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JEFFERSON LECTURE

FRANK FITZMORRIS

From Washington, D.C., National Public Radio now presents coverage of the Sixth Jefferson Lecture in the Humanities, sponsored by the National Endowment for the Humanities. I'm Frank Fitzmorris at the National Academy of Sciences Auditorium here in Washington, where we're about to hear a lecture by Nobel Prize winning author Saul Bellow. Part 1 of his lecture; "The Writer and His Country Look Each Other Over."

DR. KINGSTON

To all of us, he's an extraordinary novelist whose fiction explores himself and his society, and therefore, ourselves and our world. His essays and reviews are a continuing stream of criticism, fairly good-humored, though nonetheless severe, of our life and our letters. And, students lucky enough to be at the University of Chicago or other places where he happens to visit, occasionally come better to understand the relationship between literature and life, between a writer and his world, and that's what we're here for tonight.

The Jefferson Lecture is the highest honor this Nation, through its national cultural foundation, pays to an eminent intellectual, and on this occasion he, in turn, pays us the high honor of presenting his maturest thoughts. Mr. Saul Bellow.

MR. FITZMORRIS

Robert J. Kingston, Acting Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities, introducing Saul Bellow, for the 1977 Jefferson Lecture.

MR. BELLOW

In Chicago, a prairie city, it has always been a mark of privilege to live near the lake. In the twenties, the landlocked slum-dwellers coming eastward on streetcars in the heat of July, with their beach blankets and picnic baskets, had to go on foot through the Gold Coast because the car lines ended several blocks to the west of its mansions, hotels and flossy apartment buildings. The children of aliens thus received their first impressions of money and luxury. And although the Potter-Palmers went off years ago, as the buffalo had gone before them, you still make progress in Chicago by moving toward the water. Middle class apartment buildings have risen along Lake Shore on the north side of

the city, and if your windows face eastward, Chicago is at your back. Its brick six flats, schools, hospitals, factories, cemeteries, and used car lots can be seen from your balcony, but you can't stand on the balcony now, on this January day, the thermometer is about 20 below zero, Lake Michigan looks like Hudson Bay, scaley with ice, piled offshore by high winds, ocean going ships late in leaving Calumet Harbor are stuck on the horizon and their Coast Guard rescuers appear to be stuck too.

In this weather, Chicago, which has changed so much in the last 40 years, looks its old self again. In its ice armor, or frozen grime, fenders and car doors whitened with salt, and smoke moving slowly from the smokestacks into the wind, the fury of the cold shrinking the face and the heart as it did in the good old days; then other characteristic winter impressions come back. Pyramids of oranges standing behind the frost engraved plate glass of shops, the smell of blood at the butchers, the black and white newsprint matching the black and white of the streets. I tried to remember who it was that said that opening the daily newspaper is like tearing the bandages from the wound. This winter makes me feel that time, when I was starting out, when there was a great depression, when gangs of unemployed men in public works projects stood in the dim frost rising like a powder

toward the dim sun and dug up the paving blocks and chipped them clean and laid them down again.

I have been reading some of the books I was reading then: the novels of John Dos Passos, Scott Fitzgerald, Lewis' Babbitt, Dreissers' The Titan; Sherwood Anderson's Mid-American Chants. What a good idea it seemed to write about American life and to do with Chicago or Manhattan or Minneapolis what Arnold Bennett had done with the five towns or H. G. Wells with London.

To do this was to join this American life, massive and hardly conscious of itself, to the world and to history. People who in the past would have remained inert and silent, sons and daughters of farmers, laborers, small businessmen, have become capable of observation and comment. European literature has taught them that novels might be made about American small towns and backstreets, about actresses from Wisconsin, and speculators from Philadelphia. Highly finished works of art were not produced by these writers, but it was wonderful what they could do and how intensely interesting they could be, and how much they extracted from the experiences of ordinary people like Jenny Gerhardt or Sophia Baines. They didn't satisfy every taste, of course. Ezra Pound complained; the post Zolas or post-realists deal with

subject matter, human types, etc. so simple that one is more entertained by Fabra's Insects or W. H. Hudson's Birds and Wild Animals. But, in the same essay he made the following handsome concession. He said art very possibly ought to be the supreme achievement, the accomplished, but there is the other satisfactory effect, that of a man hurling himself at an indomitable chaos and yanking and hauling as much of it as possible into some sort of order or beauty, aware of it both as chaos and as potential. There are books, Pound adds, which despite their ineptitudes and lack of accomplishment or form and finish, contain something for the best minds of the time, a time, anytime. I take that to be a fair statement of the case, and as an adolescent in Chicago I already felt the truth of this. I could not be expected to understand it, but stimulated by the Russian, French, German, and English books I read, I felt it strongly. And on this winter afternoon when the soil is frozen to a depth of five feet, and the Chicago cold seems to have the head hunters' power of shrinking your flesh, you feel in the salt-whitened streets, amid the spattered car bodies, the characteristic Chicago mixture of limitations and possibility. Of an immense vitality trying to break free, of a clumsy sense of inadequacy, poverty of means and desperate limitation. A craving for expansion which demands that impractical measures be taken for there is literally nothing sensible to be done

about this condition. You accepted it in those days as you would a rare disease. In a city of 4 million people no more than a dozen adolescents have caught it. The only remedy for it was to read and write stories and novels.

I used to do my writing 40 years ago on yellow second sheets from the five and dime, and I became attached to this coarse yellow paper which caught the tip of your pen and absorbed too much ink. It was used by the young men and women in Chicago who carried rolls of manuscript in their pockets and read aloud to one another in hall bedrooms or at Thompson's or Picksley's cafeterias. No one had money, but a few dollars a week made you independent. You could rent a small bedroom for three dollars. A fifteen cent breakfast was served at all soda fountains. The blue plate dinner at 35 cents was perfectly satisfactory. We smoked, but hadn't yet learned to drink. And my late friend Isaac Rosenfeld said that it cost much less than a thousand dollars a year to be poor. You could make it on six or seven hundred. But to be poor in this way meant also to be free. We were in our early twenties, some of us were released from our families by the death of parents, some were supposed to be university students, stenographer sisters who should have been laying up, saving up for a trousseau were sacrificing their bank accounts for student brothers and no one was studying very

much. To feel these sisterly sacrifices too keenly was to lose some of your delicious freedom. So instead, you made such sacrifices; the subject of wonderful discussions about remorse, drawing on Freud or on the class morality denounced by Marx and Engles. And you could talk of Balzac's ungrateful children on the make in Paris or Dostoevski's Ruskonikaff, The Student With The Axe, or The Queer Bad Boys of Andre Djeet. And so the children of Chicago, bakers, tailors, peddlers, insurance agents, cutters, grocers, or families on relief - were reading Bockrum bound books from the public library and were in a state of enthusiasm having found themselves on the shore of the land to which they really belonged, discovering their birthright and hearing incredible news from the great world of culture. They talked to one another about the mind, society, art, religion, epistemology, and they were doing this in Chicago, of all places! What did, what could Chicago have to do with mind and art, with epistemology or the sublime? Chicago was a complex of industrial neighborhoods, a string of immigrant communities: German, Irish, Italian, Lithuanian, Swedish, German-Jews on the Southside, Russian Jews on the westside. Blacks from Mississippi and Alabama in vast and squalid slums. Even vaster were the endless bungalo-filled, middle class neighborhoods. And what else was there? There was the central business district where adventurous architects had pioneered

the skyscraper. And, we, in Chicago were known to the world for our stockyards, railroads, steel mills, gangsters, and boosters. Oscar Wilde had come here, once, and tried to be nice about our effort to be civilized. Rudyard Kipling looked us over and wrote a nasty report. Mr. Yerkes made millions out of transportation and Mr. Insall out of utilities. Jane Adams had worked in the slums and Harriett Monroe had worked in poetry, but the slums got bigger and the poets left for London, New York, and Rapallo. If you looked here for the sort of natural beauty described by Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth, Yeats, you didn't find it. Nature around Chicago was different. It was coarser. The soil, the air, the plants, the blasting heat, the blasting cold, the winds, the storms, the horizons - all different. Modern Europeans might complain in their books of an excessively humanized environment, too much history, too many ghosts, the soil sifted by too many generations, the landscapes too smooth, and the flowers too tame. But they didn't know what it was like here - we thought. The spirits of the place here had been subdued by steel and gas. They had had to submit to gas and steel. We didn't know how they felt about art. Were they inclined to be friendly to art and culture? Most of the time we felt they had no use for such things. So you sat in your three dollar rooms, which you had anxiously civilized with books - your principal support in life - and

with a few prints from the Art Institute, a Velazquez Job who said, "Noleme condemnare", and a Daumier Don Quixote riding featureless over the Castilian wasteland, and in this dusty bedroom you recognized that you were out of line. A strange deviant. With the steelmaking dinosaurs just to the south, and the stockyards, the slaughter rooms blazing with aeriated blood, where Negro workers sloshed in rubber boots right at your back, and the great farm machinery works, and the automobile assembly lines, and the mail order houses, and the endless rail yards and the gloomy Roman pillars of the downtown banks - this was a powerful place. But the power was something felt, not shared. What had it to do with you and your books? The meaning in this power lay in things and in the methods by which things were produced. What Chicago gave to the world was -- goods. A standard of living sufficient for millions: bread, bacon, overalls, gas ranges, radio sets, telephone directories, tractors, steel rails, gasoline.

I asked a German refugee in the thirties, just arrived, to tell me quickly without thinking for his opinion of Chicago, what had impressed him the most. He said at once, "Stop and Shop". This is the great food store on Washington Street with its mountains of cheese, coffee, its ramparts of canned goods and its hanging curtains of sausages. Goods,

unlimited and cheap; the highest standard of living in the world. And, as we used to say, for the broad masses.

The struggle for existence was not over, but the very fact that we adolescents could sit discussing such a struggle, meant that millions of people were free to theorize about their condition. What we were thinking, as adolescents, is succinctly summarized in a recent book by Norman Macrea, the economist, The Neurotic Trillionaire, a Survey of Mr. Nixon's America. And he says of the United States, "for this, after all, is the society in which the last important stage of man's long economic revolution is succeeding. What is the place of poets and novelists in such a society? How can a people serving such historical goals develop the necessary temper and the talents for so many different kinds of activity? They are asked not only to complete mankind's long economic revolution, but a political one with it, and to pursue the pure sciences as well as technological development, while at the same time preparing for global warfare and keeping a civilized moral standard, and interpreting themselves, to themselves, psychologically.

But I'm going too fast. Let me go back four decades to my three dollar room in the middle of America, where people saw themselves in a collective image as inhabiting down-to-

earth, bread-and-butter, meat-and-potatoes, dollar-and-cents, cash-and-carry, Chicago. Wealth and austentation, society with its eastern and European connections, its picture galleries and opera houses might pretend that there was another Chicago, but that was phony, because the money came from lard, steel, coke, and petroleum. The material standard was the only genuine one. Even a gifted writer like Ring Lardner thought that way, Here are a few sentences from an account of a performance of Carmen given by one of his low-brows, who was dragged unwillingly, Maggie and Jiggs style to the auditorium. "Carmen he says, "ain't no regular musical show where a couple of Yids come out and pull a few lines of dialogue. Carmen's a regular play. Only instead of them saying the lines they sing 'em, and in a foreign language so's the actors can pick up some loose change 'offen the sales of the librettos." Here Lardner's, "American Animal", is snarling against the show-off women in evening dress who drag off their husbands in soup and fish to an evening of fancy foreign culture. It was possible for H. L. Mencken in Baltimore, a he-man himself, to declare openly his admiration for Wagner, but in Chicago the normal male despised this female sickliness. The phony singing Dagos wearing rompers and carrying knives.

I knew these attitudes well, although I was a student usher at the auditorium during the annual visits of the San Carlo Opera Company. And Leonid Massine's, Ballet Ruse came to town I offered to get one of my pals a job as an usher, on this privileged occasion, but he said he liked jazz joints and prize fights better. He made the American refusal, and in my heart I sympathized with him. In taking such an American attitude, no one was more self-congratulatory than the sons of Russian Jewish immigrants. By God! We belonged to the heart of the country. We were at home in the streets and in the bleachers. I remember portly, sonorous Mr. Sugarman, the Shohet on Division Street singing out the names of the States during the Democratic rollcall broadcast on the radio that nominated F.D.R. He did this in Jewish style, as though he were in the synagogue standing at the prayer desk, he was very proud of knowing the correct alphabetical order he was an American patriot who wore a black rabbinical beard.

I summon up the furnished rooms in which I lived in the late 30's at Sixty First and Ellis is now a gas station. On the site of the Beatrice where you had to pull a rope to get the elevator started, community gardeners now grow vegetables. The room on Engleside, where I awoke covered with bedbugs, has been torn down. The small brick building at 57th and

Kenwood, where Mr. Rapick burned rags and garbage in the hot air furnace has made way for a playground. The best known rooming houses, Hootage Castle, Patofski's on Woodlawn Avenue, Kenwood Gardens, with its skylighted court and galleries have vanished. I find I was dealing with a void before the existentialists had put a name to it. Student life in those houses was entertaining, but when you had your degree and were no longer a student, and when your friends have gone to take up their decent professions, moving to New York to California, or the North Africa, your life became difficult to explain, your life as a novelist.

In 1939, when I was writing a book I met, on the street, an acquaintance, Professor Ell, who put a difficult question to me. He was a European scholar and immensely learned, growing bald, he decided to shave all his hair. He looked rather odd. He was severe and if he smiled it was principally because he had learned by observation that it was normal to smile, and not because anything amused him. He read books while striding rapidly through traffic, making notes in Latin shorthand using a system of his own devising. And in his round specs with rising wrinkles of polite inquiry he asked, "Uh, and how is the romancier?" The romancier was not so hot. Singularity he made his heart ache. He was, so far as he knew, the only full time romancier in Chicago.

And he felt the queerness or as he sometimes felt, of the amputation of his condition. He was angry and obstinate, with his ideas of beauty, harmony, love, goodness, friendship, freedom, etc., he was out of it all together. He hated Professor Ell for his sarcasm, and also for being right. For the romancier was dominant. And Professor Ell, the Professor held a glamorous degree from a European university, he had an appointment, he had students, he lived in an apartment, not a furnished room, he had status. In his office was a folding cot on which he lay annotating his many volumes of Toynbee and cutting articles from The World Press. In five or six languages, he studied history, psychology, and politics. What was even more enviable to me was his grasp of the real world, his full comprehension of Hegel, Marx, Lenin; of Russian, German, French politics; his detailed knowledge of society and civilization. My own relation to society was misty and dubious. I too was supposed to understand, but on my own peculiar conditions. Solitary, I was mystically connected to all this on unilateral terms. Through it all I appear to be going through the streets minding my own business but I was, as they used to say in the military, on detached service. But drawn by powerful and vivid longings and sympathies, hungry for union and for largeness, convinced by the heart, and on certain occasions, by clear thought that I had something of importance to declare, express, or transmit.

I had one of my three dollar rooms that seemed to a young man of depressive tendencies abandoned by life and purpose, musty, sour, the sheets sere, the wallpaper buckling, the dry paste sifting down; shades of the city dump and the aura of bonfires hung over my table and the dresser; wood-boring insects had for decades been eating their way through the chair legs; their chewing and my yellow second sheets manuscripts; there were days when such a comparison could not be repressed. Others had real tasks, belonged to teams, institutions; even the termites obeyed a collective will and had their reasons for gnawing. Happy were those that Baudelaire, for I always had all the text I needed, who could say at nightfall "Au joi vie nous avons a travaille." Often I couldn't say it to save my soul. The romancier was doing a solo, a most American thing to do in the age of Charles Lindberg, but I had no machine in to fly in. I looked into the letters of D. H. Lawrence and found his bitter protest against that savage pilgrimage, his wandering life, and the privation of the social instincts from which he had suffered. But of course, the prevailing assumption and the romantic assumption still prevailed, was that man could find the true meaning of life and of his own unique being by separating himself from society and its activities, and collective illusions. And if walking in the mountains as a solitary Rousseau didn't turn the trick, you could go and derange

your senses artificially. It looked then as if my wide awake and energetic peers were going to take all the active rolls in serious life in the professions, in business, or in research. They were qualified by health, strength, race, social class, or birth. I didn't belong to a class which could bring me into a significant life. Therefore, I had to seek a significant life in my own way. My way was to write. Nothing seemed to me more wonderful. I wasn't absolutely sure of my qualifications. What was there for me to write. And, did I know English well enough to write it? I had thoughts; I had a heart full of something; I studied my favorite authors; I rode the bobbling L- cars reading Shakespeare or the Russian's or Conrad or Freud, Marx, Nietzsche; unsystematic, passionately wanting to be stirred. I thought I would confirm my own truths from hints provided by these thinkers. So I moved from room to room completely equipped like a Roman legion as ready for Parthea as for wild Britain, setting up camp with my books, hanging up my Velazquez and Daumier prints; spreading a hand-towel all over the grease stains of the armchair. Fastidiousness was a handicap here, and you had to forget those who had smoked, slept, eaten, dreamed, sickened, and grieved in this room before you. And I disapproved strongly of my orphan's emotions and my castaway's sinking heart, and did my best to develop a Bohemian attitude toward cockroaches and mice. As

a Bohemian, living cheerfully, you stood for something, you fought for your freedom, you overcame your bourgeois squeamishness about dirt, death, property, and sex, and you were not afraid of idleness. But, for this you had to have a Bohemian disposition. You couldn't train yourself into Bohemianism. And as you faced the horror of the room you had just rented, all your Bohemian attitudes just crumbled away, you went to look at the bedsheets, you smelled the decay, you turned over the desk blotter to see if it had a clean side, and you longed boundlessly for contact, interest, warmth, order, continuity, and meaning; warmth, kinship, roots; it was the essence of your situation that you had no such connections. You were, if you could only bear it, wonderfully free. That certainly was how Walt Whitman saw the American situation. What an opportunity he exclaims, in the Song of the Open Road. The earth! That is sufficient! The new man needs no good fortune; he himself is good fortune. Henceforth, he wimpers no more; postpones no more; done with indoor complaints; libraries; querulous criticisms; strong and content, I travel the open road. The universe itself, conceived as such a road, draws you into happiness and this happiness is an efflux of the soul, and pervades the open air. It is the happiness of friends, lovers, and comrades. The poet does not reject the old delicious burdens but carries these burdens, men and women, wherever he goes,

receptive to all; he neither prefers nor denies; welcomes the Black, the felon, the sick, the begger, the drunkard, the mechanic. I would have been glad to embrace this blissful freedom of Whitman's but it wasn't as easy as it sounded. Impulse wasn't enough. It required thought and discipline. Besides, I couldn't find Whitman's "America in Depression-Chicago," though I looked hard for it. There were many thousands of sleepers near me nightly in apartment buildings and rented rooms, but in the morning those who were fortunate enough to have jobs, went to the factories, offices, and warehouses. By the time I got to my window, the streets were already vacant, the children were at school, the housewives were washing up, only the dogs and cats were enjoying the open road freedom; irresponsibly free. The unemployed were most responsively sad. There were no Whitmanesque mechanics having a lark on the street corner. I had no intention of succumbing to complaints in libraries, for I agreed in principle with Whitman about the evils of solitary self-absorption. Nevertheless, I am bound to point out that the market man, the furniture mover, tool and die maker had easier lives, for they were spared the labor of explaining themselves. What was the meaning of my unpractical life? Ordinary gainful employment was better, wasn't it? The tool and die maker understood pennyless idleness. But what was he to make of toilsome pennylessness. What was the sense of

all this discipline? It was immensely worthwhile, no doubt, it was courageous to assert that a world without art was unacceptable, but it was no more than the simple truth that the hero of art was unstable, stubborn, nervous, an ignorant young man who could not bear routine or accept any existence he had not made for himself, though this militant life in which the purpose of militancy was not perfectly clear, developed the will, the answer to Professor EL's question might have been: the romancier is trying to make something of himself. Something perhaps free, perhaps generous, but what is the purpose? The romancier has an idea, he doesn't quite know what that idea is. However, I think I can see now what I was getting at. Pioneering America, immigrant America, political America, industrial America of the Carnegies and Henry Fords; all these Americas did not entirely engross the human spirit in the New World. Something that mankind was doing in its American setting was beyond all these activities and innovations which so impressed or antagonized the world. And that something had not found expression. This was the intuition that made certain solitary young men so obstinate in their pursuit of art. On the open road separateness was an ideal because it ended in joining, but no such choice was ever offered in our century. At least we believed that 1914, 1917, and later, Hitler holocaust and Hiroshima had made a special case of us and that the comrado

to whom Whitman held out his loving hand, had become far too queer and kinky a bird for the whole-hearted simplicity of such a gesture. Rootlessness, so frightening to some, exhilarates others. Wyndham Lewis wrote that no American worth his salt should long for roots. The American has the most conspicuous advantage, thought Wyndham Lewis. He is so pleasantly detached or disembodied, the sensation he has is that of being in the world and not in a nation. He is liberated from casts, czars, masters, corvets and Lewis argues, he is attached to the absence of burdens and limitations, and has learned to be at home in a slightly happy-go-lucky vacuum in which the ego feels itself free. It is, it seems to me, something like the refreshing anonymity of a great city compared with the oppressive opposite of that, invariably to be found in a village, says Lewis in America and Cosmic Man. Everything that is obnoxious in the family is encountered in the village. All that man gains by escape from the family is offered by the former. A rootless elysian as Lewis calls it, is enjoyed by the great polyglot herds in American cities. In old Europe this elysian could only be enjoyed by kings with their connections in all countries. In modern Europe, it is behind the Iron Curtain that people stay put and that the rootless cosmopolitanism of the West is denounced. If you reply to the cruel dullness of police states does not justify the whirling of random human particles

in the West, I will agree. Wyndham Lewis saw the promise of elysian in this happy-go-lucky vacuum. He had a strong head and was ready for the universal future in which writers, painters, and thinkers would be strong enough to lead a free life. But most of us are aware that the human attachments which have been cut in the process of liberation will have to be restored. They will have to be restored, renewed, and the renewal can occur only because we will it and think it. We will it and think it not because we are nostalgic but because there is no human life without these attachments, which we express in words like good, moral, just, or beautiful. The restoration of these severed attachments is to be undertaken only out of the soul's desire for its necessities. It will not happen because we join political parties, form erotic societies, return to the wilderness, and take off our clothes. It will begin when the intellect becomes aware of what the soul requires; when messages and influences flow between the mind, and the emotions, and the moral senses; back and forth. It will be objected that if thinking be the first step in our recovery, we are done for. But I am not being dreamy or hypothetical. Rather, I am taking into account what is visible to everyone. The increase of concepts and abstractions in ordinary life, the grip that science has on it; the weakening of traditional culture; the thinness of esthetic and religious influence, drives Americans as it

drives men everywhere to look for guiding ideas. The thinking is invariably poor, the ideas are wretched, but since we are deprived of the old ways of life, of dependable customs and saving inertias, there is no alternative. This is not a phenomenon on which we need to congratulate ourselves. The ideas, no matter how well born, invariably degenerate as they spread. One sits down, for instance, to watch a private eye movie set in southern California, and identifies literary, psychological, and philosophic notions from Andre Djeed and his decadent predesesors, views the family life that date from the days of Obsem and Strindberg Hence, from Nietzche and from Sorrell. So it comes down to this. The living man is preoccupied with such questions as who he is and what he lives for; what he is so interminably yearning for; what his human essence is and instead of the bread of thought, he is offered conceptual stones. And so, the needs so immense, people are engaged with thoughts and the products of thought, taking attitudes that presuppose thought, attitudes toward public responsibility, personal adjustment, crime, morality, punishment, abortion, child care, education, love, race relations.

The young writer in a Chicago rooming house began to understand this condition when he read Dostoevski. For Dostoevski's subject was, after all, the condition of mankind

at the beginning of this new age of consciousness. The writer felt about the post-realists or post-Zolas, very much as Ezra Pound did. They dealt with subject matter with human types so simple that one could be more entertained by The Insects of Fabra or The Birds of W. H. Hudson. But then Pound added that while art ought to be the supreme achievement, there was the other satisfactory effect; that of a man hurling himself at an indominable chaos and yanking and hauling as much as possible into some kind of order. There are modern books, he said, which despite their lack of accomplishment contain something for the best minds of the time, of any time. With this I agree. But how useful are the best instruments that have been developed by modern literature for this purpose. What good is what we have come to know best, we writers, the lessons of symbolism with its romantic legacy of modernism and various kinds of vangardism. In asking what good Proust, Joyce, Mann, Lawrence, Kafka, Lawrence, Hemingway can do us, I intend no disrespect. These writers have formed my mind, but it is for that very reason that I can see that they must be put aside by the contemporary American novelist. Educated America would be pleased to see its writers continue to Joycify or Lawrencize, people have become accustomed to take their cultural pleasures in these familiar ways. Writers have learned to gratify these tastes, but the game can't interest writers whose art

binds them to the modern reality of disorder, to American society as it is now, and the mixture of mind and crudity that it offers. A recent correspondent writes to me about Chicago's culture and speaks of it, speaks of Chicago, as a white-knuckle city. A native Chicagoan, when he writes, I remember long afternoons in the alley digging up rusty nails and bottle caps from the blacktop. That stuff is really Chicago's culture; an oily, foul smelling matrix that binds together people in their jobs, brick and building. I cite this not as a final verdict, which I share, but as a common attitude for which there is something to be said. This Chicago does not inevitably possess us, but it most palpably surrounds us. The popular columnist Mike Roiko, in his obituary on Mayor Dailey said, "It was the powerful semi-literate Dailey's who spoke for Chicago and not the S. Bellows". Up to a point he was right. No novelist can be Chicago's representative man. But a novelist can see perhaps what is coming. What he did, he did not do for the sake of being arbitrary or different. He did it because of his intuition that something humanity was doing in its American setting was not yet physical and clear, and that we must not take what was manifest as final. For the manifest, Mayor Dailey was incoherent and vulgar, but there was another Dailey who was infinitely knowledgeable and subtle. Both these Daileys were real. The one had to be kept secret from

the other. The relations between the two of them must have been fascinating. For things are not what they seem. Even Longfellow knew that. And Chicago's crudities do not lack a certain theoretical background, an idea which is not too far below the threshold of consciousness. I was aware, in a word, that if the post-realists of my youth, in describing white-knuckle Chicago, thought that they were representing human types more simple than Fabra's Insects or Hudson's Birds, they were very badly mistaken. It was then in blacktop Chicago, among the white knuckles that an apprentice novelist was reading refined and exquisite poets and philosophers, sitting on park benches or in the public library. He read not only his American contemporaries but transitioned the Dial, the Little Review, the Frenchmen, the Germans, the Irish geniuses of the twenties. In Chicago, we were well aware of that Paris was the center of an international culture. To this culture belonged decadents, Neolists, surrealists, cubists, Mondrian, Picasso, Diaghliev, were there. A cultural Klondike, Harold Rosenberg has accurately called it, in which the century found its fullest expression. And this international-of-culture in Paris was peculiarly appreciated by some of us in Chicago, a city of Italians, Hungarians, Poles, Blacks just up from the South. A city of foreigners, roughnecks, and working stiffes. But anyone might become a prospector and find the gold of art here,

strike it rich. Such was the hope emanating from the world's cultural center and affecting us all.

This is what Rosenberg has to say in the memorable essay, "The Fall of Paris," in which he speaks of Paris in the first third of the century as a Klondike for artists who poured in from Moscow, Bucharest, Mexico City, Dublin, and even Chicago. He writes: "In all his acts, contemporary man seems narrow and poor. Yet there are moments when he seems to leap toward the marvelous in ways more varied and wholehearted than any of the generations of the past. Released is this aged and bottomless metropolis, Paris, from national folklore, national politics, national careers, detached from the family and corporate tastes, the lone individual, stripped, yet supported on all sides by the vitality of other outcasts with whom it was necessary to form no permanent ties, could experiment with everything that man today has within him of health or monstrosity. Because the modern was often inhuman, modern humanity could interpret it itself in its terms." He speaks elsewhere of a dream living in the present and a dream of world citizenship resting not upon real triumphs, but upon a willingness to go as far as it was necessary into nothingness in order to shake off what was dead and the real. Germany was ready by the end of the thirties to transfer these modern formulas

from art to politics. In that country, politics became a pure, that is, an inhuman art, independent of everything but the laws of its medium. The subject matter of this avant garde politics, in Rosenberg's opinion, was like that of the earlier art movements of Paris, the weakness, meanness, incoherence and intoxication of modern man. Rosenberg's propositions are suggestive. I don't know how many of them I would call true. Can we all agree upon what it was in the real that had died? We can only agree that many people felt profoundly that they were being asked to give their lives to dead realities. Another question. Was it necessary to plunge into neolism in order to be purified or to shake off what was dead? Or was this revolutionary attitude not in many cases the screen for perversity, an excuse for the wild craving to make war, to destroy men, women, children, cities, peoples.

Was Hitler the pure inhuman artist whose medium was politics? But it is not necessary to agree with all this. Rosenberg brings us in a few sentences before one of those giant phenomenon which, prompted by the desire for what we call normalcy or sanity, we would rather not look at. But it is useless to talk about literature if we are not prepared to think about the facts of life in this staggering century. Observe that Rosenberg speaks of the lone modernists sustained

by the vitality of other outcasts with whom he did not need to form ties. He refers to the Picassos, Apolonaires, Diaghilevs, Joyces, Kandinskies, a relatively sociable and jolly crew. What about the far more drastic isolation of artists in modern Russia, of poets who have had only their own resources to sustain them and have not at all been inclined to experiment with everything that man has within him of health or monstrosity. People utterly cut off from everything, poets like Josep Mandels, Stame or Rachmatava, had to form relations, not with living people but with Pushkin or Dante. Dante was Mandelshtams' inseparable companion, he carried a pocket edition of Dante's Widow just in case he was arrested, not at home but in the street. The edition he took to Siberia with him was bulkier and his wife doubts that it was still in his possession when he died, for she says, "In the camps under Yeshoff and Stalin, nobody could give any thought to books." The subject matter of poets who continued under such conditions to be poets could not be the meanness, weakness, incoherence and intoxication of modern man. They were more apt to concern themselves with the life they were denied or the deeper meaning of the art they were forbidden to practice; the rights and powers of the individual apparently so defenseless; the artist who was, in the gangster state, so insignificant. Nearly forty

years ago, I sat on a park bench in Chicago and read Mr. Rosenberg's essay. In all his acts, he said, contemporary man seems narrow and poor. Yet there are moments when he seems to leap toward the marvelous in ways more varied and wholehearted than any of the generations of the past. And what I felt in isolation was my privilege, my painful freedom to think and feel, which was my privilege. Workers in factories, doctors in hospitals, clerks in shops, even criminals in prison participated in a society of some sort. But a young man who had left his rooming house with a copy of the Partisan Review in his pocket, to sit in Jackson Park, detached indeed from family and corporate tastes, considered the oddity of his calling so remote from workers, clerks, doctors, even criminals. And yet so intimately connected with the vital needs of them all. The consciousness of this intimacy was mine only. For how were they to guess what I had privately determined to do. If they knew what I had privately determined to do they might think it very curious indeed. And to tell the truth, they were in turn also curious to me living as they did or as they seemed to live, without the higher motives of which I was so wildly, perhaps so ridiculously proud. But I would for the sake of us all, narrow and poor as I was, try myself to leap toward the marvelous. Here we were only beginning to understand what a decade of horrors we had just entered. The depression

was ending, the factories were stoking up again, people were returning to work, but Warsaw had just been destroyed and Rotterdam, and hundreds of thousands of people just massacred were still under rubble or in mass graves in the first stages of decay. And Paris, in which for a few years there had been a feat of international modern culture, was a conquered city. And without this center, what were we, all of us to do. I shan't begin to talk about the disasters of the century; we don't need that, but I think it necessary to consider a sort of person that the peculiarities of this century have produced. This person is our brother, our very self. He is certainly in many respects narrow and poor, blind in heart, weak, mean, intoxicated, or confused in spirit. We see how badly damaged he is, how mutilated. Nevertheless, the leap toward the marvelous is a possibility he still considers. He may, in fact, feel peculiarly qualified by his experiences to make such a leap. He dreams of beating the rap and outwitting the doom prepared for him by history. Often he seems tempted to assert that he is a new kind of human being, whose condition calls for original expression and he is ready to take a flyer, and go for the highest truths. He has been put down, he has put himself down. But he has also dreamed of strategies which will bring him past all this detraction, his own included. For he knows something that was not known before. Anyone who has lived attentively

through five decades of this century feels that he had had epochs of history thrust upon him, ages of mental experience. At his best, this person is skeptical, cant free, headful of his own intuitions. He has seen political and cultural ideologies and orthodoxies come and go. He has learned that he must trust the communications of his own soul stipulating, however, that his soul should know the dry taste of objectivity. The principal characteristic of this survivor is that he has made himself lighter by putting off, by setting aside the doctrines that have dominated the century, by taking a new distance from its leading psychologies and philosophies, its political doctrines and the endless, horrible comedy of political lying. What is observable in our best contemporaries is such a lightening, a divestiture. These contemporaries divest themselves because they must move quickly and go far. They cannot afford to be mentally respectable. They have come to see that the theories they accepted for decades had nothing at all to do with their most meaningful actions and habits. We learned to square ourselves with our ideas but in time we recognized that the unacknowledged soul has preserved us from the worst affects of our own ideas. I ocassionally encounter persons who have been lightened. They are by no means entirely fault free, redeemed from error, the heroes and heroines of love or saintly character - no! Only they have moved away from the prevailing prejudices

of this century. There are more of these lightened persons in real life than there are in books. But now and then a poem or a story may emit the welcome signal. I have recently seen signs of it in certain books by Christina Stedd, a relatively unknown writer. In a novel by Miss Stedd, called, Places of the Heart, one of the characters says, I often wonder at my strange fate to be born into the first generation to understand humanities birth right. This may be an illusion, but it is widely shared and it can be strongly argued that it is based on genuine intuition. The Greek poet, George Seferiades, in his journal, produces other lightened people; himself the most distinctly lightened of them all. Seferiades, just after the Second World War, evidently feeling in his own person all the wrongs that had been done, the damage of the world, says as he looks over the Aegean, it was impossible to separate the light from the silence, the silence and the light from the calm. There was a sense that another side of life exists. To be willing to entertain the sense of another side of existence is a sign of this lightening. He writes, after walking by the sea, "myself has come out". He says, "it's strange for me to have any feeling for this sackful of personal sentiments, desires, and aims that sometimes drives me mad. I had kept them all shut up during the war years, for six years at least". Of the interpretation of dreams he says, "intellectuals have made dreams speak only with the

trumpet of Jerico or with bagpipes." He will consider dreams from his own poet's viewpoint without psychoanalytic interpretations. The man who has been lightened reserves for himself the right to consider what a dream is and is not submitted to intellectual professionals who tell him what to make of so intimate a mystery as the dream. And here are sentences from a letter Seferiades received from one of his friends who went to America and died there. The friend writes: "The feeling of New York, this is a country starving spiritually amid her gold, like Midas.' 'All this is relative', of course, he adds, 'for, there is no place where you see man's naked soul more than over here. Blacks with bloody faces, women crying in the subway." So, by the light of one's own judgment and in one's own style, and with one's own powers, one sees the naked soul. That is, when one's self has come out, many things are visible. We have long been locked in by respectable opinion, by the prestigious sciences, by ideologies, locked in even by those modern masterpieces which have for a few decades led or governed our imagination. And I am speaking of that freedom to approach the marvelous, which cannot be taken from us. The right, with grace, to make the most of what we have in this ferocious century. To make as much as human beings have ever made of their condition. To do this, by means of an art, which, admitting defects and impurities and making the

most realistic concessions, fully aware of the sackful of personal sentiments that have the power to drive us mad. An art which takes into account the cruelty, abasement, monstrosity, and evil that we know. But is, nevertheless, true and powerful and perhaps even in spectacular defiance of this chaos that surrounds us, a devinely beautiful art.

Thank you very much.

MR. FITZMORRIS

"The Writer and His Country Look Each Other Over".
Part I of the Sixth Annual Jefferson Lecture in the Humanities sponsored by the National Endowment for the Humanities.

The speaker, Saul Bellow, Nobel Prize winning novelist, winner of the Pulitzer Prize in 1976 and Distinguished Service Professor in the Committee on Social Thought and the Department of English at the University of Chicago.

Part II of the 1977 Jefferson Lecture in the Humanities will be delivered by Mr. Bellow in Chicago.

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