

On *Down In My Heart*

—William Stafford's search for lost landmarks—

Yorifumi YAGUCHI

1. During the second world war, there were poets who went to war ; some were recruited and the others volunteered. Some didn't believe in holy war, but others, perhaps, did. But while participating in the war, some poets experienced the tragic bitterness of it and began to have a critical spirit. Randal Jarrel and Karl Shapiro are examples.

But there were also poets who denied the war and did not participate in it. They generally became CO's. William Stafford explains the situation,

There is an intricate background to understand about U. S. C. O.'s ; if you were willing to accept "noncombat" work in the military you were called (at that time, using a designation in the draft law) "1 A O," which meant noncombat work under the draft. If you would not accept any kind of military assignment but would register under the draft law, you were called "IV E"—I was under that designation, as was Wm Everson.....⁽¹⁾

He says that most C. O.'s were "IV E"—serving in "alternative service," which usually meant Forest Service, or Soil Conservation, or perhaps some kind of social service.⁽²⁾ And there were many CO poets during the war. The CO poets who are now well established are Robert Lowell, William Everson and William Stafford.

According to the law, only religious objectors could be recognized as CO's, though there were exceptions. William Everson explains :

In 1940 when France fell, the draft was instituted here although the country had no expectation of going to war. The law allowed for conscientious objection based on religious conviction, categorically defined as membership in one of the "three historic peace churches." Actually, individual draft

(1) William Stafford's letter of Aug. 20, 1974.

(2) *Loc. Cit.*

boards applied it more broadly.⁽³⁾

Historic peace churches are the Quakers, the Mennonites and the Brethren. Everson continues:

— the Quakers were the most favored by nonconformists because they were the most liberal. The Mennonites were the most disliked because they were the most conservative. The Brethren camps were ranked somewhere in between, and that's what I found myself in at Waldport.⁽⁴⁾

William Stafford is a Brethren poet and was in the Brethren camp. *Down In My Heart* is the record of his own experiences as a CO during the Camp. How he felt, how he thought, how he acted, how he observed, and how he lived with others are beautifully described. He says in the Introduction;

Many of us were alienated from our families ("I came not to bring peace, but a sword...") and from wives or sweethearts ("There's something about a soldier..."). We were picked up by ones and twos and shipped away to old CCC camps and the joint care of a church agency and a government service, like the Forest Service or the Soil Conservation Service.

What this paper tries to do in the following is to pick up a few important themes from *Down In My Heart* and to try to see William Stafford's view of war and the State as a CO poet.

2. How did American citizens in general look at CO's? This is most vividly and representatively described in "The Mob Scene at McNeil." William Stafford went to the CO camp in January, 1942. It happened in the Spring that year. On March 22, which was Sunday, he was enjoying Sabbath calm with his CO colleagues, George and Bob, in a town called McNeil, Arkansas.

Bob was painting a water color picture; George was scribbling a poem in his tablet; I was reading off and on in *Leaves of Grass* and enjoying the scene.

(3) *The San Francisco Poets*, p. 79.

(4) *Loc. cit.*

On Down In My Heart

It looked peaceful, but suddenly they found themselves surrounded by the towns-people.

About eight of the townsmen gathered to look over Bob's shoulder as he painted. His subject was a dilapidated store across the street. The men were cordial and curious. I asked them questions about their town. The only time we were abrupt was when they asked where we were from. "Magnolia," Bob said, and quickly changed the subject to their baseball team. One of the onlookers edged up behind George and looked over his shoulder, while George went on with his composing and revising—unheeding.

I went back to my book, and I'll never be able to remember whether I was reading, when it happened, "Come, I will make the continent indissoluble...."

I looked up. The onlooker, a handsome young man, well-dressed, and with tight skin over the bridge of his nose, had snatched George's poem and was reading it.

"What's the idea of writing things like this?" he challenged. "If you don't like the town, you haven't any right to come around here." I was familiar with the edge on his voice. He knew we were CO's.

There were some exchanges between this man and themselves upon George's poem and Bob's painting, and then, this young man "spoke, not directly to us but to the other townsmen, some of whom had drawn nearer, about our being CO's." Then they began more mutterings with much hatred. He continues:

There was more muttering, in which we began to hear the quickening words—"yellow" and "damn." At first these words the men said, about us, to each other; then the faces were turned more our way when the words were said.

Indeed, to the townsmen, the CO's were "yellow" and "damn." And then, their words turn into concrete actions. "A short, strong man broke into action, went to where Bob was still sitting, and grabbed the drawing board." There were some more exchanges, and then, some spoke of "stringing them up." And as to George's poem, one says that it was *information*, and the other says that Bob's painting must be for a foreign power.

Such an hysterical enmity against the CO's is not found in the mob only, but also in the common people and among Government officials

also. To them, the CO's and the enemies of the USA are almost equivalent. In the chapter THE BATTLE OF ANAPMU CREEK, he says in connection with the Forest Service,

The Forest Service was going to send a spike camp of about a dozen men back into the chaparral, into the back country; and the foreman was to be Eric Kloppenburg, a big, rough, tough hater of Germans, Japanese and CO's.

The hatred of policeman for CO's is realistically expressed in his words about George, who ran away from the camp and was captured;

Here's a dirty yellow bastard who wouldn't fight for his country. Anyone who wants to bust him—go ahead.

The following quotation from THE EMBERS OF A FIRE is a very ironical description of the situation in which CO's were.

Our companion was a prisoner, a Filipino doing the fifteenth year of a life term. He scratched his head, kicked disconsolately at the fire, and said,

"I killed a Jap too, but I guess it was out of season." The decorated one looked at him with a sad expression and said, "No fooling, is that what you're up for?"

"That's what I'm up for," said the little fellow. "But if you think that's funny—here's a guy," and he indicated me, "who's up because he refused to kill Japs."

CO's were treated like this perhaps because they wouldn't fight for the US and kill the enemies. The people became fanatically nationalistic and militaristic. They couldn't bear the existence of dissenters. Stafford quotes a slow-talking preacher who says in connection with the mob scene,

I know you men think the scene was funny, in spite of its danger; and I suppose there's no harm in having fun out of it; but don't think that our neighbors here in Arkansas are hicks just because they see you as spies and dangerous men. Just remember that our government is spending millions of dollars and hiring the smartest men in the country to devote themselves full time just to make everyone act that way.

Because of such acts of the Government, Stafford seems to say that something essential and important disappeared. He says "The country we had known was gone, had completely disappeared" (Introduction).

On Down In My Heart

In the name of holy war, in the name of defending freedom and the "consecrated country," the Government freely manipulates the opinion of the majority, changes their thinking at its will, and thus tries to tyrannically control the people. Freedom is taken away. The State thus becomes totalitarian. The people become dangerous to the dissenters. There is no love on the part of the people, even though they may attend church Sundays. There exists only a hatred against the enemies and the CO's in favor of their country and the Government. The country and the Government become their idols, for which they pledge their loyalty. Thus, through describing the enmity against the CO's, Stafford reveals the nature of the States and the US Government.

3. a) In the Introduction, Stafford says;

Those of us who objected openly found our country conquered overnight—conquered by aliens who could shout on any corner or in any building and bring down on us wrath and hate more intense than on any foreigner.

And surrounded by these aliens, they felt themselves aliens. They felt like aliens when they were surrounded by the mob in McNeil. Describing themselves in the camp, he says that they are homeless in their own society. (p. 37) They were born in the US and they live there as citizens, and yet they feel they are homeless. They can't feel kinship with those who support the war. And they continually feel like aliens all the while they are in the camp as CO's. And this "alienness" reaches its climax when the US wins the war and the people are intoxicated with the pleasure of victory. Looking at them rejoicing, they feel like strangers. Those scenes are alien to them. It is their war. It is their victory. It has nothing to do with CO's. Stafford describes the scene as follows;

Crowds hurried past on the sidewalks, smiling, crying, being jocular, speaking to strangers, speaking to the world at large. And we stood there, from the mountains, from exile, and merely looked on.

"Why don't we feel like doing something?" I finally asked. "Aren't we glad the shooting's over?"

But George points out the reality.

“But how long will it be before all the soldiers still alive can come back?” George reminded. “Before there’s no more fighting anywhere, no more intimidation of people in their own homes by strange uncomprehending men in foreign uniforms with foreign money?”

“Anyway—” Del began.

But George went on: “No more forcing of unwilling boys far from home to remain in their barracks among the glares of the citizens, to defend institutions they hate against people they love, to stand guard over men who are where they belong, doing the jobs they need to do, trying to build a way of life for themselves?”

“Isn’t it, after all,” Del contended, “worth cheering about—that the shooting is over?”

George shrugged and looked at the cars going by. “How can we join in the celebration of the atom bomb?”

We fell silent again, and then walked along the streets, following the crowds. The noise and the paper maintained their intensity, and the sidewalks became more and more crowded. We drew off by ourselves to a place on the post office lawn, where we stood and watched the winners of the war. It was their war, and they had won it.

b) But Stafford was not entirely desperate. Even though their home was gone because of the war, they knew all the time that they were not foreigners and that some day the landmarks would emerge again (cf. p. 8). And he found a home, some landmarks in the CO camp. He says;

—we delighted to find them, in miniature, in individual relations with the government officials over us...

Those landmarks that had made us a part of society we discovered to be certain elements of fellowship that we came to value for ourselves and for others—all others; and we looked for other human beings everywhere and for fellowship. When we found it in bits here and there we hoped for it again, and analyzed it, and traced its antecedents and consequences. Down in our hearts we found it and wanted to protect and promote it as something more important than—something prerequisite to—any geographical kinship or national loyalty.

This book is written in the search for the landmarks. The people in the camps are realistically described; their agony, their conscience, their deeds, their relationships to non-CO’s, and their fellowships. In the stories of how non-violence worked on Eric, a big, rough, tough

On Down In My Heart

hater of Germans, Japanese and CO's, of how they worked together, of how the CO wedding was held, for example, it seems Stafford finds the landmarks, which had disappeared outside of the Camp. For the CO's, home was in the fellowship and the working together for the common good under the reign of God. It's interesting to notice that he quotes Bosanquet's words on the The Kingdom of God as a preface ;

All that we mean by the kingdom of God on earth is the society of human beings who have a common life and are working for a common social good. The Kingdom of God has come on earth in every civilized society where men live and work together doing their best for the whole society and for mankind.

They are the citizens of the Kingdom of God, and not of the States, though living in it.

4. To CO's, any war is wrong. And any country which engages in war deprives citizens of their freedom. Such a country is totalitarian. This view is clearly seen in George's remarks on the war and the States ;

"But how long will it be before all the soldiers still alive can come back? — Before there's no more fighting anywhere, no more intimidation of people in their own homes by strange uncomprehending men in foreign uniforms with foreign speech and foreign money? — No more forcing of unwilling boys far from home to remain in their barracks among the glares of the citizens, to defend institutions they hate against people they love, to stand guard over men who are where they belong, doing the jobs they need to do, trying to build a way of life for themselves?"

CO's oppose any kind of war, any kind of killing and any kind of warring government. And they oppose them in a legal way. They do not take up guns, but go to the CCC camp and work there instead. It's a program of alternative service set up by the American government.

However, there are some CO's, who are dissatisfied with going to

the camp only. They are represented later by George, who became dissatisfied with Camp life and decided to leave there.

George had sat down at his typewriter, looked at the wall in that straight way of his, and rapidly typed out a letter to the Attorney General outlining his reason for leaving Civilian Public Service: a precedent for slave labor, not a place for constructive service in crucial times, a dictatorial program administered, in spite of the wording of the law, by military men.

George chooses the path of complete refusal to take orders. It is a radical way of protest. It is, as it were, rebellion against the Government itself and the States. "Everything that had happened to George in punishment for his attempt to do constructive work had strengthened his conviction that he was right to rebel," he says. This naturally means imprisonment for George. He is captured and put into prison, but there he "rebels," too.

He had been sent, because of nonco-operation, to a more strict prison. This time he had gone with a committee to try to get the warden to end racial segregation in the prison. The warden had said: "Yes, it's all right for CO's and your friends to try to make these reforms while you're here; but you won't be here forever, and when you leave I'll be left with the job of administering a nonsegregated prison with prisoners who want segregation...."

Even after Stafford was freed, George continues to walk the radical way, which helps us predict the emergence of such Jesuit poets as the Berrigan brothers, who are radical protesters and poets. He describes such a George as follows;

And the last time I heard of George I read about him on the front page of a paper in San Francisco. He and about ten others were on the fifteenth day of a hunger strike, protesting the continued imprisonment of men who would not kill and the continued drafting of men for the purpose of killing. George had been in solitary confinement for several months. The warden was ready to begin force-feeding--when the men's health made it necessary.

5. The CO's found a truth which otherwise they couldn't have found; the nature of the States, of the Government and of the war's effect upon society. They also found that they were the aliens in their home country, that all the landmarks were gone, but that there was a home, a

On *Down In My Heart*

home in the fellowships and working together in the camp. *Down In My Heart* is a record of these.

He believes that the landmarks which disappeared used to give security to an insecure people. Their insecurity makes them less willing to be responsible for others, and therefore more lonely (cf. p. 9). Thus, his purpose in his works is to search for the restoration of the people. Criticism of the government and the war comes from the same root. Both destroy the landmarks. They destroy people.

It seems that his later works are the continuation of this search for landmarks. There are a number of his poems directly or indirectly related to war, such as "Watching the Jet Planes Dive," "Aunt Mabel," "Report to Crazy Horse," "Widow Who Taught at an Army School," and "B. C.," etc. There are, of course, poems which criticize the destruction of nature. It seems that all these poems as well as others are related to his quest for landmarks.

This book is written in a prose form with some poems at the beginning of some chapters. But as Dan Jaffe suggests, each episode and each scene is poetry.⁽⁵⁾ And to quote Jaffe, "*Down In My Heart* is clear, unpretentious, graphic, and rhythmic. It suggests both Robert Frost and Ernest Hemingway."⁽⁶⁾

Bibliography

Stafford, William. *Down In My Heart*. The Brethren Press, Elgin, Illinois, 1971 (Third Printing)

Meltzer, David. (ed.) *The San Francisco Poets*. Ballantine Books, New York, 1971

French, Warren. (ed.) *The Forties; Fiction, Poetry, Drama*. Everett/Edwards inc., Florida, 1969

Letter to Yorifumi Yaguchi from William Stafford, 20 Aug. 1974

(5) *the Forties*, p. 46.

(6) *Loc. Cit.*

On *The Children's Hour* by Lillian Hellman

Ikuzo TANAKA

Lillian Hellman states that the theme of her first play, *The Children's Hour* (1934), is good and evil. She shows how an irresponsible lie leads two young women teachers to a tragic result. What aspect of evil is it that she describes in the play? The lies the protagonist, a fourteen-year-old girl, tells are rather harmless and do not cause any adverse affects. But the situation turns out to be serious when the rich and influential grandmother swallows the whole story made up by the girl. We find a horrible influence by a person of power who gives ready credence to slander. The thesis the playwright applies is not on an ethical but a social level.

On *Down In My Heart*

—William Stafford's search for lost landmarks—

Yorifumi YAGUCHI

William Stafford was a C. O. during the second world war. He had to spend his years in a C. O. camp, where he experienced bitter enmity toward C. O. 's.

This paper tries to identify W. Stafford's views of the States and his own "nationality" through analyzing his C. O. experiences described in *Down In My Heart*.