

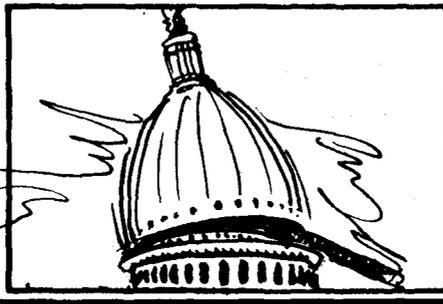
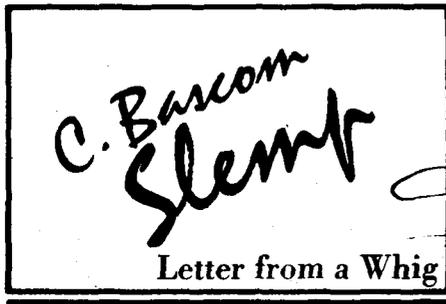
in them days, us niggers didn't know no better."

Yetman has supplemented these reminiscences with a fine essay on the history of the Slave Narrative Collection, with an even-handed discussion of possible bias in the selection of ex-slaves to be interviewed, with a description of how he chose these narratives for this volume, and with photographs of almost painful poignancy. There is also an appendix listing each interviewer on the project and his race, a valuable aid to assessing the reliability of these reports. If, as students of public opinion polling have demonstrated, white interviewers still lead black respondents to distort their reported attitudes, one can imagine the effects on ex-slaves in the South in the 1930s. One should be rightly skeptical of a report like the one (quoted in *Lay My Burden Down* which concluded: "...all in all, white folks, then was the really happy days for us niggers." The camouflage taken on in slavery times was apparently

still functioning two-thirds of a century after emancipation.

Of course these narratives are not without their own drawbacks as evidence on the experience of slavery. As the editor of another collection of ex-slave testimony reminds us: "The passing of the years, the early age of witnesses at the time, and the bitterness against the institution of slavery might be arguments against the historical accuracy of everything which follows," and, moreover, the reader must beware the tendency to remember the unusual rather than the mundane. Even outright fantasy sometimes appears in these accounts. By and large, however, a discerning reader can weigh the whole of an individual narrative and arrive at some judgment of the narrator's credibility and reliability. A surprising proportion of these narratives are coherent, detailed descriptions of life in slavery, recorded as delivered by those who knew it best.

John Shelton Reed



Jean Westwood and the Mob

(WASHINGTON)—George McGovern's defeat on November 7th weakened the very foundations on which his party stands. The results cannot be viewed simply as a personal defeat for him, but must be seen instead as a popular repudiation of the new Democratic party and the philosophy behind it.

For forty years the Democratic leadership has been able to count on the South, the poor, and the laboring man. In addition, national and local Democratic candidates could almost always rely on the loyalty of the various ethnic blocs that dominate many crucial states.

But they can't anymore. The erosion began in the early sixties and reached a high point four years ago when millions of normally Democratic voters deserted their party to vote for a third party candidate more to their liking — or for a man who had for a decade been viewed by most of them as representative of everything wrong with the Republican party.

Thus, the signs were there in 1968 and at least a few people read them correctly. Analyst Kevin Phillips, for example, began writing and talking about an "emerging Republican majority" and White House political advisors began trying to figure out how to appeal to dissident Democrats in the South and elsewhere.

Whether Richard Nixon's strategists and managers could have done it alone

is debatable, but as it turned out they didn't have to. George McGovern's people arrived on the scene as if ordered up by Nixon's people themselves to help shatter the old Democratic coalition and drive millions of confused but normally Democratic voters into the President's hands.

The seriousness of the situation in which the Democratic party now finds itself is apparent from an analysis of last November's election results. The President polled millions of votes that have never before gone to a Republican candidate. Unless the leaders of the Democratic party can do something about the inroads he made they are likely to find themselves in charge of an empty shell with little support outside Manhattan except in urban ghettos and on college campuses.

The results tell the story. No Republicans had ever won majority support from America's Catholics, but Richard Nixon carried 56 percent of them this time. He polled 65 percent of the Italian vote, an increase of 25 points since 1968, and carried this important ethnic bloc for the first time.

And, nearly 5 percent of those voters who went for Wallace in 1968 cast their lot with Richard Nixon this time.

These results must have shaken McGovern's managers as well as those interested in the future of the Democratic party. They represent both a repudiation of McGovern radicalism and a disquiet-

ing willingness to abandon partisan allegiances of long standing.

The fact that traditional Democrats were able to hold on at the state and local level can't even have eased the pain for the true believers. Many of them won only because they vociferously disavowed McGovern and his policies — and others made it because of a low turnout which — this time — favored Democrats. Had the President personally been more popular and if he had really gone after Senate and House seats, the results might have proven even more disastrous for the Democrats.

As it is, they must live with the knowledge that Democrats willing to cross over at the national level today might well elect Republicans at other levels tomorrow. This is precisely why many "traditional" Democrats are fighting so desperately to take the party back from the radical fringe that seized it in Miami. They know that if they don't, things could get much worse.

But the traditionalists won't be able to take it back because the McGovernites aren't about to give it to them and they hold most, if not all, the cards.

The party then is in a real box. McGovernism has apparently been repudiated, but McGovern's people are in control of the party. They control the national committee and the machinery in many states. They may be willing to accept cosmetic changes like the replacement of an identified radical such as Jean Westwood at the chairman's level, but they are not about to abandon control of the party they fought for and won between 1968 and 1972.

And they aren't about to sell out their principles either, for they are — as has already been noted — true believers. They would like to win, but some things are more important to them than winning.

They will compromise only to the extent that they might fall in behind someone who agrees with them, but gets along with the Richard J. Daley's of the world. Edward Kennedy, of course, is such a man.

And the traditionalists — less wedded to principle than the desire to wield power — could go along with him because they see Kennedy as a man who can win in spite of his views on the issues.

The irony is that they appear to be right about Kennedy. He has managed during the course of the last several years to stake out for himself a position far to the left of a majority of his colleagues in the Senate and his supporters in his party. Indeed, on many issues he can be found somewhere to the left even of George McGovern.

But he might be able to win in spite of himself if he can cloud his positions on the issues and ride on the family name. The Republicans and his enemies within the Democratic party, on the other hand, can be expected to try to pin him to his positions — to point out publicly that he and McGovern represent the same wing of the party. If they can succeed Kennedy and his party will both be in serious trouble.

For the President appears to want to force the issue. He and his people are

already talking about a "new American Majority" and seem intent upon consolidating political gains made on November 7th both by putting together programs specifically designed to appeal to this majority and by reducing or eliminating "bloated government bureaucracy."

If there is a strategy directed against Kennedy, then, it might make sense for the Republicans to force him to stand

up in the Senate as a defender of the Great Society welfare programs that have led to so much dissatisfaction within our society. Should this happen and should Kennedy emerge as a defender of the discredited welfarism that sunk McGovern, the President will have successfully removed a major roadblock in the way of building a "new American (and, incidentally, perhaps Republican) Majority."

Book Review:

Metaphors of Self

— The Meaning of Autobiography

by James Olney

Princeton University, \$12.50

However dull, however tedious, however uninteresting our own, about the lives of others we are insatiably avid of facts. Hence the timeless allure of even atrociously poor biography, with its too smoothly-spinning narrative, elephantine length, and seemingly inexhaustible supply of facts. We salvage all — bits and scraps of clandestine letters, rumored peccadilloes, the itineraries of foreign travel, tales of chronic dyspepsia (and worse), yellowing laundry tickets, the glittering repartee of evenings now only half-legibly inscribed in mouldering journals, countless dates, events both memorable and trivial — hoping to draw from such collections as these a metaphysical (if ultimately deceptive) comfort, hoping against hope that somewhere amid this hoarded debris we may discover the secret unity of self, that substantiality and solidity of personality so plainly evident in the lives of others, and so despairingly elusive in our own. On these grounds even the worst biography pleads extenuation. The attraction of bad biography is best exemplified by a famed nineteenth-century biographer who, lamenting the ubiquity of grossly sentimental, commemorative biographies with which his countrymen pretended to reverence their dead, was forced to concede that however painful to him their "lack of selection, of detachment, of design," so far as the common reader was concerned, "their ill-digested masses of material" really did comfort and console. For no matter how short such hack productions seemed to fall of the ideal of biography — a lucid disclosure of the shape of self by "compressing into a few shining pages the manifold existences of men" — they could still offer the minimal consolations of fiction: sharply-etched characters and effortlessly unfolding plots surrounded by a reasoned universe of order, limit, and finitude, and these in surprising abundance.

Unquestionably, autobiography affords us no such easy consolations; it neither blandishes nor reassures. From the start, its aim is wholly divergent from that of biography, if it is not its generally acknowledged antagonist. Biography samples real life deliberately through the

wrong end of a telescope: it distances and simplifies, selects and omits, clarifies and solidifies. Autobiography reverses the focus, redirecting the instrument at ourselves *from within*, obscuring if not blotting out entirely our characteristic social selves which are visible only externally — appearance, gesture, role, class, and speech — and thus bringing our personalities under our own introspective gaze. Suddenly, our solid identities begin to dissolve into handfuls of words, tags, and empty labels which try in vain to capture and fix our own sense of unique particularity. Having lost hold of our sense of solid identity because we no longer view it from without, our self seems to come disconnected, to multiply into an array of selves as we search helplessly for a thread on which to rejoin our past and future. Freud regarded these symptoms as a form of hysteria, citing the case of a woman who obsessively complained that "it was as though her life was chopped in pieces." Strikingly similar is Samuel Taylor Coleridge's allusion to men who "have ceased to look back on their selves with joy and tenderness. They exist in fragments." More recent is the query of D.H. Lawrence, foreshadowing our preoccupation with role-playing, identity crises, and transformations of self: "I am many men... Who are you? How many selves have you? And which of these selves do you want to be?" But in our time it was Jean Paul Sartre who, though caught up in the extremities of his own case ("I am cast out, forsaken in the present: I vainly try to rejoin the past: I cannot escape") realized that in fact these symptoms occur universally, are part of the basic human condition. He went on to imply that, paradoxically, relief for the common man lay in a careful avoidance (however damnable from another point of view) of the autobiographic impulse to introspect, to become increasingly self-conscious, and at least a possible acceptance of a contingent self, a self immersed in process, a self definable only as continuous change with no constitutive core and no stable past. He well understood that the more we employ "biographical optics" (looking through the wrong end of the figurative telescope) to ponder the order apparent in

the lives of others, the more liable we are to feel cheated by our own.

Introspection and instability exist, at least for most of us, in direct proportion to each other: by focusing on distant goals and ends we can avoid at least partially the uncertainties of the present. Momentum is all — to pause is to falter. The reflective glance, the examination of self is an invitation to doubt, paralysis, disaster. For most of us, the best life is that lived in placid disregard (if not outright defiance) of the classical exhortation: "Know Thyself!" Most importantly, however, Sartre conceded at least implicitly that "pure" autobiography was impossible and that a pitched and uninterrupted awareness of the flux and change of our lives, our bodies, and our existence would prove a nightmare beyond description. For this reason, all autobiography may be said to harbor an internal and irreconcilable conflict: trying to fulfill its theoretical aims of introspection and self-scrutiny while at the same time trying to satisfy our urge to become detached spectators of ourselves — to view ourselves both from a vantage point outside our bodies (as others view us), and outside the reaches of time itself. Autobiography becomes flawed by the inexorable human desire to escape into a world of fiction. And perhaps the chief consolation which fiction alone affords — a lucid disclosure of the shape of self by "compressing into a few shining pages the manifold existences of men" — may help to explain the timeless magic of biography. For like humanity itself, autobiography in its fallen state aspires to the condition of biography.

This far-reaching insight and its consequences for psychology, philosophy, and aesthetics is among the central tenets of James Olney's *Metaphors of Self*. A brilliantly conceived, immensely detailed, and eloquently written account of the nature and meaning of autobiography. "For it is impossible," Olney begins by quoting the words of A.M. Clark, "for a man to get out of his skin." Indeed, that would be the same as "an autobiographer (trying to give) a view of himself from without." And grounded in this remarkable observation is the critical distinction that Olney succeeds in drawing between two "large and loose groups" of autobiography: on the one hand, "autobiography simplex" or "autobiography of the single metaphor," and, on the other, "autobiography duplex" or "autobiography of the double metaphor." Autobiography simplex, the first group, might equally well have been dubbed autobiography as valediction (or autobiography as farewell), since into this category fall autobiographers (Olney dwells at length on George Fox, Charles Darwin, John Henry Newman, and John Stuart Mill) who regard their "autobiographic perceptions" as taking place *ex post facto*, often celebrating and pondering repeatedly the single outstanding event or occurrence responsible for the radical disjunction of past self from present. Each of these men, dissimilar in so many ways, were yet alike in that "all, in one way or another, tried to get out of their skins, tried to separate entirely their former from their present