencken in the *Mercury* is quite unfounded and unfair. It is the easiest charge to make—indeed the natural one to make, and I feel that it would have been made regardless of the contents of the book. On the other hand, it is a damaging accusation—and one of the big problems is to convince Southerners that they are not making a 'backward' step. (Winchell 96)

Although the critical ire took many shapes, one of the more common complaints is that of a misplaced "nostalgia." For many critics, the Agrarians were simply "neo-confederates" longing for a South that was not only disappearing, one which had dissipated like a vaporous dream, floating gently away on the waves of literary sentimentality. The argument was this: In a time of economic and cultural change, the South required men of action, seeking to regulate the influx of industrial growth. Addressing the cultural shift from agriculture to industry, H.L. Mencken, in his 1931 review of *ITMS*, noted the distinction between the Agrarians' beliefs and the "New South's" leaders:

> What the South needs is not fashioners of utopias, but leaders who are competent and ready to grapple with things as they are. It will get nowhere by following sufferers from nostalgic vapors; its deliverance lies in the hands of such realistic and indomitable fellows as, say, Julian Harris, Gerald Johnson and Grover C. Hall. ("Uprising in…" 380)

For Mencken and the more vocal critics of *ITMS*, the Agrarians, caught in the clutches of nostalgia, were neither prepared nor willing to deal with "things as they are." As Gerald Johnson notes:

> But here we run into the ancient excuse—the Civil War. It is part of the Southern credo that before that war we possessed a civilization which was one of the ornaments of the world. This is, of course, is sentimental tommyrot. (334)

Yet, as is the case with major criticisms of the volume, the critics had simply misunderstood Ransom's complex philosophy of "nostalgia." This philosophy was one based neither in backward looking sentimentality nor in the construction for a fantastical South in which the:

> typical white Southerner [lived in] the Golden Age [as] a free landowner—not rich, perhaps, but still well fed and comfortable, and with leisure enough to take an active and intelligent interest in public affairs. ("Uprising in…" 379)

In the Agrarian philosophy, the concept and role of nostalgia, as articulated by Ransom, was a careful examination of the cultural traditions, customs and manners that fostered a proper relationship to the land and to each other. The proper relationship was the basis for a humane existence, and, as Richard Weaver notes, this is what the critics failed to understand. He writes:

> Under various catchwords and programs they are seeking to extirpate this humanity—calling it sentimentalism or nostalgia or cowardice, or some other name implying weakness. Though in this particular exposition it had a Southern setting, its goal was general: the humane life, celebrated in many literatures and cultivated in certain epochs of history. ("Agrarian in Exile" 603-04)

Through his contributions to the volume, Ransom criticized the sentimentalized longing for "moonlight and magnolias," days comprised more of "fantasy," to borrow Lytle's language, than myth.

For Ransom, there was a distinction that had to be made between the sentimentalized longing and the nostalgia of tradition. The longing for the Old South, sentimentalized in literary portraits, contributed to the precarious position of this region of myth and tradition. Lost in eulogy and pining for a past that was, as Ransom would note, fantasy, the population had allowed the political and cultural Reconstruction of the South to go unchecked. Failing to maintain rich cultural traditions, the populace had forsaken the traditions that supported both the Agrarian South of 1861 and the Agrarian South nearing extinction in 1931. For Ransom, the loss associated with dissolution of a constant and concrete relationship with a sense of place, particularly the community's historical traditions and manners, is "nostalgia." As Ransom notes:

> Now memories of the past are attended with a certain pain called nostalgia. Nostalgia is a kind of growing-pain, physically speaking. It occurs to our sorrow when we have decided that it is for us, marching to some magnificent destiny, to abandon an old home, and old provincial setting, or an old way of living to which we have become habituated. ("The South Defends Its Heritage" 110)

Either failing or incapable of making the distinction, the critics disregarded a prophetic voice, constructing Ransom as quixotic adventurer, arguing for the mist laden, and defeated myth of the South.

Representative of the critical trend, H.L. Mencken commented that the "utopian" ideals of the "earnest young revolutionaries chiefly resident in Tennessee" were the primary error of "social reformers at all times and everywhere: they conjure up a

beautiful utopia, prove that life in it would be more pleasant, and then propose that everyone begin to move in tomorrow" ("The South Astir" 52). Continuing in his assessment of the Agrarians' "utopia," Mencken notes, "these Utopians are by no means representative of the New South […;…] they have nothing to offer save the highfalutin dream stuff that young college professors are always confecting" ("The South Astir" 58). Attempting to connect the criticism of "utopianism" with that of "nostalgia," Mencken's diatribe rails against a Southern regression "content with the scents of musk, magnolia, and [the] Jockey club" ("The South Astir" 48). Mencken's statements are representative of the criticism of 'nostalgia;" however, he was not isolated in his condemnation of Ransom's philosophy.

In his review of the volume, William S. Knickerbocker sounds a note more tempered, but ultimately just as misguided as Mencken's. While noting ITMS's argument for a "reconstruction of the entire framework of American society on the basis of an Agrarian policy suggested by the small farm of the old Middle South," Knickerbocker regrets that, "in their romantic zeal to return to a past that never was," these "young confederates" merely "exhort the South to return to the ten-acre, one-mule farm" (467-8). Directly addressing Ransom's contributions, Knickerbocker would later claim:

> Undoubtedly [Ransom] knows the immense power of the existing nostalgia in the South for "the good old days," for the seductiveness of his appeal lies largely in his subtle employment of sentiment. ("Mr. Ransom…" 223)

The appeal to sentiment, as Knickerbocker argues, is little more than the promise of the utopian "good old days," a promise arising from the backward glance of the Agrarians' "nostalgia." Yet, failing to understand the distinction Ransom drew, the critics were left

with a thunder-less charge, one containing insult, but little understanding. As Ransom notes:

> [Nostalgia …] is the complaint of human nature in its vegetative aspect, when it is plucked up by the roots from the place of its origin and transplanted in foreign soil, or even left dangling in the air. And it must be nothing else but nostalgia, the instinctive objection to being transplanted, [which] chiefly prevents the deracination of human communities […]. ("Reconstructed…" 6)

Ransom notes that, rather than a sign of gross sentimentality, "nostalgia" is the actual remembrance of traditions lost. Communicating communal traditions, nostalgia comprises the:

> [M]anners, conversation, hospitality, sympathy, family life [and] romantic love—in the social exchanges which reveal and develop the sensibility in the human affairs. [As] religion and the arts are founded on right relation of man-to-nature, these are founded on the right relations of man-to-man. ("Introduction: Statement…" xliii)

For Ransom, the Southern traditions emanated from an objective philosophy of relations. Sensing Industrialism's basis in subjectivity, Ransom argues for those traditions yielding steadfast relations between man, community and nature. Given its centrality to Ransom's Agrarian philosophy, particularly as it relates to the "Cult of Nostalgia" charge, this philosophy of objectiveness requires further consideration.

As Mark Malvasi has pointed out, the Agrarians, possessing a distinct understanding of the Southern tradition, constructed a historical picture based not in slave driven, plantation society, but dominated by "a traditional, Agrarian society[,] inhabited by 'plain folk' who had created a unified, homogenous culture: a kind of extended

family, clan, or tribe" ("Reconstructed…" 6). This "extended family" was denoted by the nature of its relationships: man-to-man, man-to-community and man-to-nature. Ransom understood that the nostalgia arose when these relations were disrupted, it was the defense required when people's traditions and relationships become threatened. Industrialism, arguing for a subjective positioning of man in relation to the world, presented a "theology" by which man could comprehend, control and, eventually, dominate his environment. This domination, based in the subjective knowledge and beliefs, removed man from co-habitant, created "social atomization and individual estrangement from God, nature, and one's fellow human beings" (Malvasi 10). When people fall victim to an illusion of 'having power over nature,' they surrender a sense of nature as being something 'mysterious and contingent' (Young *Waking Up Their Neighbors* 156). For Ransom, losing this sense of mystery correlates to the loss of myth and tradition. Understanding the Twentieth Century's popular current as irrevocably drifting toward the subjective doctrine of Industrialism, Ransom sought to recover and re-establish, through attentive study of tradition, a myth of communal sustenance. Judging traditions by the nature of the relationships they fostered, Ransom's Agrarian philosophy offered an objective perspective on individual relations.

Ransom's philosophy required the individual to maintain a balance in his relationships to both community and nature. The objectivity of the Agrarian position derived from an organic structure. Traditions, derived from the individual's respectful experience with nature and his fellow man, dictated a truce whereby submission was the requirement of belonging to a community. As Malvasi notes:

> To become fully human, everyone had to belong to a community, and obedience, discipline, and submission were the price of belonging, the price of being human. [Ransom] believed that men and women could establish their individual identities only by fulfilling their prescribed roles within a stable, hierarchical, and duly constituted society. (11)

The individual's participation in farming had shown him that nature would only yield its bounty through a truce, not domination. As the traditions were established, so was the social structure. The social structure, derived from and supported by the traditions, was transmitted by a sustaining myth.

Ransom, understanding myth's role as transmitter, also noted that myth operated at a secondary level. The sustaining myth, revelatory in its primacy, dictated a degree of submission. Revealing that a portion of understanding operated at the level of faith, the myth withheld complete knowledge from the individual, thus, sustaining the inscrutability that prevented a desire for dominance. Yet, this was a point consistently misinterpreted by the Agrarian's critics. Failing to recognize the subtlety in Ransom's construction of myth, critics sought to distinguish between "religious" and "historical" myths. C.A. Ward asked:

> If, as […] Ransom say[s], a religious myth may be a sustainer of a society, may it not also be conjectured that a historical myth—such as the myth of the Old South—may play a part in sustaining certain survivals from the past—including such an undesirable survival as the doctrine of white superiority and white supremacy? (55)

Ward's criticism is only partially correct. While the religious myth was, as Ransom notes, the sustainer of society, the historical myth, rather than existing as a separate entity, was encompassed within the religious myth. As the religious myth was one that sustained a

society, it was a myth based in the practiced tradition of a community, that is, it required a discipline of its followers. In the case of the Agrarian community, this discipline came in the form of submission to nature's inscrutability. This was the myth based in fact. Ward's argument depends more on what Andrew Lytle called the "fantasy." Existing as a construct without fact, that is, requiring a belief in the "myth" of the Old South, the fantasy asked for a belief in the very nostalgia Ransom struggled to discredit. The potential dangers Ward presents are weakened when understood to be the true nostalgic "fantasy." The traditions transmitted by Ransom's myth were not languid longings for a fantastical South; rather they were a code by which relationships, both to man and nature, were understood and judged "right" by their adherence to communal traditions. Connecting to a distinct order, Ransom's nostalgia becomes an Agrarianism arising from inherited traditions.

This first level of Ransom's concept "struggle[s] to recover the complex history of the South that the post-bellum generation of Southern writers had sentimentalized, distorted or repressed. [Ransom] hoped […] to find in that history a vision of order that would enable them to resist the chaos of the modern age" (Malvasi 18-9). In searching for this "vision of order," Ransom recovered a life sustaining myth. In distinguishing this secondary, "mythic," level, Ransom understood "nostalgia" not as a constructed fantasy, but a connection to the myths which sustained […] all societies" (Lytle "They Took Their Stand: The…118). Thus, just as nostalgia was the collected tradition by which a community was maintained, the "myth" perpetuated by nostalgia was the transference of these traditions across time, a history sustaining and dictating the nature of a community's progress. Explaining the communicative nature of Ransom's myth, Robert Penn Warren stated:

> A myth is a fiction, a construct, which exposes a truth and affirms a value. It is not an illustration of doctrine. It differs from allegory in that its components, not to be equated with anything else, function in their own right. It is the dynamic truth, the dynamic value […] Myth represents a primary exercise of sensibility in which thought and feeling are one: it is total communication. (96)

Understanding this mythic level, Ransom knew the necessity of nostalgia in articulating how progress would embody the hard-earned lessons of his Southern ancestry. These lessons, formulated in relation to both the physical place and the memory of that place, were the basis of Ransom's duality.

While Ransom's definition works to restore historical traditions, it is also a rejection of *tabula rasa* constructs of the present. The "clean slate" is not a sustaining myth; it defined tradition *in vacuo*. As the community progresses, the past is overtaken by that which will improve, but ultimately, destroy the original myth. Credence is lent to each new myth, or, more accurately, "fantasy" of progress, while the old traditions are left to wither. The foundation of the "nostalgia" Ransom saw in his critics, devoid of a sustaining tradition, is the true sentimentalized vision of life. The progressivist's concept of community, without the sustaining myth, is ripe for the continual commodified traditions of Industrialism. In this "tradition," the only acceptable and existent "past" serves an aimless advancement. Yet, Ransom's concept of "nostalgia" is the spoiler, "defining […] civilization as the continual struggle for discipline, self control and order […]" (Malvasi 19). Relegating Ransom and the Agrarians to an Old, and therefore outdated, South (and here outdated could easily read "regressive") the critics unwittingly fall victim to Ransom's skillful deconstruction: they [the progressivists] expect all of the evils to disappear when we have bigger and better machines, and more of them"

("Introduction: Statement…" xli). Ultimately, the "bigger and better machines" could be easily replaced with "bigger and better traditions." Yet, these traditions were mere constructs of a system, given its endless drive towards the perfected future, requiring the continual creation of fantasy. Existing as fantasy, these creations sustained neither tradition nor community. In comparison, Ransom's arguments seem decidedly less "utopian."

Commenting on the Nashville Agrarians, the *Macon* [GA] *Telegraph*, the paper in which editorialist Coleman Hill called *ITMS* "a high spot in the year's hilarity" and a "book of humor," ("In My Opinion" 8A) ran an editorial based less on comprehension of *ITMS'*s philosophical argument than a malicious distortion of Ransom's supposedly heady nostalgia. As Hill writes:

> …[T]he Neo-Confederates want supremacy to rest on the head of a stately old plantation owner with chivalrous intentions. They desire horses and buggies and music boxes to replace automobile and radios. They want huge Georgian plantation homes with well-filled slave quarters to take the place of suburbs and industrial villages. They want plows and hoes to take the place of looms and cards […] They pine for a return of the agrarian civilization and its crinoline embellishments […] We marvel that there is such a group alive in the South today. We wonder at the spectacle of a group of intelligent people who thus resolutely cling to a past that is so hopelessly outmoded. (Hill "Lee We Are Here" 8A)

Thomas D. Mabry, reviewing the volume for *Horn and Hound*, noted that the tide of industry was, despite the concerns of the South, and "indeed the world," an inevitable conclusion, one that required management, not evasion. Mabry states:

> [I]t is not a difficult matter to disparage these essays as a weak literary nostalgia[,…] as the question is not so simple as these men would make it. It is fallacious to think of reviving an historical mode of life which has no spiritual significance for the majority of the people, whose social and economic inheritance grows increasingly urban. It is not a matter of whether we want the South, or indeed the world, to become industrialized—we are sure we do not want it—but evasion is useless. (437-38)

While some critics were flippant in their dismissal, many bordered on malicious. Treating Ransom as an archaic taskmaster, bent on reducing the South to a Paleolithic existence, Henry Hazlitt presented Ransom as a typical fundamentalist. Beginning his review with a shot at Southern provincialism, Hazlitt employed figurative language to thinly veil his regional bias: "The twelve Southerners who contribute to this symposium figuratively take down their old muskets and intrench [sic] themselves along the Mason and Dixon line, ready to shoot anything that looks like industry heading South" (48). Despite an obvious disdain for the volume as a whole, Hazlitt reserved the brunt of his assault for Ransom's "nostalgia." For Hazlitt, Ransom epitomized the nostalgic Southerner, a pariah who "is not only against Industrialism […, but also] the ideal of Progress itself" (48). Attempting to explain Ransom's position, Hazlitt's argument becomes a slippery slope reduction. For Hazlitt, Ransom's opposition to Industrialism's philosophy was the nostalgic disease of the contemptuous "regressive." Hazlitt writes:

> [I]f Mr. Ransom's fears of Progress had always prevailed we would still be in a savage state—assuming that we had at least accepted technological advances as flint and the spearhead. Mr. Ransom may reply that he is merely proposing to dig in and stop progressing now, which, we may be

> confident, was precisely the position of the conservatives among our Paleolithic ancestors. It is obvious that this book is, in the main, the rationalization of a nostalgia for ancestral ways rather than a rational approach to real problems. (48)

Again Ransom's understanding of nostalgia was decidedly more complex than the critics could comprehend.

Far from fearing progress, or even industry, Ransom presented nostalgia as a philosophical element by which the traditionalist may judge what effect a religious devotion to purposeless "progress" will elicit. For Ransom, nostalgia was the basis of careful consideration, the standards by which individuals must comprehend not only the impact of progress on the immediate, but also on the sustaining myth of a community. Commenting on this position, Ransom would note: "The South at last is to be physically reconstructed; but it will be fatal if the South should conceive it as her duty to be regenerated and get her spirit reborn with a totally different orientation toward life" ("Reconstructed…" 21-2). Closing with this comment regarding a "different orientation life," Ransom reasserts the necessity of nostalgia in which present actions are based upon and judged by the only other known quality, the past. Again the critical distortion is immense; the reviewers ask why the "neo-confederates" refuse progress, but fail to understand the reluctance to sell traditions on the basis of speculative futures. Ransom's definition is rooted in the communal traditions carried by a sustaining communal myth.

As Mark Malvasi notes, "Ransom did not mindlessly repudiate reason, science, or even industry. Rather, they questioned the messianic cults of rationalism, scientism, and industrialism" (19). In extending Malvasi's definition, the "cults of rationalism, scientism, and industrialism" call for progress deemed successful only when unnecessary ties to the past are cut. Ransom's disdain, not "terror," of progress is not based in a

regressive, Paleolithic savagery. Rather it questions what ends progress will achieve. If Hazlitt defines "savage" as that which is in accordance with nature, then Ransom may be, gladly, guilty of savagery. For Ransom, man's "progress" is only measured as such when it respects the connection and balance it shares with nature. The "gospel" of progress and the fantasy of Industrialism's utopia are founded on a mastery over nature ("Reconstructed…" 7). This mastery is in direct conflict with Ransom's Agrarian philosophy. Ransom's nostalgia is rooted in a sense of balance noticeably absent from the industrial proponents. As Ransom notes:

> In most societies man has adopted himself to environment with plenty of intelligence to secure easily his material necessities form the graceful bounty of nature. And then, ordinarily he concludes a truce with nature, and he and nature seem to live on terms of mutual respect and amity, and his loving arts, religions, and philosophies come spontaneously into being; these are the blessings of peace. But latter-day societies have been seized—none quite so violently as our American one—with the strange idea that human destiny is not to secure an honorable peace with nature, but to wage an urelenting war on nature. ("Reconstructed…" 7)

Despite Hazlitt's assertions, Ransom's "nostalgia," rooted in an understanding of nostalgia's dualistic role, seems quite tranquil compared to the potential savagery of Industrialism's progress. The critics read Ransom's gaze, arising from a traditionally regional perspective, as a backward, politically oppressive glance, but this is far from accurate. Ransom and the Agrarians "never intended politics to define their undertaking. Their principal concern was with the spiritual condition of man in the modern world" (Malvasi 19).

John Crowe Ransom's philosophy emanated from a tradition that was neither "backward" in its gaze nor sentimentally elegiac in celebrating its "nostalgia." Connecting with a tradition which was, as Lytle has noted, "threatened but still in existence," (They Took Their Stand: The…117) Ransom was participating in a tradition of Southern protest. Maintaining a focus on principles and ideas, and how they forged an understanding of the humane tradition of the Agrarian South, Ransom's philosophy of "the Agrarian life is neither a going back nor a going forward" (Davidson "The Mystery of the Agrarians" 9). As Donald Davison states:

> It has nothing to do with the illusions of progress or decadence, it knows nothing of the straight line. Life is a timeless cycle, not a line, and the agrarian life establishes man within that natural cycle, where he belongs. (Davidson "The Mystery of the Agrarians" 9)

As the religion of "Progress," and its literal manifestation, Industrialism, began a deracination of the Southern landscape, Ransom presented a philosophy neither terrified of industry nor terrified of science. Ransom's objections were directed at Industrialism's undefined, endless cycles of "progress." Ransom's position was a call for a rational, philosophy challenging the dependence on a system that professed a blind commitment to an eminently alterable, but forever distant, future. For Ransom, a considered life required one to examine the misfortunes of a future based solely on its dissolution from the past. In presenting the philosophy of Agrarianism, one based on tradition and myth, Ransom sought one concession: "If people are to lead a really human life, [… they] must not be grossly antagonistic to the pattern and end of human life itself, as life" (Davidson "The Mystery of the Agrarians" 9). Yet, as their critics all too frequently prove, few were able to understand this position. As Cleanth Brooks, in his essay remembering Ransom, notes:

> The Agrarians never questioned the ability of a technological society to produce goods for the consumer but were much concerned with the bearing of a technological society on the nature of a good life. They asked that we consider what the good life is or ought to be. (151)

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

As this examination has argued, Ransom's philosophy was comprised of complex and considered observations on the history, customs, and myths of the Southern people. While focused on the individual, Ransom's philosophy was celebratory of the balanced life. Carefully deconstructing the modern subjectivity that gave rise to a hyper-individualism, Ransom offered a tradition by which objective relationships to fellow man, community, and communal myths are given credence. While Industrialism and the gilded promises of "Progress" celebrates the commodification of nature, leading man to a position of master, Agrarianism seeks balance. This balance is a truce; and in this truce, man establishes a communal bond with the land.

Ransom's position celebrates the traditions of the landed society. Arising from the balance man seeks in his relations, the Agrarian philosophy calls for a formation of kinship, not mastery. As Cleanth Brooks notes:

> Man was at last coming to control nature. Here again Ransom had something to say. The exploitation of nature implicit in industrialization was disastrous to the good life. Mankind, of course, has to make use of nature. Indeed, had to prey upon nature. Even so, man must indulge in no rape of nature; rather his relation to her should more nearly resemble a marriage involving love and respect. (152)

With kinship developed through "love and respect," as with all deep, lasting bonds, Ransom saw nature as the catalyst from which man began a contemplative existence.

Neither driven by the desire of dominance nor harried in his leisure, the Agrarian sought a balance from which the quality of his life was measured. This tradition of balance, forming the contemplative existence, was transmitted by Ransom's sustaining myth.

In looking for a tradition embodying their beliefs, Ransom had to look no further than the traditions that shaped the Southern traditionalist's consciousness. In these traditions, he would find a communal history governing man's relationships to the world. Constructed as both defense and celebration, Ransom's philosophy operated from the Agrarian model of stability. As Mark Royden Winchell states, "Because the society of the Old South was stable and hierarchical, it could be both homogenous and pluralistic at the same time" (142). As Ransom knew who these people were and what they believed, they were able to "live in harmony with their neighbors" (Winchell 142). Ransom's philosophy articulated the history of a harmony with nature.

Ransom was connecting rhetoric and myth, and from this connection, he sought a complete vision of life. From this vision, Ransom articulated the dangerous promises of ideology (Bradford xii). To borrow the words of M.E. Bradford, "Ransom's philosophy is the normative preference for […] order insulated by affectionately remembered history and custom" (xii-iii). This insulation in history and custom seeks to provide a tradition outside of devotion to ideology. Ransom's myths were neither fantastical nor fictional; he was offering a living tradition. The Agrarians measured every system of living "by its human product and its approach to the norms of community" (Bradford xiv). The humanity of these norms, their living sustenance, was transmitted through the communal myths. As M.E. Bradford notes:

> For it is by myth more than by principle or prudence—more than by ideology or rhetoric—that a society lives most durably: lives out of its own essential resources. Moreover, a people are shaped and restricted by how they conceive of themselves in corporate myth. (xv)

The myth provided for the community, as it provided the sustenance of a collective experience. Industrialism could only provide the fantasy of "Progress." Lost in systems, plans, and methodology, Industrialism could only dictate function, never purpose. Transmitting how and why a people lived in harmony, the Agrarian myth defined purpose. As George Core astutely comments, "The Nashville writers did not invent the myth: they seized upon its availability and its vitality. The myth was a common property that could be inherited by their generation of Southerners" (298). Yet Ransom's philosophy, connecting to the traditions and myths of the rural vision, was dismissed as nostalgic and, as one reviewer contemptuously noted, "sentimental tommyrot."

Failing to see the living, sustaining tradition out of which Ransom's philosophy was constructed, critics missed the philosophical bent of the volume. The Agrarians argument was never explicitly political or economical. Their realm was that of ideas and principles. Through this focus, the Agrarians addressed a concern beyond that of the literary pastoral. They addressed the contemplated life, while presenting the Southern traditions that supported such an existence. While critics portrayed their offerings as neo-confederate sentimentalities, the Ransom and the Agrarians proved acutely aware of their time and audience. Any critic who knew the Agrarians as Fugitives would have realized that nostalgia was not necessary—because the "local color" artists had already portrayed the glittering "moonlight and magnolias" fantasy of antebellum culture. Ransom

understood that, while the sentimentalist had sought refuge in a fictional construct, the critics had overlooked the Southern "forgotten man," the yeoman farmer. Large in number, firm in their relationships, and respectful of the land from which they drew their livelihood, the yeoman farmer fostered the traditions called forth in Ransom's philosophy. Critics wanted neither tradition nor myth, and, in their quest for practical programs and processes, they became a mere extension of Industrialism. Questioning the practices of *ITMS*'s reviewers, Fred C. Hobson, Jr. comments that in "judging [*ITMS*] only as a practical solution to Southern problems," critics missed the philosophical "plea for a traditional society" (171). Donald Davidson, recalling the volume's history, would note:

> [ITMS] was not a handbook of farming or economics. It was not a rhapsody on Pickett's Charge and the Old Plantation. It was first of all a book for mature Southerners of the late nineteen-twenties, in the so called New South—Southerners who, we trusted, were not so far gone in modern education as to require, for the act of comprehension, coloured charts, statistical tables, graphs, and journalistic monosyllables, but were prepared to use intelligence and memory. ("'I'll Take My Stand': A History" 304)

Forsaking the reductionism of the applied sciences, Ransom constructed a philosophy that sought communal and artistic integrity in a society of individuals who did not distinguish place from purpose. The Agrarian philosophy, as articulated by Ransom, allowed men to participate in the "full spectrum of [their] human condition" (Malvasi 54). The Industrial system, however, offered no such reward.

The industrialist longed for the narrow perfection of those ideas, beliefs, and pleasures that were revealed through analysis and efficient production. Obsessed with this mastery, Industrialism refuted or dismissed that which persists in inefficiency. For Ransom, the community, based on tradition and myth, persists in the intangibles that defied analytical classification. In denying this classification, the community longed for that which existed outside of industrial immediacy. The philosophy of Industrialism worships its own constructions—its "end products"—but as tradition and myth cannot be produced, they must be created through a sustaining belief that defied immediacy. Based in a belief that old machines, with their old problems, could be replaced and perfected by new engineering, Industrialism required constant deliberation and adjustment. Understanding that man is fallible and that analysis must give away to faith, the Agrarian knew that a community must sustain itself by the knowledge of the whole. Interestingly, in defending the whole, Ransom's philosophy was criticized for lacking practical specificity. Surrendered to the Industrial philosophy, reviewers consistently failed to notice the philosophical treatise. Yet this was not a struggle that would end with the *ITMS*'s critical reception. Offering a position that was so markedly distinct in its consideration of the humane life, the Agrarian philosophy proved to be a catalyst for continued debate, both literal and literary.

During the 1930's, Ransom would continue to develop and articulate his Agrarian philosophy. As part of this defense, Ransom would participate in a series of formal debates concerning the Agrarian way of life as opposed to the Industrial or American way. Ransom's opponents—he would debate Stringfellow Barr twice and William S. Knickerbocker once—argued the inevitability and necessity of a controlled acquiescence

to Industrialism. Refuting this position, Ransom, through a presentation of his philosophy, articulated the merits of the Agrarian tradition to the crowds. As Keeton notes:

> Man is a bundle of senses and he must feed them first to become a real person. He gets poor food in industrialism. Walks, machines, streets and noise are abstractions. He needs to actually touch stone, earth, and wood to know the infinite variety of nature. (5A)

While no reviewer ventured to announce a winner, Ransom met the charges of his critics directly; and, in articulating the philosophy providing a foundation for *ITMS*, he proved that his efforts were not that of an "armchair," "typewriter" Agrarian. Rather, his was a defense of beliefs. As T.D. Young notes in his biography of Ransom:

> Many years later Ransom would refer to these debates as larks which he thoroughly enjoyed because they gave him the opportunity and his colleagues a very pleasant way of presenting their views to the people. He had […] hoped that these five occasions on which important issues had been discussed before interested and often enthusiastic audiences were illustrative of the revival in the South of 'its old and nearly vanished genius for honest and forthright public argument.' (*Gentleman*… 227)

After *ITMS*, Ransom's participation in the Agrarian movement would diminish in volume, but not in spirit. While many critics have cited his later works as representative of his shift away from Agrarianism, few have realized that his literary criticism and poetic aesthetics were shaped by the philosophy articulated in *ITMS*. Still seeking the vision of order by which man may understand his life and relationships, Ransom

continued to develop a literary aesthetic that encompassed and perpetuated the spiritual sustenance of man. Noting his movement from essay to poetry and literary criticism, critics argued that Ransom had become focused on the self. For a current articulation of this position, see Mark Malvasi's comments on Ransom and the "bourgeois conception of self." However, Ransom's movements did not affront his Agrarian philosophy. While poetry and criticism are constructions of the self, they are constructs tempered by Ransom's efforts to revitalize the traditions and myths from which his poetry arose.

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