

**THE MAN WHO SLEPT WITH WOMEN:
JOHN WILLIAM CORRINGTON'S *SHAD SENTELL***

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For an established novelist to experience the difficulty that John William Corrington did in his effort to publish *The Man Who Slept with Women*, a towering opus of 1892 pages of holograph, marks the sad state into which American letters have fallen since the late 1960s. When a novel of magnitude must be pared away to insure its sales, it is time to consider that a form of economic censorship has pervaded yet another freedom which artists in this country used to take for granted. The saga surrounding *The Man Who Slept with Women*, or rather, what remains of it, is a blatant example of art succumbing to the excessively high cost of publishing.

The author, a distinguished Southern novelist, began to write this third volume of a trilogy which he had begun with *And Wait for the Night*—a civil war novel of the Sentells published in 1964—in 1980. It had been gestating in his mind for years; it was ready to be put to paper, even though he was planning to write the middle book, to be titled *Under the Double Eagle*, last.

We are fortunate that the author, who died on Thanksgiving Day, 1988, left a journal in which he recorded his thoughts on various subjects ranging from trivial observations to political philosophy, nostalgia for Shreveport, his boyhood home, NFL and USFL football, business trips for script conferences on the several TV soap operas on which he was head writer, and most importantly, his commentary on the writing of *The Man Who Slept with Women* and his struggle to publish this epic of Shreveport.

After returning from an "emergency" meeting in New York concerning problems with the scripts for the soap opera *Texas*, Corrington's entry for 6 September 1980 is devoted to the discussion of a novel, his first since publishing *The Bombardier* some ten years before. "The next substantive question to be considered," he writes, "is what I'll do next. I'd like to do a novel, but I'm not certain the emotional impulse is there. I've mentally put aside *The Man Who Slept with Women*, because it hasn't generated the emotional energy yet that a novel demands."¹

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¹ John William Corrington's papers are housed at Centenary College, Shreveport, Louisiana. Permission to quote from the Corrington journals has been granted by Joyce Corrington.

Although his thoughts seem to end on the subject, he quickly resumes: "But I'm not thirty now—I'm not even forty. I can't write a novel from the kind of hypothesis that I could fifteen years ago. I can withhold my critical faculties, but I can't shut off my insight—or lack of it—regarding the 20th century."

Expanding on his critical faculties, the entry continues by addressing a subject—the source of his writing—that preoccupies him from time to time.

The problem with knowledge and experience is that, sooner or later, you tend to take it seriously. When you do, it begins to chip away at the mythical structure out of which you create.² Maybe it was Law School—though I don't believe it—that began to rupture my own hold on a mythical world from which I could draw the energy to write large-form fiction. Maybe it was simply living with Joyce whose chronic disbelief drained away my belief because I made the error once, long ago, of falling in love with her. Or most likely, it is simply a function of age—assuming one is not a permanent adolescent.

Following these negative thoughts, he ends the entry on an optimistic note, revealing the name of a man who had a profound influence upon him and from whom he drew the inspiration to temper his work, anchor his philosophy, and organize his thinking. "Somehow," he writes, "along the line what one picks up intellectually *has* to seep through and influence one's most profound emotional life. Thank God I came across the work of Eric Voegelin. It has preserved my faith and my sense of a reality above and beyond the criminal idiocy of the late 20th century."

Almost a month passes before Corrington writes the next entry from Atlanta, where he has gone to participate in a "focus" meeting with selected viewers of the TV drama, *Texas* for which he serves as head writer. The function of the meeting is to talk with these ordinary people and obtain, through their attitudes and feedback, information which will be useful in determining the shape of future episodes of the show. Concerning his serious work, he says, "I wish I could make a living doing five or six stories a year, and a novel every two." Knowing what his schedule has been for years, he assesses the situation objectively and concludes:

Not possible. I don't say what anyone wants to hear. But I think I'll simply strengthen my austerity, and tell stories even harder, more

² For a fuller treatment of this subject, see Lloyd Halliburton, *North Louisiana: A "Mythological Construct" in the Fiction of John William Corrington*, 1 (3) *North Central Style* 44 (1990).

traditional. What I want to leave behind is a body of work which sneers at liberal ethics, and possesses a certain barbarous quality. I have not found "civilization" a thing much to be sought after or advanced. Because those who seem to like it seem to me to be degenerates. It is the antique virtues I love and want to memorialize. Today they are rare.

There is no question that Corrington's attitude toward society, toward "civilization," is that of a modern Huckleberry Finn spoken out of the mouth of a resurrected Mark Twain, and is in keeping with the finest traditions of American literature during a golden era of letters of a still young nation.

Having finished correcting proofs for *The Southern Reporter*, a collection of stories, brought out by LSU Press in 1981, Corrington again turns his attention to the novel with an entry on 25 November 1980. "I have to get past *The Man Who Slept with Women* which has been inside in inchoate form too long to toss aside. It can be good and useful to get on to the next one. . . . If I can just do it on a solid regular basis, using the story—revised—as a basis." Corrington does not identify the story, but it is obvious that he is referring to "The Man Who Slept with Women," the lead story from *The Southern Reporter*. Parts of the story are used verbatim in the opening pages of *Shad Sentell*, the excised version of the novel published by Congdon & Weed, and which was cannibalized to a length accommodating a book which could be sold to the public for \$15.95.

The entry continues with commentary that details the models on whom the characters Shad and Sonny are based: "Shad is fully developed in my mind. Sonny is not. I think they be [sic] Sam Lachle and me: that would be good. I'd like to leave a memorial to Sam. He deserves it. Even at this remove, his memory is warm and good. His friendship was immensely important to me."

Thanksgiving Day fell on 27 November that year. All of the immediate family, Joyce, his wife, and their three sons, John, Robert, and Thomas, were present, except for Shelley, the oldest child and only daughter. There had been an estrangement; she had chosen to go "her own way."

A few days later, on 1 December, Corrington, in a reflective mood, muses on the source of the novel, Shreveport, and his youth there. "I find I dream and daydream a lot of going home to Shreveport," he writes.

Maybe that's how dying feels: the urge to return to what we sense as the source. For better or worse, that is Shreveport. I was unhappy there a lot [a secret even his closest friends, Frank Jones, Jack

Halliburton, and myself did not know], and happy. But most of all, I managed to find myself a place. Centenary College was a large part of it; Otis and Sam³ and others, too. What people need most of all [is] a place of their own that they can respect, and which offers some sense of stability. I've been fortunate in seeing a good bit of the world, and even some of the flashy life of California and New York. Not for me. It's all right once every month or so, but it's an amusement, a diversion—not a life. I used to think I was an exceptionally lazy person, but I came to realize that it wasn't sloth—it was the need for contemplation, for dream-time. Reading, creating stories in my mind, playing through them: heroic, romantic, ending at some point of rest. The human spirit needs such time. Fishing was enough of an adventure; a walk in fresh clean woods enough for realigning my senses with the reality of God's world. *Shreveport was never all these things, but I have sculpted into it all that I would have had it be* [emphasis mine]. What it was and still is, is a place where people knew and acknowledged me. Even now, I expect, there are those who remember me without fondness, but they remember me. . . . as I do them.

The next day, Corrington describes the qualities of his principal character, Shad Sentell:

I've been thinking again about the novel. Should it be 3rd person, 1st person—or a mix? This is always an important choice. The ultimate character of a piece of fiction springs from distance between events, characters, and the reader. In Shad's case, I think we need first person, since feelings, his motives, are more important than the objective events in which he is involved. One comes to like Shad for his honesty, his animal spirits. He lives his life without props—in the sense of stage props. Shad will do almost anything for anyone, but you mustn't expect anything from him. He always does what his work demands of him. He is the complete pro—and it gets him killed. But he rejects any proper social role. In those areas, he is not a pro—he is an inventor, an explorer. His sexuality is a personal possession. He would subscribe to MacIvors's [?] response to every want.

Q. Haven't you ever found a man who could make you happy?

A. Sure. Lots of 'em.

There is no further entry concerning *The Man Who Slept with Women* until the end of the month. Corrington's thoughts show him involved with the problems in Poland, the impending Soviet intervention,

³ Otis Finch was Corrington's next door neighbor on Unadilla Street in Shreveport, Louisiana. Sam Lachle, identified by Corrington as his best friend, did not meet Corrington until after high school.

the black reaction to Reagan's cutting of social programs, the soap opera rating wars, the fate of the humanities, Aristotelian and Hebraic philosophy, his earliest memory of his own consciousness while he was sitting in a window-box in his family's apartment on 128th Street in Cleveland, Ohio (the city of his birth), another business trip to New York, and his views of the contempt which he believes the North holds for the South. He has obviously done very little work on his novel. An excerpt from an entry on 29 December reveals the despair brought on by commitments of the year now ending:

Here, in the dark guttering end of the year, I look over another year dedicated to making money and little else. It is depressing to always be looking to a time when I can study and write again, knowing that that day may never come. Still, this is simply the darkness at the end of a cycle. Another is about to begin, and it seems that some things may be better. I look forward to spring and summer. Perhaps I'll find the time and spiritual energy to start another novel.

Little does he suspect how depressed he will become and how utterly wrong his thoughts really are. As the future unfolds, they will prove to be contrary to fact. "I suspect," he concludes, "it would be easy to find a publisher now. Especially if we choose to go with William Morris for representation."

On 30 December, he notes that he is suffering from a strange throat ailment associated with a painful yeast infection. In spite of the pain and the depressed state of mind which afflicted him the day before, he writes that he has

done a rough outline of *The Man Who Slept with Women*. Looks absurd on paper as an outline. That's all right. There'll be another draft, and then artistry will begin: to recreate Shreveport, and bring Sam Lachle back to life in a role he would have surely loved—*Don Givanni*. Perhaps I will find in the writing some portion of what I loved back home there. How can I bring some sense of the stature of that world alive again? To me, it was like Poland today: life at the edge.

Corrington's intention to recover the past through Shreveport strangely echoes Michael Reynolds' assessment of Ernest Hemingway's *A Moveable Feast*. "At the very end," Reynolds points out, "he went back to Paris in his mind, which he knew, was the only way to recover the past, to redeem, revise or exorcize memorous time."⁴ Corrington chose the same ship for his journey.

⁴ Michael Reynolds, *THE YOUNG HEMINGWAY* 226 (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1986).

Some five months pass into the year 1981 before anything else pertaining to the novel appears in the notebooks. On 22 May we see

p. 1250 of *The Man Who Slept with Women*. My back has been bothering me the past few days. Possibly from sitting long spells writing. Went to bed early last night, and I expect to get in a good full day today. It's a little hard to say how many pages to go, but I would guess 300+. Then we'll go over it, page by page, since it's filled with inconsistencies and false paths. Plenty of work ahead.⁵

The next two days reveal consecutive entries on the novel's progress. The first, on 23 May, shows only the notation, "p. 1300." The second, for 24 May, begins, "p. 1325," and then narrates the activity of the previous day. "A long slow Sunday after a day off yesterday," which explains why only the page he reached appears. "Peter Cangelosi came by, and we went to Charlie's [Steakhouse] around six. I had worked till 3.30 a.m. Friday and was worn out. It was good to break for a little while. Now I think I'm probably ready for the last shot. About another 300-400 pages will likely do it," he predicts. "I expect reaching the end will be a surprise and a great sense of loss at the conclusion of a pattern of ideas and sentiments gathered over a number of years."

And with an optimistic but cautious attitude, he concludes, "I hope this will be the start of a long and fruitful period of work. I expect a lot depends on the reception of the book. Or, alternatively, some reasonably sure source of money. Given an income, I'm ready to settle down and write. Stories, novels, political philosophy."

Not surprisingly, the highs of the creative work level off and then descend to the gut-wrenching, tedious days that virtually every writer experiences. Three days pass and the entry for 27 May shows that Corrington has reached

p. 1368. And a slow period. Pushing back doubts, tackling the first E M Sentell⁶ monologue without really knowing him. I'm getting there. I went to sleep early last night, then awoke around 12, and found it going much better. More rewrite will be required, but I have come to see both E M and Shad⁷ more clearly focused through their mother. Jo [Joyce Corrington] suggested that Shad's subconscious motive is to give

⁵ It should be noted that Corrington does not mention the date that he began the novel.

⁶ The character is Edward Malcolm Sentell III, father of Sonny (E M IV), whose grandfather is E M II, the son of Major Edward Malcolm Sentell I, Major, C.S.A., who appeared in Corrington's first novel, *And Wait for the Night* (New York: Putnam, 1964).

⁷ Shad is identified as Sonny's uncle; later, we learn that Shad is his father.

every woman the love his mother did not receive. If E M knows this, and Shad doesn't, that would be all right.

Joyce Corrington, Bill's wife, obviously, has a lot of influence on his writing. The rest of the entry shows that Corrington feels the need to rationalize his position when rejecting her advice:

Jo objected early on to the mixture of tones in the book. I ignored that. But it is becoming either an awesome range—or a serious discontinuity. I'll have to take the chance. What am I supposed to do? Worry about the response of semi-literates? That's not worthy of concern. You cannot do serious work and worry about response. You *do* worry doing commercial work, but then that's why it's disgusting to have to do it. The real work gets done by doing it and leaving reaction to those who are paid to react. I am concerned about my mother's reaction. And I expect any chance I had to go back home will likely end when the book is published. But then what chance was there, anyhow?

On 28 May the entire entry consists, like that of 23 May, of a single, short notation: "p. 1385." The next day, however, Corrington writes, "p. 1411 and moving," and explains that he had been experiencing difficulty with the progress of the novel.

A bad couple of days with E M. Slow, uncertain, but moving now. I may divide the long section—probably a hundred pages by the time its [sic] done—into 2 pieces: one before the supper, one before he flies in with the chopper to take Shad out to the rig. Any how, I think it's going to go easier now in terms of creation. Revision is another matter altogether. I have been thinking of dropping out all the Cecil-Savior's Friends stuff, and having Cecil come alone to even it with Shad. I surely mean to revise more toward Cecil, having him reading something like *The People's Chronicle* between 1934-1960, horrified at what he has missed. Rip van Winkle with a sawed-off shotgun. All those decisions will be put off while I finish the book in hand.

The beginning of the month of June mentions that Corrington has reached

p. 1452. Going slowly but well. Risking an unfortunate image, I think I can see the light at the end of the tunnel. Maybe 300 pages away. I have to be careful not to be anxious to complete, and thus throw away good material, and rush an ending. I'm now at the scene where Mary-Clare is forced to reveal to Elvira that she is the mystery woman in Shad's book—and indirectly that Shad is Sonny's father—hence Missy's half-sister. It should be savored, not rushed.

The writing of the book is temporarily interrupted while the author and his sons drive north to the Jolly Roger Marina near Logansport, Louisiana, for a few days of fishing. It rained throughout the trip, and

the fishing was a disappointment. A decision was demanded on whether to stay, drive back to New Orleans, or go on to Shreveport for a few days. They decide to go to Shreveport. While in his old hometown, Corrington walked into his past and lived the memories evoked by familiar streets and houses of his youth.

Having brought the journal with him, he makes the next entry on 5 June from his mother's house on Unadilla Street. "I'm anxious to get back to the book," he writes. "It's taken up so much of my time over the last several months that I find it hard to get it off my mind. Especially since it's in the final stages." In addition to the lack of good fishing, he adds: "This vacation should have fallen between finishing the book and starting revision. But nothing happens the way you want it to."

While in Shreveport, Corrington looked up an old friend, Otis Finch who, when they were young, had lived in the house next door throughout their boyhood. Corrington's taste in friends was loyalty, not success. Otis Finch, having dropped out of Centenary, was drafted during the Korean War and was in the enlisted ranks until his discharge. He then managed to marry a girl from an old Shreveport family and seemed to be on his way up when he became an aide to Congressman Overton Brooks. Life was rosy until Congressman Brooks died. Otis returned to Shreveport to sell insurance, did poorly at that, lost his wife and sons to divorce, and succumbed to temptations of the bottle. Yet, the friendship remained a strong one, ending only with the author's death.

Corrington spent the next couple of days talking to Otis and getting caught up on Shreveport gossip before returning to New Orleans and the novel. On 9 June, there is a short entry that says, "p. 1472. Working again. I'm now in a section of the book that is chiefly movement, action, and it doesn't interest me much. But I hope there'll be moments," he concludes.

The next few days are spent tending to what Corrington hopes will be an investment in steel that will provide income and freedom to write. From his experience as a head TV writer, he summarizes the deal as sounding "like a soap opera."

Then, on 15 June, we discover that he has written almost one hundred pages during the past week.

p. 1570 and moving. I'm about to open what I expect to be the last pack of Schweggman's loose-leaf filler paper to be used on this job. I fervently hope so. I'm trying to save some stuff for the end, but I'm tired and slowing down. It's that I'm working too fast. And as a result, the book is thin and isn't holding my interest as well as it should.

The fact is, I'm reading *The Autobiography of Lincoln Steffens*, and am so preoccupied with it that it's hard to stop reading and write.

For all the work that he has put into the novel, Corrington feels that it is different from his other books, lacking a depth and philosophy. And though *The Man Who Slept with Women* is not yet finished, he is already thinking about the next one. Tired of the book, he struggles not to rush it through just to be rid of it. On 17 June, he writes

p. 1601. It goes slowly, but the end is in sight. Jo has edited the first 760 pages of the typescript and likes it. Says it moves fast, and the people are well established. Makes me feel like making one final concluding rush, so we can get it out to a publisher.

In an abrupt change of subject, the entry shifts to the possibility of his work being made into films, an idea that he had never seriously entertained or sought before.

I've gotten letters asking for copies of *The Southern Reporter* from Paramount, Lorimar, Rearguard, Moonlight, and other independent producers. The chance of a film coming from *The Southern Reporter* are slim and none. We've also sent copies of *The Actes and Monuments* along. Somewhat higher chance there. I don't write for films. I never did. I never will. To do so is to reduce the quality and intensity of the work to a level at which it ceases to be of any consequence at all. One had as well write children's books as write books with an eye on film. Having said so much, I feel *The Man Who Slept with Women* could have film possibilities. It is thinner than my other books, easier, less driving. It may cause controversy, but it has neither philosophical nor spiritual depth. It's a jock book. Which is all right, if I don't get in the habit. Well, I already have some notions for the next one, so let's get this one done and out on its own. Once I'm done with a book, it's on its own. I didn't take it to raise. The literati and other vultures get their shot.

An offer as head writer for the soap opera, *Another World*, entices Corrington to travel to New York for a meeting with the producers. His entry for 18 June says, "It begins again. . . . Now I have to finish TMWSW [The Man Who Slept With Women] fast. I hate that pressure, but there was already something like an August deadline anyhow. Here we go. P. 1625."

The 20th of June is more of the same. Corrington is bitten by the "rush" bug.

P.1680. A long hot day, pressing to get a first draft done. With one more long good week, I may be able to do it. With the AW [Another World] work coming up, it's got to be done. The revision can be done in patches, but not the 1st draft. I'll lose some time tomorrow, but I can't stay on it all day every day. You go nuts that way.

Two days later, we read that he is up to "p. 1730, and moving nicely. I just reread some of the E M Sentell section, and aside from some dictional crap that must be fixed, it reads beautifully. Strong, taut, and moving on. I'll be glad to get it done and get it fixed and out of the house." Corrington's thoughts then shift to the future and the plans he has for additional creative work. These thoughts, however, must be motivated more from emotion than logic because he has just told us that he is in a hurry to finish the book in hand in order to accept a high-salaried contract as head writer for *Another World*. Nevertheless, he says,

I must have at least three or four more novels in me if this one gives me any reason to keep going. I should write a novel a year, and rest for six or eight months, and do it again for as long as I can. Worn out, but it's fun. So long as I don't have to mess with the literary crowd.

With optimism on his side, Corrington's entry for 25 June announces, jubilantly, that the manuscript has grown to "p. 1790." He has averaged twenty pages per day over the past three days. He adds, "Now the end is clear. Perhaps a hundred pages more. I've got them on the way to the rig. Fifty to seventy pages on the finale—and no more than ten to twenty on the epilogue. That'll be it."

When the novel is complete, another task will await him: the hard, uncertain work that all writers know is as important, in a different way, of course, as the initial writing is. "Then the revision," Corrington continues. "Jo keeps saying it won't take long. I keep saying she's lost her mind."

But first, he has to finish it. And his reflections over what he has done produces doubt and uncertainty. With the self-analysis comes a silent lecture on writing, and the closest he has ever come to a literary manifesto that we are likely to uncover.

Nothing I've ever written has felt so fragmentary, so like extended and detailed notes. It seems to lack the density of thought and feeling and perception I always try for. But then I always said I didn't want to perfect a style, because the creation of a style, like Cummings, Hemingway, Faulkner, carries with it the mortgage of limiting the material that can be successfully treated. Even a style as brilliant and polychromatic as Faulkner's carries this liability, and I never was willing to give up any potential story for the sake of sculpturing a style.

The analysis of his work is more than we expected; his criticism is amazingly detailed. The entry continues,

Moreover, I'm too lazy to watch myself as I write, and edit to some prior notion of sentence structure or point of view. Voices are forced too

close together. The thing becomes, however brilliant, monophonic. It becomes like writing from an ideological point of view: reality and the wild diversity of life becomes forced into a mould for the sake of form. That is disastrous.

Then he writes,

We have been striving for form since Flaubert at least. There's nothing wrong with impulse—so long as one controls it. Pervasive form can become as destructive as formlessness, however.

The materials should dictate the form. There must be a central intelligence which links the otherwise apparently disparate voices, actions, ideas, into a singularity—an expression that yokes experience together, not violently, but smoothly, because the central intelligence realizes the genuine unity beneath the cacophony evident on the surface. In a sense, that is the great formal principle, and it transcends style and makes style a matter of tactical convenience rather than a superficial substitute for form.

As he finishes his commentary on style, there is a sense of foreboding concerning the success of the novel, in the realization, perhaps, that a manuscript of such length has simply been written too hastily.

There is one more element in this alibi for avoiding a personal and distinctive style: the proper unwillingness on my part to allow the conscious mind to dominate at the initial level of creation. As this book is concluded, I expect to have a serious case of withdrawal depression. It's been enormously concentrated work—two or three years of normal writing crammed into four months.⁸ I wouldn't believe it if I couldn't look at the ms. The hand-written one is a foot thick. *I think speed is what makes me unsure of its quality* [emphasis mine]. I worked so fast that I've had no time even to look back, much less be critical.

Corrington seems here to possess a premonition of the problems he will encounter in publishing *The Man Who Slept with Women*. In the final paragraph to this entry, he writes:

In the revision, I may have to decide to withhold the book for now and type a final draft myself, page by page, if the writing is too sloppy. I don't want to do that. I want the book out and around. But if it doesn't work at the writing level, I don't want to publish it. I've had to make compromises over the years, and some I've made gleefully. But not with the fiction. The only thing that ever made me send out a book sooner than I might was sheer laziness, and the difficulty of concen-

⁸ From this statement, we must assume that he began writing the novel in March.

trating intensely on something that, for all its faults, had become real for me in the act of creation.

By 26 June, the manuscript has grown thirty-three pages and the entry for the day begins, "p. 1823." Corrington had written in previous annotations that not only was he aware that he was "rushing" the ending of the book but that he must resist the urge to do so, in an attempt "not to waste good material." His own description of the previous day indicates that he has been unable to slow the pace, so anxious is he to finish. The remainder of the entry reads, "By tomorrow it will be done, so far as I can see. I moved a little fast last night, didn't set up the atmosphere, the feeling of the Gulf sufficiently."

His need to finish, however, is not realized. The next entry is as optimistic as the one of the day before: "I think today is the day," he begins. "I had a long good evening after a nap, and have got Shad and E M ready to go up onto the rig. Another 30, 50 pages, counting the epilog? I want the blowup of the rig to have a degree of horror and awe that rivals the end of Moby Dick. It ain't easy. Anyhow, this is a first pass. You can improve with a little distance, a little time," he cautions himself.

Almost as an aside, Corrington digresses from his quotidian commentary on the novel: "We're going to fly to Houston Monday." As quickly as he broke away, he returns to discuss it.

Just a little break at the end of the novel. . . . Then back again, and revision begins. I don't know how much I can manage in a week, but I need a flying start, since the week after we'll be in New York, talking about AW [Another World] with Bob [Short] and Paul [Rauch].

But the revision must be done by 1 August. I want this book going around as soon as possible.

At last, on 28 June 1981, the gigantic task of writing the *opus magnus* is over: "p. 1892, and finished," he notes. The rest of the entry is subdued. The emotional energy spent in almost full-time writing at such an accelerated pace for four months has left Corrington with little to expend when writing the climactic entry.

I got done at almost exactly noon today. Jo has already suggested some changes in the last section which sound good, but that can wait. If I had the leisure, I'd let the whole thing rest for a month or so, but with the AW job in the offing, I think I'd better get this book revised.

Tom Bell read some of the first draft, and liked it. I wonder if I will. Ten years is a long time between novels.

True to his word, Corrington sets to work on the revision immediately. The entry of 29 June is devoted to assessing the problems to tackle

in the rewriting. "This morning we had our first discussions on revision," he informs us. "Jo's structural changes are excellent. The story seems to flow very well. There are sections that will call for additional writing, some needing to be somewhat recast, and of course a lot of dictional stuff. Otherwise the first book looks pretty good." He closes the entry with an interesting change. It says simply: "First, to recast the overture." He does, indeed. In a conversation at LSU in the early sixties concerning the importance of an opening sentence of a work, Corrington insisted that the first sentence *had* to be one that would be remembered, a sentence that "would hit the reader *hard*." As an example, he referred to "It was raining and it was going to rain," from his first novel, *And Wait for the Night*, published in 1964. The first sentence of *Shad Sentell* is verbatim. It was a sentence that he remembered, at least subconsciously, if no one else did.

Bill Corrington and Joyce fly to Houston on 30 June—"just a break, to see Charlie [Barzilla] and Garland [Clark] [Barzilla & Clark are Corrington's brothers-in-law] and Mrs. Hooper [and] to go have supper at the Red Lion," a restaurant which he and Jo frequented when they were students at Rice. His entry for the day covers the work done on the novel so far. He says, "I finished a new draft of the *Overture* yesterday, drafted a new first scene for Sonny, and got into revision of the body of the novel. So far, so good."

Between the end of the month and the beginnings of July, there are no entries. But he has been working. "I can't note progress of the revision by page numbers, because the restructuring has shifted everything," he writes on 3 July.

The 4th of July was a day for reading and reflection—not for work. On the 5th, exhausted, Corrington plows ahead. "Revision is going all right. But it's lucky I got done when I did. I think I was about played out. On *that* book," he says. It appears that the fatigue has more to do with the subject matter than with work *per se*. "I'm ready for another one, but the low comedy aspect of *Man* got old before I was done." He then launches into an analysis of the book he has just completed and, with all the revising, is able to see from a vantage point of a few steps away rather than from within it, as had been the case during its feverish creation.

Is it a *dramma graciosa*? I think so. Surely there are serious issues played squarely against farce. That is what I wanted. I doubt it will be recognized or understood—now. But a serious novel is not *for* now. It takes its chances with the future.

The invisible narrator is cold, brilliant, heartless. He sounds too much like Thackeray of *Vanity Fair* for comfort. But I guess he is

needed as a constant reminder that the book is not a printed version of *The Dukes of Hazzard*. The voices of the characters may make up for that, and provide balance.

The next entry is dated "7 July, New York." Corrington is in New York to discuss *Another World*, see his literary agent, Roslyn Targ, visit his sister Pat Wykes in Westchester, and buy a new short Rossini opera and the new Proust edition. "We'll have supper with Bill and Roz Targ tonight at Odeon, and hand over the novel to her," he writes. "The larger areas needing revision have been taken care of. I still have plenty to get done so I lash [?] my mind to the next one."

Upon returning from talking and eating with Roz, there is a notation, "11:55," before the last paragraph in the entry. It reads:

Just came back from supper. A nice evening. Roz was pushy as usual, but that's all right. Bill was a lot of fun. We talked about a lot of things, but not the novel. That would be premature. Bill makes a fine Martini.

After an afternoon discussing plans for the TV series, Corrington turns his attention to the marketing of the novel. In an entry for 12 July he says, "Meanwhile, Roz is presumably reading the first draft of the novel. I'm hoping another two weeks will see it completely revised and ready to show publishers. I want it pushed hard and fast, because the more they pay, the more they'll spend and work for promotion." Although contradictory to his stated view concerning writing novels with film in mind ("might as well write children's books"), he again dreams of TMWSWW being made into a motion picture. "I'd like to see the book work as a vehicle for Jo and Paul and I to do our first film. On location in Shreveport. What a blast that would be."

Following the "dream," an analytical, sentimental monologue covering why he created Shad Sentell and wrote a book about him, drawing the conclusion that what an artist does is done from love and that his creation springs from love, Corrington closes the note for the day. It is interesting in its entirety, revealing Corrington's state of mind and purpose, his intent, in the writing of *The Man Who Slept with Women*.

It has begun to dawn on me that my work may become recognized. If it does, I would want to use it as a series of monuments to those I have loved, and who have loved me. . . . I seem to be growing farther and farther from myself over the last few years. My own appetites are for music and work and books. The rest is the desire to render in some permanent form the objects of my love.⁹ But isn't art the purest and the best when it reflects a vanished artist, and a luminous object whose

⁹ Hasn't he done this with *The Man Who Slept With Women*?

sheen, the glory surrounding, is the living projection of the subject artist immolated as an ego, existing only in the patina of love which lifts the object out of nature and into that small transcendence of artistic creation?

. . . . Eliot was surely right: one wishes to lavish the gifts of personality on what one loves. This is not some form of selfishness; it springs from the artist's own sense of an immortality of spirit (*not* ego) to which he wishes to join what has given his own life its form and its meaning.

To love God is to want to talk to him, and of what would one talk except of what he loves?

On 15 July, Roz Targ has some suggestions for re-write. The entry provides the details and the author's reaction to them.

Roz called, having read the book, and made a few suggestions, mostly along lines easy to do, or of the kind we'd already considered.

I plan to reconsider the structure of book II carefully, pulling out pieces, condensing others. The Hotel and the Mardi Gras street stuff must be reduced, since Jo, Ros [sic], and I agree it's too much. One might be able to reduce it by 100 pages or so, and make the book run better.

Jo and I had our last look at the novel's structure today, made changes reducing the *Casablanca* hotel stuff, and taking into account Ros's [sic] comments. We should have a revised draft within a week or so.

The entry closes with thoughts on financial security and society in general. "I hate it," he says, "that our prosperity has to be dependent on my serious writing. No one can do his best work under the condition of seeking favor of a society gone mad. But one has no choice."

There are no entries for 16 and 17 July. On the 18th, he mentions still further cuts to the book and first doubts and uncertainty concerning the success of a novel that he has, for some time, known is too long for publication and which he portends will not garner sufficient interest for a quick sale.

About midway through the revision. Yesterday I completed the Shad-MC love scene. Now come the deep cuts in the comic material at the hotel. I got a nice letter from Bill Targ [Corrington's former editor at G. P. Putnam's Sons] saying he liked the book. But I'm in a more or less depressed condition over the failure of the AW deal, and I just wonder what kind of reception the book will receive. There are so damned many ideologues wandering around nowadays that anything you write invites a broadside from one viewpoint or another. Jo says the sex will turn off the conservatives, the violence will turn off the

liberals. It seems hardly worth writing any more, considering the lunatic taboos that hedge contemporary experience.

The depression and pressure of the revision collide with another self-assessment that borders on agoraphobia: "Sometimes I feel as if I am drifting away from life, moving slowly into a legendary and solitary plane defined by books and music, the great work of the dead."

Depression gives way to sarcasm and second-guessing about what the editors will think. On 21 July Corrington writes, "Revision into MC-Elvira confrontation over Missy-Sonny relationship. Going pretty well. We're leaving a little fat for the contingency of a jerk-off editor who just has to mess around."

He concludes the entry with another gloomy prognostication: "Moral, you can't write amidst ideological chaos. There's a monastic aspect to serious writing. Haydn-Mozart. Haydn lived long outside Prague; Vienna killed Mozart."

While in the throes of re-write, an emotional crisis relating to domestic harmony between Bill and Joyce erupts, creating yet another obstacle to the working environment already pressured by having no immediate job in the offing or current income. The entry for 23 July details some of this new interruption.

What concerns me now is that it seems likely that Jo and I may one day soon reach a point where parting will be the only sensible choice. I doubt she has loved me in the last 10 years. We almost parted in 1970, but I hung on through sheer manic determination to preserve my family at all costs.

To tell the truth, I wonder if Jo ever loved me as I understand love. I think she was fascinated for a while, but in fact she has never *loved* anyone.

The most recent outbreak of her hostility took place day before yesterday. We were swimming, and she suddenly said she wanted editing credit on the new book. I told her Max Perkins and Edward Aswell had never gotten such credit, though they took large chunks of Wolfe's manuscripts and made them into novels.

The upshot was she has stopped typing on the book, leaving it to me and John to finish.

It seems there is nothing of mine that she doesn't want to publically claim. I'm no Wolfe, and no one has made this book but me. Her organization has been excellent, but no more than Peter Israel did with AWFTN [*And Wait for the Night*].

How can there be love and a good life where scrambling for credits is at issue? I told her she could have solo credit on the next TV or film we do. That, it seems, is not enough.

During the three-day interval between entries, the anger subsided. Joyce had second thoughts and again turned her energies to helping Bill with the editing. "Jo has done a flip-flop, and has helped me finish with the revisions on the book," he writes on 26 July. "It is now complete, as of last night, except for the epilogue which is being wholly done over, and a last whack at the overture. Ideally, I'd want another few weeks to whack at it here and there. . ." Little does Corrington know, nor does he even suspect, what whacking there is to come when the book is finally accepted by Congdon and Weed. The haste continues in the work and in his mind as he concludes, "but I can do that [edit] while the Ms. is going around. I wouldn't have any enormous changes."

Contradictions appear in the next two entries, 31 July and 2 August. The first leads us to believe that the revision is complete. The second one shows that three more days passed before he had actually finished, due to a delay in work caused by visitors.

The revision is now complete—a week later than it should have been. My fault as much as Jo's—in that re-working the epilogue took more time than I had supposed. Also Charlie and Charlene [Barzilla] came over Sunday and left last night, and we wanted to make sure they had a good time.

Now I'm reading through, making small corrections. It'll go off Monday—one copy by express mail.

As mentioned above, the contradiction written on 2 August is as follows: "A dark rainy Sunday. I'm to p. 511 in final revision. I'll be done tonight or early tomorrow. It is an unusual book by any measure."

Corrington gets the manuscript off to his agent on 4 August. Now that the active work is over, a passive mood engulfs him, allowing for all the intensity spent in preparation to boomerang, his emotional impulses swinging into an arc of despair and lack of confidence in the fate of the book.

First copies of the Ms went off to Ros [sic] Targ today. What with the Air Controller's strike, they could be days getting there.

Now the wait begins. I don't know that I can do any better than this book, though I like to hope I can. I'd like to do better until I write the last one.

Not knowing that TMWSWW would be his last novel, his thoughts roam not only to the past, but to the future as well, to work yet to come for which no time would be allotted.

But I've been disappointed time after time. Everything I've written has fallen into a void. Perhaps it will emerge later, but I have no reason to suppose that this time will be any different. Why should it be? I guess

I have to get ready for any of the possibilities that may arise. With God's grace, I'll take success or failure with the same equanimity. I mean for this to be a productive decade, and to lay down the foundations of a permanent reputation. Not for pride's sake, though Lord knows that is in it, but because as Wolfe said, this is a man's work, and worthy of a man's dignity.

Several days of drifting through plans for other novels, contemplation over the use of the time remaining from the *Texas*¹⁰ royalties and the need to be productive while they last occupy Corrington's time until an entry on 15 August breaks the self-imposed silence of what has been happening in New York with *The Man Who Slept with Women*.

Word from Roslyn Targ as to the publishers she's sent the book to. I'm amazed that it seems she thinks I should know them. I am not in the writing trade! I never have been. I never will be. Whether the work is good or bad, I am a writer in the tradition from Hawthorne through Faulkner, dealing solely with "the human heart in conflict with itself." I will never acknowledge another goal, or betray what my predecessors have accomplished. Mailer and Styron can make all the bucks they want. I'm going to leave to my posterity the clean, unburdened fact of a man writing, seeking the truth like the pre-Socratics of the prophets did.

It is like breathing cold winter air to dedicate yourself once more to this thing. I want for my companions in eternity, besides all those I have loved, the men and women who wanted to say it all—at whatever price.

While he waits for word from New York, another entry describing fears, self-doubt, the effects of ageing, and worries in general appears on 20 August.

Still sweating it out. No word from Roz on the novel yet. I begin to think I've never had the experience of writing a novel before. All the rest has been prelude—or something. Very tough. Sign of advancing age, sense of insecurity? I think it's mostly a question of fearing that I may not have the time, the leisure to go on to the next book, and the one after that. I worry that I may have to practice law again, or find some crummy job to keep going. I guess I'm ashamed of this anxiety. I'll manage it. I always manage these things.

Corrington is in no mood to compromise his standards and pervert his art for the sake of commercial convention. The entry for 23 August

¹⁰ *Texas* was the soap opera that Bill and Joyce created together and where Bill was head writer for a time.

is written with this burden of helplessness flowing from the stylus of his unhappiness as the wait for news increases his frustration.

I feel good about the book [*Down to Ilium*¹¹], but fear it could be as long as *The Man*. I don't want it to be, but I'm going to write the book the way it is, not for some commercial reason.

Still waiting for word on *The Man* from New York. Monday will be the third week's beginning. It is hard to wait for word which is so important to the family's future. If the book brings in good money, we may not have to concern ourselves with TV or movies again. That would be terrific. I want to be free to do serious work, and not have to worry about crap—except for a little extra money. But just now I can't wait. I have to go on with the next book.

The days dropped off the calendar, one page after another, an endless trail of paper measuring the helplessness of more emptiness. The entry of 28 August epitomizes the nothingness of his reward: "Friday, and still no word on the book." The remainder of the entry enumerates taxes to be paid, investment strategies, and actually brings to mind Ernest Hemingway's paranoia when he thought that he was being hounded by the I.R.S. and the F.B.I. during the days preceding his suicide.

Eleven days pass before the next entry, 8 September, provides a continuation of the negative reaction that *The Man* has evoked in publishing circles.

Things haven't improved. Ros [sic] Targ sent a raft of rejection letters on the novel: Simon and Schuster, Harper, Random House, St. Martin—the stupidity was uniform and monotonous. The bottom line is a huge hatred of Shad. Eunuchs despise normal men. There are plenty of presses yet to try, but I have no sense of impending success.

He is less than objective about the reception of the book, blaming liberal politics and the media, and presumably explaining the book's troubles on the Democrats; that somehow taking *their* frustrations out on him will avenge their losses at the polls. His shifting of responsibility for his own lack of success is evidently more than a clue to the depth of his personal wounds caused by the rejection of his book thus far.

I guess I hadn't fully taken into account how many enemies a book like this would necessarily have. They've lost the White House and they've lost the country. But they still have control of publishing and the media. And they hate the burgeoning new South and Southwest for

¹¹ Although he was writing the book after finishing *The Man Who Slept With Women*, it was to have been the second book of the trilogy on the Sentells.

having pushed them into a position of cultural irrelevance. "Smokey and the Bear" is okay—But not a Shad taken seriously.

I spoke to Beverly¹² about the possibility of LSU publishing the book. The length took her aback, which irked me a little, in that she is much too smart to suppose that a work of art can be cut to size.

If things don't look up in New York, I may have to submit to LSU and take my chances. Meanwhile, I'm going back to DTI [*Down to Ilium*]. I'm not going to let the Yankee scum demoralize me.¹³ That would be absurd. If I can get several novels circulating, one may help the other.

Another discouraging day is recorded in the entry for 10 September. There was little hope before, but the new entry shows that, if it is possible to calculate, there is now even less.

Today is the day Roslyn has set for the second round of publishers to report on the novel. It's almost noon, and no word. What with all this and a deep chest cold, it's been a long time since I have been so depressed. It seems hopeless. What's the good of trying to write well and honestly when only bullshit makes any impression? Publishing has always been commercial, but now it's ideological as well. Cliches and gimmicks and left-wing causes, or forget it. I can't write that crap. I'd fall asleep on the page. I begin to wonder if there's any hope at all, or any reason to continue writing when it seems no one wants my work.

Two more days bring no good news. The entry for 12 September is a realistic assessment of the New York market, the LSU Press, and his own psyche as well. "The entry above is horse-shit, the result of a deep chest cold and possibly senile dementia," he writes. "We spoke to Roslyn yesterday, and it's true she had no good word. Jane Rosenman of Dutton, who apparently has become a giant of literary criticism," he says sarcastically, "was 'disappointed' by the book. I will put all the rejection letters in this volume of the journal." But Corrington must have had second thoughts on doing this, because the journal entries do not include any of the publishers' letters nor does he quote from them. "Senator Hickenlooper said, mediocrities need to be represented, too," he writes with the attempt at humor failing to raise the statement above the level of an amateur stand-up comic.

¹² Beverly Jarrett was director of the LSU Press and the wife of Corrington's old friend, William Mills.

¹³ This negative attitude towards Yankees seemed to develop when Corrington was doing the research for his first novel, *And Wait for the Night* (1964). Although born in Cleveland, Ohio, he hid his Yankee identity by listing his native city as Memphis, Tennessee.

We'll be taking a copy of the book up to Baton Rouge this coming week so that Bev and Billy can read it "unofficially."¹⁴ I have a suspicion that LSU could be my last chance, and of course Bev has already mentioned the cost of a 900 page book. I find it hard to believe that the novel won't be published, but that's a possibility. The other possibility is that I might have to mutilate the book, cut it down by 300-400 pages.

What a prophecy! But Corrington underestimates the amount by 200 pages in his sarcasm.

I don't know if I can bear to do that. Maybe it would be better to let it lie and go on to the next one. Either way it will be painful. But not fatal. I've always worked well out of hatred, and my hatred of New York literati has become stronger than ever. I mean to ram my work down their throats, no matter how long or how much work it takes.

There are only two more entries in Corrington's journal for the rest of the month of September. Both, spaced half a month apart, are lengthy and filled with bitterness. In addition to his concern for *The Man Who Slept with Women*, his foul mood is intruding on his present work and causing a desultory effect upon it as his notes on 14 September show.

DTI goes rather languidly, partly because of my cold, partly because it's hard to get moving with conviction while the last novel is being savaged by one publisher after another in New York. But I'm getting my concentration back, and it's a good story. Who knows? Maybe I can make my protagonist enough of an intense, confused Jewish intellectual type to sell the novel to the first publisher who reads it. I find it amusing that many readers like Sonny. I thought him something of a wimp. Only his lurch for Missy made me like him. As I said in a note to Roz, all readers are agreed on two things: 1. I am a fine writer. 2. They are not going to publish me.

It appears that New York publishers now assume they know better what kind of book a writer should write. Commercially, I doubt they know shit; artistically, if one may still use that word, I'm quite certain they're utterly ignorant. Jo was surprised no one had mentioned the parallels with *Don Giovanni*. I just laughed. Those culturally illiterate bastards don't even know what a *Don Giovanni* is.

The word "culturally" apparently triggers a diatribe, for Corrington devotes the last paragraph of the entry to some caustic comments on the New York editorial establishment's lack of culture and his own recognition and production of it as a contrast, proving his superiority over the ones he believes to be ignorant.

¹⁴ See note 12, *supra*.

To maintain a culture, one does not simply work hard so that he can recognize the numberless terms and events, words, poems, tones, gestures, shapes, and so on that, taken together, form the bases of the culture. One needs to work with living tissue, to transmute bits of it so as to show a hitherto unexpected turn of meaning, or a new tone, a possible new attitude inherent in the material. This capacity, this feel for Western culture is what the jerks lack. The notion of finding an educated editor in New York today is foreclosed. Sooner look for compassion on Wall Street.

The same negative, finger-pointing mood permeates the entry for 30 September which is filled with analysis of the entertainment establishment, both publishing and cinematic, and covers the United States from coast to coast. It is decadence of this latter part of the twentieth century, as Corrington sees and feels it, that is responsible for the publishers failure to accept his novel.

"A long dry spell," he writes, "both the weather and otherwise. No takers on the book, and now Roz is in Europe." Corrington is referring to his agent's annual vacation, the month of October which she spends in Europe. The frustration of not being able to communicate with her only adds to the bad news he has already received from her. With Roslyn Targ away, Corrington takes matters into his own hands once again.

I plan to carry the book to LSU Press this week. I haven't looked past a rejection there. I guess it would be to hold the book, write another, and hope for the success of the second to force publication of the first Serious literature means John Updike's latest revelation regarding an anti-hero who was not worth writing of in the first place. The spiritual and intellectual vacuum now open and roaring, is drawing into it any small hope for reconstitution. All the talk of the New Right is meaningless while the media is in the hands of liberal decadence. It is still New York and Hollywood which determine what we will read and what we see—and between west coast coke-heads and east coast faggots, the future isn't bright. I suspect no resurgence of conservative *ideas* is possible now: simply a rash of conservative nervous responses, followed by . . . what?

He shifts gears, briefly returning his thoughts to the stalemate he is experiencing with *Down to Ilium*.

The new book is just waiting so far. I don't feel anything about it yet. I guess I should try a few stories, but I feel I *have* to get something done that will be published. I have to get established enough so I can do my work, because it *is* what I do, what I want to do, and maybe there's something to the notion of salvation through art. I doubt it, but what I don't doubt is that I chose this way to serve God long ago, and

it's scary to think that these Yankee pigs¹⁵ have the power to keep me from doing my work. It is no use to write if you can't publish—at least I don't think there is.

Still examining the problem he is having with getting *The Man Who Slept With Women* published, Corrington delves into the reasons he writes about the past that he knows and not about his own present:

I begin to wonder if I need to come closer to my own personal life in my writing. I don't think so, because the scale of meaning and significance has to be lowered by factors of ten if you do that sort of thing. Proust was wise and lucky, and the scale of the life he led was, after all, that of the *fin de siècle* [sic] ruling class society of Paris. My own world is somewhat constricted, though I prefer it that way.

No, what I need to do is to fasten on the definitive myths of the latter days of the 20th century. But I fear I couldn't do them. I don't understand the character—rather, lack of it—of this age, and what I do understand is so awful, so disgusting, that depiction of it is virtually foreclosed. Sodomy, child-abuse, murder of incredible kinds and of cruelty that rivals the Nazis and the Bolsheviks.

The month of October begins with a trip to Baton Rouge planned for the purpose of trying to place the novel with the LSU Press (where Corrington was well connected due to old friendships) and to seek employment where he had first worked as an academic.

Today [1 October] we go to Baton Rouge, novel in hand. I want to give it my best pitch, and then let it go. I am getting tired of the thing. I think I hate business (for myself) because it is repetitive and calls for lies and exaggerations to be told that are recognized as such by both sides and which reduce the value of relations.

I'll be seeing Lewis Simpson also, and see if there might be any chance for a place at LSU. I have little hope that there will be, and I'm not even sure I want to go back. But I *do* know that the *Texas* money is unlikely to hold out forever, and that an academic position is less awful than most alternatives. Of course, if the press publishes the novel and it should be successful, that would be a whole other thing. I suppose I could also see what's up in the polysci department, or even in the law school. I'd enjoy teaching legal philosophy.

¹⁵ See note 13, *supra*. This effort to show disdain for the people of the northern part of the United States was part of Corrington's affectation, and the way he presented himself as "Southern." This early writing shows him using the name William Corrington. He added John so as to become more "Southern," with the "redneck" double name, was to enhance his identity as a "good ol' boy."

Returning to New Orleans, Corrington sets down his reflections on the trip to Baton Rouge. The entry for 3 October shows that the grass was not as green as he had hoped it would be.

Nice visit with Billy [Mills] and Bev [Jarrett]. Gave the book to Les, and saw Lewis [Simpson]. Nothing at LSU in English, and it dawned on me when I sat with Lewis that I didn't want to go back. It's grim. It's no place to spend your life. Better TV for a while than academia for the rest of my life. I guess I shouldn't fret, but trust in the Lord to see that everything works as it should. He's given me a year to do the novel, and seems about to provide another paying job. I don't know if I can do the TV crap and still get anything serious done on DTI [*Down to Ilium*]. I hope so. Otherwise, I'll just have to do stories.

Nothing about the book is written in the journal for over a week, although there are entries on 6 and 8 October. Commentary on *The Man Who Slept with Women* has dropped from his thoughts as if they were lost in the canyons formed by the skyscrapers of Manhattan. The continuing dilemma surrounding the lack of success with marketing *The Man* causes Corrington to write a manifesto on fiction, probably prompted by the occasional self-analysis of his work and his thoughts on the purpose of his life. The entry appears on 11 October.

Fiction is not a statement; it's an evocation. In my fiction, I have *never* meant what I said. Even in the work which may seem unequivocal, there was always something more than, at that time, I supposed I meant. It has been said that I am an apologist for the South. The South does not, and has never, needed an apologist. Only those whose own spiritual reality has been constricted by their self-mutilation in the mode of the gnostic inflation, and who have consequently lost their own sense of sin and personal evil can suppose that the South owes anyone an apologia. Even the Russian nation owes such an apologia—to the world only because of their denial of the field of historical reality under God.

What my work really represents is the openness, the ambiguity, the vastness of the possibilities of human being in the mode of existence as it realizes itself in the South in my time [emphasis added].

Any work that deals with a certain place intensely is a celebration of that place. There can be a celebration of evil as well as of good, and it is in that acknowledgement of the two, the light and the dark in us all, singly and collectively, in total collision over time in that space that the intensity resides.

None of us who works out of the spirit can know what we have done. We make an approximate aim, do what we regard as our best, and the rest depends on the interplay between the symbols we create and the people encountering them in our books. Stripped of their

peculiarity, symbols may look quite different from the same symbols in context.

Many days and many entries pass with no further word on the whereabouts or the status of *The Man*. During this period, Corrington began work on what would become the novella, "Decoration Day," which he originally entitled "All My Trials." His entries outline the plot, character development, and a few speculative scenes that he discarded in the published version. This beautiful novella, along with a second one, "The Risi's Wife," was published by The University of Arkansas Press in 1987. This volume contains some of the finest prose Corrington ever wrote. It is proof that he snapped out of his depression and began to work at the top of his form, even though he remained bitter and disillusioned over the ongoing treatment of the novel in New York.

On 4 November, his entry reads: "The tyranny of length and east-coast publisher's faggotry can't be taken into account because then nothing is possible. Things are becoming difficult enough without one's cooperating in the disarray. I have to keep on working." Although indirect, this is the only reference to *The Man* in nearly a month.

The next mention of the novel appears on 9 November. "I received a letter from a Mr. Guttenplan of Pantheon Books praising *The Southern Reporter*. If I'm not mistaken, that's a house that's turned down *The Man Who Slept with Women*," writes Corrington. The text of the letter, dated 3 November, is as follows:

If you are the author of *The Southern Reporter*, then I am writing to the right person, in which case this is a fan letter. I think those stories are wonderful, that you are one hell of a writer.

What I want to know is, what are you doing next and can I have a look at it? As a Tennessean (Memphis) born in Virginia, I think you can trust my ear. Frankly, sir, *The Southern Reporter* amazed me, and believe me, the publishing business is mighty short on amazement. Finally, if you do happen through New York any time in the near future, I'd be honored to stand you to lunch.

Very truly yours,

/s/ D. D. Guttenplan

"It's a nice note," Corrington continues. "Much appreciated, but I question Mr. Guttenplan's future in the business. Literacy isn't going to take him very far."

The next day, Corrington follows up on the letter and gets in touch with his agent. "I spoke to Roz today [10 November] about the Guttenplan letter. She says she has not been to Pantheon, but will send him a

copy of *TMWSWW*. She had planned to go to the editor-in-chief there anyhow," he explains. "If this young man likes the book, and takes it upstairs, I could have a valuable ally there. Well, what happens will happen. All I can do is keep working."

The euphoria generated by the Guttenplan letter keeps Corrington's spirits up for a week. Then the inevitable depression lowers his expectations again on 18 November as he writes: "Unfortunately, no word from Roz on the book." The last paragraph of the entry is like a coda: "At least 1981 is drawing to a close. Perhaps, with God's grace, 1982 will be better. If we can't get the book published, at least we may be able to put some more money aside."

A week later, Corrington's plan to follow up on the Guttenplan letter has made some progress. "Talked to Roz today," he writes on the 25th. "The novel is now with the guns at Pantheon. Guttenplan liked it. One wonders if he can sell it to his superiors . . . I'm still hoping the novel will be published, and establish me in fiction. That's the game I want to play."

While Guttenplan and Pantheon were considering *TMWSWW*, Corrington had talked to his sister Pat in New Hampshire; the call spawns a tactic that he wants to try. The entry for 27 November explains the ploy. "Yesterday Pat mentioned that a friend of hers knew an editor at Houghton Mifflin who liked my work," he writes. "Turned out to be Roby McCauley who used to edit Kenyon [Review] and worked for Playboy. I think I'll have Roz send him a copy of the novel. He might like it. Having worked for Kenyon and Playboy, he might be the perfect editor."

With copies of the novel floating around, a chance encounter relating to a technicality in the book grabs his attention. The entry on 1 December states, "A mess: today in the paper, there's something about a novel called 'Shadowland.' I'll have to come up with a new name for both this book and *TMWSWW*, as to the sanatorium." It was subsequently changed to *Shady Grove*, the "nuthouse" where Shad had been sent to dry out.

Having received contracts for work on *General Hospital*, and with the prospect of moving to California to fulfill this obligation, he notes: "This promises to be an exciting time. I only hope it's a pleasant time as well. Meanwhile, I hope, too, that we can extend our contracts—and, more than anything, that the novel gets picked up. The future I want lies there; not in TV or film." [emphasis added].

He spends the 4th, 5th, and 6th in Los Angeles, meeting with the producers of *General Hospital*. Back again in New Orleans, there is a short entry on 10 December concerning a new novel he had been working on but was never published. He called it *Asylum*. The thoughts

expressed reveal continued doubts about his writing, and he recalls identical feelings that he experienced when writing *The Man*. "p.365 of the novel," he informs us. "It should be complete in the next few days. I have no idea whether it is any good or not. It's that same uncertainty I felt in the writing of the last one."

On 19 December, the narration regarding his effort to obtain a publisher for *The Man* reappears. "There's been no word from Roz for several weeks, so I have to assume *The Man* has struck out again. I guess I'll tell her to contact Roby McCauley at Houghton-Mifflin and see if that does any good."

Corrington mentions that ABC wants a meeting in New York to discuss the show [*General Hospital*]. His entry dated 27 December includes an opportunity to meet with Pantheon while there, at ABC's expense. He says, "I'll also be seeing the Pantheon editor, David Guttenplan, who has the novel under consideration. We've got our fingers crossed on that one. If they take it, we may find our California venture a lot easier to take."

Winter has set in. On a short trip to Shreveport, Corrington, surrounded by its bleakness, the naked trees, the dead grass, the dead of winter everywhere, notices the houses stark and set apart and crowned by a perpetual gray, overcast sky. The mood stays with him as he reports from New York in his entry of 3 January 1982. "Nothing with ABC for tomorrow. Another meeting and change. Good. Tomorrow night we'll have supper with Pat Mulcahey, and I'll have a drink with Guttenplan, presumably."

His impressions of Guttenplan and that meeting are written after gestating for five days:

The meeting with Guttenplan was all right. He is bright but fragile, that odd Jewish circumspection I remember from Paul Greenberg [a younger classmate at Byrd High School who, as Editorial Page Editor of the *Pine Bluff* (Arkansas) *Commercial*, won a Pulitzer Prize], hardly noticeable in Paul Ranch. They want the book cut by 300 pages. We can probably do it, but it is irksome, and I believe it's strictly for length-budget reasons, not for literary ones. Jo will do the cut, and I'll do the transitions and re-write. I have no reason to suppose this work will guarantee publication, but it is work that has to be done probably for any publisher. We'll see.

He works intermittently for nearly three weeks before the journal reveals additional information on *The Man Who Slept with Women*. On 23 January he writes, "We've almost finished the revision of the novel—or the chopping down, more properly. It will be sent to Pantheon this week, and we'll hope." Then he adds, "It's not the book I wrote. It may

be the book they'll publish. It's been carved down from 892 pages to 697. That's the second cutting. I hope it ends here."

And on 25 January, he informs us: "Today I started reworking the cut version of the novel. I'll be taking it out to California, and send it to Pantheon from there by next week."

But it needs more work, as much as he can give it. From Los Angeles, his entry for 29 January shows that time will be precious. "If I get some time, I'll do that review [for *The Washington Post*] and work on the novel later today."

A similar entry appears a few days later, 1 February. It says simply, "I'll work on the novel over the next few days, so I can send it to Pantheon."

While Corrington awaits word on the fate of TMWSWW, he becomes more introspective and analytical, defines himself as a thinker and muses on what this will mean to his future work. He calls himself *poeta*, a myth-lover, and primitive, "being elevated via sensible things to the insensible, things sending me onward to no-things."

The revision is not being done as quickly as he had predicted. Perhaps it is, as he has suggested, a lack of time brought about by the new responsibilities of writing the show; perhaps, he is simply reluctant to sever large chunks of prose from the novel just as one would, understandably, delay the amputation of mangled fingers or a gangrenous limb. Still putting off the surgery, he writes on 9 February, "Maybe tonight we'll go out to dinner. I'll read a little, and perhaps get started on the last half of revision of the novel."

Several short entries over the next two and one-half months refer to efforts to refashion *The Man* so it can be published by either Pantheon or LSU. On 11 February he writes: "Working on *Man* now. Not a lot left to do, then off to Pantheon, and I'll start going over *Asylum*." On the 13th we read, "I've worked on the novel most of the day, and it shouldn't take much longer to finish the revision. I'll be glad to see it off. At least, I'll have the sense that things are moving on it—whether they are or not." Ten days later (23 February), he reports: "Only a few more pages to do on the book, and it'll be ready to go." In the entry for 9 March we find that

[I] had, as they say out here, a good day. For the rest of it, I got a kind letter from John Willingham, and a hopeful one from Ros [sic] Targ. I also got back the novel ms from LSU. Bad, sorry, crabbed little review of the novel by some sad little academic who couldn't even manage to get the title right.

On the other hand, I got a check for royalties on *The Southern Reporter*—\$500+. They've sold 1200 copies. Pretty good sales for short stories. Eases the pain a little.

Then, repetitive entries for 19 March and 8 April: "No word on the book yet. I suppose that doesn't look good." And, simply, "No word yet on the novel."

Finally, the waiting for this round is over. "I only wish I could work as rapidly as last summer. But then that came to nothing. Pantheon turned the book down, and we start from zero again. That's all right. When the Lord wants my work published, it will be," he concludes.

Another idea with another old friend at still another university press is where Corrington turns next in his quest for a publisher for *The Man Who Slept with Women*. He writes on 6 September that "Miller Williams¹⁶ has *The Man Who Slept with Women*—I told him I'd pay the publication costs if he'd take the book. I don't like doing that, but the handwriting is on the wall. There is no more American literature as there was even 20 years ago." This pronouncement is a drastic solution born out of his desperation to have the book accepted intact and which will allow Corrington to maintain his artistic integrity. He explains this bold decision through rationalization: "Everything is big business, film sale, paperback. As it happens, I've got the bucks to see the book into print—and that's just what I'm going to do. If Miller takes it."

The entry continues with reminiscences of his and Miller's association together and the estrangement that came about.

There has been much between us over the years. A good friendship and collaboration, a lot of misunderstandings at Loyola, coolness since.

Miller is a fine poet. Lately he's been a little facile, but he holds to the old problems stated in the old way, with the charity and demonism they invite and require. I'll always remember his early poems. Hell, I even remember some of mine.

It would be nice if a collaboration between us should publish the novel. Who knows? It might even sell. Which would be the very best revenge.

¹⁶ Miller Williams was an old colleague from LSU days. He and Corrington shared an office in the English Department. They jointly edited *Southern Writing in the Sixties*, a two volume publication (one volume devoted to short stories, the other to poetry) published by Louisiana State University Press in 1966 and 1967. They moved to Loyola University before going their separate ways: Miller to found and direct the University of Arkansas Press, Corrington to study law at Tulane.

The cycle begins again. The endless waiting and speculation precipitate procrastination and anguish on a scale which he is now so used to marking time with, that time, itself, becomes unmeasurable.

I've heard nothing from Miller regarding the novel. I'll give him a call next week [the date is now 23 September] and see if I can find out anything. There may be other alternatives if I'm willing to come up with some money. I don't like doing it on principle, but it has certain business advantages, and the general situation in the publishing business is such that it makes sense—if I can get the book published in such a way as to see it reviewed and decently distributed. It would be best to get it done this year for business and tax reasons.

The contract with *General Hospital* ends, but Corrington and Joyce sign on as head writer for *Capitol*. The money was assured and the time for his serious writing, as usual, was as desicated as a prune's face. The only certainties were death, taxes, and the rejection of the novel. Columbus Day 1982 brings word that the University of Arkansas Press does not want to publish *The Man Who Slept With Women*. "Miller can't do the book," he writes in the entry for 12 October. "Back to square one. I'm about ready to put it on the shelf and stop worrying about it. This isn't the time for it." With an ironic aside, he adds, "It is amusing that *Ancient Lights* could be published by Viking, and *Man* not find a home."

With the advent of Miller's rejection, further news of *The Man Who Slept with Women* disappears from the journal entries. Instead, Corrington the critic lashes out at the Eastern establishment's darling, John Updike, and again retreats to the high altar of his basilica, the past, in a note of 28 October.

I think seeing John Updike's picture on the cover of *Time* told me what fiction had come to, and it doesn't interest me much. Fiction as an heroic exploration is gone. The middle class has appropriated it as a kind of celebration of its own virtues and vices—both of which are reduced to a scale so diminutive, so contemptible, that they are not even of concern to a pathologist. Flannery O'Connor would shake her head and shrug.

Hemingway, much on Corrington's mind, provides the subject for the entry of 29 October. It should be remembered that a long book extolling land, sea, and air, and filling some 1500 pages of hand-written manuscript, left unpublished by Ernest Hemingway had been consigned to a bank vault in Havana from which his widow and Scribner's excavated it and brought some of it out as the posthumous *Islands in the Stream*.

Tonight I'm watching *Islands in the Stream*, and I'm beginning to realize that over the past year, I'd begun to doubt the power of words in any meaningful sense. I was simply lacking in heart. Scott brought

Hemingway back to life. It was a good film. I doubt it made its costs. But it makes me want to try again. The last lines were "No one thing is true. It is all true." But I'm beginning to wonder if it is not all one.

Corrington writes nothing in his journal for the remainder of October and does not enter a word in November nor for the first week of December. Then on 7 December 1982, exactly one year and six months from his handing over of the novel to Roslyn Targ, he announces: "Yesterday, things changed. Roz Targ called. She's sold the book to a N.Y. publisher, Congdon. \$7500 advance. Wants a final ms. by February, the book will lead his fall list." Ever the religious man, he adds, "I heard the Lord saying I lacked patience, and had a small and mean faith. Never mind. I'll be better next time, I told him."

Back in October, after having seen the film version of *Islands in the Stream*, Corrington had written that "words are not valueless. They are simply not as valuable as we would have them be, or as true as we think we need them to be—or as permanent and enduring as we pray they will be. Still, they are good enough." And now, that prayer had been answered. His words had been "good enough." His thoughts pour out in anticipation and hope, wiping away the disillusionment and depression that had plagued him for almost two years.

This resolves months of personal misery. Now I think I can begin working again. The impulse is still there. It will take a while to get it back in gear, but I have *All My Trials* and *Shady Grove*¹⁷ to re-write. I may also have a TV documentary to do . . . It would be fun, but with *Texas* cancelled, we have to hold on to *Capitol* for our livelihood. Only a lunatic would suppose we'll make any money out of *The Man Who Slept with Women*.

I guess the best part of the news about the book being accepted is that when it is published, Ronnie Gallagher and Sam Lachle will have at least a tiny sliver of immortality—as much as I can give them. And that old Shreveport, too.

Corrington is hyper with plans for the revision that will be required to satisfy the new publisher's vision of what he wants in the book: "I'll be making notes and re-writing now. The publisher wants 100 pages out. This means a six hundred page ms. with a reshaping of the prologue by giving it to Sonny as an imaginative creation. La Paloma will become Okeanos," he explains, "—the dragon down below, the *perai*, the limit, the

¹⁷ The novel, never published, is about "the nut house where Shad went to dry out." Corrington had named it "Shadowland" in *Shad Sentell*, but changed it to "Shady Grove" when he discovered the name had been used as the title of another author's novel. He finally settled on the title, *Asylum*.

boundary, that which binds us, keeping us from becoming *akosmoi*—the binding of Kosmos as we are personally bound by fate.”

The journal has no entries for two weeks. Corrington must have been enjoying the afterglow of the sale during the interim; the next note indicates that he is working on what he had promised himself he would do two weeks earlier. Nevertheless, the news is good. “Tom Congdon, my new publisher called today as I was reworking the overture and opening of TMWSWW. He sounds like a nice man, and seems to love the book. It’s a strange feeling, to be back on track,” he writes on 22 December. Then, rather emotionally, he expresses the appreciation he feels for the opportunity that has been afforded him and, of course, *The Man*: “Beginning work last night, I found tears in my eyes—compounded of gratitude to God, and the sudden realization that, after all, *my* Shreveport will live again, and my debt to Sam Lachle will be paid.” And as a tribute for his dead friends he includes, “I wish he and Ronnie Gallagher were still here. They’d like the book a lot.”

Christmas Eve finds him well into the cutting as he makes his last entry for the year 1982: “I’ve reduced the first 67 pages of the book to 39, and am ready to go forward as fast as my script work will allow.”

Three weeks into the year 1983 is enough time for the euphoria and gratitude to have passed as new problems surface on 20 January. “I got contracts from Congdon, but they posed a question. They specified 120,000 words. That’s not enough. Even with the cuts,” Corrington writes. It is evident that to bring the book down to that size will surely compromise the novel to the point that it will be damaged art. “Ros [sic] is singing the sad song about book prices—and I know it’s true. But who can write a novel to the specifications of a \$10.95 book?” He argues. “They’re going to have to solve the problem technologically—not by asking for nice short books. Or maybe we’ll write long books cut in pieces, to be published bit by bit.”

Not until 20 March do we find new information on *The Man*, and then, only a brief entry: “I got word from Roz Targ that the British rights to the novel have been sold.” On 12 April we learn who bought them. “MacMillan,” he tells us, “bought the rights to TMWSWW—Tom Congdon has taken to calling it that in his letters, so I suspect that will be its name.”¹⁸

With all of this good news, there is also unwelcome news. The *Capitol* contract expires and is not renewed, so Corrington returns to his serious writing unmolested with commercial work intruding on his

¹⁸ Another wrong guess. The title, too, will be cut, but not because of its length.

precious time, but without the big money that supports the family. Then, on 23 April comes more good news via England. "She [Roz] sent a letter saying MacMillan wants to see all my old books. I wonder if they're considering republication?" He ponders. "That could mean a lot in terms of recognition, if not money. One ends up translating into the other, of course, and it would be splendid if we could make a living on my serious work." Lest he dream too much, Corrington concludes: "I can't imagine that's likely, but this is such a grotesque time in American letters that perhaps a good story or two might succeed."

The entry closes with a strange statement about his notes on the writing of *The Man Who Slept with Women*. That he kept them, from the standpoint of literary posterity, is important. To decide not to write further notes on his present and future work is a disappointment. The author feels that they were not helpful to him. That may not have been, but to the critic and student of literature, clues to an author's creative processes often are of great help in determining his state of mind and literary intent. As a result of his decision, Corrington writes, "I started to keep notes here as the final stages of *All My Trials* began, but it seemed fruitless. My recollection of the journal passages during the composition of *The Man Who Slept with Women* is that they revealed nothing."

Another trip to New York takes place in May for the purpose of talking to Roz Targ about *All My Trials*. While there Corrington was to meet with Tom Congdon. This trip did not go well for reasons that he explains in his entry of 16 May.

We had no interview with Tom Congdon who recently lost his father, and was, so they told me, down with the flu. I was irked, and begin to wonder how this relation will work out. Ros [sic] and Bill were fun—Roz drunk as usual. She hasn't sent *All My Trials* to Congdon because he hasn't paid the second half of the advance for *Man*. I want this business on the road, but the politics is difficult; we can't slough Tom off, and take AMT to another publisher, because *Man* would then receive little or no care from Congdon. Still I don't want to sit on it till *Man* is published. It appears there is no way to get the bullshit out of the process. One comes to believe it is not hydrogen that lies at the root of all matter, but bullshit. Much is thus explained.

Once back from New York the suitcase is no more than returned to a closet until he's beckoned abroad. On 18 May Corrington notes "It appears that we'll be going to Greece on 6 June, with three days in Athens and a boat cruise of the islands. Then, on 13 June, we'll be in

London where I hope to meet with James Hale, editor of MacMillan, who bought TMWSWW."

Besides Hale, he plans to cover another base while in London. "I spoke to Roz today, and got the name of her agent in London, Carole Blake. I'll look forward to seeing her as well as Hale in regard to *Man* and also *All My Trials*."

On 2 June we learn that there is still work to be done on the revision; it will be postponed during the interlude in Europe. "But we'll be home and working on Dick's script [Dick Berserjion] by the 18th or 19th. After that, there'll be a final revision of the novel, and start of work on *Shady Grove*¹⁹—and hope that we'll find new work to make a living on."

In spite of the pressures of not having a job waiting on him, Corrington enjoyed the experience. Sailing the Aegean, along with the stops ashore, provided time for exploring Athens and Ephesus as well as the islands of Ionia. It was a special thrill for him to be in the places where Pythagoras and Heraclitus and St. Paul once stood. Even good weather awaited him in London. Although he was not particularly impressed with the British editor, the low humidity, coupled with the brilliant sun and deep blue of the sea had apparently relaxed his taut nerves and improved his disposition. The entry for 16 June gives a summary of the meeting. "We met James Hale . . . last night. Very diffident—very tight. We're to have supper with him tonight. I'll have to track carefully. Seems James is Labor, and they just got their butts kicked in."

It is now late summer, with Corrington commencing studies on Indic philosophy and philology in preparation for work on a novella, "The Risi's Wife." Once again in Los Angeles, he writes on 7 September that he has received a "letter from James Hale full of suggested cuts on *Shad*—the new title—came 2 months late. I'm going to ignore it." To change the title which he had loved so much is the final insult to the book which had been gutted, leaving only the skeleton of the one he had created. "The novel has been cut to pieces, and I no longer really give a damn about it," he adds. "It's just something I wrote. That seems the price I pay for writing a long novel." The remaining news on *Shad* concerns another subsidiary right. "Doris Quinlan has sent *Shad* to James Garner as a possible film. Garner isn't Jo's choice or mine. We'd like Robert Preston. It would make a good film—a lot like *Smokey and the Bandit*. Maybe we'll make mega bucks and never have to come out here again."

¹⁹ It should be recalled that Corrington changed the title to *Asylum*.

From this point, we hear nothing of *Shad* for several months; there are few entries in the journal on any subject. On 23 January 1984 he writes, "Longtime between entries. No special reason. I've been working hard. Maybe that's it." He laments the fate of *All My Trials* and *Asylum* (previously titled *Shady Grove*), both with Roz Targ in New York and "at the mercy of mental defectives who want to make a lot of money and don't give a shit for lit." As for *Shad*, he writes that

I'm starting the proofs for SHAD SENTELL tonight. That wretched asshole Congdon finally got that much of his way—for the sake of sales he supposes he would have lost if he'd called it *The Man Who Slept with Women*. I understand the British edition will have the original title.²⁰ Maybe if there's a paperback, we can get them to use TMWSWW, too.

Although one can tell that Corrington is bitter about what has happened to his novel, he, nevertheless, finishes the proofs quickly. "The proofs have gone back to Congdon, and TMWSWW is, at long last, out of my hands," he writes on 28 January. "It has much merit and perhaps even the vices are the result of an overflow of animal spirits. I have no commercial hopes for it—on principle as well as concretely. But it'll be in print: that's what counts."

Other work occupies Corrington in early February. He delivers the principal lecture at a conference on the humanities at the University of Tennessee-Chattanooga,²¹ and then returns to Los Angeles for meetings with "producers, networks, etc." to land work which he hopes will last for the next year.

Home again in New Orleans, his journal records on 24 February that the "novel will be published in early May—or late April—if Congdon ever makes up his mind. The first review I've seen—Kirkus—is snot-nosed and patronizing—But might not hurt sales. Lord knows what's to come. The title is not going to help." As far as any other action on the novel, he tells us that "Ros [sic] hasn't gotten anything going on the paperback yet. That could mean some money. As to Hollywood, who knows?"

In less than three weeks another trip to Los Angeles is deemed necessary. Most of the month of March is spent with TV producers and

²⁰ The first mention of the new title was in an entry dated September 7, nearly five months, when Corrington commented on a letter from his British publisher, James Hale. It is now clear that Hale was not the one demanding a change of title.

²¹ John William Corrington, "The Recovery of the Humanities," in Reed Sanderlin & Craig Barrow (eds.), *POLITICS, SOCIETY AND THE HUMANITIES* 113-129 (Chattanooga: Southern Humanities Press, 1985)(reprinted in 26 *Legal Stud. F.* 781 (2002)).

various studio functionaries before leaving for New Orleans again on the 31st.

April Fool's Day brings together his past and his present in a jarring merger that makes him wonder if his "life is beginning to run toward its conclusion" or if "it is a perfect situation for great poetry." A strange and portentous phone-call from his first wife Floice,²² whom he has not seen in almost thirty years, comes on the morning that he receives the first copy of *Shad Sentell*. The book says, Corrington

seems much like what it is: a thin remnant of what it was originally. My feeling was, what a shame. It started as a big rambunctious book, and now it's properly tamed down, a shadow of what it was originally.

Never mind. It's done and behind me now. I'll seal up the Ms. of the original and put it aside for some later time, and get on to the next one—when I can see a time amidst the commercial writing long enough to get one done.

More travel, both to New York and Los Angeles for show discussions, leaves little time for thoughts of what once was called *The Man Who Slept with Women*. Then on 18 April an entry of importance appears stating that

Shad Sentell is out. I spent the 16th in Monroe, Louisiana with John Kelly, a bookseller. He's a fine person, his wife Vicki is lovely, and I met a lot of good people. I signed at least sixty or seventy books, and also met Ellen Gilchrist, whose stories I read. That girl can write.

With *Shad Sentell* published, we might expect no further entries in the journal concerning the novel. But Corrington continues comments that directly and indirectly mention the book; comments worthy of inclusion in this chronology in order to complete the history of one of Corrington's most ambitious writing projects. The first of his post-publication entries appears on 17 June. In it, he provides an insight into his philosophy of fiction that should, we must conclude, apply to *Shad*.

There's no connection between the pleasure one takes in the creation of a story and its value. I remember in 1968, at Berkeley, when I wrote "Keep Them Cards and Letters Comin In," I was disappointed with the result. It seemed to me I hadn't brought to honest material the sense of loss and the special pathos it deserved. But later, when I edited it for

²² Floice Rhodes Smith of Knoxville, Tennessee, was a music major at Centenary College. They married late in the fall of 1956, shortly after Corrington entered Rice. The girl's father, a minister, was adamantly opposed to Corrington, his Catholicism, and the marriage in general. Floice filed to end the marriage after only a few months. As a result of the phone call, she, Joyce, and Bill met in a restaurant for lunch.

inclusion in *The Actes and Monuments*, I realized it was a fine story, and that what had been wrong was that its proper austerity had not satisfied my own Baroque innards. But ... a writer is a mirror, and he should honor his material by introducing into it as little distortion factor as possible. I have always tried to avoid making fiction which in fact constituted nothing but fictionalized essays on my own opinion and moods.

In a long diatribe against having to write for TV and films, we see a bitter Corrington making an assessment of himself. The memories of the treatment of *Shad Sentell* are evidently still fresh enough to contribute to this mood which he expresses on 22 October. "A man has to have something to give him dignity, to make sense in the long arc of his life," he points out. "Win or lose, I think I've published enough to establish myself as something more than a movie or TV writer—though I wonder if even that matters."

Much later in the same entry (a lengthy commentary), he describes the man on whom the character Shad Sentell was modeled. This section is written with nostalgia and conveys Corrington's emotional attachment to many people he has cared about and whom "no one will remember in another 50 years."

Sam Lachle. The best friend I ever had. I would need a volume to set out the relationship between me and Sam. But I would want to say here that Sam is the one person I miss every day, and will always miss. That's why I was so pleased to dedicate *Shad* to him. He would have liked the book, in that it was as wild and unpredictable as he was.

I begin to realize why fiction is so easy for me: Because it doesn't require me to recreate in detail those whom I have truly loved. Shad, whom I also love, was a simple creation compared to Sam.

... It seems a shame that all a man can do for those he has loved is create a fiction for them: a fund or a novel, a memorial collection or a scholarship. Sam would have preferred a whorehouse for good old boys—though in fact he was not one himself—any more than I. We were rednecks in temperament, and because there was, spiritually, nowhere else to go. We couldn't manage to stomach what the yankee liberals call "civilization." Maybe we would have done better in my case.

Even an unrelated event, a phone-call about another book, which he receives a year and one-half later, works its way into the world that Corrington shares with *Shad Sentell*. On 10 April 1986 he writes that "Georgia Jones called from *The Los Angeles Times*. She wants me to do book reviews for them. The first book I'm to review is a first novel called *Those Who Blink*—by William Mills." He and Billy Mills had been fraternity brothers in the Kappa Sigma chapter at Centenary some thirty years before. Mills was married to Beverly Jarrett, the executive

editor of the LSU Press. This association naturally turned his thoughts to *Shad Sentell*. "So the novel is on the way," he continues. "It's being published by LSU—which turned down *Shad*—But why not? The politics is embarrassing, but this is Louisiana, and I don't blame Billy."

Over a year since having been disturbed by the publication of *Those Who Blink*, the latest edition of his butchered novel draws forth some lingering bitterness. "Got the British paperback of *Shad*," notes Corrington on 20 May 1986. "The cover is a piece of insulting stupidity. The English can't seem to grasp the distinction between rednecks and hillbillies. *Shad* with laced boots?"

Some ten months later, the wound is *still* fresh. The disappointment from the hard work to produce material that he could not manage to have published, represents a perpetual frustration. On 8 March 1987 he writes:

I came up with a notion to use all that excised material from *The Man Who Slept with Women*—bring back Billy Bob Stoker and Mary Anne Downey as a successful preacher and wife on TV a la Bakkers. Cecil returns as their mortal foe; Christopher, edging back toward Rome, is involved with the Archbishop. *The Savior's Friends*, of course. A really great and broad comic novel—but with no malice toward genuine protestant Christianity—only toward American bullshit. It sounds like my kind of book.

The will to publish the rest of *Shad* is evidenced by the seriousness and determination of his efforts during the final months of his life. He is tying the unpublished parts of the novel to the hypocrisy associated with fundamentalist Christianity. This will be a novel to which he has alluded, *The Savior's Friends*. Time to write will continue to be a problem; he had settled in California where he and Joyce would write and produce *Superior Court*. They had purchased twenty-six acres in the hills above Malibu, together with a large house which sat at the end of a private road some two miles off of Mulholland Highway. The house was being refurbished to accommodate their needs; Corrington, always interested in the land and sense of place, was busy planting trees and preparing a sign to erect over the front gate. The estate would be called "Louisiana."

His entry for 30 May 1987 concerns the preparations being made to live there and the work he planned to do. "As soon as the study is cleared, I want to go over the draft of *The Man Who Slept with Women* and rescue the cut material for *The Savior's Friends*—'with such friends, who needs an enema?'" He then writes what he really intends the book to be:

I think the book could be a comic work of some seriousness, penetrating to the heartbreak and tragedy unrecognized behind "fundamentalism." I find it jarring to see the diseased and pathetic creatures who set up to do battle against Jerry Falwell, et al. Norman Lear? A form of cultural cancer seeking another vector. Dead in the spirit himself, he despises the crude postures and attitudes of the living. But the creeps aren't important. What matters a great deal is the irruption of some vision that can ease the anguish and heighten the joy of ordinary human beings.

The entries end on 14 November 1988, ten days before his death. *Shad Sentell*, the odyssey of *The Man Who Slept with Women*, has taxied to the terminal. Corrington's last novel, although not to his taste or its intended length, has been published. We can await posthumous publications, but these will depend on time and the growth of his literary reputation. The several manuscripts that lie in his study may, indeed, one day enhance his standing as an important voice in American letters. But, as in a *Catch-22*, additional publication may require a broader acceptance by the reading public of his earlier works before his perceived enemy, the New York establishment, decides to act. To have the opportunity to read *all* of his work would be a final bonus. If this never comes to pass, his envoi must bequeath satiety:

To all of you, and to my friends, I go on into eternity, to join the hosts of those who have been, realizing that my life has been complete and rich and could not have been better.

I will miss you and the rain, rain and the woods, the marshes and the quietude of the earth at night. I'll miss spring in Louisiana and a world that renews itself each year.

Or perhaps I'll miss nothing, since I carry it with me forever.²³

²³ Corrington's journal entry dated 22 October 1986.

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